

Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Li

George Griffith

Table of Contents

<u>The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie</u>	1
<u>George Griffith</u>	2
<u>A Visit To The Moon</u>	5
<u>INTRODUCTORY NOTE</u>	6
<u>The World Of The War God</u>	16
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	17
<u>A Glimpse Of The Sinless Star</u>	27
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	28
<u>The World Of The Crystal Cities</u>	38
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	39
<u>In Saturn's Realm</u>	48
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	49
<u>Homeward Bound</u>	58
<u>A Honeymoon In Space</u>	64
<u>Prologue</u>	65
<u>Chapter I</u>	70
<u>Chapter II</u>	73
<u>Chapter III</u>	76
<u>Chapter IV</u>	79
<u>Chapter V</u>	82
<u>Chapter VI</u>	85
<u>Chapter VII</u>	91
<u>Chapter VIII</u>	96
<u>Chapter IX</u>	100
<u>Chapter X</u>	104
<u>Chapter XI</u>	108
<u>Chapter XII</u>	113
<u>Chapter XIII</u>	118
<u>Chapter XIV</u>	124
<u>Chapter XV</u>	130
<u>Chapter XVI</u>	133
<u>Chapter XVII</u>	137
<u>Chapter XVIII</u>	141
<u>Chapter XIX</u>	146
<u>Chapter XX</u>	149
<u>The World Peril Of 1910</u>	154
<u>Prologue — A Race For A Woman</u>	155
<u>Chapter II — Norah's Good-Bye</u>	159
<u>Chapter III — Seen Under The Moon</u>	162
<u>Chapter IV — The Shadow Of The Terror</u>	165
<u>Chapter V — A Glimpse Of The Moon</u>	168
<u>Chapter VI — The Note Of War</u>	172
<u>Chapter VII — Caught!</u>	176
<u>Chapter VIII — First Blood</u>	180
<u>Chapter IX — The "Flying Fish"</u>	184
<u>Chapter X — First Blows From The Air</u>	187
<u>Chapter XI — The Tragedy Of The Two Squadrons</u>	191
<u>Chapter XII — How London Took The News</u>	195

Table of Contents

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

<u>Chapter XIII — A Crime And A Mistake.....</u>	199
<u>Chapter XIV — The Eve Of Battle.....</u>	203
<u>Chapter XV — The Strife Of Giants.....</u>	207
<u>Chapter XVI — How The French Landed At Portsmouth.....</u>	211
<u>Chapter XVII — Away From The Warpath.....</u>	216
<u>Chapter XVIII — A Glimpse Of The Peril.....</u>	220
<u>Chapter XIX — A Change Of Scene.....</u>	224
<u>Chapter XX — The Night Of Terror Begins—.....</u>	227
<u>Chapter XXI — —And Ends.....</u>	231
<u>Chapter XXII — Disaster.....</u>	234
<u>Chapter XXIII — The Other Campaign Begins.....</u>	237
<u>Chapter XXIV — Tom Bowcock—Pitman.....</u>	240
<u>Chapter XXV — Preparing For Action.....</u>	243
<u>Chapter XXVI — The First Bombardment Of London.....</u>	246
<u>Chapter XXVII — Lennard's Ultimatum.....</u>	249
<u>Chapter XXVIII — Concerning Astronomy And Oysters.....</u>	252
<u>Chapter XXIX — The Lion Wakes.....</u>	256
<u>Chapter XXX — Mr Parmenter Says.....</u>	259
<u>Chapter XXXI — John Castellan's Thread.....</u>	262
<u>Chapter XXXII — A Vigil In The Night.....</u>	265
<u>Chapter XXXIII — Mr Parmenter Returns.....</u>	268
<u>Chapter XXXIV — The “Auriole”.....</u>	271
<u>Chapter XXXV — The “Auriole” Hoists The White Ensign.....</u>	273
<u>Chapter XXXVI — A Parley At Aldershot.....</u>	276
<u>Chapter XXXVII — The Verdict of Science.....</u>	279
<u>Chapter XXXVIII — Waiting For Doom.....</u>	282
<u>Chapter XXXIX — The Last Fight.....</u>	284
<u>EPILOGUE — “And On Earth, Peace!”.....</u>	287
<u>The Romance Of Golden Star.....</u>	291
<u>Prologue.....</u>	292
<u>I — His Highness The Mummy.....</u>	293
<u>II — A Physiological Experiment.....</u>	297
<u>The Story of Vilcaroya.....</u>	302
<u>CHAPTER I — Back Through The Shadows.....</u>	303
<u>CHAPTER II — Brothers Of The Blood.....</u>	307
<u>CHAPTER III — In The Hall Of Gold.....</u>	312
<u>CHAPTER IV — The Sister Stars.....</u>	318
<u>CHAPTER V — How Djama Did His Work.....</u>	323
<u>CHAPTER VI — The Waking Of Golden Star.....</u>	328
<u>CHAPTER VII — In The Throne—Room Of Yupanqui.....</u>	334
<u>CHAPTER VIII — How The Soul Of Golden Star Came Back.....</u>	340
<u>CHAPTER IX — The Treachery Of Djama.....</u>	345
<u>CHAPTER X — On The Rodadero.....</u>	351
<u>CHAPTER XI — How We Took The City Of The Sun.....</u>	357
<u>CHAPTER XII — Queen And Crown.....</u>	362
<u>CHAPTER XIII — How Djama Paid His Debt.....</u>	365
<u>CHAPTER XIV — The Re—Kindling Of The Sacred Fire.....</u>	368

Table of Contents

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

<u>The Raid Of Le Vengeur</u>	372
<u>I.—The Dream Of Captain Flaubert</u>	373
<u>II.—A Dinner At Albert Gate</u>	375
<u>III.—The Water-Ray</u>	377
<u>IV.—In The Solent</u>	379
<u>From Pole To Pole</u>	383
<u>I</u>	384
<u>II</u>	387
<u>III</u>	389
<u>IV</u>	391
<u>V</u>	393
<u>VI</u>	396
<u>A Corner In Lightning</u>	400
<u>I</u>	401
<u>II</u>	404

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

George Griffith

This page formatted 2007 Blackmask Online.
<http://www.blackmask.com>

- A Visit To The Moon
- INTRODUCTORY NOTE
- The World Of The War God
- INTRODUCTION
- A Glimpse Of The Sinless Star
- INTRODUCTION
- The World Of The Crystal Cities
- INTRODUCTION
- In Saturn's Realm
- INTRODUCTION
- Homeward Bound
- A Honeymoon In Space
- Prologue
- Chapter I
- Chapter II
- Chapter III
- Chapter IV
- Chapter V
- Chapter VI
- Chapter VII
- Chapter VIII
- Chapter IX
- Chapter X
- Chapter XI
- Chapter XII
- Chapter XIII
- Chapter XIV
- Chapter XV
- Chapter XVI
- Chapter XVII
- Chapter XVIII
- Chapter XIX
- Chapter XX
- The World Peril Of 1910
- Prologue — A Race For A Woman
- Chapter II — Norah's Good-Bye
- Chapter III — Seen Under The Moon
- Chapter IV — The Shadow Of The Terror
- Chapter V — A Glimpse Of The Moon
- Chapter VI — The Note Of War
- Chapter VII — Caught!
- Chapter VIII — First Blood

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

- Chapter IX — The “Flying Fish”
- Chapter X — First Blows From The Air
- Chapter XI — The Tragedy Of The Two Squadrons
- Chapter XII — How London Took The News
- Chapter XIII — A Crime And A Mistake
- Chapter XIV — The Eve Of Battle
- Chapter XV — The Strife Of Giants
- Chapter XVI — How The French Landed At Portsmouth
- Chapter XVII — Away From The Warpath
- Chapter XVIII — A Glimpse Of The Peril
- Chapter XIX — A Change Of Scene
- Chapter XX — The Night Of Terror Begins—
- Chapter XXI — —And Ends
- Chapter XXII — Disaster
- Chapter XXIII — The Other Campaign Begins
- Chapter XXIV — Tom Bowcock–Pitman
- Chapter XXV — Preparing For Action
- Chapter XXVI — The First Bombardment Of London
- Chapter XXVII — Lennard's Ultimatum
- Chapter XXVIII — Concerning Astronomy And Oysters
- Chapter XXIX — The Lion Wakes
- Chapter XXX — Mr Parmenter Says
- Chapter XXXI — John Castellan's Thread
- Chapter XXXII — A Vigil In The Night
- Chapter XXXIII — Mr Parmenter Returns
- Chapter XXXIV — The “Auriole”
- Chapter XXXV — The “Auriole” Hoists The White Ensign
- Chapter XXXVI — A Parley At Aldershot
- Chapter XXXVII — The Verdict of Science
- Chapter XXXVIII — Waiting For Doom
- Chapter XXXIX — The Last Fight
- EPILOGUE — “And On Earth, Peace!”
- The Romance Of Golden Star
- Prologue
- I — His Highness The Mummy
- II — A Physiological Experiment
- The Story of Vilcaroya
- CHAPTER I — Back Through The Shadows
- CHAPTER II — Brothers Of The Blood
- CHAPTER III — In The Hall Of Gold
- CHAPTER IV — The Sister Stars
- CHAPTER V — How Djama Did His Work
- CHAPTER VI — The Waking Of Golden Star
- CHAPTER VII — In The Throne–Room Of Yupanqui
- CHAPTER VIII — How The Soul Of Golden Star Came Back
- CHAPTER IX — The Treachery Of Djama
- CHAPTER X — On The Rodadero
- CHAPTER XI — How We Took The City Of The Sun
- CHAPTER XII — Queen And Crown
- CHAPTER XIII — How Djama Paid His Debt
- CHAPTER XIV — The Re–Kindling Of The Sacred Fire

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

- The Raid Of Le Vengeur
 - I.—The Dream Of Captain Flaubert
 - II.—A Dinner At Albert Gate
 - III.—The Water-Ray
 - IV.—In The Solent
 - From Pole To Pole
 - I.
 - II.
 - III.
 - IV.
 - V.
 - VI.
 - A Corner In Lightning
 - I.
 - II.
-

This eBook was produced by: Richard Scott

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

A Visit To The Moon

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The adventures of Rollo Lenox Smeaton Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride Lilla Zaidie, daughter of the late Professor Hartley Rennick, Demonstrator in Physical Science in the Smith–Oliver University in New York, were first made possible by that distinguished scientist's now famous separation of the Forces of Nature into their positive and negative elements. Starting from the axiom that everything in Nature has its opposite, he not only divided the Universal Force of Gravitation into its elements of attraction and repulsion, but also constructed a machine which enabled him to develop either or both of these elements at will. From this triumph of mechanical genius it was but a step to the magnificent conception which was subsequently realised by Lord Redgrave in the Astronef. Lord Redgrave had met Professor Rennick, about a year before his lamented death, when he was on a holiday excursion in the Canadian Rockies with his daughter. The young millionaire nobleman was equally fascinated by the daring theories of the Professor, and by the mental and physical charms of Miss Zaidie. And thus the chance acquaintance resulted in a partnership, in which the Professor was to find the knowledge and Lord Redgrave the capital for translating the theory of the “R. Force” (Repulsive or Antigravitational Force) into practice, and constructing a vessel which would be capable, not only of rising from the earth, but of passing the limits of the terrestrial atmosphere, and navigating with precision and safety the limitless ocean of Space.

Unhappily, before the Astronef, or star–navigator, was completed at the works which Lord Redgrave had built for her construction on his estate at Smeaton, in Yorkshire, her inventor succumbed to pulmonary complications following an attack of influenza. This left Lord Redgrave the sole possessor of the secret of the “R. Force.” A year after the Professor's death he completed the Astronef, and took her across the Atlantic by rising into Space until the attraction of the earth was so far weakened that in a couple of hours' time he was able to descend in the vicinity of New York. On this trial trip he was accompanied by Andrew Murgatroyd, an old engineer who had superintended the building of the Astronef. This man's family had been attached to his Lordship's for generations and for this reason he was selected as engineer and steersman of the Navigator of the Stars.

The excitement which was caused, not only in America but over the whole civilised world, by the arrival of the Astronef from the distant regions of Space to which she had soared; the marriage of her creator to the daughter of her inventor in the main saloon while she hung motionless in a cloudless sky a mile above the Empire City; their return to earth; the wedding banquet; and their departure to the moon, which they had selected as the first stopping–place on their bridal trip—these are now matters of common knowledge. The present series of narratives begins as the earth sinks away from under them, and their Honeymoon in Space has actually begun.

WHEN the Astronef rose from the ground to commence her marvellous voyage through the hitherto untraversed realms of Space, Lord Redgrave and his bride were standing at the forward–end of a raised deck which ran along about two–thirds of the length of the cylindrical body of the vessel. The walls of this compartment, which was about fifty feet long by twenty broad, were formed of thick, but perfectly transparent, toughened glass, over which, in cases of necessity, curtains of ribbed steel could be drawn from the floor, which was of teak and slightly convex. A light steel rail ran round it and two stairways ran up from the other deck of the vessel to two hatches, one fore and one aft, destined to be hermetically closed when the Astronef had soared beyond breathable atmosphere and was crossing the airless, heatless wastes of interplanetary space.

Lord and Lady Redgrave and Andrew Murgatroyd were the only members of the crew of the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Star-navigator. No more were needed, for on board this marvellous craft nearly everything was done by machinery; warming, lighting, cooking, distillation and re-distillation of water, constant and automatic purification of the air, everything, in fact, but the regulation of the mysterious "R. Force" could be done with a minimum of human attention. This, however, had to be minutely and carefully regulated, and her commander usually performed this duty himself.

The developing engines were in the lowest part of the vessel amidships. Their minimum power just sufficed to make the Astronef a little lighter than her own bulk of air, so that when she visited a planet possessing an atmosphere sufficiently dense, the two propellers at her stern would be capable of driving her through the air at the rate of about a hundred miles an hour. The maximum power would have sufficed to hurl the vessel beyond the limits of the earth's atmosphere in a few minutes.

When they had risen to the height of about a mile above New York, her ladyship, who had been gazing in silent wonder and admiration at the strange and marvellous scene, pointed suddenly towards the East and said: "Look, there's the moon! Just fancy—our first stopping-place! Well, it doesn't look so very far off at present."

Redgrave turned and saw the pale yellow crescent of the new moon just rising above the eastern edge of the Atlantic Ocean.

"It almost looks as if we could steer straight to it right over the water, only, of course, it wouldn't wait there for us," she went on.

"Oh, it'll be there when we want it, never fear," laughed his lordship, "and, after all, it's only a mere matter of about two hundred and forty thousand miles away, and what's that in a trip that will cover hundreds of millions? It will just be a sort of jumping-off place into Space for us."

"Still I shouldn't like to miss seeing it," she said. "I want to know what there is on that other side which nobody has ever seen yet, and settle that question about air and water. Won't it just be heavenly to be able to come back and tell them all about it at home? But fancy me talking stuff like this when we are going, perhaps, to solve some of the hidden mysteries of Creation and, maybe, to look upon things that human eyes were never meant to see," she went on, with a sudden change in her voice.

He felt a little shiver in the arm that was resting upon his, and his hand went down and caught hers.

"Well, we shall see a good many marvels, and, perhaps, miracles, before we come back, but I hardly think we shall see anything that is forbidden. Still, there's one thing we shall do, I hope. We shall solve once and for all the great problem of the worlds—whether they are inhabited or not. By the way," he went on, "I may remind your ladyship that you are just now drawing the last breaths of earthly air which you will taste for some time, in fact until we get back! You may as well take your last look at earth as earth, for the next time you see it, it will be a planet."

She went to the rail and looked over into the enormous void beneath, for all this time the Astronef had been mounting towards the zenith. She could see, by the growing moonlight, vast, vague shapes of land and sea. The myriad lights of New York and Brooklyn were mingled in a tiny patch of dimly luminous haze. The air about her had suddenly grown bitterly cold, and she saw that the stars and planets were shining with a brilliancy she had never seen before. Her husband came to her side, and, laying his arm across her shoulder, said:

"Well, have you said goodbye to your native world? It is a bit solemn, isn't it, saying goodbye to a world that you have been born on; which contains everything that has made up your life, everything that is dear to you?"

"Not quite everything!" she said, looking up at him. "At least, I don't think so."

He immediately made the only reply which was appropriate under the circumstances; and then he said, drawing her towards the staircase: "Well, for the present this is our world; a world travelling among worlds, and as I have been able to bring the most delightful of the Daughters of Terra with me, I, at any rate, am perfectly happy. Now, I think it's getting on to supper time, so if your ladyship will go to your household duties, I'll have a look at my engines and make everything snug for the voyage."

The first thing he did when he got on to the main deck, was to hermetically close the two companion-ways; then he went and carefully inspected the apparatus for purifying the air and supplying it with fresh oxygen from the tanks in which it was stored in liquid form. Lastly he descended into the lower

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

hold of the ship and turned on the energy of repulsion to its full extent, at the same time stopping the engines which had been working the propellers.

It was now no longer necessary or even possible to steer the Astronef. She was directed solely by the repulsive force which would carry her with ever-increasing swiftness, as the attraction of the earth became diminished, towards that neutral point some two hundred thousand miles away, at which the attraction of the earth is exactly balanced by the moon. Her momentum would carry her past this point, and then the "R. Force" would be gradually brought into play in order to avert the unpleasant consequences of a fall of some forty odd thousand miles.

Andrew Murgatroyd, relieved from his duties in the wheelhouse, made a careful inspection of the auxiliary machinery, which was under his special charge, and then retired to his quarters forward to prepare his own evening meal. Meanwhile her ladyship, with the help of the ingenious contrivances with which the kitchen of the Astronef was stocked, and with the use of which she had already made herself quite familiar, had prepared a dainty little souper a deux. Her husband opened a bottle of the finest champagne that the cellars of New York could supply, to drink at once to the prosperity of the voyage, and the health of his beautiful fellow-voyager.

When supper was over and the coffee made he carried the apparatus up the stairs on to the glass-domed upper deck. Then he came back and said:

"You'd better wrap yourself up as warmly as you can, dear, for it's a good deal chillier up there than it is here."

When she reached the deck and took her first glance about her, Zaidie seemed suddenly to lapse into a state of somnambulism. The whole heavens above and around were strewn with thick clusters of stars which she had never seen before. The stars she remembered seeing from the earth were only little pinpoints in the darkness compared with the myriads of blazing orbs which were now shooting their rays across the silent void of Space. So many millions of new ones had come into view that she looked in vain for the familiar constellations. She saw only vast clusters of living gems of all colours crowding the heavens on every side of her. She walked slowly round the deck, looking to right and left and above, incapable for the moment either of thought or speech, but only of dumb wonder, mingled with a dim sense of overwhelming awe. Presently she craned her neck backwards and looked straight up to the zenith. A huge silver crescent, supporting, as it were, a dim, greenish coloured body in its arms stretched overhead across nearly a sixth of the heavens.

Her husband came to her side, took her in his arms, lifted her as if she had been a little child, so feeble had the earth's attraction now become, and laid her in a long, low deck-chair, so that she could look at it without inconvenience. The splendid crescent grew swiftly larger and more distinct, and as she lay there in a trance of wonder and admiration she saw point after point of dazzlingly white light flash out on to the dark portions, and then begin to send out rays as though they were gigantic volcanoes in full eruption, and were pouring torrents of living fire from their blazing craters.

"Sunrise on the moon!" said Redgrave, who had stretched himself on another chair beside her. "A glorious sight, isn't it! But nothing to what we shall see tomorrow morning—only there doesn't happen to be any morning just about here."

"Yes," she said dreamily, "glorious, isn't it? That and all the stars—but I can't think of anything yet, Lenox! It's all too mighty and too marvellous. It doesn't seem as though human eyes were meant to look upon things like this. But where's the earth? We must be able to see that still."

"Not from here," he said, "because it's underneath us. Come below, and you shall see Mother Earth as you have never seen her yet."

They went down into the lower part of the vessel, and to the after-end behind the engine-room. Redgrave switched on a couple of electric lights, and then pulled a lever attached to one of the side-walls. A part of the flooring, about 6ft. square, slid noiselessly away; then he pulled another lever on the opposite side and a similar piece disappeared, leaving a large space covered only by absolutely transparent glass. He switched off the lights again and led her to the edge of it, and said:

"There is your native world, dear; that is the earth!"

Wonderful as the moon had seemed, the gorgeous spectacle, which lay seemingly at her feet, was infinitely more magnificent. A vast disc of silver grey, streaked and dotted with lines and points of dazzling light, and

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

more than half covered with vast, glittering, greyish-green expanses, seemed to form, as it were the floor of the great gulf of space beneath them. They were not yet too far away to make out the general features of the continents and oceans, and fortunately the hemisphere presented to them happened to be singularly free from clouds.

Zaidie stood gazing for nearly an hour at this marvellous vision of the home-world which she had left so far behind her before she could tear herself away and allow her husband to shut the slides again. The greatly diminished weight of her body almost entirely destroyed the fatigue of standing. In fact, at present on board the Astronef it was almost as easy to stand as it was to lie down.

There was of course very little sleep for any of the travellers on this first night of their adventurous voyage, but towards the sixth hour after leaving the earth her ladyship, overcome as much by the emotions which had been awakened within her as by physical fatigue, went to bed, after making her husband promise that he would wake her in good time to see the descent upon the moon. Two hours later she was awake and drinking the coffee which Redgrave had prepared for her. Then she went on to the upper deck.

To her astonishment she found on one hand, day more brilliant than she had ever seen it before, and on the other hand, darkness blacker than the blackest earthly night. On the right hand was an intensely brilliant orb, about half as large again as the full moon seen from earth, shining with inconceivable brightness out of a sky black as midnight and thronged with stars. It was the sun, the sun shining in the midst of airless space.

The tiny atmosphere inclosed in the glass-domed space was lighted brilliantly, but it was not perceptibly warmer, though Redgrave warned her ladyship not to touch anything upon which the sun's rays fell directly as she would find it uncomfortably hot. On the other side was the same black immensity of space which she had seen the night before, an ocean of darkness clustered with islands of light. High above in the zenith floated the great silver-grey disc of earth, a good deal smaller now, and there was another object beneath which was at present of far more interest to her. Looking down to the left she saw a vast semi-luminous area in which not a star was to be seen. It was the earth-lit portion of the long familiar and yet mysterious orb which was to be their resting-place for the next few hours.

"The sun hasn't risen over there yet," said Redgrave, as she was peering down into the void. "It's earth-light still. Now look at the other side."

She crossed the deck and saw the strangest scene she had yet beheld. Apparently only a few miles below her was a huge crescent-shaped plain arching away for hundreds of miles on either side. The outer edge had a ragged look, and little excrescences, which soon took the shape of flat-topped mountains projected from it and stood out bright and sharp against the black void beneath, out of which the stars shone up, as it seemed, sharp and bright above the edge of the disc.

The plain itself was a scene of the most awful and utter desolation that even the sombre fancy of a Dante could imagine. Huge mountain walls, towering to immense heights and inclosing great circular and oval plains, one side of them blazing with intolerable light, and the other side black with impenetrable obscurity; enormous valleys reaching down from brilliant day into rayless night—perhaps down into the empty bowels of the dead world itself; vast, grey-white plains lying round the mountains, crossed by little ridges and by long, black lines which could only be immense fissures with perpendicular sides—but all hard grey-white and black, all intolerable brightness or repulsive darkness; not a sign of life anywhere, no shady forests, no green fields, no broad, glittering oceans; only a ghastly wilderness of dead mountains and dead plains.

"What an awful place!" said Zaidie, in a slowly spoken whisper. "Surely we can't land there. How far are we from it?" "About fifteen hundred miles," replied Redgrave, who was sweeping the scene below him with one of the two powerful telescopes which stood on the deck. "No, it doesn't look very cheerful, does it; but it's a marvellous sight for all that, and one that a good many people on earth would give their ears to see from here. I'm letting her drop pretty fast, and we shall probably land in a couple of hours or so. Meanwhile, you may as well get out your moon atlas and your Jules Verne and Flammarion, and study your lunography. I'm going to turn the power a bit astern so that we shall go down obliquely and see more of the lighted disc. We started at new moon so that you should have a look at the full earth, and also so that we could get round to the invisible side while it is lighted up."

They both went below, he to deflect the repulsive force so that one set of engines should give them a somewhat oblique direction, while the other, acting directly on the surface of the moon, simply retarded their

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

fall; and she to get her maps and the ever-fascinating works of Jules Verne and Flammarion. When they got back, the Astronef had changed her apparent position, and, instead of falling directly on to the moon, was descending towards it in a slanting direction. The result of this was that the sunlit crescent rapidly grew in breadth, whilst peak after peak and range after range rose up swiftly out of the black gulf beyond. The sun climbed quickly up through the star-strewn, mid-day heavens, and the full earth sank more swiftly still behind them.

Another hour of silent, entranced wonder and admiration followed, and then Lenox remarked to Zaidie: "Don't you think it's about time we were beginning to think of breakfast, dear, or do you think you can wait till we land?"

"Breakfast on the moon!" she exclaimed. "That would be just too lovely for words! Of course we'll wait."

"Very well," he said, "you see that big, black ring nearly below us, that, as I suppose you know, is the celebrated Mount Tycho. I'll try and find a convenient spot on the top of the ring to drop on, and then you will be able to survey the scenery from seventeen or eighteen thousand feet above the plains."

About two hours later a slight jarring tremor ran through the frame of the vessel, and the first stage of the voyage was ended. After a passage of less than twelve hours the Astronef had crossed a gulf of nearly two hundred and fifty thousand miles and rested quietly on the untrodden surface of the lunar world.

"We certainly shan't find any atmosphere here," said Redgrave, when they had finished breakfast, "although we may in the deeper parts, so if your ladyship would like a walk we'd better go and put on our breathing dresses."

These were not unlike diving dresses, save that they were much lighter. The helmets were smaller, and made of aluminium covered with asbestos. A sort of knapsack fitted on to the back, and below this was a cylinder of liquefied air which, when passed through the expanding apparatus, would furnish pure air for a practically indefinite period, as the respired air passed into another portion of the upper chamber, where it was forced through a chemical solution which deprived it of its poisonous gases and made it fit to breathe again.

The pressure of air inside the helmet automatically regulated the supply, which was not permitted to circulate into the dress, as the absence of air-pressure on the moon would cause it to instantly expand and probably tear the material, which was a cloth woven chiefly of asbestos fibre. The two helmets could be connected for talking purposes by a light wire communicating with a little telephonic apparatus inside the helmet.

They passed out of the Astronef through an air-tight chamber in the wall of her lowest compartment, Murgatroyd closing the first door behind them. Redgrave opened the next one and dropped a short ladder on to the grey, loose, sand-strewn rock of the little plain on which they had stopped. Then he stood aside and motioned for Zaidie to go down first.

She understood him, and, taking his hand, descended the four easy steps. And so hers was the first human foot which, in all the ages since its creation, had rested on the surface of the World that Had Been. Redgrave followed her with a little spring which landed him gently beside her, then he took both her hands and pressed them hard in his. He would have kissed her if he could; but that of course was out of the question.

Then he connected the telephone wire, and hand in hand they crossed the little plateau towards the edge of the tremendous gulf, fifty-four miles across, and nearly twenty thousand feet deep. In the middle of it rose a conical mountain about five thousand feet high, the summit of which was just beginning to catch the solar rays. Half of the vast plain was already brilliantly illuminated, but round the central cone was a vast semi-circle of shadow impenetrable in its blackness.

"Day and night in this same valley, actually side by side!" said Zaidie. Then she stopped, and pointed down into the brightly lit distance, and went on hurriedly: "Look, Lenox, look at the foot of the mountain there! Doesn't that seem like the ruins of a city?"

"It does," he said, "and there's no reason why it shouldn't be. I've always thought that, as the air and water disappeared from the upper parts of the moon, the inhabitants, whoever they were, must have been driven down into the deeper parts. Shall we go down and see?"

"But how?" she said. He pointed towards the Astronef. She nodded her helmeted head, and they went back to the vessel. A few minutes later the Astronef had risen from her resting-place with a spring which rapidly carried her over half of the vast crater, and then she began to drop slowly into the depths. She grounded as

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

gently as before, and presently they were standing on the lunar surface about a mile from the central cone. This time, however, Redgrave had taken the precaution to bring a magazine rifle and a couple of revolvers with him in case any strange monsters, relics of the vanished fauna of the moon, might still be taking refuge in these mysterious depths. Zaidie, although like a good many American girls, she could shoot excellently well, carried no weapon more offensive than a whole-plate camera and a tripod, which here, of course, only weighed a sixth of their earthly weight.

The first thing that Redgrave did when they stepped out on to the sandy surface of the plain was to stoop down and strike a wax match; there was a tiny glimmer of light which was immediately extinguished.

“No air here,” he said, “so we shall find no living beings—at any rate, none like ourselves.”

They found the walking exceedingly easy although their boots were purposely weighted in order to counteract to some extent the great difference in gravity. A few minutes' sharp walking brought them to the outskirts of the city. It had no walls, and in fact exhibited no signs of preparations for defence. Its streets were broad and well-paved; and the houses, built of great blocks of grey stone joined together with white cement, looked as fresh and unworn as though they had only been built a few months, whereas they had probably stood for hundreds of thousands of years. They were flat roofed, all of one storey and practically of one type.

There were very few public buildings, and absolutely no attempt at ornamentation was visible. Round some of the houses were spaces which might once have been gardens. In the midst of the city, which appeared to cover an area of about four square miles, was an enormous square paved with flag stones, which were covered to the depth of a couple of inches with a light grey dust, and, as they walked across it, this remained perfectly still save for the disturbance caused by their footsteps. There was no air to support it, otherwise it might have risen in clouds about them.

From the centre of this square rose a huge Pyramid nearly a thousand feet in height, the sole building in the great, silent city which appeared to have been raised as a monument, or, possibly, a temple by the hands of its vanished inhabitants. As they approached this they saw a curious white fringe lying round the steps by which it was approached. When they got nearer they found that this fringe was composed of millions of white-bleached bones and skulls, shaped very much like those of terrestrial men except that the ribs were out of all proportion to the rest of the bones.

They stopped awe-stricken before this strange spectacle. Redgrave stooped down and took hold of one of the bones, a huge thigh bone. It broke in two as he tried to lift it, and the piece which remained in his hand crumbled instantly to white powder.

“Whoever they were,” said Redgrave, “they were giants. When air and water failed above they came down here by some means and built this city. You see what enormous chests they must have had. That would be Nature's last struggle to enable them to breathe the diminishing atmosphere. These, of course, will be the last descendants of the fittest to breathe it; this was their temple, I suppose, and here they came to die—I wonder how many thousand years ago—perishing of heat, and cold, and hunger, and thirst, the last tragedy of a race, which, after all, must have been something like our own.”

“It is just too awful for words,” said Zaidie. “Shall we go into the temple? That seems one of the entrances up there, only I don't like walking over all those bones.”

Her voice sounded very strange over the wire which connected their helmets.

“I don't suppose they'll mind if we do,” replied Redgrave, “only we mustn't go far in. It may be full of cross passages and mazes, and we might never get out. Our lamps won't be much use in there, you know, for there's no air. They'll just be points of light, and we shan't see anything but them. It's very aggravating, but I'm afraid there's no help for it. Come along!”

They ascended the steps, crushing the bones and skulls to powder beneath their feet, and entered the huge, square doorway, which looked like a rectangle of blackness against the grey-white of the wall. Even through their asbestos-woven clothing they felt a sudden shock of icy cold. In those few steps they had passed from a temperature of tenfold summer heat into one far below that of the coldest spots on earth. They turned on the electric lamps which were fitted to the breast-plates of their dresses, but they could see nothing save the glow of the lamps. All about them was darkness impenetrable, and so they reluctantly turned back to the doorway, leaving all the mysteries which the vast temple might contain to remain mysteries to the end of time. They passed down the steps again and crossed the square, and for the next half hour Zaidie, who was photographer

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

to the expedition, was busy taking photographs of the Pyramid with its ghastly surroundings, and a few general views of this strange City of the dead.

Then they went back to the Astronef. They found Murgatroyd pacing up and down under the dome looking about him with serious eyes, but yet betraying no particular curiosity. The wonderful vessel was at once his home and his idol, and nothing but the direct orders of his master would have induced him to leave her even in a world in which there was probably not a living human being to dispute possession of her.

When they had resumed their ordinary clothing, she rose rapidly from the surface of the plain, crossed the encircling wall at the height of a few hundred feet, and made her way at a speed of about fifty miles an hour towards the regions of the South Pole. Behind them to the north-west they could see from their elevation of nearly thirty thousand feet the vast expanse of the Sea of Clouds. Dotted here and there were the shining points and ridges of light, marking the peaks and crater walls which the rays of the rising sun had already touched. Before them and to right and left of them rose a vast maze of crater-rings and huge ramparts of mountain-walls inclosing plains so far below their summits that the light of neither sun nor earth ever reached them.

By directing the force exerted by what might now be called the propelling part of the engines against the mountain masses, which they crossed to right and left and behind, Redgrave was able to take a zigzag course which carried him over many of the walled plains which were wholly or partially lit up by the sun, and in nearly all of the deepest their telescopes revealed what they had found within the crater of Tycho. At length, pointing to a gigantic circle of white light fringing an abyss of utter darkness, he said:

"There is Newton, the greatest mystery of the moon. Those inner walls are twenty-four thousand feet high; that means that the bottom, which has never been seen by human eyes, is about five thousand feet below the surface of the moon. What do you say, dear—shall we go down and see if the searchlight will show us anything? There may be air there."

"Certainly!" replied Zaidie decisively, "haven't we come to see things that nobody else has ever seen?"

Redgrave signalled to the engine-room, and presently the Astronef changed her course, and in a few minutes was hanging, bathed in sunlight, like a star suspended over the unfathomable gulf of darkness below.

As they sank beyond the sunlight, Murgatroyd turned on both the head and stern searchlights. They dropped down ever slowly and more slowly until gradually the two long, thin streams of light began to spread themselves out, and by the time the Astronef came gently to a rest they were swinging round her in broad fans of diffused light over a dark, marshy surface, with scattered patches of moss and reeds which showed dull gleams of stagnant water between them.

"Air and water at last!" said Redgrave, as he rejoined his wife on the upper deck, "air and water and eternal darkness! Well, we shall find life on the moon here if anywhere. Shall we go?"

"Of course," replied her ladyship, "what else have we come for? Must we put on the breathing-dresses?"

"Certainly," he replied, "because, although there's air we don't know yet whether it is breathable. It may be half carbon-dioxide for all we know; but a few matches will soon tell us that."

Within a quarter of an hour they were again standing on the surface. Murgatroyd had orders to follow them as far as possible with the head searchlight, which, in the comparatively rarefied atmosphere, appeared to have a range of several miles. Redgrave struck a match, and held it up level with his head. It burnt with a clear, steady, yellow flame.

"Where a match will burn a man can breathe," he said. "I'm going to see what lunar air is like."

"For Heaven's sake be careful, dear," came the reply in pleading tones across the wire.

"All right, but don't open your helmet till I tell you."

He then raised the hermetically-closed slide of glass, which formed the front of the helmets half an inch or so. Instantly he felt a sensation like the drawing of a red-hot iron across his skin. He snapped the visor down and clasped it in its place. For a moment or two he gasped for breath and then he said rather faintly:

"It's no good, it's too cold, it would freeze the blood in our veins. I think we'd better go back and explore this valley under cover. We can't do anything in the dark, and we can see just as well from the upper deck with the searchlights. Besides, as there's air and water here, there's no telling but there may be inhabitants of sorts such as we shouldn't care to meet."

He took her hand, and, to Murgatroyd's intense relief, they went back to the vessel.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Redgrave then raised the Astronef a couple of hundred feet and, by directing the repulsive force against the mountain walls, developed just sufficient energy to keep them moving at about twelve miles an hour.

They began to cross the plain with their searchlights flashing out in all directions. They had scarcely gone a mile before the headlight fell upon a moving form half walking, half crawling among some stunted brown-leaved bushes by the side of a broad, stagnant stream.

“Look!” said Zaidie, clasping her husband's arm, “is that a gorilla, or—no, it can't be a man.”

The light was turned full upon the object. If it had been covered with hair it might have passed for some strange type of the ape tribe, but its skin was smooth and of a livid grey. Its lower limbs were evidently more powerful than its upper; its chest was enormously developed, but the stomach was small. The head was big and round and smooth. As they came nearer they saw that in place of finger-nails it had long white feelers which it kept extended and constantly waving about as it groped its way towards the water. As the intense light flashed full on it, it turned its head towards them. It had a nose and a mouth. The nose was long and thick, with huge mobile nostrils, and the mouth formed an angle something like a fish's lips, and of teeth there seemed none. At either side of the upper part of the nose there were two little sunken holes, in which this thing's ancestors of countless thousand years ago had possessed eyes.

As she looked upon this awful parody of what had once perhaps been a human face, Zaidie covered hers with her hands and uttered a little moan of horror.

“Horrible, isn't it?” said Redgrave. “I suppose that's what the last remnants of the lunarians have come to, evidently once men and women something like ourselves. I daresay the ancestors of that thing have lived here in coldness and darkness for hundreds of generations. It shows how tremendously tenacious nature is of life.

“Ages ago that awful thing's ancestors lived up yonder when there were seas and rivers, fields and forests just as we have them on earth; men and women who could see and breathe and enjoy everything in life and had built up civilisations like ours. Look, it's going to fish or something. Now we shall see what it feeds on. I wonder why that water isn't frozen. I suppose there must be some internal heat left still, split up into patches, I daresay, and lakes of lava. Perhaps this valley is just over one of them, and that's why these creatures have managed to survive. Ah, there's another of them, smaller not so strongly formed. That thing's mate, I suppose, female of the species. Ugh, I wonder how many hundreds of thousands of years it will take for our descendants to come to that.”

“I hope our dear old earth will hit something else and be smashed to atoms before that happens!” exclaimed Zaidie, whose curiosity had now partly overcome her horror. “Look, it's trying to catch something.”

The larger of the two creatures had groped its way to the edge of the sluggish, foetid water and dropped or rather rolled quietly into it. It was evidently cold-blooded or nearly so, for no warm-blooded animal could have withstood that more than glacial cold. Presently the other dropped in, too, and both disappeared for some minutes. Then suddenly there was a violent commotion in the water a few yards away; and the two creatures rose to the surface of the water, one with a wriggling eel-like fish between its jaws.

They both groped their way towards the edge, and had just reached it and were pulling themselves out when a hideous shape rose out of the water behind them. It was like the head of an octopus joined to the body of a boa-constrictor, but head and neck were both of the same ghastly, livid grey as the other two bodies. It was evidently blind, too, for it took no notice of the brilliant glare of the searchlight. Still it moved rapidly towards the two scrambling forms, its long white feelers trembling out in all directions. Then one of them touched the smaller of the two creatures. Instantly the rest shot out and closed round it, and with scarcely a struggle it was dragged beneath the water and vanished.

Zaidie uttered a little low scream and covered her face again, and Redgrave said: “The same old brutal law again. Life preying upon life even on a dying world, a world that is more than half dead itself. Well, I think we've seen enough of this place. I suppose those are about the only types of life we should meet anywhere, and one acquaintance with them satisfies me completely. I vote we go and see what the invisible hemisphere is like.”

“I have had all I want of this side,” said Zaidie, looking away from the scene of the hideous conflict, “so the sooner the better.”

A few minutes later the Astronef was again rising towards the stars with her searchlights still flashing down into the Valley of Expiring Life, which seemed worse than the Valley of Death. As he followed the rays

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

with a pair of powerful field glasses, Redgrave fancied that he saw huge, dim shapes moving about the stunted shrubbery and through the slimy pools of the stagnant rivers, and once or twice he got a glimpse of what might well have been the ruins of towns and cities; but the gloom soon became too deep and dense for the searchlights to pierce and he was glad when the Astronef soared up into the brilliant sunlight once more. Even the ghastly wilderness of the lunar landscape was welcome after the nameless horrors of that hideous abyss.

After a couple of hours rapid travelling, Redgrave pointed down to a comparatively small, deep crater, and said:

“There, that is Malapert. It is almost exactly at the south pole of the moon, and there,” he went on pointing ahead, “is the horizon of the hemisphere which no earthborn eyes but ours and Murgatroyd's have ever seen.”

Contrary to certain ingenious speculations which have been indulged in, they found that the hemisphere, which for countless ages has never been turned towards the earth, was almost an exact replica of the visible one. Fully three-fourths of it was brilliantly illuminated by the sun, and the scene which presented itself to their eyes was practically the same which they had beheld on the earthward side; huge groups of enormous craters and ringed mountains, long, irregular chains crowned with sharp, splintery peaks, and between these vast, deeply depressed areas, ranging in colour from dazzling white to grey-brown, marking the beds of the vanished lunar seas.

As they crossed one of these, Redgrave allowed the Astronef to sink to within a few thousand feet of the surface, and then he and Zaidie swept it with their telescopes. Their chance search was rewarded by what they had not seen in the sea-beds of the other hemisphere. These depressions were far deeper than the others, evidently many thousands of feet deep, but the sun's rays were blazing full into this one, and, dotted round its slopes at varying elevations, they made out little patches which seemed to differ from the general surface.

“I wonder if those are the remains of cities,” said Zaidie. “Isn't it possible that the populations might have built their cities along the seas, and that their descendants may have followed the waters as they retreated, I mean as they either dried up or disappeared into the centre?”

“Very probable indeed, dear,” he said, “we'll go down and see.”

He diminished the vertically repulsive force a little, and the Astronef dropped slantingly towards the bed of what might once have been the Pacific of the Moon. When they were within about a couple of thousand feet of the surface it became quite plain that Zaidie was correct in her hypothesis. The vast sea-floor was literally strewn with the ruins of countless cities and towns, which had been inhabited by an equally countless series of generations of men and women, who had, perhaps, lived in the days when our own world was a glowing mass of molten rock, surrounded by the envelope of vapours which has since condensed to form its oceans.

The nearer they approached to the central and deepest depression the more perfect the buildings became until, down in the lowest depth, they found a collection of low-built square edifices, scarcely better than huts which had clustered round the little lake into which ages before the ocean had dwindled. But where the lake had been there was now only a depression covered with grey sand and brown rock.

Into this they descended and touched the lunar soil for the last time. A couple of hours' excursion among the houses proved that they had been the last refuge of the last descendants of a dying race, a race which had steadily degenerated just as the successions of cities had done, as the bitter fight for mere existence had become keener and keener until the two last essentials air and water, had failed and then the end had come.

The streets, like the square of the great temple of Tycho, were strewn with myriads and myriads of bones, and there were myriads more scattered round what had once been the shores of the dwindling lake. Here, as elsewhere, there was not a sign or a record of any kind—carving or sculpture.

Inside the great Pyramid of the City of Tycho they might, perhaps, have found something—some stone or tablet which bore the mark of the artist's hand; elsewhere, perhaps, they might have found cities reared by older races, which might have rivalled the creations of Egypt and Babylon, but there was no time to look for these. All that they had seen of the dead World had only sickened and saddened them. The untravelled regions of Space peopled by living worlds more akin to their own were before them, and the red disc of Mars was glowing in the zenith among the diamond-white clusters which gemmed the black sky behind him.

More than a hundred millions of miles had to be traversed before they would be able to set foot on his surface, and so, after one last look round the Valley of Death about them Redgrave turned on the full energy of the repulsive force in a vertical direction, and the Astronef leapt upwards in a straight line for her new

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

destination. The unknown hemisphere spread out in a vast plain beneath them, the blazing sun rose on their left, and the brilliant silver orb of the Earth on their right, and so, full of wonder, and yet without regret, they bade farewell to the World that Was The Moon.

THE END

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

The World Of The War God

INTRODUCTION

For their honeymoon Rollo Lenox Smeaton Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie, leave the earth on a visit to the moon and the principal planets; their sole companion being Andrew Murgatroyd, an old engineer who had superintended the building of the Astronef in which the journey is made. By means of the "R Force," or Anti-Gravitational Force, of the secret of which Lord Redgrave is the sole possessor, they are able to navigate with precision and safety the limitless ocean of space. Their adventures on the moon were described in the first story of the series.

THE Earth and the Moon were more than a hundred Million miles behind in the depths of Space, and the Astronef had crossed this immense gap in eleven days and a few hours; but this apparently inconceivable speed was not altogether due to the powers of the Navigator of the Stars, for Lord Redgrave had taken advantage of the passage of the planet along its orbit towards that of the earth; therefore, while the Astronef was approaching Mars with ever-increasing speed, Mars was travelling towards the Astronef at the rate of sixteen miles a second. The great silver disc of the earth had diminished until it looked only a little larger than Venus appears from the earth. In fact the planet Terra is to the inhabitants of Mars what Venus is to us, the star of the morning and evening.

Breakfast on the morning of the twelfth day, or, since there is neither day nor night in Space, it would be more correct to say the twelfth period of twenty-four earth-hours as measured by the chronometers, was just over, and the Commander of the Astronef was standing with his bride in the forward end of the glass-covered deck looking downwards at a vast crescent of rosy light which stretched out over an arc of more than ninety degrees. Two tiny black spots were travelling towards each other across it. "Ah!" said her ladyship, going towards one of the telescopes, "there are the moons. I was reading my Gulliver last night. I wonder what the old Dean would have given to be here, and see how true his guess was. Have you made up your mind to land on them?"

"I don't see why we shouldn't," said her husband. "I think they'd make rather convenient stopping-places; besides, we want to know whether they have atmospheres and inhabitants."

"What, people living on those wee things?" she laughed, "why, they're only about thirty or forty miles round, aren't they?"

"That's about it," he said, "but that's just one of the points I want to solve, and as for life, it doesn't always mean people, you know. We are only a few hundred miles away from Deimos, the outer one, and he is twelve thousand five hundred miles from Mars. I vote we drop on him first and let him carry us towards his brother Phobos. Then when we've examined him we'll drop down to Phobos and take a trip round Mars on him. He does the journey in about seven hours and a half, and as he's only three thousand seven hundred miles above the surface we ought to get a very good view of our next stopping-place."

"That ought to be quite a delightful trip!" said her ladyship, "but how commonplace you are getting, Lenox. That's so like you Englishmen. We are doing what has only been dreamt of before, and here you are talking about moons and planets as if they were railway stations."

"Well, if your ladyship prefers it, we will call them undiscovered islands and continents in the Ocean of Space. That does sound a little bit better, doesn't it? Now I must go down and see to my engines."

When he had gone, Zaidie sat down to the telescope again and kept it on one of the little black spots travelling across the crescent of Mars. Both it and the other spot rapidly grew larger, and the features of the planet itself became more distinct. She could make out the seas and continents and the mysterious canals quite plainly through the clear rosy atmosphere, and, with the aid of the telescope, she could even make out the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

glimmer which the inner moon threw upon the unlighted portion of the disc.

Deimos grew bigger and bigger, and in about half-an-hour the Astronef grounded gently on what looked to her like a dimly-lighted circular plain, but which, when her eyes became accustomed to the light, was more like the summit of a conical mountain. Redgrave raised the keel a little from the surface again and propelled her towards a thin circle of light on the tiny horizon. As they crossed into the sunlit portion it became quite plain that Deimos at any rate was as airless and lifeless as the moon. The surface was composed of brown rock and red sand broken up into miniature hills and valleys. There were a few traces of bygone volcanic action, but it was evident that the internal fires of this tiny world must have burnt themselves out very quickly.

“Not much to be seen here,” said Redgrave, “and I don't think it would be safe to go out. The attraction is so weak here that we might find ourselves falling off with very little exertion. You might take a couple of photographs of the surface, and then we'll be off to Phobos.”

A few minutes later Zaidie got a couple of good photographs of the satellite. The attraction of Mars now began to make itself strongly felt, and the Astronef dropped rapidly through the eight thousand miles which separate the inner and outer Moons of Mars. As they approached Phobos they saw that half the little disc was brilliantly lighted by the same rays of the sun which were glowing on the rapidly increasing crescent of Mars beneath them. By careful manipulation of his engines Lord Redgrave managed to meet the approaching satellite with a hardly perceptible shock about the centre of its lighted portion, that is to say the side turned towards the planet.

Mars now appeared as a gigantic rosy moon filling the whole vault of the heavens above them. Their telescopes brought the three thousand seven hundred and fifty miles down to about fifty. The rapid motion of the tiny satellite afforded them a spectacle which might be compared to the rising of a moon glowing with rosy light and hundreds of times larger than the earth. The speed of the vehicle of which they had taken possession, something like four thousand two hundred miles an hour, caused the surface of the planet to apparently sweep away from below them from west to east, just as the earth appears to slip away from under the car of a balloon.

Neither of them left the telescopes for more than a few minutes during this aerial circumnavigation. Murgatroyd, outwardly impassive, but inwardly filled with solemn fears for the fate of this impiously daring voyage, brought them wine and sandwiches and later on tea and toast and more sandwiches; but they hardly touched even these, so absorbed were they in the wonderful spectacle which was passing swiftly under their eyes. Their telescopes were excellent ones, and at that distance Mars gave up all his secrets.

Phobos revolves from west to east almost along the plane of the planet's equator. To left and right they saw the huge ice-caps of the South and North Poles gleaming through the red atmosphere with a pale sunset glimmer. Then came the great stretches of sea, often obscured by vast banks of clouds, which, as the sunlight fell upon them, looked strangely like the earth-clouds at sunset. Then, almost immediately underneath them spread out the great land areas of the equatorial region. The three continents of Halle, Gallileo, and Tycho-land; then Huygens—which is to Mars what Europe, Asia, and Africa are to the earth. Then Herschell and Copernicus. Nearly all of these land masses were split up into semi-regular divisions by the famous canals which have so long puzzled terrestrial observers.

“Well, there is one problem solved at any rate,” said Redgrave, when after a journey of nearly four hours they had crossed the western hemisphere. “Mars is getting, very old, her seas are diminishing, and her continents are increasing, and those canals are the remains of gulfs and isthmuses which have been widened and deepened and lengthened by human, or we'll say Martian, labour, partly, I've no doubt, for purposes of navigation, and partly to keep the inhabitants of the interior of the continent within measurable distance of the sea. There's not the slightest doubt about that. Then, you see, we've seen scarcely any mountains to speak of so far, only ranges of low hills.”

“And that means, I suppose,” said Zaidie, “that they've all been worn down as the mountains of the earth are worn away. I was reading Flammarion's 'End of the World' last night, and he, you know, painted the earth at the end as an enormous plain of land, no hills or mountains, no seas, and only sluggish rivers draining into marshes. I suppose that's what they're coming to down yonder. Now, I wonder what sort of civilisation we shall find. Perhaps we shan't find any at all. Suppose all their civilisations have worn out, and they are degenerating into the same struggle for sheer existence those poor creatures in the moon must have had.”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Or suppose,” said his lordship seriously, “we find that they have passed the zenith of civilisation, and are dropping back into savagery, but still have the use of weapons and means of destruction which we, perhaps, have no notion of, and are inclined to use them. We'd better be careful, dear.”

“What do you mean, Lenox?” she said. “They wouldn't try to do us any harm, would they? Why should they?”

“I don't say they would,” he replied, “but still you never know. You see, their ideas of right and wrong and hospitality and all that sort of thing might quite differ to what we have on the earth. In fact, they may not be men at all, but just a sort of monster with a semi-human intellect, perhaps a superhuman one with ideas that we have no notion of. Then there's another thing: suppose they fancied a trip through Space, and thought that they had quite as good a right to the Astronef as we have? I dare say they've seen us if they've got telescopes, as no doubt they have, perhaps a good deal more powerful than ours, and they may be getting ready to receive us now. I think I'll get the guns up before we go down, in case our reception may not be a friendly one.”

The defensive armament of the Astronef consisted of four pneumatic guns, which could be mounted on swivels, two ahead and two astern, and which carried a shell containing either one of two kinds of explosives invented by her creator. One was a solid, and burst on impact with an explosive force equal to about twenty pounds of dynamite. The other consisted of two liquids separated in the shell, and these, when mixed by the breaking of the partition, burst into a volume of flame which could not be extinguished by any known human means. It would burn even in a vacuum, since it supplied its own elements of combustion. The guns would throw these shells to a distance of about seven terrestrial miles. On the upper deck there were also stands for a couple of light machine guns, capable of discharging seven hundred bullets a minute.

The small arms consisted of a couple of heavy, ten-bore, elephant guns carrying explosive bullets, a dozen rifles and fowling pieces of different makes of which three, a single and a double-barrelled rifle and a double-barrelled shot-gun, belonged to her ladyship, as well as a dainty brace of revolvers, one of half-a-dozen brace of various calibres which completed the minor armament of the Astronef.

These guns were got up and mounted while the attraction of the planet was comparatively feeble, and the guns themselves were, therefore, of very little weight. On the surface of the earth a score of men could not have done the work, but on board the Astronef, suspended in space, his lordship and Murgatroyd found the work easy, and Zaidie herself picked up a Maxim and carried it about as though it were a toy sewing-machine.

“Now I think we can go down,” said Redgrave, when everything had been put in position as far as possible. “I wonder whether we shall find the atmosphere of Mars suitable for terrestrial lungs. It will be rather awkward if it isn't.”

A very slight exertion of repulsive force was sufficient to detach the Astronef from the body of Phobos. She dropped rapidly towards the surface of the planet, and within three hours they saw the sunlight for the first time since they had left the Earth shining through an unmistakable atmosphere, an atmosphere of a pale, rosy hue, instead of the azure of the earthly skies, and an angular observation showed that they were within fifty miles of the surface of the undiscovered world.

“Well, there's air here of some sort, there's no doubt. We'll drop a bit further and then Andrew shall start the propellers. They'll very soon give us an idea of the density. Do you notice the change in the temperature? That's the diffused rays instead of the direct ones. Twenty miles, I think that will do. I'll stop her now and we'll prospect for a landing-place.”

He went down to apply the repulsive force directly to the surface of Mars, so as to check the descent, and then he put on his breathing-dress, went into the exit chamber, closed one door behind him, opened the other and allowed it to fill with Martian air; then he shut it again, opened his visor and took a cautious breath.

It may, perhaps, have been the idea that he, the first of all the sons of Earth, was breathing the air of another world, or it might have been some peculiar property from the Martian atmosphere, but he immediately experienced a sensation such as usually follows drinking a glass of champagne. He took another breath, and another. Then he opened the inner door and went on to the lower deck, saying to himself:

“Well, the air's all right if it is a bit champagney, rich in oxygen, I suppose, with perhaps a trace of nitrous-oxide in it. Still, it's certainly breathable and that's the principal thing.”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

"It's all right, dear." he said as he reached the upper deck where Zaidie was walking about round the sides of the glass dome gazing with all her eyes at the strange scene of mingled cloud and sea, and land, which spread for an immense distance on all sides of them. "I have breathed the air of Mars, and even at this height it is distinctly wholesome, though of course it's rather thin, and I had it mixed with some of our own atmosphere. Still I think it will agree all right with us lower down."

"Well, then," said Zaidie, "suppose we get down below those clouds and see what there really is to be seen."

"Your ladyship has but to speak and be obeyed," he replied, and disappeared into the lower regions of the vessel.

In a couple of minutes she saw the cloud belt below them rising rapidly. When her husband returned the Astronef plunged into a sea of rosy mist.

"The clouds of Mars," she exclaimed, "fancy a world with pink clouds! I wonder what there is on the other side." The next moment they saw.

Just below them, at a distance of about five earth-miles, lay an irregularly triangular island, a detached portion of the Continent of Huygens almost equally divided by the Martian equator, and lying with another almost similarly shaped island between the fortieth and fiftieth meridians of west longitude. The two islands were divided by a broad straight stretch of water about the width of the English Channel between Folkestone and Boulogne. Instead of the bright blue green of terrestrial seas, this connecting link between the great Northern and Southern Martian oceans had an orange tinge.

The land immediately beneath them was of a gently undulating character, something like the Downs of South-Eastern England. No mountains were visible in any direction. The lower portions, particularly along the borders of the canals and the sea, were thickly dotted with towns and cities, apparently of enormous extent. To the north of the Island Continent there was a Peninsula, covered with a vast collection of buildings, which, with the broad streets and spacious squares which divided them, must have covered an area of something like two hundred square miles.

"There's the London of Mars!" said Redgrave, pointing down towards it; "where the London of Earth will be in a few thousand years, close to the equator. And you see all those other towns and cities crowded round the canals! I dare say when we go across the northern and southern temperate zones we shall find them in about the state that Siberia or Patagonia are in."

"I dare say we shall," replied Zaidie, "Martian civilisation is crowding towards the equator, though I should call that place down there the greater New York of Mars, and see there's Brooklyn just across the canal. I wonder what they're thinking about us down there."

"Hullo, what's that!" exclaimed Redgrave, interrupting her and pointing towards the great city whose roofs, apparently of glass, were flashing with a thousand tints in the pale crimson sunlight. "That's either an air-ship or another Astronef, and it's evidently coming up to interview us. So they've solved the problem, have they? Well, dear, I think it quite possible that we're in for a pretty exciting time on Mars."

While he was speaking a little dark shape, at first not much bigger than a bird, had risen from the glittering roofs of the city. It rapidly increased in size until in a few minutes Zaidie got a glimpse of it through one of the telescopes and said:

"It's a great big thing something like the Astronef, only it has wings and, I think, masts; yes, there are three masts and there's something glittering on the tops of them."

"Revolving helices, I suppose. He's screwing himself up into the air. That shows that they must either have stronger and lighter machinery here than we have, or, as the astronomers have thought, this atmosphere is denser than ours and therefore easier to fly in. Then, of course, things are only half their earthly weight here. Well, I suppose we may as well let them come and reconnoitre; then we shall see what kind of creatures they are. Ah! there are a lot more of them, some coming from Brooklyn, too, as you call it. Come up into the wheelhouse and I'll relieve Murgatroyd so that he can go and look after his engines. We shall have to give these gentlemen a lesson in flying. Meanwhile, in case of accidents, we may as well make ourselves as invulnerable as possible."

A few minutes later they were in the little steel conning-tower forward, watching the approach of the Martian fleet through the thick windows of toughened glass which enabled them to look in every direction

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

except straight down. The steel coverings had been drawn down over the glass dome of the main deck, and Murgatroyd had gone down to the engine-room, which was connected with the conning-tower by telephone and electric signal, as well as by speaking tubes. Fifty feet ahead of them stretched out a long shining spur, the forward end of the Astronef of which ten feet were solid steel, a ram which no floating structure built by human hands could have resisted.

Redgrave was at the wheel, standing with his hands on the steering-wheel, looking more serious than he had done so far during the voyage. Zaidie stood beside him with a powerful binocular telescope watching, with cheeks a little paler than usual, the movements of the Martian air-ships. She counted twenty-five vessels rising round them in a wide circle.

"I don't like the idea of a whole fleet coming up," said Redgrave, as he watched them rising, and the ring narrowing round the still motionless Astronef. "If they only wanted to know who and what we are, or to leave their cards on us, as it were, and bid us welcome to the world, one ship could have done that just as well as fifty. This lot coming up looks as if they wanted to get round and capture us."

"It does look like it!" said Zaidie, with her glasses fixed on the nearest of the vessels; "and now I can see they've guns, too, something like ours, and, perhaps, as you said just now, they may have explosives that we don't know anything about. Oh, dear, suppose they were able to smash us up with a single shot!"

"You needn't be afraid of that, dear!" said Redgrave, laying his hand on her shoulder; "but, of course, it's perfectly natural that they should look upon us with a certain amount of suspicion, dropping like this on them from the stars. Can you see anything like men on board them yet?"

"No, they're all closed in," she replied, "just as we are; but they've got conning-towers like this, and something like windows along the sides; that's where the guns are, and the guns are moving, they're pointing them at us. Lenox, I'm afraid they're going to shoot."

"Then we may as well spoil their aim," he said, pressing an electric button three times, and then once more after a little interval. In obedience to the signal Murgatroyd turned on the repulsive force to half power, and the Astronef leapt up vertically a couple of thousand feet; then Redgrave pressed the button once and stopped. Another signal set the propellers in motion, and as she sprang forward across the circle formed by the Martian air-ships, they looked down and saw that the place which they had just left was occupied by a thick, greenish-yellow cloud.

"Look, Lenox, what on earth is that?" exclaimed Zaidie, pointing down to it.

"What on Mars would be nearer the point, dear," he said, with what she thought a somewhat vicious laugh. "That I'm afraid means anything but a friendly reception for us. That cloud is one of two things. It's either made by the explosion of twenty or thirty shells, or else it's made of gases intended to either poison us or make us insensible, so that they can take possession of the ship. In either case I should say that the Martians are not what we should call gentlemen."

"I should think not," she said angrily. "They might at least have taken us for friends till they had proved us enemies, which they wouldn't have done. Nice sort of hospitality that, considering how far we've come, and we can't shoot back because we haven't got the ports open."

"And a very good thing too!" laughed Redgrave. "If we had had them open, and that volley had caught us unawares, the Astronef would probably have been full of poisonous gases by this time, and your honeymoon, dear, would have come to a somewhat untimely end. Ah, they're trying to follow us! Well, now we'll see how high they can fly."

He sent another signal to Murgatroyd, and the Astronef, still beating the Martian air with the fans of her propellers, and travelling forward at about fifty miles an hour, rose in a slanting direction through a dense bank of rosy-tinted clouds, which hung over the bigger of the two cities—New York, as Zaidie had named it. When they reached the golden red sunlight above it, the Astronef stopped her ascent, and with half a turn of the wheel her commander sent her sweeping round in a wide circle. A few minutes later they saw the Martian fleet rise almost simultaneously through the clouds. They seemed to hesitate a moment, and then the prow of every vessel was directed towards the swiftly moving Astronef.

"Well, gentlemen," said Redgrave, "you evidently don't know anything about Professor Rennick and his R. Force; and yet you ought to know that we couldn't have come through space without being able to get beyond this little atmosphere of yours. Now let us see how fast you can fly."

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Another signal went down to Murgatroyd, and the whirling propellers became two intersecting circles of light. The speed of the Astronef increased to a hundred miles an hour, and the Martian fleet began to drop behind and trail out into a triangle like a flock of huge birds.

"That's lovely; we're leaving them!" exclaimed Zaidie leaning forward with the glasses to her eyes and tapping the floor of the conning-tower with her toe as if she wanted to dance, "and their wings are working faster than ever. They don't seem to have any screws."

"Probably because they've solved the problem of the bird's flight," said Redgrave, "They're not gaining on us, are they?"

"No, they're at about the same distance."

"Then we'll see how they can soar."

Another signal went over the wire, the Astronef's propellers slowed down and stopped, and the vessel began to rise swiftly towards the Zenith, which the Sun was now approaching. The Martian fleet continued the impossible chase until the limits of the navigable atmosphere. about eight earth-miles above the surface, was reached. Here the air was evidently too rarefied for their wings to act. They came to a standstill arranged in an irregular circle, their occupants no doubt looking up with envious eyes upon the shining body of the Astronef glittering like a tiny star in the sunlight ten thousand feet above them.

"Now, gentlemen," said Redgrave, "I think we have shown you that we can fly faster and soar higher than you can. Perhaps you'll be a bit more civil now. And, if you're not, well, we shall have to teach you manners."

"But you're not going to fight them all dear, are you? Don't let us be the first to bring war and bloodshed with us into another world."

"Don't trouble about that, little woman, it's here already," said her husband. "People don't have air-ships and guns, which fire shells or whatever they were, without knowing what war is. From what I've seen, I should say these Martians have civilised themselves out of all the emotions, and, I daresay, have fought pitilessly for the possession of the last habitable lands of the planet. They've preyed upon each other till only the fittest are left, and those, I suppose, were the ones who invented the air-ships and finally got possession of all that existed. Of course that would give them the command of the planet, land, and sea. In fact, if we were able to make the personal acquaintance of the Martians, we should probably find them a set of over-civilised savages."

"That's a rather striking paradox, isn't it, dear?" said Zaidie, slipping her hand through his arm: "but still it's not at all bad. You mean, of course, that they've civilised themselves out of all the emotions until they're just a set of cold, calculating, scientific animals. After all they must be. We should not have done anything like that on earth if we'd had a visitor from Mars. We shouldn't have got out cannons, and shot at him before we'd even made his acquaintance."

"Now, if he or they had dropped in America as we were going down there, we should have received them with deputations, given them banquets, which they might not have been able to eat, and speeches, which they would not understand, photographed them, filled the newspapers with everything that we could imagine about them, put them in a palace car and hustled them round the country for everybody to look at."

"And meanwhile," laughed Redgrave, "some of your smart engineers, I suppose, would have gone over the vessel they had come in, found out how she was worked, and taken out a dozen patents for her machinery."

"Very likely," replied Zaidie, with a saucy little toss of her chin; "and why not? We like to learn things down there—and anyhow that would be better than shooting at them."

While this little conversation was going on, the Astronef was dropping rapidly into the midst of the Martian fleet, which had again arranged itself in a circle. Zaidie soon made out through the glasses that the guns were pointed upwards.

"Oh, that's your little game, is it!" said Redgrave, when she told him of this. "Well, if you want a fight, you can have it."

As he said this, his jaws came together, and Zaidie saw a look in his eyes that she had never seen there before. He signalled rapidly two or three times to Murgatroyd. The propellers began to whirl at their utmost speed, and the Astronef, making a spiral downward course, swooped down on to the Martian fleet with terrific velocity. Her last curve coincided almost exactly with the circle occupied by the fleet. Half-a-dozen spouts of greenish flame came from the nearest vessel, and for a moment the Astronef was enveloped in a yellow mist.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Evidently they don't know that we are air-tight, and they don't use shot or shell. They've got past that. Their projectiles kill by poison or suffocation. I daresay a volley like that would kill a regiment. Now give that fellow a lesson which he won't live to remember.”

They swept through the poison mist. Redgrave swung the wheel round. The Astronef dropped to the level of the ring of Martian vessels which had now got up speed again. Her steel ram was directed straight at the vessel which had fired the last shot. Propelled at a speed of more than a hundred miles an hour, it took the strange-winged craft amidships. As the shock came, Redgrave put his arm round Zaidie's waist and held her close to him, otherwise she would have been flung against the forward wall of the conning-tower.

The Martian vessel stopped and bent up. They saw human figures, more than half as large again as men, inside her, staring at them through the windows in the sides. There were others at the breeches of the guns in the act of turning the muzzles on the Astronef; but this was only a momentary glimpse, for in a second or two after the Astronef's spur had pierced her, the Martian air-ship broke in twain, and her two halves plunged downwards through the rosy clouds.

“Keep her at full speed, Andrew,” said Redgrave down the speaking-tube, “and stand by to jump if we want to.”

“Ready, my lord!” came back up the tube.

The old Yorkshireman during the last few minutes had undergone a transformation which he himself hardly understood. He recognised that there was a fight going on, that it was a case of “burn, sink and destroy,” and the thousand-year-old savage awoke in him just, as a matter of fact, it had done in his lordship.

“Well, they can pick up the pieces down there,” said Redgrave, still holding Zaidie tight to his side with one hand and working the wheel with the other. “Now we'll teach them another lesson.”

“What are you going to do, dear?” she said, looking up at him with somewhat frightened eyes.

“You'll see in a moment,” he said, between his shut teeth. “I don't care whether these Martians are degenerate human beings or only animals; but from my point of view the reception that they have given us justifies any kind of retaliation. If we'd had a single port hole open during the first volley you and I would have been dead by this time, and I'm not going to stand anything like that without reprisals. They've declared war on us, and killing in war isn't murder.”

“Well, no, I suppose not,” she said; “but it's the first fight I've been in, and I don't like it. Still, they did receive us pretty meanly, didn't they?”

“Meanly? If there was anything like a code of interplanetary morals, one might call it absolutely caddish.”

He sent another message to Murgatroyd. The Astronef sprang a thousand feet towards the zenith; another signal, and she stopped exactly over the biggest of the Martian air-ships; another, and she dropped on to it like a stone and smashed it to fragments. Then she stopped and mounted again above the broken circle of the fleet, while the pieces of the air-ship and what was left of her crew plunged downwards through the crimson clouds in a fall of nearly thirty thousand feet.

Within the next few moments the rest of the Martian fleet had followed it, sinking rapidly down through the clouds and scattering in all directions. “They seem to have had enough of it,” laughed Redgrave, as the Astronef, in obedience to another signal, began to drop towards the surface of Mars. “Now we'll go down and see if they're in a more reasonable frame of mind. At any rate we've won our first scrimmage, dear.”

“But it was rather brutal, Lenox, wasn't it?”

“When you are dealing with brutes, Zaidie, it is sometimes necessary to be brutal.”

“And you look a wee bit brutal now,” she replied, looking up at him with something like a look of fear in her eyes. “I suppose that is because you have just killed somebody—or some things—whichever they are.”

“Do I, really?”

The hard-set jaw relaxed and his lips melted into a smile under his moustache, and he bent down and kissed her. And then he said:

“Well, what do you suppose I should have thought of them if you had had a whiff of that poison?”

“Yes, dear,” she said; “I see now.”

When the Astronef dropped through the clouds, they saw that the fleet had not only scattered, but was apparently getting as far out of reach as possible. One vessel had dropped into the principal square in the centre of the city which her ladyship had called New York.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“That fellow has gone to report, evidently,” said Redgrave. “We'll follow him, but I don't think we'd better open the ports even then. There's no telling when they might give us a whiff of that poison—mist, or whatever it is.”

“But how are you going to talk to them, then, if they can talk?—I mean, if they know any language that we do?”

“They're something like men, and so I suppose they understand the language of signs, at any rate. Still, if you don't fancy it, we'll go somewhere else.”

“No thanks,” she said. “That's not my father's daughter. I haven't come a hundred million miles from home to go away before the first act's finished. We'll go down to see if we can make them understand.”

By this time the Astronef was hanging suspended over an enormous square about half the size of Hyde Park. It was laid out just as a terrestrial park would be in grassland, flower beds, and avenues, and patches of trees, only the grass was a reddish yellow, the leaves of the trees were like those of a beech in autumn, and the flowers were nearly all a deep violet, or a bright emerald green.

As they descended they saw that the square, or Central Park, as her ladyship at once christened it, was flanked by enormous blocks of buildings, palaces built of a dazzlingly white stone, and topped by domed roofs, and lofty cupolas of glass.

“Isn't that just lovely!” she said, swinging her binoculars in every direction. “Talk about Fifth Avenue and the houses in Central Park; why, it's the Chicago Exposition, and the Paris one, and your Crystal Palace, multiplied by about ten thousand, and all spread out just round this one place. If we don't find these people nice, I guess we'd better go back and build a fleet like this, and come and take it.”

“There spoke the new American imperialism,” laughed Redgrave. “Well, we'll go and see what they're like first, shall we?”

The Astronef dropped a little more slowly than the air-ship had done, and remained suspended a hundred feet or so above her after she had reached the ground. Swarms of human figures, but of more than human statures clad in tunics and trousers or knickerbockers, came out of the glass-domed palaces from all sides into the park. They were nearly all of the same stature and there appeared to be no difference whatever between the sexes. Their dress was absolutely plain; there was no attempt at ornament or decoration of any kind.

“If there are any of the Martian women among those people,” said her ladyship, “they've taken to rationals and they've grown about as big as the men. And look; there's someone who seems to want to communicate with us. Why, they're all bald! They haven't got a hair among them—and what a size their heads are!”

“That's brains—too much brains, I expect! Those people have lived too long. I expect they've ceased to be animals—civilised themselves out of everything in the way of passions and emotions, and are just purely intellectual beings, with as much human nature about them as a limited company has.”

The orderly swarms of figures, which were rapidly filling the park, divided as he was speaking, making a broad lane from one of its entrances to where the Astronef was hanging above the air-ship. A light four-wheeled vehicle, whose framework and wheels glittered like burnished gold, sped towards them, driven by some invisible agency. Its only occupant was a huge man, dressed in the universal costume, saving only a scarlet sash in place of the cord-girdle which the others wore round their waists. The vehicle stopped near the air-ship, over which the Astronef was hanging, and, as the figure dismounted, a door opened in the side of the vessel and three other figures, similar both in stature and attire, came out and entered into conversation with him.

“The Admiral of the Fleet is evidently making his report,” said Redgrave. “Meanwhile, the crowd seems to be taking a considerable amount of interest in us.”

“And very naturally, too!” replied Zaidie. “Don't you think we might go down now and see if we can make ourselves understood in any way? You can have the guns ready in case of accidents, but I don't think they'll try and hurt us now. Look, the gentleman with the red sash is making signs.”

“I think we can go down now all right,” replied Redgrave, “because it's quite certain they can't use the poison guns on us without killing themselves as well. Still, we may as well have our own ready. Andrew, load up and get that port Maxim ready. I hope we shan't want it, but we may. I don't quite like the look of these people.”

“They're very ugly, aren't they?” said Zaidie; “and really you can't tell which are men and which are

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

women. I suppose they've civilised themselves out of everything that's nice, and are just scientific and utilitarian and everything that's horrid."

"I shouldn't wonder. They look to me as if they've just got common sense as we call it, and hadn't any other sense; but, at any rate, if they don't behave themselves, we shall be able to teach them manners of a sort, though I dare say we've done that to some extent already."

As he said this Redgrave went into the conning-tower, and the Astronef moved from above the air-ship, and dropped gently into the crimson grass about a hundred feet from her. Then the ports were opened, the guns, which Murgatroyd had loaded, were swung into position, and they armed themselves with a brace of revolvers each, in case of accident.

"What delicious air this is!" said her ladyship, as the ports were opened, and she took her first breath of the Martian atmosphere. "It's ever so much nicer than ours; it's just like breathing champagne."

Redgrave looked at her with an admiration which was tempered by a sudden apprehension. Even in his eyes she had never seemed so lovely before. Her cheeks were glowing and her eyes were gleaming with a brightness that was almost feverish, and he was himself sensible of a strange feeling of exultation, both mental and physical, as his lungs filled with the Martian air.

"Oxygen," he said shortly, "and too much of it! Or, I shouldn't wonder if it was something like nitrous-oxide—you know, laughing gas."

"Don't!" she laughed, "it may be very nice to breathe, but it reminds one of other things which aren't a bit nice. Still, if it is anything of that sort it might account for these people having lived so fast. I know I feel just now as if I were living at the rate of thirty-six hours a day and so, I suppose, the fewer hours we stop here the better."

"Exactly!" said Redgrave, with another glance of apprehension at her. Now, there's his Royal Highness, or whatever he is, coming. How are we going to talk to him? Are you all ready, Andrew?"

"Yes, my lord, all ready," replied the old Yorkshireman, dropping his huge, hairy hand on the breech of the Maxim.

"Very well, then, shoot the moment you see them doing anything suspicious, and don't let anyone except his Royal Highness come nearer than a hundred yards."

As he said this, Redgrave, revolver in hand, went to the door, from which the gangway steps had been lowered, and, in reply to a singularly expressive gesture from the huge Martian, who seemed to stand nearly nine feet high, he beckoned to him to come up on to the deck.

As he mounted the steps the crowd closed round the Astronef and the Martian air-ship; but, as though in obedience to orders which had already been given, they kept at a respectful distance of a little over a hundred yards away from the strange vessel, which had wrought such havoc with their fleet. When the Martian reached the deck Redgrave held out his hand and the giant recoiled, as a man on earth might have done if, instead of the open palm, he had seen a clenched hand gripping a knife.

"Take care, Lenox," exclaimed Zaidie, taking a couple of steps towards him, with her right hand on the butt of one of her revolvers. The movement brought her close to the open door, and in full view of the crowd outside.

If a seraph had come on earth and presented itself thus before a throng of human beings, there might have happened some such miracle as was wrought when the swarm of Martians beheld the strange beauty of this radiant daughter of the earth. As it seemed to them, when they discussed it afterwards, ages of purely mechanical and utilitarian civilisation had brought all conditions of Martian life up—or down—to the same level. There was no apparent difference between the males and females in stature; their faces were all the same, with features of mathematical regularity, pale skin, bloodless cheeks, and all expression, if such it could be called, utterly devoid of emotion.

But still these creatures were human, or at least their forefathers had been. Hearts beat in their breasts, blood flowed through their veins, and so the magic of this marvellous vision instantly awoke the long-slumbering elementary instincts of a bye-gone age. A low murmur ran through the vast throng, a murmur, half-human, half-brutish, which swiftly rose to a hoarse, screaming roar.

"Look out, my lord! Quick! Shut the door, they're coming! It's her ladyship they want; she must look like an angel from Heaven to them. Shall I fire?"

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Yes,” said Redgrave, gripping the lever, and bringing the door down. “Zaidie, if this fellow moves, put a bullet through him. I'm going to talk to that air-ship before he gets his poison guns to work.”

As the last word left his lips, Murgatroyd put his thumb on the spring on the Maxim. A roar such as Martian ears had never heard before resounded through the vast square, and was flung back with a thousand echoes from the walls of the huge palaces on every side. A stream of smoke and flame poured out of the little port-hole, and then the onward-swarving throng seemed to stop, and the front ranks of it began to sink down silently in long rows.

Then through the roaring rattle of the Maxim, sounded the deep, sharp bang of Redgrave's gun, as he sent twenty pounds' weight of an explosive, invented by Zaidie's father, which was nearly four times as powerful as Lyddite, into the Martian air-ship. Then came an explosion, which shook the air for miles around. A blaze of greenish flame, and a huge cloud of steamy smoke, showed that the projectile had done its work, and, when the smoke drifted away, the spot on which the air-ship had lain was only a deep, red, jagged gash in the ground. There was not even a fragment of the ship to be seen.

Then Redgrave left the gun and turned the starboard Maxim on to another swarm which was approaching the Astronef from that side. When he had got the range, he swung the gun slowly from side to side. The moving throng stopped, as the other one had done, and sank down to the red grass, now dyed with a deeper red.

Meanwhile, Zaidie had been holding the Martian at something more than arm's length with her revolver. He seemed to understand perfectly that if she pulled the trigger, the revolver would do something like what the Maxims had done. He appeared to take no notice whatever either of the destruction of the air-ship or of the slaughter that was going on around the Astronef. His big pale blue eyes were fixed upon her face. They seemed to be devouring a loveliness such as they had never seen before. A dim, pinky flush stole for the first time into his sallow cheeks, and something like a light of human passion came into his eyes.

Then he spoke. The words were slowly uttered, passionless, and very distinct. As words they were unintelligible but there was no mistaking their meaning or that of the gestures which accompanied them. He bent forward, towering over her with outstretched arms, huge, hideous, and half human.

Zaidie took a step backwards and, just as Redgrave whipped out one of his revolvers, she pulled the trigger of hers. The bullet cut a clean hole through the smooth, hairless skull of the Martian, and he dropped to the deck without a sound other than what was made by his falling body.

“That's the first man I've ever killed,” she faltered, as her hand fell to her side, and the revolver dropped from it. “Still, do you think it really was a man?”

“That a man!” said Redgrave through his clenched teeth. “Not much! Here, Andrew, open that door again and help me to heave this thing overboard, and then we'd better be off or we shall be having the rest of the fleet with their poison guns around us. Hurry up! Zaidie, I think you'd better go below for the present, little woman, and keep the door of your room tight shut. There's no telling what these animals may do if they get a chance at us.”

Although she would rather have remained on deck to see what was to happen, she saw that he was in earnest, and so she at once obeyed.

The dead body of the Martian was tumbled out, Murgatroyd closed all the air-tight doors of the upper deck chamber, while Redgrave set the engines in motion and, with hardly a moment's delay, the Astronef sprang up into the crimson sky from her first and last battle-field in the well-named world of the War God.

THE END

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

A Glimpse Of The Sinless Star

INTRODUCTION

For their honeymoon Rollo Lenox Smeaton Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie, leave the earth on a visit to the moon and the principal planets, their sole companion being Andrew Murgatroyd, an old engineer who had superintended the building of the Astronef, in which the journey is made. By means of the "R.Force," or Anti-Gravitational Force, of the secret of which Lord Redgrave is the sole possessor, they are able to navigate with precision and safety the limitless ocean of space. Their adventures on the moon and on Mars have been described in the first two stories of the series.

"How very different Venus looks now to what it does from the earth," said Zaidie as she took her eye away from the telescope, through which she had been examining the enormous crescent, almost approaching to what would be called upon earth a half-moon, which spanned the dark vault of space ahead of the Astronef.

"I wonder what she'll be like. All the authorities are agreed that on Venus, having her axis of revolution very much inclined to the plane of her orbit, the seasons are so severe that for half the year its temperate zone and its tropics have a summer about twice as hot as our tropics and the other half they have a winter twice as cold as our coldest. I'm afraid, after all, we shall find the Love-Star a world of salamanders and seals; things that can live in a furnace and bask on an iceberg; and when we get back home it will be our painful duty, as the first explorers of the fields of space, to dispel another dearly-cherished popular delusion."

"I'm not so very sure about that," said Lenox, glancing from the rapidly growing crescent, which was still so far away, to the sweet smiling face that was so near to his. "Don't you see something very different there to what we saw either on the moon or Mars? Now just go back to your telescope and let us take an observation."

"Well," said Zaidie, "as our trip is partly, at least, in the interest of science, I will." and then, when she had got her own telescope into focus again—for the distance between the Astronef and the new world they were about to visit was rapidly lessening—she took a long look through it, and said:

"Yes, I think I see what you mean. The outer edge of the crescent is bright, but it gets greyer and dimmer towards the inside of the curve. Of course Venus has an atmosphere. So had Mars; but this must be very dense. There's a sort of halo all round it. Just fancy that splendid thing being the little black spot we saw going across the face of the sun a few days ago! It makes one feel rather small, doesn't it?"

"That is one of the things which a woman says when she doesn't want to be answered; but, apart from that, your ladyship was saying?"

"What a very unpleasant person you can be when you like! I was going to say that on the moon we saw nothing but black and white, light and darkness. There was no atmosphere, except in those awful places I don't want to think about. Then, as we got near Mars, we saw a pinky atmosphere, but not very dense; but this, you see, is a sort of pearl-grey white shading from silver to black. But look—what are those tiny bright spots? There are hundreds of them."

"Do you remember, as we were leaving the earth, how bright the mountain ranges looked; how plainly we could see the Rockies and the Andes?"

"Oh, yes, I see; they're mountains; thirty-seven miles high some of them, they say; and the rest of the silver-grey will be clouds, I suppose. Fancy living under clouds like those."

"Only another case of the adaptation of life to natural conditions, I expect. When we get there, I daresay we shall find that these clouds are just what make it possible for the inhabitants of Venus to stand the extremes of heat and cold. Given elevations, three or four times as high as the Himalayas, it would be quite possible for them to choose their temperature by shifting their altitude.

"But I think it's about time to drop theory and see to the practice," he continued, getting up from his chair

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

and going to the signal board in the conning-tower. "Whatever the planet Venus may be like, we don't want to charge it at the rate of sixty miles a second. That's about the speed now, considering how fast she's travelling towards us."

"And considering that, whether it is a nice world or not, it's about as big as the earth, and so we should get rather the worst of the charge," laughed Zaidie, as she went back to her telescope.

Redgrave sent a signal down to Murgatroyd to reverse engines, as it were, or, in other words, to direct the "R. Force" against the planet, from which they were now only a couple of hundred thousand miles distant. The next moment the sun and stars seemed to halt in their courses. The great silver-grey crescent which had been increasing in size every moment appeared to remain stationary, and then when Lenox was satisfied that the engines were developing the force properly, he sent another signal down, and the Astronef began to descend.

The half-disc of Venus seemed to fall below them, and in a few minutes they could see it from the upper deck spreading out like a huge semi-circular plain of silver grey light ahead, and on both sides, of them. The Astronef was falling upon it at the rate of about a thousand miles a minute towards the centre of the half crescent, and every moment the brilliant spots above the cloud-surface grew in size and brightness.

"I believe the theory about the enormous height of the mountains of Venus must be correct after all," said Redgrave, tearing himself with an evident wrench away from his telescope. "Those white patches can't be anything else but the summits of snow-capped mountains. You know how brilliantly white a snow-peak looks on earth against even the whitest of clouds."

"Oh, yes," said her ladyship, "I've often seen that in the Rockies. But it's lunch time, and I must go down and see how my things in the kitchen are getting on. I suppose you'll try and land somewhere where it's morning, so that we can have a good day before us. Really it's very convenient to be able to make your own morning or night as you like, isn't it? I hope it won't make us too conceited when we get back, being able to choose our mornings and our evenings; in fact, our sunrises and sunsets on any world we like to visit in a casual way like this."

"Well," laughed Redgrave, as she moved away towards the companion stairs, "after all, if you find the United States, or even the planet Terra, too small for you, we've always got the fields of Space open to us. We might take a trip across the zodiac or down the Milky Way."

"And meanwhile," she replied, stopping at the top of the stairs and looking round, "I'll go down and get lunch. You and I may be king and queen of the realms of Space, and all that sort of thing; but we've got to eat and drink after all."

"And that reminds me," said Redgrave, getting up and following her, "we must celebrate our arrival on a new world as usual. I'll go down and get out the champagne. I shouldn't be surprised if we found the people of the Love-World living on nectar and ambrosia, and as fizz is our nearest approach to nectar—"

"I suppose," said Zaidie, as she gathered up her skirts and stepped daintily down the companion stairs, "if you find anything human or at least human enough to eat and drink, you'll have a party and give them champagne. I wonder what those wretches on Mars would have thought of it if we'd only made friends with them?"

Lunch on board the Astronef was about the pleasantest meal of the day. Of course there was neither day nor night, in the ordinary sense of the word, except as the hours were measured off by the chronometers. Whichever side or end of the vessel received the direct rays of the sun, there then was blazing heat and dazzling light. Elsewhere there was black darkness, and the more than icy cold of space; but lunch was a convenient division of the waking hours, which began with a stroll on the upper deck and a view of the ever-varying splendours about them and ended after dinner in the same place with coffee and cigarettes and speculations as to the next day's happenings.

This lunch hour passed even more pleasantly and rapidly than others had done, for the discussion as to the possibilities of Venus was continued in a quite delightful mixture of scientific disquisition and that converse which is common to most human beings on their honeymoon.

As there was nothing more to be done or seen for an hour or two, the afternoon was spent in a pleasant siesta in the luxurious saloon of the star-navigator; because evening to them would be morning on that portion of Venus to which they were directing their course, and, as Zaidie said, when she subsided into her

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

hammock: "It will be breakfast time before we shall be able to get dinner."

As the Astronef fell with ever-increasing velocity towards the cloud-covered surface of Venus, the remainder of her disc, lit up by the radiance of her sister-worlds, Mercury, Mars, and the earth, and also by the pale radiance of an enormous comet, which had suddenly shot into view from behind its southern limb, became more or less visible.

Towards six o'clock, according to earth, or rather Astronef, time, it became necessary to exert the full strength of her engines to check the velocity of her fall. By eight she had entered the atmosphere of Venus, and was dropping slowly towards a vast sea of sunlit cloud, out of which, on all sides, towered thousands of snow-clad peaks, with wide-spread stretches of upland above which the clouds swept and surged like the silent billows of some vast ocean in ghost-land.

"I thought so!" said Redgrave, when the propellers had begun to revolve and Murgatroyd had taken his place in the conning-tower. "A very dense atmosphere loaded with clouds. There's the sun just rising, so your ladyship's wishes are duly obeyed."

"And doesn't it seem nice and homelike to see him rising through an atmosphere above the clouds again? It doesn't look a bit like the same sort of dear old sun just blazing like a red-hot moon among a lot of white hot stars and planets. Look, aren't those peaks lovely, and that cloud-sea? Why, for all the world we might be in a balloon above the Rockies or the Alps, And see," she continued, pointing to one of the thermometers fixed outside the glass dome which covered the upper deck, "it's only sixty-five even here. I wonder if we could breathe this air, and oh, I do wonder what we shall see on the other side of those clouds."

"You shall have both questions answered in a few minutes," replied Redgrave, going towards the conning-tower. "To begin with, I think we'll land on that big snow-dome yonder, and do a little exploring. Where there are snow and clouds there is moisture, and where there is moisture a man ought to be able to breathe."

The Astronef, still falling, but now easily under the command of the helmsman, shot forwards and — towards a vast dome of snow which, rising some two thousand feet above the cloud-sea, shone with dazzling brilliance in the light of the rising sun. She landed just above the edge of the clouds. Meanwhile they had put on their breathing suits, and Redgrave had seen that the air chamber, through which they had to pass from their own little world into the new ones that they visited, was in working order. When the outer door was opened and the ladder lowered he stood aside, as he had done on the moon, and her ladyship's was the first human foot which made an imprint on the virgin snows of Venus.

The first thing Lenox did was to raise the visor of his helmet and taste the air of the new world. It was cool, and fresh, and sweet, and the first draught of it sent the blood tingling and dancing through his veins. Perfect as the arrangements of the Astronef were in this respect, the air of Venus tasted like clear running spring water would have done to a man who had been drinking filtered water for several days. He threw the visor right up and motioned to Zaidie to do the same. She obeyed, and, after drawing a long breath, she said:

"That's glorious! It's like wine after water, and rather stagnant water too. But what a world, snow-peaks and cloud-sea, islands of ice and snow in an ocean of mist! Just look at them! Did you ever see anything so lovely and unearthly in your life? I wonder how high this mountain is, and what there is on the other side of the clouds. Isn't the air delicious! Not a bit too cold after all—but, still, I think we may as well go back and put on something more becoming. I shouldn't quite like the ladies of Venus to see me dressed like a diver."

"Come along then," laughed Lenox, as he turned back towards the vessel. "That's just like a woman. You're about a hundred and fifty million miles away from Broadway or Regent Street. You are standing on the top of a snow mountain above the clouds of Venus, and the moment that you find the air is fit to breathe you begin thinking about dress. How do you know that the inhabitants of Venus, if there are any, dress at all?"

"What nonsense! Of course they do—at least, if they are anything like us."

As soon as they got back on board the Astronef and had taken their breathing-dresses off, Redgrave and the old engineer, who appeared to take no visible interest in their new surroundings, threw open all the sliding doors on the upper and lower decks so that the vessel might be thoroughly ventilated by the fresh sweet air. Then a gentle repulsion was applied to the huge snow mass on which the Astronef rested. She rose a couple of hundred feet, her propellers began to whirl round, and Redgrave steered her out towards the centre of the vast cloud-sea which was almost surrounded by a thousand glittering peaks of ice and domes of snow.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“I think we may as well put off dinner, or breakfast as it will be now, until we see what the world below is like,” he said to Zaidie, who was standing beside him on the conning-tower.

“Oh, never mind about eating just now; this is altogether too wonderful to be missed for the sake of ordinary meat and drink. Let's go down and see what there is on the other side.”

He sent a message down the speaking tube to Murgatroyd, who was below among his beloved engines, and the next moment sun and clouds and ice-peaks had disappeared and nothing was visible save the all-enveloping silver-grey mist.

For several minutes they remained silent, watching and wondering what they would find beneath the veil which hid the surface of Venus from their view. Then the mist thinned out and broke up into patches which drifted past them as they descended on their downward-slanting course.

Below them they saw vast, ghostly shapes of mountains and valleys, lakes and rivers, continents, islands, and seas. Every moment these became more and more distinct, and soon they were in full view of the most marvellous landscape that human eyes had ever beheld.

The distances were tremendous. Mountains, compared with which the Alps or even the Andes would have seemed mere hillocks, towered up out of the vast depths beneath them. Up to the lower edge of the all-covering cloud-sea they were clad with a golden-yellow vegetation, fields and forests, open, smiling valleys, and deep, dark ravines through which a thousand torrents thundered down from the eternal snows beyond, to spread themselves out in rivers and lakes in the valleys and plains which lay many thousands of feet below.

“What a lovely world!” said Zaidie, as she at last found her voice after what was almost a stupor of speechless wonder and admiration. “And the light! Did you ever see anything like it? It's neither moonlight nor sunlight. See, there are no shadows down there; it's just all lovely silvery twilight. Lenox, if Venus is as nice as she looks from here I don't think I shall want to go back. It reminds me of Tennyson's Lotus Eaters, ‘The land where it is always afternoon.’”

“I think you are right after all. We are thirty million miles nearer to the sun than we were on the earth, and the light and heat have to filter through those clouds. They are not at all like earth-clouds from this side. It's the other way about. The silver lining is on this side. Look, there isn't a black or a brown one, or even a grey one within sight. They are just like a thin mist, lighted by millions of electric lamps. It's a delicious world, and if it isn't inhabited by angels it ought to be.”

While they were talking, the Astronef was still sweeping swiftly down towards the surface through scenery of whose almost inconceivable magnificence no human words could convey any adequate idea. Underneath the cloud-veil the air was absolutely clear and transparent; clearer, indeed, than terrestrial air at the highest elevations, and, moreover, it seemed to be endowed with a strange luminous quality, which made objects, no matter how distant, stand out with almost startling distinctness.

The rivers and lakes and seas, which spread out beneath them, seemed never to have been ruffled by the blast of a storm or wind, and shone with a soft silvery grey light, which seemed to come from below rather than from above. The atmosphere, which had now penetrated to every part of the Astronef, was not only exquisitely soft but also conveyed a faint but delicious sense of languorous intoxication to the nerves.

“If this isn't Heaven it must be the half-way house,” said Redgrave, with what was, perhaps, under the circumstances, a pardonable irreverence. “Still, after all, we don't know what the inhabitants may be like, so I think we'd better close the doors, and drop on the top of that mountain spur running out between the two rivers into the bay. Do you notice how curious the water looks after the earth-seas; bright silver, instead of blue and green?”

“Oh, it's just lovely,” said Zaidie. “Let's go down and have a walk. There's nothing to be afraid of. You'll never make me believe that a world like this can be inhabited by anything dangerous.”

“Perhaps, but we mustn't forget what happened on Mars; still, there's one thing, we haven't been tackled by any aerial fleets yet.”

“I don't think the people here want air-ships. They can fly themselves. Look! there are a lot of them coming to meet us. That was a rather wicked remark of yours about the half-way house to Heaven; but those certainly look something like angels.”

As Zaidie said this, after a somewhat lengthy pause, during which the Astronef had descended to within a

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

few hundred feet of the mountain–spur, she handed a pair of field–glasses to her husband and pointed downward towards an island which lay a couple of miles or so off the end of the spur.

Redgrave put the glasses to his eyes, and, as he took a long look through them, moving them slowly up and down, and from side to side, he saw hundreds of winged figures rising from the island and soaring towards them.

“You were right, dear,” he said, without taking the glass from his eyes, “and so was I. If those aren't angels, they're certainly something like men, and, I suppose, women too, who can fly. We may as well stop here and wait for them. I wonder what sort of an animal they take the Astronef for.”

He sent a message down the tube to Murgatroyd, and gave a turn and a half to the steering–wheel. The propellers slowed down and the Astronef landed with a hardly perceptible shock in the midst of a little plateau covered with a thick soft moss of a pale yellowish green, and fringed by a belt of trees which seemed to be over three hundred feet high, and whose foliage was a deep golden bronze.

They had scarcely landed before the flying figures reappeared over the tree–tops and swept downwards in long spiral curves towards the Astronef.

“If they're not angels, they're very like them,” said Zaidie, putting down her glasses.

“There's one thing,” replied her husband; “they fly a lot better than the old masters' angels or Dore's could have done, because they have tails—or at least something that seems to serve the same purpose, and yet they haven't got feathers.”

“Yes, they have, at least round the edges of their wings or whatever they are, and they've got clothes, too, silk tunics or something of that sort—and there are men and women.”

“You're quite right. Those fringes down their legs are feathers, and that's how they fly.”

The flying figures which came hovering near to the Astronef, without evincing any apparent sign of fear, were certainly the strangest that human eyes had looked upon. In some respects they had a sufficient resemblance to human form for them to be taken for winged men and women, while in another they bore a decided resemblance to birds. Their bodies and limbs were almost human in shape, but of slenderer and lighter build; and from the shoulder–blades and muscles of the back there sprang a pair of wings arching up above their heads.

The body was covered in front and down the back between the wings with a sort of tunic of a light, silken–looking material, which must have been clothing, since there were many different colours.

In stature these inhabitants of the Love–Star varied from about five feet six to five feet, but both the taller and the shorter of them were all of nearly the same size, from which it was easy to conclude that this difference in stature was on Venus, as well as on the earth, one of the broad distinctions between the sexes.

They flew once or twice completely round the Astronef with an exquisite ease and grace which made Zaidie exclaim: “Now, why weren't we made like that on earth!”

To which Redgrave, after a look at the barometer, replied:

“Partly, I suppose, because we weren't built that way, and partly because we don't live in an atmosphere about two and a half times as dense as ours.”

Then several of the winged figures alighted on the mossy covering of the plain and walked towards the vessel.

“Why, they walk just like us, only much more prettily!” said Zaidie. “And look what funny little faces they've got! Half bird, half human, and soft, downy feathers instead of hair. I wonder whether they talk or sing. I wish you'd open the doors again, Lenox. I'm sure they can't possibly mean us any harm; they are far too innocent for that. What soft eyes they have, and what a thousand pities it is we shan't be able to understand them.”

They had left the conning–tower and both his lordship and Murgatroyd were throwing open the sliding doors and, to Zaidie's considerable displeasure, getting the deck Maxims ready for action in case they should be needed. As soon as the doors were open Zaidie's judgement of the inhabitants of Venus was entirely justified.

Without the slightest sign of fear, but with very evident astonishment in their round golden–yellow eyes, they came walking close up to the sides of the Astronef. Some of them stroked her smooth, shining sides with their little hands, which Zaidie now found had only three fingers and a thumb. Many ages before they might

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

have been bird's claws, but now they were soft and pink and plump, utterly strange to work as manual work is understood upon earth.

“Just fancy getting Maxim guns ready to shoot those delightful things,” said Zaidie, almost indignantly, as she went towards the doorway from which the gangway ladder ran down to the soft, mossy turf. “Why, not one of them has got a weapon of any sort; and just listen,” she went on, stopping in the opening of the doorway, “have you ever heard music like that on earth? I haven't. I suppose it's the way they talk. I'd give a good deal to be able to understand them. But still, it's very lovely, isn't it?”

“Ay, like the voices of syrens enticing honest folk to destruction,” said Murgatroyd, speaking for the first time since the Astronef had landed; for this big, grizzled, taciturn Yorkshireman, who looked upon the whole cruise through Space as a mad and almost impious adventure, which nothing but his hereditary loyalty to his master's name and family could have persuaded him to share in, had grown more and more silent as the millions of miles between the Astronef and his native Yorkshire village had multiplied day by day.

“Syrens—and why not?” laughed Redgrave. “Yes, Zaidie, I never heard anything like that before. Unearthly, of course it is; but then we're not on earth. Now, Zaidie, they seem to talk in song—language. You did pretty well on Mars with your sign—language, suppose we go out and show them that you can speak the song—language, too.”

“What do you mean?” she said; “sing them something?”

“Yes,” he replied, “they'll try to talk to you in song, and you won't be able to understand them; at least, not as far as words and sentences go. But music is the universal language on earth, and there's no reason why it shouldn't be the same through the Solar System. Come along, tune up, little woman!”

They went together down the gangway stairs, he dressed in an ordinary English tweed grey suit, with a golf cap on the back of his head, and she in the last and daintiest of costumes which had combined the art of Paris and London and New York before the Astronef soared up from Central Park.

The moment that she set foot on the golden—yellow sward she was surrounded by a swarm of the winged, and yet strangely human creatures. Those nearest to her came and touched her hands and face, and stroked the folds of her dress. Others looked into her violet—blue eyes, and others put out their queer little hands and touched her hair.

This and her clothing seemed to be the most wonderful experience for them, saving always the fact that she had no wings.

Redgrave kept close beside her until he was satisfied that these strange half—human, and yet wholly interesting creatures were innocent of any intention of harm, and when he saw two of the winged daughters of the Love—Star put up their hands and touch the thick coils of her hair, he said:

“Take those pins and things out and let it down. They seem to think that your hair's part of your head. It's the first chance you've had to work a miracle, so you may as well do it. Show them the most beautiful thing they've ever seen.”

“What babies you men can be when you get sentimental!” laughed Zaidie, as she put her hands up to her head. “How do you know that this may not be ugly in their eyes?”

“Quite impossible!” he replied. “They're a great deal too pretty themselves to think you ugly.”

While he was speaking Zaidie had taken off a Spanish mantilla which she had thrown over her head as she came out, and which the ladies of Venus seemed to think was part of her hair. Then she took out the comb and one or two hairpins which kept the coils in position, deftly caught the ends, and then, after a few rapid movements of her fingers, she shook her head, and the wondering crowd about her saw, what seemed to them a shimmering veil, half gold, half silver, in the strange, reflected light from the cloud—veil, fall down from her head over her shoulders.

They crowded still more closely round her, but so quietly and so gently that she felt nothing more than the touch of wondering hands on her arms, and dress, and hair. Her husband, as he said afterwards, was “absolutely out of it.” They seemed to imagine him to be a kind of uncouth monster, possibly the slave of this radiant being which had come so strangely from somewhere beyond the cloud—veil. They looked at him with their golden—yellow eyes wide open, and some of them came up rather timidly and touched his clothes, which they seemed to think were his skin.

Then one or two, more daring, put their little hands up to his face and touched his moustache, and all of

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

them, while both examinations were going on, kept up a running conversation of cooing and singing which evidently conveyed their ideas from one to the other on the subject of this most marvellous visit of these two strange beings with neither wings nor feathers, but who, most undoubtedly, had other means of flying, since it was quite certain that they had come from another world.

There was a low cooing note, something like the language in which doves converse, and which formed a sort of undertone. But every moment this rose here and there into higher notes, evidently expressing wonder or admiration, or both.

“You were right about the universal language,” said Redgrave, when he had submitted to the stroking process for a few moments. “These people talk in music, and, as far as I can see or hear, their opinion of us, or, at least, of you, is distinctly flattering. I don't know what they take me for, and I don't care, but, as we'd better make friends with them, suppose you sing them 'Home, Sweet Home,' or 'The Swanee River.' I shouldn't wonder if they consider our talking voices most horrible discords, so you might as well give them something different.”

While he was speaking the sounds about them suddenly hushed, and, as Redgrave said afterwards, it was something like the silence that follows a cannon shot. Then, in the midst of the hush, Zaidie put her hands behind her, looked up towards the luminous silver surface which formed the only visible sky of Venus, and began to sing “The Swanee River.”

The clear, sweet notes rang up through the midst of a sudden silence. The sons and daughters of the Love-Star ceased the low, half-humming, half-cooing tones in which they seemed to be whispering to each other, and Zaidie sang the old plantation song through for the first time that a human voice had sung it to ears other than human.

As the last note thrilled sweetly from her lips she looked round at the crowd of strange half-human figures about her, and something in their unlikeness to her own kind brought back to her mind the familiar scenes which lay so far away, so many millions of miles across the dark and silent Ocean of Space.

Other winged figures, attracted by the sound of her singing had crossed the trees, and these, during the silence which came after the singing of the song, were swiftly followed by others, until there were nearly a thousand of them gathered about the side of the Astronef.

There was no crowding or jostling among them. Each one treated every other with the most perfect gentleness and courtesy. No such thing as enmity or ill-feeling seemed to exist among them, and, in perfect silence, they waited for Zaidie to continue what they thought was her first speech of greeting. The temper of the throng somehow coincided exactly with the mood which her own memories had brought to her, and the next moment she sent the first line of “Home Sweet Home” soaring up to the cloud-veiled sky.

As the notes rang up into the still, soft air a deeper hush fell on the listening throng. Heads were bowed with a gesture almost of adoration, and many of those standing nearest to her bent their bodies forward, and expanded their wings, bringing them together over their breasts with a motion which, as they afterwards learnt, was intended to convey the idea of wonder and admiration, mingled with something like a sentiment of worship.

Zaidie sang the sweet old song through from end to end, forgetting for the time being everything but the home she had left behind her on the banks of the Hudson. As the last notes left her lips, she turned round to Redgrave and looked at him with eyes dim with the first tears that had filled them since her father's death, and said, as he caught hold of her outstretched hand:

“I believe they've understood every word of it.”

“Or, at any rate, every note. You may be quite certain of that,” he replied. “If you had done that on Mars it might have been even more effective than the Maxims.”

“For goodness sake don't talk about things like that in a heaven like this! Oh, listen! They've got the tune already!” It was true! The dwellers of the Love-Star, whose speech was song, had instantly recognised the sweetness of the sweetest of all earthly songs. They had, of course, no idea of the meaning of the words; but the music spoke to them and told them that this fair visitant from another world could speak the same speech as theirs. Every note and cadence was repeated with absolute fidelity, and so the speech, common to the two far-distant worlds, became a link connecting, this wandering son and daughter of the earth with the sons and daughters of the Love-Star.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

The throng fell back a little and two figures; apparently male and female, came to Zaidie and held out their right hands and began addressing her in perfectly harmonised song, which, though utterly unintelligible to her in the sense of speech, expressed sentiments which could not possibly be mistaken, as there was a faint suggestion of the old English song running through the little song—speech that they made, and both Zaidie and her husband rightly concluded that it was intended to convey a welcome to the strangers from beyond the cloud-veil.

And then the strangest of all possible conversations began. Redgrave, who had no more notion of music than a walrus, perforce kept silence. In fact, he noticed with a certain displeasure which vanished speedily with a musical, and half-malicious little laugh from Zaidie, that when he spoke the bird-folk drew back a little and looked in something like astonishment at him, but Zaidie was already in touch with them, and half by song and half by signs she very soon gave them an idea of what they were and where they had come from. Her husband afterwards told her that it was the best piece of operatic acting he had ever seen, and, considering all the circumstances, this was very possibly true.

In the end the two, who had come to give her what seemed to be the formal greeting, were invited into the Astronef. They went on board without the slightest sign of mistrust, and with only an expression of mild wonder on their beautiful and almost childlike faces.

Then, while the other doors were being closed, Zaidie stood at the open one above the gangway and made signs showing that they were going up beyond the clouds and then down into the valley, and as she made the signs she sang through the scale, her voice rising and falling in harmony with her gestures. The bird-folk understood her instantly, and as the door closed and the Astronef rose from the ground, a thousand wings were outspread and presently hundreds of beautiful soaring forms were circling about the Navigator of the Stars.

“Don't they look lovely,” said Zaidie. “I wonder what they would think if they could see us flying above New York or London or Paris with an escort like this. I suppose they're going to show us the way. Perhaps they have a city down there. Suppose you were to go and get a bottle of champagne and see if Master Cupid and Miss Venus would like a drink. We'll see then if our nectar is anything like theirs.”

Redgrave went below. Meanwhile, for lack of other possible conversation, Zaidie began to sing the last verse of “Never Again.” The melody almost exactly described the upward motion of the Astronef, and she could see that it was instantly understood, for when she had finished, their two voices joined in an almost exact imitation of it.

When Redgrave brought up the wine and the glasses they looked at them without any sign of surprise. The pop of the cork did not even make them look round.

“Evidently a semi-angelic people, living on nectar and ambrosia, with nectar very like our own,” he said, as he filled the glasses. “Perhaps you'd better give it to them. They seem to understand you better than they do me—you being, of course, a good bit nearer to the angels than I am.”

“Thanks!” she said, as she took a couple of glasses up, wondering a little what their visitors would do with them. Somewhat to her surprise, they took them with a little bow and a smile and sipped at the wine, first with a little glint of wonder in their eyes, and then with smiles which are unmistakable evidence of perfect appreciation.

“I thought so,” said Redgrave, as he raised his own glass, and bowed gravely towards them. “This is our nearest approach to nectar, and they seem to recognise it.”

“And don't they just look like the sort of people who live on it, and, of course, other things,” added Zaidie, as she too lifted her glass, and looked with laughing eyes across the brim at her two guests.

But meanwhile Murgatroyd had been applying the repulsive force a little too strongly. The Astronef shot up with a rapidity which soon left her winged escort far below. She entered the cloud-veil and passed beyond it. The instant that the unclouded sun-rays struck the glass-roofing of the upper deck, their two guests, who had been moving about examining everything with a childlike curiosity, closed their eyes and clasped their hands over them, uttering little cries, tuneful and musical, but still with a note of strange discord in them.

“Lenox, we must go down again,” exclaimed Zaidie. “Don't you see they can't stand the light; it hurts them. Perhaps, poor dears, it's the first time they've ever been hurt in their lives. I don't believe they have any of our ideas of pain or sorrow or anything of that sort. Take us back under the clouds, quick, or we may blind them.”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Before she had finished speaking, Redgrave had sent a signal down to Murgatroyd, and the Astronef began to drop back again towards the surface of the cloud-sea. Zaidie had, meanwhile, gone to her lady guest and dropped the black lace mantilla over her head, and, as she did so, she caught herself saying:

“There, dear, we shall soon be back in your own light. I hope it hasn't hurt you. It was very stupid of us to do a thing like that.”

The answer came in a little cooing murmur, which said: “Thank you!” quite as effectively as any earthly words could have done, and then the Astronef dropped through the cloud-sea. The soaring forms of her lost escort came into view again and clustered about her; and, surrounded by them, she dropped, in obedience to their signs, down between the tremendous mountains and towards the island, thick with golden foliage, which lay two or three earth-miles out in a bay, where four converging rivers spread out into the sea.

It would take the best part of a volume rather than a few lines to give even an imperfect conception of the purely Arcadian delights with which the hours of the next ten days and nights were filled; but some idea of what the Space-voyagers experienced may be gathered from this extract of a conversation which took place in the saloon of the Astronef on the eleventh evening.

“But look here, Zaidie,” said his lordship, “as we've found a world which is certainly much more delightful than our own, why shouldn't we stop here a bit? The air suits us and the people are simply enchanting. I think they like us, and I'm sure you're in love with every one of them, male and female. Of course, it's rather a pity that we can't fly unless we do it in the Astronef. But that's only a detail. You're enjoying yourself thoroughly, and I never saw you looking better or, if possible, more beautiful; and why on earth—or Venus—do you want to go?”

She looked at him steadily for a few moments, and with an expression which he had never seen on her face or in her eyes before, and then she said slowly and very sweetly, although there was something like a note of solemnity running through her tone:—

“I altogether agree with you, dear; but there is something which you don't seem to have noticed. As you say, we have had a perfectly delightful time. It's a delicious world, and just everything that one would think it to be, either Aurora or Hesperus looked at from the earth; but if we were to stop here we should be committing one of the greatest crimes, perhaps the greatest, that ever was committed within the limits of the Solar System.”

“My dear Zaidie, what in the name of what we used to call morals on the earth, do you mean?”

“Just this,” she replied, leaning a little towards him in her deck chair. “These people, half angels, and half men and women, welcomed us after we dropped through their cloud-veil, as friends; a bit strange to them, certainly, but still they welcomed us as friends. They've taken us into their palaces, they've given us, as one might say, the whole planet. Everything was ours that we liked to take.”

“We've been living with them ten days now, and neither you nor I, nor even Murgatroyd, who, like the old Puritan that he is, seems to see sin or wrong in everything that looks nice, has seen a single sign among them that they know anything about what we call sin or wrong on earth.”

“I think I understand what you're driving at,” said Redgrave. “You mean, I suppose, that this world is something like Eden before the fall, and that you and I—oh—but that's all rubbish you know.”

She got up out of her chair and, leaning over his, put her arm round his shoulder. Then she said very softly: “I see you understand what I mean, Lenox. It doesn't matter how good you think me or I think you, but we have our original sin. You're an earthly man and I'm an earthly woman, and, as I'm your wife, I can say it plainly. We may think a good bit of each other, but that's no reason why we shouldn't be a couple of plague-spots in a sinless world like this.”

Their eyes met, and he understood. Then he got up and went down to the engine-room.

A couple of minutes later the Astronef sprang upwards from the midst of the delightful valley in which she was resting. In five minutes she had passed through the cloud-veil, and the next morning when their new friends came to visit them and found that they had vanished back into Space, there was sorrow for the first time among the sons and daughters of the Love-Star.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

THE END

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

The World Of The Crystal Cities

INTRODUCTION

For their honeymoon Rollo Lenox Smeaton Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie, leave the earth on a visit to the moon and the principal planets, their sole companion being Andrew Murgatroyd, an old engineer who had superintended the building of the Astronef, in which the journey is made. By means of the "R. Force," or Anti-Gravitational Force, of the secret of which Lord Redgrave is the sole possessor, they are able to navigate with precision and safety the limitless ocean of space. Their adventures on the Moon, Mars, and Venus have been described in the first three stories of the series.

"FIVE HUNDRED MILLION miles from the earth and forty-seven million miles from Jupiter," said his lordship, as he came into breakfast on the morning of the twenty-eighth day after leaving Venus.

During this brief period the Astronef had recrossed the orbits of the Earth and Mars and passed through that marvellous region of the Solar System, the Belt of the Asteroides. Nearly a hundred million miles of their journey had lain through this zone, in which hundreds and possibly thousands of tiny planets revolve in vast orbits round the Sun.

Then had come a desert void of over three hundred million miles, through which the Astronef voyaged alone, surrounded by the ever-constant splendours of the Heavens, but visited only now and then by one of those Spectres of Space, which we call comets.

Astern, the disc of the Sun steadily diminished, and ahead, the grey-blue shape of Jupiter, the Giant of the Solar System, had grown larger and larger until now they could see it as it had never been seen before—a gigantic three-quarter moon filling up the whole Heavens in front of them almost from Zenith to Nadir.

Its four satellites, Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Calisto were distinctly visible to the naked eye, and Europa and Ganymede happened to be in such a position with regard to the Astronef that her crew could see not only the bright sides turned towards the sun, but also the black shadow-spots which they cast on the cloud-veiled face of the huge planet.

"Five hundred million miles!" said Zaidie, with a little shiver, "that seems an awful long way from home, doesn't it? Though, of course, we've brought our home with us to a certain extent. Still I often wonder what they are thinking about us on the dear old earth. I don't suppose anyone ever expects to see us again. However, it's no good getting homesick in the middle of a journey when you're outward bound."

They were now falling very rapidly towards the huge planet, and, as the crescent approached the full they were able to examine the mysterious bands as human observers had never examined them before. For hours they sat almost silent at their telescopes, trying to probe the mystery which has baffled human science since the days of Gallileo.

"I believe I was right, or, in other words, the people I got the idea from are," said Redgrave eventually, as they approached the orbit of Calisto, which revolves at a distance of about eleven hundred thousand miles from the surface of the planet.

"Those belts are made of clouds or vapour in some stage or other. The lightest—the ones along the equator and what we should call the Temperate Zones—are the highest, and therefore coolest and whitest. The dark ones are the lowest and hottest. I daresay they are more like what we call volcanic clouds. Do you see how they keep changing? That's what's bothered our astronomers. Look at that big one yonder a bit to the north, going from brown to red. I suppose that's something like the famous red spot which they have been puzzling about. What do you make of it?"

"Well," said Zaidie, looking up from her telescope, "it's quite certain that the glare must come from underneath. It can't be sunlight, because the poor old sun doesn't seem to have strength enough to make a

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

decent sunset or sunrise here, and look how it's running along to the westward! What does that mean, do you think?"

"I should say it means that some half-formed Jovian Continent has been flung sky high by a big burst-up underneath, and that's the blaze of the incandescent stuff running along. Just fancy a continent, say ten times the size of Asia, being split up and sent flying in a few moments like that. Look, there's another one to the north. On the whole, dear, I don't think we should find the climate on the other side of those clouds very salubrious. Still, as they say the atmosphere of Jupiter is about ten thousand miles thick, we may be able to get near enough to see something of what's going on.

"Meanwhile, here comes Calisto. Look at his shadow flying across the clouds. And there's Ganymede coming up after him, and Europa behind him. Talk about eclipses, they must be about as common here as thunderstorms are with us."

"We don't have a thunderstorm every day," corrected Zaidie, "but on Jupiter they have two or three eclipses every day. Meanwhile, there goes Jupiter himself. What a difference distance makes! This little thing is only a trifle larger than our moon, and it's hiding everything else."

As she was speaking, the full-orbed disc of Calisto, measuring nearly three thousand miles across, swept between them and the planet. It shone with a clear, somewhat reddish light like that of Mars. The Astronef was feeling its attraction strongly, and Redgrave went to the levers and turned on about a fifth of the R. Force to avoid contact with it.

"Another dead world," said Redgrave, as the surface of Calisto revolved swiftly beneath them, "or, at any rate, a dying one. There must be an atmosphere of some sort, or else that snow and ice wouldn't be there, and the land would be either black or white as it was on the Moon. It's not worth while landing there. Ganymede will be much more interesting."

Zaidie took half-a-dozen photographs of the surface of Calisto while they were passing it at a distance of about a hundred miles, and then went to get lunch ready.

When they got on to the upper deck again Calisto was already a half-moon in the upper sky nearly five hundred thousand miles away and the full orb of Ganymede, shining with a pale golden light, lay outspread beneath them. A thin, bluish-grey arc of the giant planet over-arched its western edge.

"I think we shall find something like a world here," said Zaidie, when she had taken her first look through her telescope. "There's an atmosphere and what looks like thin clouds. Continents, and oceans, too! And what is that light shining up between the breaks? Isn't it something like our Aurora?"

As the Astronef fell towards the surface of Ganymede she crossed its northern pole, and the nearer they got the plainer it became that a light very like the terrestrial Aurora was playing about it, illuminating the thin, yellow clouds with a bluish-violet light, which made magnificent contrasts of colouring amongst them.

"Let us go down there and see what it's like," said Zaidie. "There must be something nice under all those lovely colours."

Redgrave checked the R. Force and the Astronef fell obliquely across the pole towards the equator. As they approached the luminous clouds Redgrave turned it on again, and they sank slowly through a glowing mist of innumerable colours, until the surface of Ganymede came into plain view about ten miles below them.

What they saw then was the strangest sight they had beheld since they had left the Earth. As far as their eyes could reach, the surface of Ganymede was covered with vast orderly patches, mostly rectangular, of what they at first took for ice, but which they soon found to be a something that was self-illuminating.

"Glorified hot houses, as I'm alive," exclaimed Redgrave. "Whole cities under glass, fields, too, and lit by electricity or something very like it. Zaidie, we shall find human beings down there."

"Well, if we do I hope they won't be like the half-human things we found on Mars! But isn't it all just lovely! Only there doesn't seem to be anything outside the cities, at least nothing but bare, flat ground with a few rugged mountains here and there. See, there's a nice level plain near the big glass city, or whatever it is. Suppose we go down there."

Redgrave checked the after-engine which was driving them obliquely over the surface of the satellite, and the Astronef fell vertically towards a bare flat plain of what looked like deep yellow sand, which spread for miles alongside one of the glittering cities of glass.

"Oh, look, they've seen us!" exclaimed Zaidie. "I do hope they're going to be as friendly as those dear

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

people on Venus were.”

“I hope so,” replied Redgrave, “but if they're not, we've got the guns ready.”

As he said this about twenty streams of an intense bluish light suddenly shot up all round them, concentrating themselves upon the hull of the Astronef, which was now about a mile and a half from the surface. The light was so intense that the rays of the sun were lost in it. They looked at each other, and found that their faces were almost perfectly white in it. The plain and the city below had vanished.

To look downwards was like staring straight into the focus of a ten thousand candlepower electric arc lamp. It was so intolerable that Redgrave closed the lower shutters, and meanwhile he found that the Astronef had ceased to descend. He shut off more of the R. Force, but it produced no effect. The Astronef remained stationary. Then he ordered Murgatroyd to set the propellers in motion. The engineer pulled the starting levers, and then came up out of the engine-room and said to Lord Redgrave:

“It's no good, my lord; I don't know what devil's world we've got into now, but they won't work. If I thought that engines could be bewitched—”

“Oh, nonsense, Andrew!” said his lordship rather testily. “It's perfectly simple; those people down there, whoever they are, have got some way of demagnetising us, or else they've got the R. Force too, and they're applying it against us to stop us going down. Apparently they don't want us. No, that's just to show us that they can stop us if they want to. The light's going down. Begin dropping a bit. Don't start the propellers, but just go and see that the guns are all right in case of accidents.”

The old engineer nodded and went back to his engines, looking considerably scared. As he spoke the brilliancy of the light faded rapidly and the Astronef began to sink towards the surface.

As a precaution against their being allowed to drop with force enough to cause a disaster, Redgrave turned the R. Force on again and they dropped slowly towards the plain, through what seemed like a halo of perfectly white light. When she was within a couple of hundred yards of the ground a winged car of exquisitely graceful shape, rose from the roof of one of the huge glass buildings nearest to them, flew swiftly towards them, and after circling once round the dome of the upper deck, ran close alongside.

The car was occupied by two figures of distinctly human form but rather more than human stature. Both were dressed in long, close-fitting garments of what seemed like a golden brown fleece. Their heads were covered with a close hood and their hands with thin, close-fitting gloves.

“What an exceedingly handsome man!” said Zaidie, as one of them stood up. “I never saw such a noble-looking face in my life; it's half philosopher, half saint. Of course, you won't be jealous.”

“Oh, nonsense!” he laughed. “It would be quite impossible to imagine you in love with either. But he is handsome, and evidently friendly—there's no mistaking that. Answer him, Zaidie; you can do it better than I can.” The car had now come close alongside. The standing figure stretched its hands out, palms upward, smiled a smile which Zaidie thought was very sweetly solemn, next the head was bowed, and the gloved hands brought back and crossed over his breast. Zaidie imitated the movements exactly. Then, as the figure raised its head, she raised hers, and she found herself looking into a pair of large luminous eyes, such as she could have imagined under the brows of an angel. As they met hers, a look of unmistakable wonder and admiration came into them. Redgrave was standing just behind her; she took him by the hand and drew him beside her, saying with a little laugh:

“Now, please look as pleasant as you can; I am sure they are very friendly. A man with a face like that couldn't mean any harm.”

The figure repeated the motions to Redgrave, who returned them, perhaps a trifle awkwardly. Then the car began to descend, and the figure beckoned to them to follow.

“You'd better go and wrap up, dear. From the gentleman's dress it seems pretty cold outside, though the air is evidently quite breathable,” said Redgrave, as the Astronef began to drop in company with the car. “At any rate, I'll try it first, and, if it isn't, we can put on our breathing-dresses.”

When Zaidie had made her winter toilet, and Redgrave had found the air to be quite respirable, but of Arctic cold, they went down the gangway ladder about twenty minutes later.

The figure had got out of the car which was lying a few yards from them on the sandy plain, and came forward to meet them with both hands outstretched.

Zaidie unhesitatingly held out hers, and a strange thrill ran through her as she felt them for the first time

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

clasped gently by other than earthly hands, for the Venus folk had only been able to pat and stroke with their gentle little paws, somewhat as a kitten might do. The figure bowed its head again and said something in a low, melodious voice, which was, of course, quite unintelligible save for the evident friendliness of its tone. Then, releasing her hands, he took Redgrave's in the same fashion, and then led the way towards a vast, domed building of semi-opaque glass, or a substance which seemed to be something like a mixture of glass and mica, which appeared to be one of the entrance gates of the city.

When they reached it a huge sheet of frosted glass rose silently from the ground. They passed through, and it fell behind them. They found themselves in a great oval antechamber along each side of which stood triple rows of strangely shaped trees whose leaves gave off a subtle and most agreeable scent. The temperature here was several degrees higher, in fact about that of an English spring day, and Zaidie immediately threw open her big fur cloak saying:

“These good people seem to live in Winter Gardens, don't they? I don't think I shall want these things much while we're inside. I wonder what dear old Andrew would have thought of this if we could have persuaded him to leave the ship.”

They followed their host through the antechamber towards a magnificent pointed arch, raised on clusters of small pillars each of a different coloured, highly polished stone which shone brilliantly in a light which seemed to come from nowhere. Another door, this time of pale, transparent, blue glass, rose as they approached; they passed under it and, as it fell behind them, half-a-dozen figures, considerably shorter and slighter than their host, came forward to meet them. He took off his gloves and cape and thick outer covering, and they were glad to follow his example for the atmosphere was now that of a warm June day.

The attendants, as they evidently were, took their wraps from them, looking at the furs and stroking them with evident wonder; but with nothing like the wonder which came into their wild, soft grey eyes when they looked at Zaidie, who, as usual when she arrived on a new world, was arrayed in one of her daintiest costumes.

Their host was now dressed in a tunic of a light blue material, which glistened with a lustre greater than that of the finest silk. It reached a little below his knees, and was confined at the waist by a sash of the same colour but of somewhat deeper hue. His feet and legs were covered with stockings of the same material and colour, and his feet, which were small for his stature and exquisitely shaped, were shod with thin sandals of a material which looked like soft felt, and which made no noise as he walked over the delicately coloured mosaic pavement of the street—for such it actually was—which ran past the gate.

When he removed his cap they expected to find that he was bald like the Martians, but they were mistaken. His well-shaped head was covered with long, thick hair of a colour something between bronze and grey. A broad band of metal, looking like light gold, passed round the upper part of his forehead, and from under this the hair fell in gentle waves to below his shoulders.

For a few moments Zaidie and Redgrave stared about them in frank and silent wonder. They were standing in a broad street running in a straight line, apparently several miles, along the edge of a city of crystal. It was lined with double rows of trees with beds of brilliantly coloured flowers between them. From this street others went off at right angles and at regular intervals. The roof of the city appeared to be composed of an infinity of domes of enormous extent, supported by tall clusters of slender pillars standing at the street corners.

Presently their host touched Redgrave on the shoulder and pointed to a four-wheeled car of light framework and exquisite design, containing seats for four besides the driver, or guide, who sat behind. He held out his hand to Zaidie, and handed her to one of the front seats just as an earth-born gentleman might have done. Then he motioned to Redgrave to sit beside her, and mounted behind them.

The car immediately began to move silently, but with considerable speed, along the left-hand side of the outer street, which, like all the others, was divided by narrow strips of russet-coloured grass and flowering shrubs.

In a few minutes it swung round to the right, crossed the road, and entered a magnificent avenue, which, after a run of some four miles, ended in a vast, park-like square, measuring at least a mile each way.

The two sides of the avenue were busy with cars like their own, some carrying six people, and others only the driver. Those on each side of the road all went in the same direction. Those nearest to the broad side-walks between the houses and the first row of trees went at a moderate speed of five or six miles an

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

hour, but along the inner sides, near the central line of trees, they seemed to be running as high as thirty miles an hour. Their occupants were nearly all dressed in clothes made of the same glistening, silky fabric as their host wore, but the colourings were of infinite variety. It was quite easy to distinguish between the sexes, although in stature they were almost equal.

The men were nearly all clothed as their host was. The women were dressed in flowing garments something after the Greek style, but they were of brighter hues, and much more lavishly embroidered than the men's tunics were. They also wore much more jewellery. Indeed, some of the younger ones glittered from head to foot with polished metal and gleaming stones.

"Could anyone ever have dreamt of such a lovely place?" said Zaidie, after their wondering eyes had become accustomed to the marvels about them, "and yet—oh dear, now I know what it reminds me of! Flammarion's book, 'The End Of The World,' where he describes the remnants of the human race dying of cold and hunger on the Equator in places something like this. I suppose the life of poor Ganymede is giving out, and that's why they've got to live in glorified Crystal Palaces like this, poor things."

"Poor things!" laughed Redgrave, "I'm afraid I can't agree with you there, dear. I never saw a jollier looking lot of people in my life. I daresay you're quite right, but they certainly seem to view their approaching end with considerable equanimity."

"Don't be horrid, Lenox! Fancy talking in that cold-blooded way about such delightful-looking people as these, why, they are even nicer than our dear bird-folk on Venus, and, of course, they are a great deal more like ourselves."

"Wherefore it stands to reason that they must be a great deal nicer!" he replied, with a glance which brought a brighter flush to her cheeks. Then he went on: "Ah, now I see the difference."

"What difference? Between what?"

"Between the daughter of Earth and the daughters of Ganymede," he replied. "You can blush, and I don't think they can. Haven't you noticed that, although they have the most exquisite skins and beautiful eyes and hair and all that sort of thing, not a man or woman of them has any colouring. I suppose that's the result of living for generations in a hothouse."

"Very likely," she said; "but has it struck you also that all the girls and women are either beautiful or handsome, and all the men, except the ones who seem to be servants or slaves, are something like Greek gods, or, at least, the sort of men you see on the Greek sculptures?"

"Survival of the fittest, I presume. These will be the descendants of the highest races of Ganymede,—the people who conceived the idea of prolonging human life like this and were able to carry it out. The inferior races would either perish of starvation or become their servants. That's what will happen on Earth, and there is no reason why it shouldn't have happened here."

As he said this the car swung out round a broad curve into the centre of the great square, and a little cry of amazement broke from Zaidie's lips as her glance roamed over the multiplying splendours about her.

In the centre of the square, in the midst of smooth lawns and flower beds of every conceivable shape and colour, and groves of flowering trees, stood a great, domed building, which they approached through an avenue of overarching trees interlaced with flowering creepers.

The car stopped at the foot of a triple flight of stairs of dazzling whiteness which led up to a broad, arched doorway. Several groups of people were sprinkled about the avenue and steps and the wide terrace which ran along the front of the building. They looked with keen, but perfectly well-mannered surprise at their strange visitors, and seemed to be discussing their appearance; but not a step was taken towards them nor was there the slightest sign of anything like vulgar curiosity.

"What perfect manners these dear people have!" said Zaidie, as they dismounted at the foot of the staircase. "I wonder what would happen if a couple of them were to be landed from a motor car in front of the Capitol at Washington. I suppose this is their Capitol, and we've been brought here to be put through our paces. What a pity we can't talk to them. I wonder if they'd believe our story if we could tell it."

"I've no doubt they know something of it already," replied Redgrave; "they're evidently people of immense intelligence. Intellectually, I daresay, we're mere children compared with them, and it's quite possible that they have developed senses of which we have no idea."

"And perhaps," added Zaidie, "all the time that we are talking to each other our friend here is quietly

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

reading everything that is going on in our minds.”

Whether this was so or not their host gave no sign of comprehension. He led them up the steps and through the great doorway where he was met by three splendidly dressed men even taller than himself.

“I feel beastly shabby among all these gorgeously attired personages,” said Redgrave, looking down at his plain tweed suit, as they were conducted with every manifestation of politeness along the magnificent vestibule beyond.

At the end of the vestibule another door opened, and they were ushered into a large hall which was evidently a council-chamber. At the further end of it were three semi-circular rows of seats made of the polished silvery metal, and in the centre and raised slightly above them another under a canopy of sky-blue silk. This seat and six others were occupied by men of most venerable aspect, in spite of the fact that their hair was just as long and thick and glossy as their host's or even as Zaidie's own.

The ceremony of introduction was exceedingly simple. Though they could not, of course, understand a word he said, it was evident from his eloquent gestures that their host described the way in which they had come from Space, and landed on the surface of the World of the Crystal Cities, as Zaidie subsequently rechristened Ganymede.

The President of the Senate or Council spoke a few sentences in a deep musical tone. Then their host, taking their hands, led them up to his seat, and the President rose and took them by both hands in turn. Then, with a grave smile of greeting, he bent his head and resumed his seat. They joined hands in turn with each of the six senators present, bowed their farewells in silence, and then went back with their host to the car.

They ran down the avenue, made a curving sweep round to the left—for all the paths in the great square were laid in curves, apparently to form a contrast to the straight streets—and presently stopped before the porch of one of the hundred palaces which surrounded it. This was their host's house, and their home during the rest of their sojourn on Ganymede.

It is, as I have already said, greatly to be regretted that the narrow limits of these brief narratives make it impossible for me to describe in detail all the experiences of Lord Redgrave and his bride during their Honeymoon in Space. Hereafter I hope to have an opportunity of doing so with the more ample assistance of her ladyship's diary; but for the present I must content myself with the outlines of the picture which she may some day consent to fill in.

The period of Ganymede's revolution round its gigantic primary is seven days, three hours, and forty-three minutes, practically a terrestrial week, and both of the daring navigators of Space describe this as the most interesting and delightful week in their lives, not even excepting the period which they spent in the Eden of the Morning Star.

There the inhabitants had never learnt to sin; here they had learnt the lesson that sin is mere foolishness, and that no really sensible or properly educated man or woman thinks crime worth committing.

The life of the Crystal Cities, of which they visited four in different parts of the satellite, using the Astronef as their vehicle, was one of peaceful industry and calm innocent enjoyment. It was quite plain that their first impressions of this aged world were correct. Outside the cities spread a universal desert on which life was impossible. There was hardly any moisture in the thin atmosphere. The rivers had dwindled into rivulets and the seas into vast, shallow marshes. The heat received from the Sun was only about a twenty-fifth of that received on the surface of the Earth, and this was drawn to the cities and collected and preserved under their glass domes by a number of devices which displayed superhuman intelligence.

The dwindling supplies of water were hoarded in vast subterranean reservoirs and by means of a perfect system of redistillation the priceless fluid was used over and over again both for human purposes and for irrigating the land within the cities.

Still the total quantity was steadily diminishing, for it was not only evaporating from the surface, but, as the orb cooled more and more rapidly towards its centre, it descended deeper and deeper below the surface, and could now only be reached by means of marvellously constructed borings and pumping machinery which extended down several miles into the ground.

The dwindling store of heat in the centre of the little world, which had now cooled through more than half its bulk, was utilised for warming the air of the cities, and also to drive the machinery which propelled it through the streets and squares. All work was done by electricity developed directly from this source, which

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

also actuated the repulsive engines which had prevented the Astronef from descending.

In short, the inhabitants of Ganymede were engaged in a steady, ceaseless struggle to utilise the expiring natural forces of their world to prolong to the latest possible date their own lives and the exquisitely refined civilisation to which they had attained. They were, in fact, in exactly the same position in which the distant descendants of the human race may one day be expected to find themselves.

Their domestic life, as Zaidie and Lenox saw it while they were the guests of their host, was the perfection of simplicity and comfort, and their public life was characterised by a quiet but intense intellectuality which, as Zaidie had said, made them feel very much like children who had only just learnt to speak.

As they possessed magnificent telescopes, far surpassing any on earth, the wanderers were able to survey, not only the Solar System, but the other systems far beyond its limits as no other of their kind had ever been able to do before. They did not look through or into the telescopes. The lens was turned upon the object, which was thrown, enormously magnified, upon screens of what looked something like ground glass some fifty feet square. It was thus that they saw, not only the whole visible surface of Jupiter as he revolved above them and they about him, but also their native earth, sometimes a pale silver disc or crescent close to the edge of the Sun, visible only in the morning and the evening of Jupiter, and at other times like a little black spot crossing the glowing surface.

It was, of course, inevitable that the Astronef—which Murgatroyd could not be persuaded to leave once during their stay—should prove an object of intense interest to their hosts. They had solved the problem of the Resolution of Forces, and, as they were shown pictorially, a vessel had been made which embodied the principles of attraction and repulsion. It had risen from the surface of Ganymede, and then, possibly because its engines could not develop sufficient repulsive force, the tremendous pull of the giant planet had dragged it away. It had vanished through the cloud-belts towards the flaming surface beneath—and the experiment had never been repeated.

Here, however, was a vessel which had actually, as Redgrave had convinced his hosts by means of celestial maps and drawings of his own, left a planet close to the Sun, and safely crossed the tremendous gulf of six hundred and fifty million miles which separated Jupiter from the centre of the system. Moreover he had twice proved her powers by taking his host and two of his newly-made friends, the chief astronomers of Ganymede, on a short trip across space to Calisto and Europa, the second satellite of Jupiter, which, to their very grave interest they found had already passed the stage in which Ganymede was, and had lapsed into the icy silence of death.

It was these two journeys which led to the last adventure of the Astronef in the Jovian System. Both Redgrave and Zaidie had determined, at whatever risk, to pass through the cloud-belts of Jupiter, and catch a glimpse, if only a glimpse, of a world in the making. Their host and the two astronomers, after a certain amount of quiet discussion, accepted their invitation to accompany them, and on the morning of the eighth day after their landing on Ganymede, the Astronef rose from the plain outside the Crystal City, and directed her course towards the centre of the vast disc of Jupiter.

She was followed by the telescopes of all the observatories until she vanished through the brilliant cloud-band, eighty-five thousand miles long and some five thousand miles broad, which stretched from east to west of the planet. At the same moment the voyagers lost sight of Ganymede and his sister satellites.

The temperature of the interior of the Astronef began to rise as soon as the upper cloud-belt was passed. Under this, spread out a vast field of brown-red cloud, rent here and there into holes and gaps like those storm-cavities in the atmosphere of the Sun, which are commonly known as sun-spots. This lower stratum of cloud appeared to be the scene of terrific storms, compared with which the fiercest earthly tempests were mere zephyrs.

After falling some five hundred miles further they found themselves surrounded by what seemed an ocean of fire, but still the internal temperature had only risen from seventy to ninety-five. The engines were well under control. Only about a fourth of the total R. Force was being developed, and the Astronef was dropping swiftly, but steadily.

Redgrave, who was in the conning-tower controlling the engines, beckoned to Zaidie and said:

“Shall we go on?”

“Yes,” she said. “Now we've got as far as this I want to see what Jupiter is like, and where you are not

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

afraid to go, I'll go."

"If I'm afraid at all it's only because you are with me, Zaidie," he replied, "but I've only got a fourth of the power turned on yet, so there's plenty of margin."

The Astronef, therefore, continued to sink through what seemed to be a fathomless ocean of whirling, blazing clouds, and the internal temperature went on rising slowly but steadily. Their guests, without showing the slightest sign of any emotion, walked about the upper deck now singly and now together, apparently absorbed by the strange scene about them.

At length, after they had been dropping for some five hours by Astronef time, one of them, uttering a sharp exclamation, pointed to an enormous rift about fifty miles away. A dull, red glare was streaming up out of it. The next moment the brown cloud-floor beneath them seemed to split up into enormous wreaths of vapour, which whirled up on all sides of them, and a few minutes later they caught their first glimpse of the true surface of Jupiter.

It lay as nearly as they could judge, some two thousand miles beneath them, a distance which the telescopes reduced to less than twenty; and they saw for a few moments the world that was in the making. Through floating seas of misty steam they beheld what seemed to them to be vast continents shape themselves and melt away into oceans of flames. Whole mountain ranges of glowing lava were hurled up miles high to take shape for an instant and then fall away again, leaving fathomless gulfs of fiery mist in their place.

Then waves of molten matter rose up again out of the gulfs, tens of miles high and hundreds of miles long, surged forward, and met with a concussion like that of millions of earthly thunder-clouds. Minute after minute they remained writhing and struggling with each other, flinging up spurts of flaming matter far above their crests. Other waves followed them, climbing up their bases as a sea-surge runs up the side of a smooth, slanting rock. Then from the midst of them a jet of living fire leapt up hundreds of miles into the lurid atmosphere above, and then, with a crash and a roar which shook the vast Jovian firmament, the battling lava-waves would split apart and sink down into the all-surrounding fire-ocean, like two grappling giants who had strangled each other in their final struggle.

"It's just Hell let loose!" said Murgatroyd to himself as he looked down upon the terrific scene through one of the portholes of the engine-room; "and, with all respect to my lord and her ladyship, those that come this near almost deserve to stop in it."

Meanwhile, Redgrave and Zaidie and their three guests were so absorbed in the tremendous spectacle, that for a few moments no one noticed that they were dropping faster and faster towards the world which Murgatroyd, according to his lights, had not inaptly described. As for Zaidie, all her fears were for the time being lost in wonder, until she saw her husband take a swift glance round upwards and downwards, and then go up into the conning-tower. She followed him quickly, and said:

"What is the matter, Lenox, are we falling too quickly?"

"Much faster than we should," he replied, sending a signal to Murgatroyd to increase the force by three-tenths.

The answering signal came back, but still the Astronef continued to fall with terrific rapidity, and the awful landscape beneath them—a landscape of fire and chaos—broadened out and became more and more distinct.

He sent two more signals down in quick succession. Three-fourths of the whole repulsive power of the engines was now being exerted, a force which would have been sufficient to hurl the Astronef up from the surface of the Earth like a feather in a whirlwind. Her downward course became a little slower, but still she did not stop. Zaidie, white to the lips, looked down upon the hideous scene beneath and slipped her hand through Redgrave's arm. He looked at her for an instant and then turned his head away with a jerk, and sent down the last signal.

The whole energy of the engines was now directing the maximum of the R. Force against the surface of Jupiter, but still, as every moment passed in a speechless agony of apprehension, it grew nearer and nearer. The fire-waves mounted higher and higher, the roar of the fiery surges grew louder and louder. Then, in a momentary lull, he put his arm round her, drew her close up to him, and kissed her and said:

"That's all we can do, dear. We've come too close and he's too strong for us."

She returned his kiss and said quite steadily:

"Well, at any rate, I'm with you, and it won't last long, will it?"

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Not very long now, I’m afraid,” he said between his clenched teeth.

Almost the next moment they felt a little jerk beneath their feet—a jerk upwards; and Redgrave shook himself out of the half stupor into which he was falling and said:

“Hallo, what’s that! I believe we’re stopping—yes, we are—and we’re beginning to rise, too. Look, dear, the clouds are coming down upon us—fast too! I wonder what sort of miracle that is. Ay, what’s the matter, little woman?”

Zaidie’s head had dropped heavily on his shoulder. A glance showed him that she had fainted. He could do nothing more in the conning–tower, so he picked her up and carried her towards the companion–way, past his three guests, who were standing in the middle of the upper deck round a table on which lay a large sheet of paper.

He took her below and laid her on her bed, and in a few minutes he had brought her to and told her that it was all right. Then he gave her a drink of brandy and water, and went back on to the upper deck. As he reached the top of the stairway one of the astronomers came towards him with the sheet of paper in his hand, smiling gravely, and pointing to a sketch upon it.

He took the paper under one of the electric lights and looked at it. The sketch was a plan of the Jovian System. There were some signs written along one side, which he did not understand, but he divined that they were calculations. Still, there was no mistaking the diagram. There was a circle representing the huge bulk of Jupiter; there were four smaller circles at varying distances in a nearly straight line from it, and between the nearest of these and the planet was the figure of the Astronef, with an arrow pointing upwards.

“Ah, I see!” he said, forgetting for a moment that the other did not understand him, “That was the miracle! The four satellites came into line with us just as the pull of Jupiter was getting too much for our engines, and their combined pull just turned the scale. Well, thank God for that, sir, for in a few minutes more we should have been cinders!”

The astronomer smiled again as he took the paper back. Meanwhile the Astronef was rushing upward like a meteor through the clouds. In ten minutes the limits of the Jovian atmosphere were passed. Stars and gems and planets blazed out of the black vault of Space, and the great disc of the World that Is to Be once more covered the floor of Space beneath them—an ocean of cloud, covering continents of lava and seas of flame.

They passed Io and Europa, which changed from new to full moons as they sped by towards the Sun, and then the golden yellow crescent of Ganymede also began to fill out to the half and full disc, and by the tenth hour of earth–time after they had risen from its surface, the Astronef was once more lying beside the gate of the Crystal City.

At midnight on the second night after their return, the ringed shape of Saturn, attended by his eight satellites, hung in the zenith magnificently inviting. The Astronef’s engines had been replenished after the exhaustion of their struggle with the might of Jupiter. Zaidie and Lenox said farewell to their friends of the dying world. The doors of the air chamber closed. The signal tinkled in the engine–room, and a few moments later a blur of white lights on the brown background of the surrounding desert was all they could distinguish of the Crystal City under whose domes they had seen and learnt so much.

THE END

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

In Saturn's Realm

INTRODUCTION

For their honeymoon Rollo Lenox Smeaton Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie, leave the earth on a visit to the Moon and the principal planets, their sole companion being Andrew Murgatroyd, an old engineer who had superintended the building of the Astronef, in which the journey is made. By means of the "R Force," or Anti-Gravitational Force, of the secret of which Lord Redgrave is the sole possessor, they are able to navigate with precision and safety the limitless ocean of Space. Their adventures on the Moon, Mars, Venus, and Jupiter have been described in the first four stories of the series.

THE relative position of the two giants of the Solar System at the moment when the Astronef left the surface of Ganymede, the third and largest satellite of Jupiter, was such that she had to make a journey of rather more than 340,000,000 miles before she passed within the confines of the Saturnian System.

At first her speed, as shown by the observations which Redgrave took by means of instruments designed for such a voyage by Professor Rennick, was comparatively slow. This was due to the tremendous "pull" or attraction of Jupiter and its four moons on the fabric of the Star Navigator; but this backward drag rapidly decreased as the pull of Saturn and his System began to overmaster that of Jupiter.

It so happened, too, that Uranus, the next outer planet of the Solar System, revolving round the Sun at the tremendous distance of more than 1,700,000,000 miles, was approaching its conjunction with Saturn, and thus the pull of the two huge orbs and their systems of satellites acted together on the tiny bulk of the Astronef, producing a constant acceleration of speed.

Jupiter and his System dropped behind, sinking, as it seemed to the wanderers, down into the bottomless gulf of Space, but still forming by far the most brilliant and splendid object in the skies. The far distant Sun which, seen from the Saturnian System, has only about a ninetieth of the superficial extent which he presents to the Earth, dwindled away rapidly until it began to look like a huge planet, with the Earth, Venus, Mars, and Mercury as satellites. Beyond the orbit of Saturn, Uranus, with his eight moons, was shining with the lustre of a star of the first magnitude, and far above and beyond him again hung the pale disc of Neptune, the outer guard of the Solar System, separated from the Sun by a gulf of more than 2,750,000,000 miles.

When two-thirds of the distance between Jupiter and Saturn had been traversed, Saturn lay beneath them like a vast globe surrounded by an enormous circular ocean of many-coloured fire, divided, as it were, by circular shores of shade and darkness. On the side opposite to them a gigantic conical shadow extended beyond the confines of the ocean of light. It was the shadow of half the globe of Saturn cast by the Sun across his rings. Three little dark spots were also travelling across the surface of the rings. They were the shadows of Mimas, Enceladus, and Tethys, the three inner satellites. Japetus, the most distant, which revolves at a distance ten times greater than that of the Moon from the Earth, was rising to their left above the edge of the rings, a pale, yellow, little disc shining feebly against the black background of Space. The rest of the eight satellites were hidden behind the enormous bulk of the planet, and the infinitely vaster area of the rings.

Day after day Zaidie and her husband had been exhausting the possibilities of the English language in attempting to describe to each other the multiplying marvels of the wondrous scene which they were approaching at a speed of more than a hundred miles a second, and at length Zaidie, after nearly an hour's absolute silence, during which they sat with eyes fastened to their telescopes, looked up and said:

"It's no use, Lenox, all the fine words that we've been trying to think of have just been wasted. The angels may have a language that you could describe that in, but we haven't. If it wouldn't be something like blasphemy I should drop down to the commonplace, and call Saturn a celestial spinning-top, with bands of light and shadow instead of colours all round it."

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

"Not at all a bad simile either," laughed Redgrave, as he got up from his chair with a yawn and a stretch of his athletic limbs, "still, it's as well that you said celestial, for, after all, that's about the best word we've found yet. Certainly the ringed world is the most nearly heavenly thing we've seen so far."

"But," he went on, "I think it's about time we were stopping this headlong fall of ours. Do you see how the landscape is spreading out round us? That means that we're dropping pretty fast. Whereabouts would you like to land? At present we're heading straight for the north pole."

"I think I'd rather see what the rings are like first," said Zaidie; "couldn't we go across them?"

"Certainly we can," he replied, "only we'll have to be a bit careful."

"Careful, what of—collisions? I suppose you're thinking of Proctor's explanation that the rings are formed of multitudes of tiny satellites?"

"Yes, but I should go a little farther than that, I should say that his rings and his eight satellites are to Saturn what the planets generally and the ring of the Asteroides are to the Sun, and if that is the case—I mean if we find the rings made up of myriads of tiny bodies flying round with Saturn—it might get a bit risky."

"You see the outside ring is a bit over 160,000 miles across, and it revolves in less than eleven hours. In other words we might find the ring a sort of celestial maelstrom, and if we once got into the whirl, and Saturn exerted his full pull on us, we might become a satellite, too, and go on swinging round with the rest for a good bit of eternity."

"Very well, then," she said, "of course we don't want to do anything of that sort, but there's something else I think we could do," she went on, taking up a copy of Proctor's "Saturn and its System," which she had been reading just after breakfast. "You see those rings are, all together, about 10,000 miles broad; there's a gap of about 1700 miles between the big dark one and the middle bright one, and it's nearly 10,000 miles from the edge of the bright ring to the surface of Saturn. Now why shouldn't we get in between the inner ring and the planet? If Proctor was right and the rings are made of tiny satellites and there are myriads of them, of course they'll pull up while Saturn pulls down. In fact Flammarion says somewhere, that along Saturn's equator there is no weight at all."

"Quite possible," said Redgrave, "and, if you like, we'll go and prove it. Of course, if the Astronef weighs absolutely nothing between Saturn and the rings, we can easily get away. The only thing that I object to is getting into this 170,000 mile vortex, being whizzed round with Saturn every ten and a half hours, and sauntering round the Sun at 21,000 miles an hour."

"Don't," she said, "really it isn't good to think about these things, situated as we are. Fancy, in a single year of Saturn there are nearly 25,000 days. Why, we should each of us be about thirty years older when we got round, even if we lived, which, of course, we shouldn't. By the way, how long could we live for, if the worst came to the worst?"

"About two earth-years at the outside," he replied, "but, of course, we shall be home long before that."

"If we don't become one of the satellites of Saturn," she replied, "or get dragged away by something into the outer depths of Space."

Meanwhile the downward speed of the Astronef had been considerably checked. The vast circle of the rings seemed to suddenly expand, though it now covered the whole floor of the vault of Space.

As the Astronef dropped towards what might be called the limit of the northern tropic of Saturn, the spectacle presented by the rings became every minute more and more marvellous—purple and silver, black and gold, dotted with myriads of brilliant points of many-coloured lights, they stretched upwards like vast rainbows in the Saturnian sky as the Astronef's position changed with regard to the horizon of the planet. The nearer they approached the surface, the nearer the gigantic arch of the many coloured rings approached the zenith. Sun and stars sank down behind it, for now they were dropping through the fifteen-year-long twilight that reigns over that portion of the globe of Saturn which during half of his year of thirty terrestrial years is turned away from the Sun.

The further they dropped towards the rings the more certain it became that the theory of the great English astronomer was the correct one. Seen through the telescopes at a distance of only thirty or forty thousand miles, it became perfectly plain that the outer or darker ring as seen from the Earth, was composed of myriads of tiny bodies so far separated from each other that the rayless blackness of Space could be seen through them.

"It's quite evident," said Redgrave, "that those are rings of what we should call meteorites on earth, atoms

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

of matter which Saturn threw off into Space after the satellites were formed .”

“And I shouldn't wonder, if you will excuse my interrupting you,” said Zaidie, “if the moons themselves have been made up of a lot of these things going together when they were only gas, or nebula or something of that sort. In fact, when Saturn was a good deal younger than he is now, he may have had a lot more rings and no moons, and now these aerolites, or whatever they are, can't come together and make moons, because they've got too solid.”

Meanwhile the Astronef was dropping rapidly down towards the port on of Saturn's surface which was illuminated by the rays of the Sun, streaming under the lower arch of the inner ring.

As they passed under it the whole scene suddenly changed. The rings vanished. Overhead was an arch of brilliant light a hundred miles thick, spanning the whole of the visible heavens. Below lay the sunlit surface of Saturn divided into light and dark bands of enormous breadth.

The band immediately below them was of a brilliant silver–grey, very much like the central zone of Jupiter. North of this on the one side stretched the long shadow of the rings, and southward other bands of alternating white and gold and deep purple succeeded each other till they were lost in the curvature of the vast planet. The poles were of course invisible since the Astronef was now too near to the surface; but on their approach they had seen unmistakable evidence of snow and ice.

As soon as they were exactly under the Ring–arch, Redgrave shut off the R. Force, and, somewhat to their astonishment, the Astronef began to revolve slowly on its axis, giving them the idea that the Saturnian System was revolving round them. The arch seemed to sink beneath their feet while the belts of the planet rose above them.

“What on earth is the matter?” said Zaidie. “Everything has gone upside down.”

“Which shows.” replied Redgrave, “that as soon as the Astronef became neutral the rings pulled harder than the planet, I suppose because we're so near to them, and, instead of falling on to Saturn, we shall have to push up at him.”

“Oh yes, I see that,” said Zaidie, “but after all it does look a little bit bewildering, doesn't it, to be on your feet one minute and on your head the next?”

“It is, rather; but you ought to be getting accustomed to that sort of thing now. In a few minutes neither you, nor I, nor anything else will have any weight. We shall be just between the attraction of the Rings and Saturn, so you'd better go and sit down, for if you were to give a bit of an extra spring in walking you might be knocking that pretty head of yours against the roof,” said Redgrave, as he went to turn the R. Force on to the edge of the Rings.

A vast sea of silver cloud seemed now to descend upon them. Then they entered it, and for nearly half–an–hour the Astronef was totally enveloped in a sea of pearl–grey luminous mist.

“Atmosphere!” said Redgrave, as he went to the conning–tower and signalled to Murgatroyd to start the propellers. They continued to rise and the mist began to drift past them in patches, showing that the propellers were driving them ahead.

They now rose swiftly towards the surface of the planet. The cloud wrack got thinner and thinner, and presently they found themselves floating in a clear atmosphere between two seas of cloud, the one above them being much less dense than the one below.

“I believe we shall see Saturn on the other side of that,” said Zaidie, looking up at it. “Oh dear, there we are going round again.”

“Reaching the point of neutral attraction,” said Redgrave; “once more you'd better sit down in case of accidents.”

Instead of dropping into her deck chair as she would have done on Earth, she took hold of the arms and pulled herself into it, saying:

“Really it seems rather absurd to have to do this sort of thing. Fancy having to hold yourself into a chair. I suppose I hardly weigh anything at all now.”

“Not much,” said Redgrave, stooping down and taking hold of the end of the chair with both hands. Without any apparent effort he raised her about five feet from the floor, and held her there while the Astronef made another revolution. For a moment he let go, and she and the chair floated between the roof and the floor of the deck–chamber. Then he pulled the chair away from under her, and as the floor of the vessel once more

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

turned towards Saturn, he took hold of her hands and brought her to her feet on deck again.

"I ought to have had a photograph of you like that!" he laughed. "I wonder what they'd think of it at home?"

"If you had taken one I should certainly have broken the negative. The very idea, a photograph of me standing on nothing! Besides, they'd never believe it on Earth."

"We might have got old Andrew to make an affidavit to that effect," he began.

"Don't talk nonsense, Lenox! Look! There's something much more interesting. There's Saturn at last. Now I wonder if we shall find any sort of life there—and shall we be able to breathe the air?"

"I hardly think so," he said, as the Astronef dropped slowly through the thin cloud-veil. "You know spectrum analysis has proved that there is a gas in Saturn's atmosphere which we know nothing about, and, whatever it may be for the inhabitants' it's not very likely that it would agree with us, so I think we'd better be content with our own. Besides, the atmosphere is so enormously dense that even if we could breathe it it might squash us up. You see we're only accustomed to fifteen pounds on the square inch, and it may be hundreds of pounds here."

"Well," said Zaidie, "I haven't got any particular desire to be flattened out like that, or squeezed dry like an orange. It's not at all a nice idea, is it? But, look, Lenox," she went on, pointing downwards, "surely this isn't air at all, or at least it's something between air and water. Aren't these things swimming about in it—something like fish in the sea? They can't be clouds, and they aren't either fish or birds. They don't fly or float. Well, this is certainly more wonderful than anything else we've seen, though it doesn't look very pleasant. They're not nice looking, are they? I wonder if they are at all dangerous!"

While she was saying this Zaidie had gone to her telescope, and was sweeping the surface of Saturn, which was now about 100 miles distant. Her husband was doing the same. In fact, for the time being they were all eyes, for they were looking on a stranger sight than human beings had ever seen before.

Underneath the inner cloud-veil the atmosphere of Saturn appeared to them somewhat as the lower depths of the ocean would appear to a diver, granted that he was able to see for hundreds of miles about him. Its colour was a pale greenish yellow. The outside thermometers showed that the temperature was a hundred and seventy-five. In fact the interior of the Astronef was getting uncomfortably like a Turkish bath, and Redgrave took the opportunity of at once freshening and cooling the air by releasing a little from the cylinders where it was stored in liquid form.

From what they could see of the surface of Saturn it seemed to be a dead level, greyish-brown in colour, and not divided into oceans and continents. In fact there were no signs whatever of water within range of their telescopes. There was nothing that looked like cities, or any human habitations, but the ground, as they got nearer to it, seemed to be covered with a very dense vegetable growth, not unlike gigantic forms of seaweed, and of somewhat the same colour. In fact, as Zaidie remarked, the surface of Saturn was not at all unlike what the floors of the ocean of the Earth might be if they were laid bare.

It was evident that the life of this portion of Saturn was not what, for want of a more exact word, might be called terrestrial. Its inhabitants, however they were constituted, floated about in the depths of this semi-gaseous ocean as the denizens of earthly seas did in the terrestrial oceans. Already their telescopes enabled them to make out enormous moving shapes, black and grey-brown and pale red, swimming about, evidently by their own volition, rising and falling and often sinking down on to the gigantic vegetation which covered the surface, possibly for the purpose of feeding. But it was also evident that they resembled the inhabitants of earthly oceans in another respect since it was easy to see that they preyed upon each other.

"I don't like the look of those creatures at all," said Zaidie when the Astronef had come to a stop and was floating about five miles above the surface. "They're altogether too uncanny. They look to me something like jelly-fish about the size of whales only they have eyes and mouths. Did you ever see such awful looking eyes, bigger than soup-plates and as bright as a cat's. I suppose that's because of the dim light. And the nasty wormy sort of way they swim, or fly, or whatever it is. Lenox, I don't know what the rest of Saturn may be like, but I certainly don't like this part. It's quite too creepy and unearthly for my taste. Look at the horrors fighting and eating each other. That's the only bit of earthly character they've got about them; the big ones eating the little ones. I hope they won't take the Astronef for something nice to eat."

"They'd find her a pretty tough morsel if they did," laughed Redgrave, "but still we may as well get some

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

speed on her in case of accident.”

In obedience to a signal to Murgatroyd, the propellers began to revolve, beating the dense air and driving the Star Navigator about twenty miles an hour through the depths of this strangely-peopled ocean.

They approached nearer and nearer to the surface, and as they did so the strange creatures about them grew more and more numerous. They were certainly the most extraordinary living things that human eyes had looked upon. Zaidie's comparison to the whale and the jelly fish was by no means incorrect; only when they got near enough to them they found, to their astonishment, that they were double-headed—that is to say, they had a head furnished with mouth, nostrils, ear-holes, and eyes at each end of their bodies.

The larger of the creatures appeared to have a certain amount of respect for each other. Now and then they witnessed a battle-royal between two of the monsters who were pursuing the same prey. Their method of attack was as follows: the assailant would rise above his opponent or prey, and then, dropping on to its back, envelope it and begin tearing at its sides and under parts with huge beak-like jaws, somewhat resembling those of the largest kind of the earthly octopus, only very much larger. The substance composing their bodies appeared to be not unlike that of a terrestrial jelly-fish, but much denser, and having the tenacity of soft India rubber save at the double ends, where it was much harder, in fact a good deal more like horn.

When one of them had overpowered an enemy or a victim the two sank down into the vegetation, and the victor began to eat the vanquished. Their means of locomotion consisted of huge fins, or rather half fins, half wings, of which they had three laterally arranged behind each head, and four much longer and narrower, above and below, which seemed to be used mainly for steering purposes.

They moved with equal ease in either direction, and they appeared to rise or fall by inflating or deflating the middle portions of their bodies, somewhat as fish do with their swimming bladders.

The light in the lower regions of this strange ocean was dimmer than earthly twilight, although the Astronef was steadily making her way beneath the arch of the rings towards the sunlit hemisphere.

“I wonder what the effect of the searchlight would be on these fellows!” said Redgrave. “Those huge eyes of theirs are evidently only suited to dim light. Let's try and dazzle some of them.”

“I hope it won't be a case of the moths and the candle!” said Zaidie. “They don't seem to have taken much interest in us so far. Perhaps they haven't been able to see properly, but suppose they were attracted by the light and began crowding round us and fastening on to us, as the horrible things do with each other. What should we do then? They might drag us down and perhaps keep us there; but there's one thing, they'd never eat us, because we could keep closed up and die respectably together.”

“Not much fear of that, little woman,” he said, “we're too strong for them. Hardened steel and toughened glass ought to be more than a match for a lot of exaggerated jelly-fish like these,” said Redgrave, as he switched on the head search-light. “We've come here to see strange things and we may as well see them. Ah, would you my friend. No, this is not one of your sort, and it isn't meant to eat.”

A huge, double-headed monster, apparently some four hundred feet long, came floating towards them as the search-light flashed out, and others began instantly to crowd about them, just as Zaidie had feared.

“Lenox, for Heaven's sake be careful!” cried Zaidie, shrinking up beside him as the huge, hideous head, with its saucer eyes and enormous beak-like jaws wide open, came towards them. “And look, there are more coming. Can't we go up and get away from them?”

“Wait a minute, little woman,” replied Redgrave, who was beginning to feel the passion of adventure thrilling in his nerves “If we fought the Martian air fleet and licked it I think we can manage these things. Let's see how he likes the light.”

As he spoke he flashed the full glare of the five thousand candle-power lamp full on to the creature's great cat-like eyes. Instantly it bent itself up into an arc. The two heads, each the exact image of the other, came together. The four eyes glared half dazzled into the conning-tower and the four huge jaws snapped viciously together.

“Lenox, Lenox, for goodness sake let us go up!” cried Zaidie shrinking still closer to him. “That thing's too horrible to look at.”

“It is a beast, isn't it?” he said, “but I think we can cut him in two without much trouble.”

He pressed one of the buttons on the signal board three times quickly and once slowly. It was the signal for full speed on the propellers, that is to say about a hundred earth-miles an hour. The Astronef ought to have

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

sprung forward and driven her ram through the huge, brick-red body of the hideous creature which was now only a couple of hundred yards from them; but instead of that a slow, jarring, grinding thrill seemed to run through her, and she stopped. The next moment Murgatroyd put his head up through the companion-way which led from the upper deck to the conning-tower, and said in a tone whose calm indicated, as usual, resignation to the worst that could happen:

“My lord, two of those beasts, fishes or live balloons, or whatever they are, have come across the propellers. They're cut up a good bit, but I've had to stop the engines, and they're clinging all round the after part. We're going down, too. Shall I disconnect the propellers and turn on the repulsion?”

“Yes, certainly, Andrew!” cried Zaidie, “and all of it, too. Look, Lenox, that horrible thing is coming. Suppose it broke the glass, and we couldn't breathe this atmosphere!”

As she spoke the enormous, double-headed body advanced until it completely enveloped the forward part of the Astronef. The two hideous heads came close to the sides of the conning-tower; the huge, palely luminous eyes looked in upon them. Zaidie, in her terror, even thought that she saw something like human curiosity in them.

Then, as Murgatroyd disappeared to obey the orders which Redgrave had sanctioned with a quick nod, the heads approached still closer, and she heard the ends of the pointed jaws, which she now saw were armed with shark-like teeth, striking against the thick glass walls of the conning-tower.

“Don't be frightened, dear!” he said, putting his arm round her, just as he had done when they thought they were falling into the fiery seas of Jupiter. “You'll see something happen to this gentleman soon. Big and all as he is there won't be much left of him in a few minutes. They are like those monsters they found in the lowest depths of our own seas. They can only live under tremendous pressure. That's why we didn't find any of them up above. This chap'll burst like a bubble presently. Meanwhile, there's no use in stopping here. Suppose you go below and brew some coffee and bring it up on deck with a drop of brandy in it, while I go and see how things are looking aft. It doesn't do you any good, you know, to be looking at monsters of this sort. You can see what's left of them later on.”

Zaidie was not at all sorry to obey him, for the horrible sight had almost sickened her.

They were still under the arch of the rings, and so, when the full strength of the R. Force was directed against the body of Saturn, the vessel sprang upwards like a projectile fired from a cannon.

Redgrave went back into the conning-tower to see what happened to their assailant. It was already trying vainly to detach itself and sink back into a more congenial element. As the pressure of the atmosphere decreased its huge body swelled up into still huger proportions. The skin on the two heads puffed up as though air was being pumped in under it. The great eyes protruded out of their sockets; the jaws opened widely as though the creature were gasping for breath.

Meanwhile Murgatroyd was seeing something very similar at the after end, and wondering what was going to happen to his propellers, the blades of which were deeply imbedded in the jelly-like flesh of the monsters.

The Astronef leaped higher and higher, and the hideous bodies which were clinging to her swelled out huger and huger, and Redgrave even fancied that he heard something like the cries of pain from both heads on either side of the conning-tower. They passed through the inner cloud-veil, and then the Astronef began to turn on her axis, and, just as the outer envelope came into view the enormously distended bulk of the monsters collapsed, and their fragments, seeming now more like the tatters of a burst balloon, dropped from the body of the Astronef and floated away down into what had once been their native element.

“Difference of environment means a lot, after all,” said Redgrave to himself. “I should have called that either a lie or a miracle if I hadn't seen it, and I'm jolly glad I sent Zaidie down below.”

“Here's your coffee, Lenox,” said Zaidie's voice from the upper deck, “only it doesn't seem to want to stop in the cups, and the cups keep getting off the saucers. I suppose we're turning upside down again.”

Redgrave stepped somewhat gingerly on to the deck, for his body had so little weight under the double attraction of Saturn and the Rings that a very slight effort would have sent him flying up to the roof of the deck-chamber.

“That's exactly as you please,” he said, “just hold that table steady a minute. We shall have our centre of gravity back soon. And now, as to the main question, suppose we take a trip across the sunlit hemisphere of Saturn to, what I suppose we should call, on Earth, the South Pole. We can get resistance from the Rings, and

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

as we are here we may as well see what the rest of Saturn is like. You see, if our theory is correct as to the Rings gathering up most of the atmosphere of Saturn about its equator, we shall get to higher altitudes where the air is thinner and more like our own, and therefore it is quite possible that we shall find different forms of life in it too—or if you've had enough of Saturn and would prefer a trip to Uranus?"

"No, thanks," said Zaidie quickly. "To tell you the truth, Lenox, I've had almost enough star-wandering for one honeymoon, and though we've seen nice things as well as horrible things—especially those ghastly, slimy creatures down there—I'm beginning to feel a bit homesick for good old mother Earth. You see, we're nearly a thousand million miles from home, and, even with you, it makes one feel a bit lonely. I vote we explore the rest of this hemisphere up to the pole, and then, as they say at sea—I mean our sea—'bout ship, and see if we can find our own old world again. After all, it's more homelike than any of these, isn't it?"

"Just take your telescope and look at it," said Redgrave, pointing towards the Sun, with its little cluster of attendant planets. "It looks something like one of Jupiter's little moons down there, doesn't it, only not quite as big?"

"Yes, it does, but that doesn't matter. The fact is that it's there, and we know what it's like, and it's home, if it is a thousand million miles away, and that's everything."

By this time they had passed through the outer band of clouds. The huge, sunlit arch of the Rings towered up to the zenith, and apparently overarched the whole heavens. Below and in front of them lay the enormous semi-circle of the hemisphere which was turned towards the Sun, shrouded by its many colored bands of clouds. The Repulsive Force was directed strongly against the lower Ring, and the Astronef dropped rapidly in a slanting direction through the cloud-bands towards the southern temperate zone of the planet.

They passed through the second, or dark, cloud-band at the rate of about three thousand miles an hour, aided by the Repulsion against the Rings and, the attraction of the planet, and soon after lunch, the materials of which now consented to remain on the table, they passed through the clouds and found themselves in a new world of wonders.

On a far vaster scale, it was the Earth during that period of its development which is called the Reptilian Age. The atmosphere was still dense and loaded with aqueous vapour, but the waters had already been divided from the land.

They passed over vast, marshy continents and islands, and warm seas, above which thin clouds of steam still hung. They passed through these, and, as they swept southward with the propellers working at their utmost speed, they caught glimpses of giant forms rising out of the steamy waters near the land; of others crawling slowly over it, dragging their huge bulk through a tremendous vegetation, which they crushed down as they passed, as a sheep on earth might push its way through a field of standing corn.

Yet other shapes, huge winged and ungainly, fluttered with a slow, bat-like motion, through the lower strata of the atmosphere.

Every now and then during the voyage across the temperate zone the propellers were slowed down to enable them to witness some Titanic conflict between the gigantic denizens of land and sea and air. But her ladyship had had enough of horrors on the Saturnian equator, and so she was quite content to watch this phase of evolution (as it had happened on the Earth many thousands of ages ago) from a convenient distance, and so the Astronef sped on southward without approaching the surface nearer than a couple of miles.

"It'll be all very nice to see and remember and dream about afterwards," she said, "but really I don't think I can stand any more monsters just now, at least not at close quarters, and I'm quite sure if those things can live there we couldn't, any more than we could have lived on Earth a million years or so ago. No, really I don't want to land, Lenox, let's go on."

They went on at a speed of about a hundred miles an hour, and, as they progressed southward, both the atmosphere and the landscape rapidly changed. The air grew clearer and the clouds lighter. Lands and seas were more sharply divided, and both teeming with life. The seas still swarmed with serpentine monsters of the saurian type, and the firmer lands were peopled by huge animals, mastodons, bears, giant tapirs, nyledons, deinotheriums, and a score of other species too strange for them to recognise by any earthly likeness, which roamed in great herds through the vast twilight forests and over boundless plains covered with grey-blue vegetation.

Here, too, they found mountains for the first time on Saturn; mountains steep-sided, and many earth-miles

high.

As the Astronef was skirting the side of one of these ranges Redgrave allowed it to approach more closely than he had so far done to the surface of Saturn.

"I shouldn't wonder if we found some of the higher forms of life up here," he said. "If there is anything here that's going to develop some clay into the human race of Saturn, it would naturally get up here."

"Of course it would," said Zaidie, "as far as possible out of the reach of those unutterable horrors on the equator. I should think that would be one of the first signs they would show of superior intelligence. Look, I believe there are some of them. Do you see those holes in the mountain side there? And there they are, something like gorillas, only twice as big, and up the trees, too—and what trees! They must be seven or eight hundred feet high."

"Tree and cave-dwellers, and ancestors of the future royal race of Saturn, I suppose!" said Redgrave. "They don't look very nice, do they? Still, there's no doubt about their being far superior in intelligence to what we left behind us. Evidently this atmosphere is too thin for the two-headed jelly-fishes, and the saurians to breathe. These creatures have found that out in a few hundreds of generations, and so they have come to live up here out of the way. Vegetarians, I suppose, or perhaps they live on smaller monkeys and other animals, just as our ancestors did."

"Really, Lenox," said Zaidie, turning round and facing him, "I must say that you have a most unpleasant way of alluding to one's ancestors. They couldn't help what they were."

"Well, dear," he said, going towards her, "marvellous as the miracle seems, I'm heretic enough to believe it possible that your ancestors even, millions of years ago, perhaps, may have been something like those; but then, of course, you know I'm a hopeless Darwinian."

"And, therefore, entirely horrid, as I've often said before when you get on subjects like these. Not, of course, that I'm ashamed of my poor relations; and then, after all, your Darwin was quite wrong when he talked about the descent of man—and woman. We—especially the women—have ascended from that sort of thing, if there's any truth in the story at all; though, personally, I must say I prefer dear old Mother Eve."

"Who never had a sweeter daughter!" he replied, drawing her towards him.

"And, meanwhile, compliments being barred, I'll go and get dinner ready," she said. "After all, it doesn't matter what world one's in, one get's hungry all the same."

The dinner, which was eaten somewhere in the middle of the fifteen-year-long day of Saturn, was a very pleasant one, because they were now nearing the turning-point of their trip into the depths of Space, and thoughts of home and friends were already beginning to fly back across the thousand-million-mile gulf which lay between them and the Earth which they had left only a little more than two months ago.

While they were at dinner the Astronef rose above the mountains and resumed her southward course. Zaidie brought the coffee up on deck as usual after dinner, and, while Redgrave smoked his cigar and Zaidie her cigarette, they luxuriated in the magnificent spectacle of the sunlit side of Rings towering up, rainbow built on rainbow, to the zenith of their visible heavens.

"What a pity there aren't any words to describe it!" said Zaidie. "I wonder if the descendants of the ancestors of the future human race on Saturn will invent anything like a suitable language. I wonder how they'll talk about those Rings millions of years hence."

"By that time there may not be any Rings," Lenox replied, blowing a ring of smoke from his own lips. "Look at that—made in a moment and gone in a moment—and yet on exactly the same principle, it gives one a dim idea of the difference between time and eternity. After all it's only another example of Kelvin's theory of vortices. Nebulae, and asteroids, and planet-rings, and smoke-rings are really all made on the same principle."

"My dear Lenox, if you're going to get as philosophical and as commonplace as that I'm going to bed. Now that I come to think of it, I've been about fifteen earth-hours out of bed, so it's about time I went. It's your turn to make the coffee in the morning—our morning I mean—and you'll wake me in time to see the South Pole of Saturn, won't you? You're not coming yet, I suppose?"

"Not just yet, dear. I want to see a bit more of this, and then I must go through the engines and see that they're all right for that thousand million mile homeward voyage you're talking about. You can have a good ten hours' sleep without missing much, I think, for there doesn't seem to be anything more interesting than our

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

own Arctic life down there. So good-night, little woman, and don't have too many nightmares.”

“Good-night!” she said, “if you hear me shout you'll know that you've to come and protect me from monsters. Weren't those two-headed brutes just too horrid for words? Good-night, dear!”

THE END

Homeward Bound

AFTER leaving Saturn the Astronef pursued her lonely course on her homeward voyage across the fields of space, while the Ringed World, which had so nearly proved the end of Lord and Lady Redgrave's wanderings, grew dimmer every hour behind them.

On the morning of the fourth day from Saturn Lord Redgrave went as usual into the conning-tower to examine the instruments and to see that everything was in order. To his intense surprise he found, on looking at the gravitational compass, which was to the Astronef what the ordinary compass is to a ship at sea, that the vessel was a long way out of her course.

Such a thing had never yet occurred. Up to now the Astronef had obeyed the laws of gravitation and repulsion with absolute exactness. He made another examination of the instruments; but no, all were in perfect order.

"I wonder what the deuce is the matter," he said, after he had looked for a few moments with frowning eyes at the Heavens before him. "By Jove, we're swinging more. This is getting serious."

He went back to the compass. The long, slender needle was slowly swinging farther and farther out of the middle line of the vessel.

"There can only be two explanations of that," he went on, thrusting his hands deep into his trouser pockets; "either the engines are not working properly, or some enormous and invisible body is pulling us towards it out of our course. Let's have a look at the engines first."

When he reached the engine-room he said to Murgatroyd, who was indulging in his usual pastime of cleaning and polishing his beloved charges:

"Have you noticed anything wrong during the last hour or so, Murgatroyd?"

"No, my lord, at least not so far as concerns the engines. They're all right. Hark now, they're not making more noise than a lady's sewing machine," replied the old Yorkshireman with a note of resentment in his voice. The suspicion that anything could be wrong with his shining darlings was almost a personal offence to him. "But is anything the matter, my lord, if I might ask?"

"We're a long way off our course, and for the life of me I can't understand it," replied Redgrave. "There's nothing about here to pull us out of our line. Of course the stars—good Lord, I never thought of that! Look here, Murgatroyd, not a word about this to her ladyship. and stand by to raise the power by degrees, as I signal to you."

"Ay, my lord. I hope it's nothing bad."

Redgrave went back to the conning-tower without replying. The only possible solution of the mystery of the deviation had suddenly dawned upon him, and a very serious solution it was. He remembered that there were such things as dead suns—the derelicts of the Ocean of Space—vast, invisible orbs, lightless and lifeless, too distant from any living sun to be illumined by its rays, and yet exercising the only force left to them, the force of attraction. Might not one of these have wandered near enough to the confines of the Solar system to exert this force, a force of absolutely unknown magnitude, upon the Astronef?

He went to a little desk beside the instrument-table and plunged into a maze of mathematics, of masses and weights, angles and distances. Half-an-hour later he stood looking at the last symbol on the last sheet of paper with something like fear. It was the fatal x which remained to satisfy the last equation, the unknown quantity which represented the unseen force that was dragging the Astronef into the outer wilderness of interstellar space, into far-off regions from which, with the remaining force at his disposal, no return would be possible.

He signalled to Murgatroyd to increase the development of the R. Force from a tenth to a half. Then he went to the lower saloon, where Zaidie was busy with her usual morning "tidy-up." Now that the mystery

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

was explained there was no reason to keep her in the dark. Indeed, he had given her his word that he would conceal from her no danger, however great, that might threaten them when he had once assured himself of its existence.

She listened to him in silence and without a sign of fear beyond a little lifting of the eyelids and a little fading of the colour in her cheeks.

“And if we can't resist this force,” she said, when he had finished, “it will drag us millions—perhaps millions of millions—of miles away from our own system into outer space, and we shall either fall on the surface of this dead sun and be reduced to a puff of lighted gas in an instant, or some other body will pull us away from it, and then another away from that, and so on, and we shall wander among the stars for ever and ever until the end of time!”

“If the first happens, darling, we shall die—together—without knowing it. It's the second that I'm most afraid of. The Astronef may go on wandering among the stars for ever—but we have only water enough for three weeks more. Now come into the conning—tower and we'll see how things are going.”

As they bent their heads over the instrument-table Redgrave saw that the remorseless needle had moved two degrees more to the right. The keel of the Astronef, under the impulse of the R. Force, was continually turning. The pull of the invisible orb was dragging the vessel slowly but irresistibly out of her line.

“There's nothing for it but this,” said Redgrave, putting out his hand to the signal-board, and signalling to Murgatroyd to put the engines to their highest power. “You see, dear, our greatest danger is this; we have had to exert such a tremendous lot of power that we haven't any too much to spare, and if we have to spend it in counteracting the pull of this dead sun, or whatever it is, we may not have enough of what I call the R. Fluid left to get home with.”

“I see,” she said, staring with wide-open eyes at the needle. “You mean that we may not have enough to keep us from falling into one of the planets or perhaps into the sun itself. Well, supposing the dangers are equal, this one is the nearest, and so I guess we've got to fight it first.”

“Spoken like a good American!” he said, putting his arm across her shoulders and looking at once with infinite pride and infinite regret at the calm, proud face which the glory of resignation had adorned with a new beauty.

She bowed her head and then looked away again so that he should not see that there were tears in her eyes. He took his hand from her shoulder and stared in silence down at the needle. It was stationary again.

“We've stopped!” he said, after a pause of several moments. “Now, if the body that's taken us out of our course is moving away from us we win, if it's coming towards us we lose. At any rate, we've done all we can. Come along, Zaidie, let's go and have a walk on deck.”

They had scarcely reached the upper deck when something happened which dwarfed all the other experiences of their marvellous voyage into utter insignificance. Above and around them the constellations blazed with a splendour inconceivable to an observer on earth, but ahead of them gaped the vast, black void which sailors call “the coal-hole,” and in which the most powerful telescopes have only discovered a few faintly luminous bodies. Suddenly, out of the midst of this infinity of darkness, there blazed a glare of almost intolerably brilliant radiance. Instantly the forward end of the Astronef was bathed in light and heat—the light and heat of a re-created sun, whose elements had been dark and cold for uncounted ages.

Hundreds of tiny points of light, unknown worlds which had been dark for myriads of years, twinkled out of the blackness. Then the fierce glare grew dimmer. A vast mantle of luminous mist spread out with inconceivable rapidity, and in the midst of this blazed the central nucleus—the sun which in far-off ages to come would be the giver of light and heat, of life and beauty to worlds unborn, to planets which were now only little eddies of atoms whirling in that ocean of nebulous flame.

For more than an hour the two voyagers stood motionless and silent, gazing on the indescribable splendours of a spectacle such as no human eyes but theirs had ever beheld. Every earthly thought seemed burnt out of their souls by the glory and the wonder of it. It was almost as though they were standing in the very presence of God, for were they not witnessing the supreme act of omnipotence, a new creation? Their peril, a peril such as had never threatened mortals before, was utterly forgotten. They had even forgotten each other's presence. For the time being they existed only to look and to wonder.

They were called at length out of their trance by the matter-of-fact voice of Murgatroyd saying: “My lord,

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

she's back to her course. Will I keep the power on full?"

"Eh! What's that?" exclaimed Redgrave, as they both turned quickly round. "Oh, it's you, Murgatroyd. The power? Yes, keep it on full till I have taken the bearings."

"Ay, my lord, very good." replied the engineer. As he left the deck Redgrave put his arm round Zaidie and drew her gently towards him and said: "Zaidie, truly you are favoured among women! You have seen the beginning of a new creation. You will certainly be saved somehow after that."

"Yes, and you too, dear," she murmured, as though still half-dreaming. "It is very glorious and wonderful; but what is it all—I mean, what is the explanation of it?"

"The merely scientific explanation, dear, is very simple. I see it all now. The force that was dragging us out of our course was the united pull of two dead stars approaching each other in the same orbit. They may have been doing that for millions of years. The shock of their meeting has transformed their motion into light and heat. They have united to form a single sun and a nebula, which will some day condense into a system of planets like ours. To-night the astronomers on earth will discover a new star—a variable star as they'll call it—for it will grow dimmer as it moves away from our system. It has often happened before."

Then they turned back to the conning-tower. The needle had swung to its old position. The new star, henceforth to be known in the annals of astronomy as Lilla-Zaidie, had already set for them to the right of the Astronef and risen on the left, and, at a distance of over nineteen hundred million miles from the earth, the corner was turned, and the homeward voyage began.

A few days later they crossed the path of Jupiter, but the giant was invisible, far away on the other side of the sun. Redgrave laid his course so as to avail himself to the utmost of the "pull" of the planets without going near enough to them to be compelled to exert too much of the priceless R. Force, which the indicators showed to be running perilously low.

Between the orbits of Jupiter and Mars they made a decided economy by landing on Ceres, one of the largest of the asteroids, and travelling about fifty million miles on her towards the orbit of the earth without any expenditure of force whatever. They found the tiny world possessed of a breathable atmosphere and a fluid resembling water but nearly as dense as mercury. A couple of flasks of it form the greatest treasures of the British Museum and the National Museum at Washington. The vegetable world was represented by coarse grass, lichens, and dwarf shrubs, and the animal by different species of worms, lizards and flies, and small burrowing animals of the rodent type.

As the orbit of Ceres, like that of the other asteroids, is considerably inclined to that of the earth, the Astronef rose from its surface when the plane of the earth's revolution was reached, and the glittering swarm of miniature planets plunged away into space beneath them.

"Where to now?" said Zaidie, as her husband came down on deck from the conning-tower.

"I am going to try to steer a middle course between the orbits of Mercury and Venus," he replied. "They just happen to be so placed now that we ought to be able to get the advantage of the pull of both of them as we pass, and that will save us a lot of power. The only thing I'm afraid of is the pull of the sun, equal to goodness knows how many times the attraction of all the planets put together. You see, little woman, it's like this," he went on, taking out a pencil and going down on one knee on the deck: "Here's the Astronef; there's Venus; there's Mercury; there's the sun; and there, away on the other side of him, is Mother Earth: If we can turn that corner safely and without expending too much power we should be all right."

"And if we can't, what will happen?"

"It will be a choice between morphine and cremation in the atmosphere of the sun, dear, or rather gradually roasting as we fall towards it."

"Then, of course, it will be morphine," she said quite quietly, as she turned away from his diagram and looked at the now fast increasing disc of the sun. A well-balanced mind speedily becomes accustomed even to the most terrible perils, and Zaidie had now looked this one so long and so steadily in the face that for her it had already become merely the choice between two forms of death with just a chance of escape hidden in the closed hand of Fate.

Thirty-six earth-hours later the glorious golden disc of Venus lay broad and bright beneath them. Above was the blazing orb of the Sun, nearly half as big again as it appears from the earth, with Mercury, a round black spot, travelling slowly across it.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“My dear Bird-Folk!” said Zaidie, looking down at the lovely world below them. “If home wasn't home—”

“We can be back among them in a few hours with absolute safety,” interrupted her husband, catching at the suggestion. “I've told you the truth about getting back to the earth. It's only a chance at best, and even if we pass the sun we may not have force enough left to prevent the Astronef from being smashed to dust or burnt up in the atmosphere. After all we might do worse—”

“What would you do if you were alone, Rollo?” she said, interrupting him in turn.

“I should take my chance and go on. After all home's home and worth a struggle. But you, dear—”

“I'm you, and so I take the same chances as you do. Besides, we're not perfect enough for a world where there isn't any sin. We should probably get quite miserable there. No, home's home, as you say.”

“Then home it is, dear!” he replied.

The vast, resplendent hemisphere of the Love-Star sunk down into the vault of space, growing swiftly smaller and dimmer as the Astronef sped towards the little black spot on the face of the sun, which to them was like a buoy marking a place of utter and hopeless shipwreck in the ocean of immensity.

The chronometer, still set to earth time, had now begun to mark the last hours of the Astronef's voyage. She was not only travelling at a speed of which figures could give no comprehensible idea, but the Sun, Mercury, and the Earth were rushing towards her with a compound velocity, composed of the movement of the Solar System through space and of the movement of the two planets round the sun.

Murgatroyd was at his post in the engine-room. Redgrave and Zaidie had gone into the conning-tower, perhaps for the last time. For good fortune or evil, for life or death, they would see the end of the voyage together.

“How far yet, dear?” she said, as Venus began to slip away behind them, rising like a splendid moon in their wake.

“Only sixty million miles or so, a matter of a few hours, more or less—it all depends,” he replied, without taking his eyes off the compass.

“Sixty millions! Why I feel almost at home again.”

“But we have to turn the corner of the street yet, dear, and after that there's a fall of more than twenty-five million miles on to the more or less kindly breast of Mother Earth.”

“A fall! It does sound rather awful when you put it that way; but I am not going to let you frighten me. I believe Mother Earth will receive her wandering children quite as kindly as they deserve.”

The moon-like disc of Venus grew swiftly smaller, and the black spot on the face of the sun larger and larger as the Astronef rushed silently and imperceptibly, and yet with almost inconceivable velocity, towards doom or fortune. Neither Zaidie nor Redgrave spoke again for nearly three hours—hours which to them seemed to pass like so many minutes. Their eyes were fixed on the black disc of Mercury, which, as they approached it, expanded with magical rapidity till it completely eclipsed the blazing orb behind it. Their thoughts were far away on the still invisible earth and all the splendid possibilities that it held for two young lives like theirs.

As the sunlight vanished they looked at each other in the golden moonlight of Venus, and Zaidie let her head rest for a moment on her husband's shoulder. Then a swiftly broadening gleam of light shot out from behind the black circle of Mercury. The first crisis had come. Redgrave put out his hand to the signal-board and rang for full power. The planet seemed to swing round as the Astronef rushed into the blaze. In a few minutes it passed through the phases from “new” to “full.” Venus became eclipsed in turn as they swung between Mercury and the Sun, and then Redgrave, after a rapid glance to either side, said:

“If we can only keep the two pulls balanced we shall do it. That will keep us in a straight line, and our own momentum ought to carry us into the earth's attraction.”

Zaidie did not reply. She was shading her eyes with her hand from the almost intolerable brilliance of the sun's rays, and looking straight ahead to catch the first glimpse of the silver-grey orb. Her husband read her thoughts and respected them. But a few minutes later he startled her out of her dream of home by exclaiming:

“Good God, we're turning!”

“What do you say, dear? Turning what?”

“On our own centre. Look! I'm afraid only a miracle can save us now, darling.”

She looked to the left-hand side where he was pointing. The sun, no longer now a sun, but a vast ocean of

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

flame filling, nearly a third of the vault of space, was sinking beneath them, on the right Mercury was rising. Zaidie knew only too well what this meant. It meant that the keel of the Astronef was being dragged out of the straight line which would cut the earth's orbit some forty million miles away. It meant that, in spite of the exertion of the full power that the engines could develop, they had begun to fall into the sun.

Redgrave laid his hand on his wife's, and their eyes met. There was no need for words. Perhaps speech just then would have been impossible. In that mute glance each looked into the other's soul and was content. Then he left the conning-tower, and Zaidie dropped on to her knees before the instrument-table and laid her forehead upon her clasped hands.

Her husband went to the saloon, unlocked a little cupboard in the wall and took out a blue bottle of corrugated glass labeled "Morphine, poison." He took another empty bottle of white glass and measured fifty drops into it. Then he went to the engine-room and said abruptly:

"Murgatroyd, I'm afraid it's all up with us. We're falling into the sun, and you know what that means. In a few hours the Astronef will be red-hot. So it's roasting alive—or this. I recommend this."

"And what might that be, my lord?" said the old engineer, looking at the bottle which his master held out towards him. "That's morphine—poison. Fill that up with water, drink it, and in half-an-hour you'll be dead without knowing it. Of course, you won't take it until there's absolutely no hope; but, granted that, you'll find this a better death than roasting or baking alive." Then his voice changed suddenly as he went on: "Of course, I need not say, Murgatroyd, how deeply I regret now that I asked you to come in the Astronef."

"My lord, my people have served yours for seven hundred years, and, whether on earth or among the stars, where you go it is my duty to go also. But don't ask me to take the poison. It is not for me to say that a journey like this is tempting Providence, but, by my lights, if I am to die it will be the death that Providence sends."

"I daresay you're right in one way, Murgatroyd, but it's no time to argue about beliefs now. There's the bottle. Do as you think right. And now, in case the miracle doesn't happen, good-bye."

"Good-bye, my lord, if it be so," replied the old Yorkshireman, taking the hand which Redgrave held out to him. "I'll keep the power on to the last, I suppose?"

"Yes, you may as well. If it doesn't keep us away from the Sun it won't be much use to us in two or three hours."

He left the engine-room and went back to the conning-tower. Zaidie was still on her knees. Beneath and around them the awful gulf of flame was broadening and deepening. Mercury was rising higher and growing smaller. He put the bottle down on the table and waited. Then Zaidie looked up. Her eyes were clear, and her face was perfectly calm. She rose and put her arm through his, and said:

"Well, is there any hope, dear? There can't be now, can there? Is that the morphine?"

"Yes," he replied, slipping his arm beneath hers and round her waist. "I'm afraid there's not much hope now, little woman. We're using up the last of the power, and you see—"

As he said this he looked at the thermometer. The mercury had risen from 65 deg. Fahrenheit, the normal temperature of the interior of the Astronef, to 93 deg., and during the half-minute that he watched it rose another degree. There was no mistaking such a warning as that. He had brought two little liqueur glasses in his pocket from the saloon. He divided the morphine between them, and filled them up with water.

"Not until the last moment, dear," said Zaidie, as he set one of them before her. "We have no right to do it until then."

"Very well. When the mercury reaches a hundred and fifty. After that it will go up ten and fifteen degrees at a jump, and we—"

"Yes, at a hundred and fifty," she replied, cutting short a speech she dared not hear the end of. "I understand. It will be impossible to hope any more."

Now, side by side, they stood and watched the thermometer.

N i n e t y - f i v e — n i n e t y - e i g h t — a h u n d r e d a n d t h r e e — a h u n d r e d a n d t e n — e i g h t e e n — t w e n t y - f o u r — t h i r t y - t w o — f o r t y - o n e —

The silent minutes passed, and with each the silver thread—for them the thread of life—grew, with strange contradiction, longer and longer, and with every minute it grew more quickly.

A hundred and forty-six.

With his right arm Redgrave drew Zaidie still closer to him. He put out his left hand and took up the little

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

glass. She did the same.

“Good—bye, dear, till we have slept and wake again!”

“Good—bye, darling, God grant that we may!” But the agony of that last farewell was more than Zaidie could hear. She looked away at the little glass in her hand, a hand which even now did not tremble. Then she raised her eyes again to take one last look at the glory of the stars, and at the Fate incarnate in flame which lay beneath them.

“The Earth, the Earth—thank God, the Earth!”

With the hand that held the draught of Lethe—which in another moment would have passed her lips—she caught at her husband's hand, pulled the glass out of it, and then with a little sigh she dropped senseless on the floor of the conning—tower. Redgrave looked for a moment in the direction that her eyes had taken. A pale, silver—grey crescent, with a little white spot near it, was rising out of the blackness beyond the edge of the solar ocean of flame. Home was in sight at last, but would they reach it—and how?

He picked her up and carried her to their room and laid her on the bed. Then he went to the medicine chest again, this time for a very different purpose.

An hour later, they were on the upper deck with their telescopes turned on to the rapidly—growing crescent of the home—world, which, in its eternal march through space, had come into the line of direct attraction just in time to turn the scale in which the lives of the star—voyagers were trembling. The higher it rose, the bigger and broader and brighter it grew, and, at last, Zaidie—forgetting in her transport of joy all the perils that were yet to come—sprang to her feet and clapped her hands, and cried:

“There's America!”

Then she dropped back into her long deck—chair and began a good, hearty, healthy cry.

Note.—The manner of the ending of the Astronef's marvellous voyage is now as much a matter of public knowledge as are the circumstances of its beginning. Everyone knows now how, with the remains of the R force, Lord Redgrave managed to steer the star—navigator so accurately between the earth and the moon that, descending obliquely towards the earth, she became, during eleven days and twelve nights of terrible suspense, a tiny satellite of the Mother Planet with a constantly decreasing orbit. How, during one awful hour, by the exertions of the last unit of power, of which her engines were capable, she almost grazed the highest peaks of the Bolivian Andes, swept like a meteor over the foot—hills and plains of the western slope of Peru and took the waters of the Pacific barely ten miles from the coast. It is equally needless to recapitulate the delights and the splendours of the welcome home which the whole civilised world united to give to Lord Redgrave and his lovely countess, whose diary of the star voyage has, thanks to her Ladyship's generous condescension, furnished alike the groundwork and the inspiration of the present series of narratives.

THE END

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

A Honeymoon In Space

Prologue

ABOUT eight o'clock on the morning of the 5th of November, 1900, those of the passengers and crew of the American liner *St. Louis* who happened, whether from causes of duty or of their own pleasure, to be on deck, had a very strange—in fact a quite unprecedented experience.

The big ship was ploughing her way through the long, smooth rollers at her average twenty-one knots towards the rising sun, when the officer in charge of the navigating bridge happened to turn his glasses straight ahead. He took them down from his eyes, rubbed the two object-glasses with the cuff of his coat, and looked again. The sun was shining through a haze which so far dimmed the solar disc that it was possible to look straight at it without inconvenience to the eyes.

The officer took another long squint, put his glasses down, rubbed his eyes and took another, and murmured, "Well I'm damned!"

Just then the Fourth Officer came up on to the bridge to relieve his senior while he went down for a cup of coffee and a biscuit. The Second took him away to the other end of the bridge, out of hearing of the helmsman and the quartermaster standing by, and said almost in a whisper:

"Say, Norton, there's something ahead there that I can't make out. Just as the sun got clear above the horizon I saw a black spot go straight across it, right through the upper and lower limbs. "I looked again, and it was plumb in the middle of the disc. "Look, he went on, speaking louder in his growing excitement, there it is again! I can see it without the glasses now. See?"

The Fourth did not reply at once. He had the glasses close to his eyes, and was moving them slowly about as though he were following some shifting object in the sky. Then he handed them back, and said:

"If I didn't believe the thing was impossible I should say that's an air-ship; but, for the present, I guess I'd rather wait till it gets a bit nearer, if it's coming. Still, there is something. Seems to be getting bigger pretty fast, too. Perhaps it would be as well to notify the old man. What do you think?"

"Guess we'd better," said the Second. "S'pose you go down. Don't say anything except to him. We don't want any more excitement among the people than we can help."

The Fourth nodded and went down the steps, and the Second began walking up and down the bridge, every now and then taking another squint ahead. Again and again the mysterious shape crossed the disc of the sun, always vertically as though, whatever it might be, it was steering a direct course from the sun to the ship, its apparent rising and falling being due really to the dipping of her bows into the swells.

"Well, Mr. Charteris, what's the trouble?" said the Skipper as he reached the bridge. "Nothing wrong, I hope? Have you sighted a derelict, or what? Ay, what in hell's that!"

His hands went up to his eyes and he stared for a few moments at the pale yellow oblate shape of the sun.

At this moment the *St. Louis*' head dipped again, and the Captain saw something like a black line swiftly drawn across the sun from bottom to top.

"That's what I wanted to call your attention to, sir," said the Second in a low tone. "I first noticed it crossing the sun as it rose through the mist. I thought it was a spot of dirt on my glasses, but it has crossed the sun several times since then, and for some minutes seemed to remain dead in the middle of it. Later on it got quite a lot larger, and whatever it is it's approaching us pretty rapidly. You see it's quite plain to the naked eye now."

By this time several of the crew and of the early loungers on deck had also caught sight of the strange thing which seemed to be hanging and swinging between the sky and the sea. People dived below for their glasses, knocked at their friends' state-room doors and told them to get up because something was flying towards the ship through the air; and in a very few minutes there were hundreds of passengers on deck in all varieties of early morning costume, and scores of glasses, held to anxious eyes, were being directed ahead.

The glasses, however, soon became unnecessary, for the passengers had scarcely got up on deck before the mysterious object to the eastward at length took definite shape, and as it did so mouths were opened as well as

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

eyes, for the owners of the eyes and mouths beheld just then the strangest sight that travellers by sea or land had ever seen.

Within the distance of about a mile it swung round at right angles to the steamer's course with a rapidity which plainly showed that it was entirely obedient to the control of a guiding intelligence, and hundreds of eager eyes on board the liner saw, sweeping down from the grey-blue of the early morning sky, a vessel whose hull seemed to be constructed of some metal which shone with a pale, steely lustre.

It was pointed at both ends, the forward end being shaped something like a spur or ram. At the after end were two flickering, interlacing circles of a glittering greenish-yellow colour, apparently formed by two intersecting propellers driven at an enormous velocity. Behind these was a vertical fan of triangular shape. The craft appeared to be flat-bottomed, and for about a third of her length amidships the upper half of her hull was covered with a curving, dome-like roof of glass.

"She's an air-ship of some sort, there's no doubt about that," said the Captain, "so I guess the great problem has got solved at last. And yet it ain't a balloon, because it's coming against the wind, and it's nothing of the aeroplane sort neither, because it hasn't planes or kites or any fixings of that kind. Still it's made of something like metal and glass, and it must take a lot of keeping up. It's travelling at a pretty healthy speed too. Getting on for a hundred miles an hour, I should guess. Ah! he's going to speak us! Hope he's honest."

Everybody on board the St. Louis was up on deck by this time, and the excitement rose to fever-heat as the strange vessel swept down towards them from the middle sky, passed them like a flash of light, swung round the stern, and ranged up alongside to starboard some twenty feet from the bridge rail.

She was about a hundred and twenty feet long, with some twenty feet of depth and thirty of beam, and the Captain and many of his officers and passengers were very much relieved to find that, as far as could be seen, she carried no weapons of offence.

As she ranged up alongside, a sliding door opened in the glass-domed roof amidships, just opposite to the end of the St. Louis' bridge. A tall, fair-haired, clean-featured man, of about thirty, in grey flannels, tipped up his golf cap with his thumb, and said:

"Good morning, Captain! You remember me, I suppose? Had a fine passage, so far? I thought I should meet you somewhere about here."

The Captain of the St. Louis, in common with every one else on board, had already had his credulity stretched about as far as it would go, and he was beginning to wonder whether he was really awake; but when he heard the hail and recognised the speaker he stared at him in blank and, for the moment, speechless bewilderment. Then he got hold of his voice again and said, keeping as steady as he could:

"Good morning, my Lord! Guess I never expected to meet even you like this in the middle of the Atlantic! So the newspaper men were right for once in a way, and you have got an airship that will fly?"

"And a good deal more than that, Captain, if she wants to. I am just taking a trial trip across the Atlantic before I start on a run round the Solar System. Sounds like a lie, doesn't it? But it's coming off. Oh, good morning, Miss Rennick! Captain, may I come on board?"

"By all means, my Lord, only I'm afraid I daren't stop Uncle Sam's mails, even for you."

"There's no need for that, Captain, on a smooth sea like this," Was the reply. "Just keep on as you are going and I'll come alongside."

He put his head inside the door and called something up a speaking-tube which led to a glass walled chamber in the forward part of the roof, where a motionless figure stood before a little steering wheel.

The craft immediately began to edge nearer and nearer to the liner's rail, keeping speed so exactly with her that the threshold of the door touched the end of the bridge without a perceptible jar. Then the flannel-clad figure jumped on to the bridge and held out his hand to the Captain.

As they shook hands he said in a low tone, "I want a word or two in private with you, as soon as possible."

The commander saw a very serious meaning in his eyes. Besides, even if he had not made his appearance under such extraordinary circumstances, it was quite impossible that one of his social position and his wealth and influence could have made such a request without good reason for it, so he replied:

"Certainly, my Lord. Will you come down to my room?"

Hundreds of anxious, curious eyes looked upon the tall athletic figure and the regular-featured, bronzed, honest English face as Rollo Lenox Smeaton Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, Baron Smeaton in the Peerage of

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

England, and Viscount Aubrey in the Peerage of Ireland, followed the Captain to his room through the parting crowd of passengers. He nodded to one or two familiar faces in the crowd, for he was an old Atlantic ferryman, and had crossed five times with Captain Hawkins in the St. Louis.

Then he caught sight of a well and fondly remembered face which he had not seen for over two years. It was a face which possessed at once the fair Anglo-Saxon skin, the firm and yet delicate Anglo-Saxon features, and the wavy wealth of the old Saxon gold-brown hair; but a pair of big, soft, pansy eyes, fringed with long, curling, black lashes, looked out from under dark and perhaps just a trifle heavy eye-brows. Moreover, there was that indescribable expression in the curve of her lips and the pose of her head; to say nothing of a lissome, vivacious grace in her whole carriage which proclaimed her a daughter of the younger branch of the Race that Rules.

Their eyes met for an instant, and Lord Redgrave as startled and even a trifle angered to see that she flushed up quickly, and that the momentary smile with which she greeted him died away as she turned her head aside. Still, he was a man accustomed to do what he wanted and what he wanted to do just then was to shake hands with Lilla Zaidie Rennick, and so he went straight towards her, raised his cap, and held out his hand saying, first with a glance into her eyes, and then with one upward at the Astronef:

“Good morning again, Miss Rennick! You see it is done.”

“Good morning, Lord Redgrave!” she replied, he thought, a little awkwardly. “Yes, I see you have kept your promise. What a pity it is too late! But I hope you will be able to stop long enough to tell us all about it. This is Mrs. Van Stuyler, who has taken me under her protection on my journey to Europe.”

His lordship returned the bow of a tall, somewhat hard-featured matron who looked dignified even in the somewhat nondescript costume which most of the ladies were wearing. But her eyes were kindly, and he said:

“Very pleased to meet, Mrs. Van Stuyler. I heard you were coming, and I was in hopes of catching you on the other side before you left. And now, if you will excuse me, I must go and have a chat with the Skipper. He raised his cap again and presently vanished from the curious eyes of the excited crowd, through the door of the Captain's apartment.”

Captain Hawkins closed the door of his sitting-room as he entered, and said:

“Now, my Lord, I'm not going to ask you any questions to begin with, because if I once began I should never stop; and besides, perhaps you'd like to have your own say right away.”

“Perhaps that will be the shortest way,” said his lordship. “The fact is, we've not only the remains of this Boer business on our hands, but we've had what is practically a declaration of war from France and Russia. Briefly it's this way. A few weeks ago, while the Allies thought they were fighting the Boxers, it came to the knowledge of my brother, the Foreign Secretary, that the Tsung-Li-Yamen had concluded a secret treaty with Russia which practically annulled all our rights over the Yang-tse Valley, and gave Russia the right to bring her Northern Railway right down through China.

“As you know, we've stood a lot too much in that part of the world already, but we couldn't stand this; so about ten days ago an ultimatum was sent declaring that the British government would consider any encroachment on the Yang-tse valley as an unfriendly act.

“Meanwhile France chipped in with a notification that she was going to occupy Morocco as a compensation for Fashoda, and added a few nasty things about Egypt and other places. Of course we couldn't stand that either, so there was another ultimatum, and the upshot of it all was that I got a wire late last night from my brother telling me that war would almost certainly be declared to-day, and asking me for the use of this craft of mine as a sort of dispatch-boat if she was ready. She is intended for something very much better than fighting purposes, so he couldn't ask me to use her as a war-ship; besides, I am under a solemn obligation to her inventor—her creator, in fact, for I've only built her—to blow her to pieces rather than allow her to be used as a fighting machine except, of course, in sheer personal self-defence.

“There is the telegram from my brother, so you can see there's no mistake, and just after it came a messenger asking me, if the machine was a success, to bring this with me across the Atlantic as fast as I could come. It is the duplicate of an offensive and defensive alliance between Great Britain and the United States, of which the details had been arranged just as this complication arose. Another is coming across by a fast cruiser, and, of course, the news will have got to Washington by cable by this time.

“By the time you get to the entrance of the Channel you will probably find it swarming with French

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

cruisers and torpedo-destroyers, so if you'll be advised by me, you'll leave Queenstown out and get as far north as possible.

"Lord Redgrave," said the Captain, putting out his hand, "I'm responsible for a good bit right here, and I don't know how to thank you enough. I guess that treaty's been given away back to France by some of our Irish statesmen by now, and it'd be mighty unhealthy for the St. Louis to fall in with a French or Russian cruiser—"

"That's all right, Captain," said Lord Redgrave, taking his hand. "I should have warned any other British or American ship. At the same time, I must confess that my motives in warning you were not entirely unselfish. The fact is, there's some one on board the St. Louis whom I should decidedly object to see taken off to France as a prisoner of war."

"And may I ask who that is?" said Captain Hawkins.

"Why not?" replied his lordship. "It's the young lady I spoke to on deck just now, Miss Rennick. Her father was the inventor of that craft of mine. No one would believe his theories. He was refused patents both in England and America the ground of lack of practical utility. I met him about two years ago, that is to say rather more an a year before his death, when I was stopping at Banff up in the Canadian Rockies. We made a travellers' acquaintance, and he told me about this idea of his. I was very much interested, but I'm afraid I must confess that I might not have taken it practically if the Professor hadn't happened to possess an exceedingly beautiful daughter. However, of course I'm pretty glad now that I did do though the experiments cost nearly five thousand pounds and the craft herself close on a quarter of a million. Still, she is worth every penny of it, and I was bringing her over to offer to Miss Rennick as a wedding present, that is to say if she'd have it—and me."

Captain Hawkins looked up and said rather seriously:

"Then, my Lord, I presume you don't know—"

"Don't know what?"

"That Miss Rennick is crossing in the care of Mrs. Van Stuyler, to be married in London next month."

"The devil she is! And to whom, may I ask?" exclaimed his lordship, pulling himself up very straight.

"To the Marquis of Byfleet, son of the Duke of Duncaster. I wonder you didn't hear of it. The match was arranged last fall. From what people say she's not very desperately in love with him, but—well, I fancy it's like rather too many of these Anglo-American matches. A couple of million dollars on one side, a title on the other, and mighty little real love between them."

"But," said Redgrave between his teeth, "I didn't understand that Miss Rennick ever had a fortune; in fact I'm quite certain that if her father had been a rich man he'd have worked out his invention himself."

"Oh, the dollars aren't his. In fact they won't be hers till she marries," replied the Captain. "They belong to her uncle, old Russell Rennick. He got in on the ground floor of the New York and Chicago ice trusts, and made millions. He's going to spend some of them on making his niece a Marchioness. That's about all there is to it."

"Oh, indeed!" said Redgrave, still between his teeth. "Well, considering that Byfleet is about as big a wastrel as ever disgraced the English aristocracy, I don't think either Miss Rennick or her uncle will make a very good bargain. However, of course that's no affair of mine now. I remember that this Russell Rennick refused to finance his brother when he really wanted the money. He made a particularly bad bargain, too, then, though he didn't know it; for a dozen crafts like that, properly armed, would imply smash up the navies of the world, and make sea-power a private trust. After all, I'm not particularly sorry, because then it wouldn't have belonged to me. Well now, Captain, I'm going to ask you to give me a bit of breakfast when it's ready, then I must be off. I want to be in Washington to-night."

"To-night! What, twenty-one hundred miles!"

"Why not?" said Redgrave; "I can do about a hundred and fifty an hour through the atmosphere, and then, you see, if that isn't fast enough I can rise outside the earth's attraction, let it spin round, and then come down where I want to."

"Great Scott!" remarked Captain Hawkins inadequately, but with emphasis. "Well, my Lord, I guess we'll go down to breakfast."

But breakfast was not quite ready, and so Lord Redgrave rejoined Miss Rennick and her chaperon on deck.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

All eyes and a good many glasses were still turned on the Astronef, which had now moved a few feet away from the liner's side, and was running along, exactly keeping pace with her.

"It's so wonderful, that even seeing doesn't seem believing," said the girl, when they had renewed their acquaintance of two years before.

"Well," he replied, "it would be very easy to convince you. She shall come alongside again, and if you and Mrs. Van Stuyler will honour her by your presence for half an hour while breakfast is getting ready, I think I shall be able to convince you that she is not the airy fabric of a vision, but simply the realisation in metal and glass and other things of visions which your father saw some years ago."

There was no resisting an invitation put in such a way. Besides, the prospect of becoming the wonder and envy of every other woman on board was altogether too dazzling for words.

Mrs. Van Stuyler looked a little aghast at the idea at first, but she too had something of the same feeling as Zaidie, and besides, there could hardly be any impropriety in accepting the invitation of one of the wealthiest and most distinguished noblemen in the British Peerage. So, after a little demur and a slight manifestation of nervousness, she consented.

Redgrave signalled to the man at the steering wheel. The Astronef slackened pace a little, dropped a yard or so, and slid up quite close to the bridge-rail again. Lord Redgrave got in first and ran a light gangway down on to the bridge. Zaidie and Mrs. Van Stuyler were carefully handed up. The next moment the gangway was drawn up again, the sliding glass doors clashed to, the Astronef leapt a couple of thousand feet into the air, swept round to the westward in a magnificent curve, and vanished into the gloom of the upper mists.

Chapter I

THE situation was one which was absolutely without parallel in all the history of courtship from the days of Mother Eve to those of Miss Lilla Zaidie Rennick. The nearest approach to it would have been the old-fashioned Tartar custom which made it lawful for a man to steal his best girl, if he could get her first, fling her across his horse's crupper and ride away with her to his tent.

But to the shocked senses of Mrs. Van Stuyler the present adventure appeared a great deal more terrible than that. Both Zaidie and herself had sprung to their feet as soon as the upward rush of the Astronef had slackened and they were released from their seats. They looked down through the glass walls of what may be called the hurricane deck-chamber of the Astronef, and saw below them a snowy sea of clouds just crimsoned by the rising sun.

In this cloud-sea, which spread like a wide-meshed veil between them and the earth, there were great irregular rifts which looked as big as continents on a map. These had a blue-grey background, or it might be more correct to say under-ground, and in the midst of one of these they saw a little black speck which after a moment or two took the shape of a little toy ship, and presently they recognised it as the eleven-thousand-ton liner which a few moments ago had been their ocean home.

Mrs. Van Stuyler was shaking in every muscle, afflicted by a sort of St. Vitus' dance induced by physical fear and outraged propriety. Quite apart from these, however, she experienced a third sensation which made for a nameless inquietude. She was a woman of the world, well versed in most of its ways, and she fully recognised that that single bound from the bridge-rail of the St. Louis to the other side of the clouds had already carried her and her charge beyond the pale of human law.

The same thought, mingled with other feelings, half of wonder and half of re-awakened tenderness, was just then uppermost in Miss Zaidie's mind. It was quite obvious that the man who could create and control such a marvellous vehicle as this could, morally as well as physically, lift himself beyond the reach of the conventions which civilised society had instituted for its own protection and government.

He could do with them exactly as he pleased. They were utterly at his mercy. He might carry them away to some unexplored spot on one of the continents, or to some unknown island in the midst of the wide Pacific. He might even transport them into the midst of the awful solitudes which surround the Poles. He could give them the choice between doing as he wished, submitting unconditionally to his will, or committing suicide by starvation.

They had not even the option of jumping out, for they did not know how to open the sliding doors; and even if they had done, what feminine nerves could have faced a leap into that awful gulf which lay below them, a two-thousand-foot dive through the clouds into the waters of the wintry Atlantic?

They looked at each other in speechless, dazed amazement. Far away below them on the other side of the clouds the St. Louis was steaming eastward, and with her were going the last hopes of the coronet which was to be the matrimonial equivalent of Miss Zaidie's beauty and Russell Rennick's millions.

They were no longer of the world. Its laws could no longer protect them. Anything might happen, and that anything depended absolutely on the will of the lord and master of the extraordinary vessel which, for the present, was their only world.

"My dearest Zaidie!" Mrs. Van Stuyler gasped, when she at length recovered the power of articulate speech, "what an entirely too awful thing this is! Why, it's abduction and nothing less. Indeed it's worse, for he's taken us clean off the earth, and there's no more chance of rescue than if he took us to one of those planets he said he could go to. If I didn't feel a great responsibility for you, dear, I believe I should faint."

By this time Miss Zaidie had recovered a good deal of her usual composure. The excitement of the upward rush, and what was left of the momentary physical fear, had flushed her cheeks and lighted her eyes. Even Mrs. Van Stuyler thought her looking, if possible, more beautiful than she had done under the most favourable of terrestrial circumstances. There was a something else too, which she didn't altogether like to see, a sort of

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

resignation to her fate which, in a young lady situated as she was then, Mrs. Van Stuyler considered to be distinctly improper.

“It is rather startling, isn't it?” she said, with hardly a trace of emotion in her voice; “But I have no doubt that everything will be all right in the end.”

“Everything all right, my dear Zaidie! What on Earth, or I might say under heaven, do you mean?”

“I mean,” replied Zaidie even more composedly than before, and also with a little tightening of her lips, “that Lord Redgrave is the owner of this vessel, and that therefore it is quite impossible that anything out of the way could happen to us—I mean anything more out of the way than this wonderful jump from the sea to the sky has been, unless, of course, Lord Redgrave is going to take us for a voyage among the stars.”

“Zaidie Rennick!” said Mrs. Van Stuyler, bridling up into her most frigid dignity, “I am more than surprised to hear you talk in such a strain. Perfectly safe, indeed! Has it not struck you that we are absolutely at this man's—this Lord Redgrave's, mercy, that he can take us where he likes, and treat us just as he pleases?”

“My dear Mrs. Van,” replied Zaidie, dropping back into her familiar form of address, but speaking even more frigidly than her chaperon had done, “you seem to forget that, however extraordinary our situation may be just now, we are in the care of an English gentleman. Lord Redgrave was a friend of my father's, the only man who believed in his ideals, the only man who realised them, the only man—”

“That you were ever in love with, eh?” said Mrs. Van Stuyler with a snap in her voice. “Is that so? Ah, I begin to see something now.”

“And I think, if you possess your soul in patience, you will see something more before long,” snapped Miss Zaidie in reply. Then she stopped abruptly and the flush on her cheek deepened, for at that moment Lord Redgrave came up the companion way from the lower deck carrying a big silver tray with a coffee pot, three cups and saucers, a rack of toast, and a couple of plates of bread and butter and cake.

Just then a sort of social miracle happened. The fact was that Mrs. Van Stuyler had never before had her early coffee brought to her by a peer of the British Realm. She thought it a little humiliating afterwards, but for the moment all sorts of conventional barriers seemed to melt away. After all she was a woman, and some years ago she had been a young one. Lord Redgrave was an almost perfect specimen of English manhood in its early prime. He was one of the richest peers in England, and he was bringing her her coffee. As she said afterwards, she wilted, and she couldn't help it.

“I'm afraid I have kept you waiting a long time for your coffee, ladies,” said Redgrave, as he balanced the tray on one hand and drew a wicker table towards them with the other. “You see there are only two of us on board this craft, and as my engineer is navigating the ship, I have to attend to the domestic arrangements.”

Mrs. Van Stuyler looked at him in the silence of mental paralysis. Miss Zaidie frowned, smiled, and then began to laugh.

“Well, of all the cold-blooded English ways of putting things—” she began.

“I beg your pardon?” said Lord Redgrave as he put the tray down on the table.

“What Miss Rennick means, Lord Redgrave,” interrupted Mrs. Van Stuyler, struggling out of her paralytic condition, “and what I, too, should like to say, is that under the circumstances—”

“You think that I am not as penitent as I ought to be. Is that so?” said Redgrave, with a glance and a smile mostly directed towards Miss Zaidie.

“Well, to tell you the truth,” he went on, “I am not a bit penitent. On the contrary, I am very glad to have been able to assist the Fates as far as I have done.”

“Assist the Fates!” gasped Mrs. Van Stuyler, helping herself shakingly to sugar, while Miss Zaidie folded a gossamer slice of bread and butter and began to eat it; “I think, Lord Redgrave, that if you knew all the circumstances, you would say that you were working against them.”

“My dear Mrs. Van Stuyler,” he replied, as he filled his own coffee cup, “I quite agree with you as to certain fates, but the Fates which I mean are the ones which, with good or bad reason, I think are working on my side. Besides, I do know all the circumstances, or at least the most important of them. That knowledge is, in fact, my principal excuse for bringing you so unceremoniously above the clouds.”

As he said this he took a sideway glance at Miss Zaidie. She dropped her eyelids and went on eating her bread and butter; but there was a little deepening of the flush on her cheeks which was to him as the first flush of sunrise to a benighted wanderer.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

There was a rather awkward silence after this. Miss Zaidie stirred the coffee in her cup with a dainty Queen Anne spoon, and seemed to concentrate the whole of her attention upon the operation. Then Mrs. Van Stuyler took a sip out of her cup and said:

“But really, Lord Redgrave, I feel that I must ask you whether you think that what you have done during the last few minutes (which already, I assure you, seem hours to me) is—well, quite in accordance with the—what shall I say—ah, the rules that we have been accustomed to live under?”

Lord Redgrave looked at Miss Zaidie again. She didn't even raise her eyelids, only a very slight tremor of her hand as she raised her cup to her lips told that she was even listening. He took courage from this sign, and replied:

“My dear Mrs. Van Stuyler, the only answer that I can make to that just now is to remind you that, by the sanction of ages, everything is supposed to be fair under two sets of circumstances, and, whatever is happening on the earth down yonder, we, I think, are not at war.”

The next moment Miss Zaidie's eyelids lifted a little. There was a tremor about her lips almost too faint to be perceptible, and the slightest possible tinge of colour crept upwards towards her eyes. She put her cup down and got up, walked towards the glass walls of the deck-chamber, and looked out over the cloud-scape.

The shortness of her steamer skirt made it possible for Lord Redgrave and Mrs. Van Stuyler to see that the sole of her right boot was swinging up and down on the heel ever so slightly. They came simultaneously to the conclusion that if she had been alone she would have stamped, and stamped pretty hard. Possibly also she would have said things to herself and the surrounding silence. This seemed probable from the almost equally imperceptible motion of her shapely shoulders.

Mrs. Van Stuyler recognised in a moment that her charge was getting angry. She knew by experience that Miss Zaidie possessed a very proper spirit of her own, and that it was just as well not to push matters too far. She further recognised that the circumstances were extraordinary, not to say equivocal, and that she herself occupied a distinctly peculiar position.

She had accepted the charge of Miss Zaidie from her Uncle Russell for a consideration counted partly by social advantages and partly by dollars. In the most perfect innocence she had permitted not only her charge but herself to be abducted—for, after all, that was what it came to—from the deck of an American liner, and carried, not only beyond the clouds, but also beyond the reach of human law, both criminal and conventional.

Inwardly she was simply fuming with rage. As she said afterwards, she felt just like a bottled volcano which would like to go off and daren't.

About two minutes of somewhat surcharged silence passed. Mrs. Van Stuyler sipped her coffee in ostentatiously small sips. Lord Redgrave took his in slower and longer ones, and helped himself to bread and butter. Miss Zaidie appeared perfectly contented with her contemplation of the clouds.

Chapter II

At length Mrs. Van Stuyler, being a woman of large experience and some social deftness, recognised that a change of subject was the easiest way of retreat out of a rather difficult situation. So she put her cup down, leant back in her chair, and, looking straight into Lord Redgrave's eyes, she said with purely feminine irrelevance:

"I suppose you know, Lord Redgrave, that, when we left, the machine which we call in America Manhood Suffrage—which, of course, simply means the selection of a government by counting noses which may or may not have brains above them—was what some of our orators would call in full blast. If you are going to New York after Washington, as you said on the boat, we might find it a rather inconvenient time to arrive. The whole place will be chaos, you know; because when the citizen of the United States begins electioneering, New York is not a very nice place to stop in except for people who want excitement, and so if you will excuse me putting the question so directly, I should like to know what you just do mean to do—"

Lord Redgrave saw that she was going to add "With us," but before he had time to say anything, Miss Zaidie turned round, walked deliberately towards her chair, sat down, poured herself out a fresh cup of coffee, added the milk and sugar with deliberation, and then after a preliminary sip said, with her cup poised halfway between her dainty lips and the table:

"Mrs. Van, I've got an idea. I suppose it's inherited, for dear old Pop had plenty. Anyhow we may as well get back to common-sense subjects. Now look here," she went on, switching an absolutely convincing glance straight into her host's eyes, "My father may have been a dreamer, but still he was a Sound Money man. He believed in honest dealings. He didn't believe in borrowing a hundred dollars gold and paying back in fifty dollars silver. What's your opinion, Lord Redgrave; you don't do that sort of thing in England, do you? Uncle Russell is a Sound Money man too. He's got too much gold locked up to want silver for it."

"My dear Zaidie," said Mrs. Van Stuyler, "what have democratic and republican politics and bimetalism got to do with—"

"With a trip in this wonderful vessel which Pop told me years ago could go up to the stars if it ever was made? Why just this, Lord Redgrave is an Englishman and too rich to believe in anything but sound money, so is Uncle Russell, and there you have it, or should have."

"I think I see what you mean, Miss Rennick," said their host, leaning back in his chair and folding his hands behind his head, as steamboat travellers are wont to do when seas are smooth and skies are blue. "The Astronef might come down like a vision from the clouds and preach the Gospel of Gold in electric rays of silver through the commonplace medium of the Morse Code. How's that for poetry and practice?"

"I quite agree with his lordship as regards the practice," said Mrs. Van Stuyler, talking somewhat rudely across him to Zaidie. "It would be an excellent use to put this wonderful invention to. And then, I am sure his lordship would land us in Central Park, so that we could go to your Uncle's house right away."

"No, no, I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me there, Mrs. Van Stuyler," said Redgrave, with a change of tone which Miss Zaidie appreciated with a swiftly veiled glance. "You see, I have placed myself beyond the law. I have, as you have been good enough to intimate, abducted—to put it brutally—two ladies from the deck of an Atlantic liner. Further, in doing so I have selfishly spoiled the prospects of one of the ladies. But, seriously, I really must go to Washington first—"

"I think, Lord Redgrave," interrupted Mrs. Van Stuyler, ignoring the last unfinished sentence and assuming her best Knickerbocker dignity, "if you will forgive me saying so, that that is scarcely a subject for discussion here."

"And if that's so," interrupted Miss Zaidie, the less we say about it the better. What I wanted to say was this. We all want the Republicans in, at least all of us that have much to lose. Now, if Lord Redgrave was to use this wonderful air-ship of his on the right side—why there wouldn't be any standing against it.

"I must say that until just now I had hardly contemplated turning the Astronef into an electioneering

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

machine. Still, I admit that she might be made use of in a good cause, only I hope—”

“That we shan't want you to paste her over with election bills, eh?—or start handbill—snowstorms from the deck—or kidnap Croker and Bryan just as you did us, for instance?”

“If I could, I'm quite sure that I shouldn't have as pleasant guests as I have now on board the Astronef. What do you think, Mrs. Van Stuyler?”

“My dear Lord Redgrave,” she replied, “that would be quite impossible. The idea of being shut up in a ship like this which can soar not only from earth, but beyond the clouds, with people who would find out your best secrets and then perhaps shoot you so as to be the only possessors of them—well, that would be foolishness indeed.”

“Why, certainly it would,” said Zaidie; “The only use you could have for people like that would be to take them up above the clouds and drop them out. But suppose we—I mean Lord Redgrave—took the Astronef down over New York and signalled messages from the sky at night with a searchlight—”

“Good,” said their host, getting up from his deck-chair and stretching himself up straight, looking the while at Miss Zaidie's averted profile. “That's gorgeously good! We might even turn the election. I'm for sound money all the time, if I may be permitted to speak American.”

“English is quite good enough for us, Lord Redgrave,” said Miss Zaidie a little stiffly. “We may have improved on the old language a bit, still we understand it, and—well, we can forgive its short-comings. But that isn't quite to the point.”

“It seems to me,” said Mrs. Van Stuyler, “that we are getting nearly as far from the original subject as we are from the St. Louis. May I ask, Zaidie, what you really propose to do?”

“Do is not for us to say,” said Miss Zaidie, looking straight up to the glass roof of the deck-chamber. “You see, Mrs. Van, we're not free agents. We are not even first-class passengers who have paid their fares on a contract ticket which is supposed to get them there.”

“If you'll pardon me saying so,” said Lord Redgrave, stopping his walk up and down the deck, “that is not quite the case. To put it in the most brutally material form, it is quite true that I have kidnapped you two ladies and taken you beyond the reach of earthly law. But there is another law, one which would bind a gentleman even if he were beyond the limits of the Solar System, and so if you wish to be landed either in Washington or New York it shall be done. You shall be put down within a carriage drive of your own residence, or of Mr. Russell Rennick's. I will myself see you to his door, and there we may say goodbye, and I will take my trip through the Solar System alone.”

There was another pause after this, a pause pregnant with the fate of two lives. They looked at each other—Mrs. Van Stuyler at Zaidie, Zaidie at Lord Redgrave, and he at Mrs. Van Stuyler again. It was a kind of three-cornered duel of eyes, and the eyes said a good deal more than common human speech could have done.

Then Lord Redgrave, in answer to the last glance from Zaidie's eyes,” said slowly and deliberately:

“I don't want to take any undue advantage, but I think I am justified in making one condition. Of course I can take you beyond the limits of the world that we know, and to other worlds that we know little or nothing of. At least I could do so if I were not bound by law as strong as gravitation itself; but now, as I said before, I just ask whether or not my guests or, if you think it suits the circumstances better, my prisoners, shall be released unconditionally wherever they choose to be landed.”

He paused for a moment and then, looking straight into Zaidie's eyes, he added:

“The one condition I make is that the vote shall be unanimous.”

“Under the circumstances, Lord Redgrave,” said Mrs. Van Stuyler, rising from her seat and walking towards him with all the dignity that would have been hers in her own drawing-room, “there can only be one answer to that. Your guests or your prisoners, as you choose to call them, must be released unconditionally.”

Lord Redgrave heard these words as a man might hear words in a dream. Zaidie had risen too. They were looking into each other's eyes, and many unspoken words were passing between them. There was a little silence, and then, to Mrs. Van Stuyler's unutterable horror, Zaidie said, with just the suspicion of a gasp in her voice:

“There's one dissentient. We are prisoners, and I guess I'd better surrender at discretion.”

The next moment her captor's arm was round her waist, and Mrs. Van Stuyler, with her twitching fingers

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

linked behind her back, and her nose at an angle of sixty degrees, was staring away through the blue immensity, dumbly wondering what on earth or under heaven was going to happen next.

Chapter III

AFTER a couple of minutes of silence which could be felt, Mrs. Van Stuyler turned round and said angrily:

“Zaidie, you will excuse me, perhaps, if I say that your conduct is not—I mean has not been what I should have expected—what I did, indeed, expect from your uncle's niece when I undertook to take you to Europe. I must say—”

“If I were you, Mrs. Van, I don't think I'd say much more about that, because, you see, it's fixed and done. Of course, Lord Redgrave's only an earl, and the other is a marquis, but, you see, he's a man, and I don't quite think the other one is—and that's about all there is to it.”

Their host had just left the deck-saloon, taking the early coffee apparatus with him, and Miss Zaidie, in the first flush of her pride and re-found happiness, was taking a promenade of about twelve strides each way, while Mrs. Van Stuyler, after partially relieving her feelings as above, had seated herself stiffly in her wicker-chair, and was following her with eyes which were critical and, if they had been twenty years younger, might also have been envious.

“Well, at least I suppose I must congratulate you on your ability to accommodate yourself to most extraordinary circumstances. I must say that as far as that goes I quite envy you. I feel as though I ought to choke or take poison, or something of that sort.”

“Sakes, Mrs. Van, please don't talk like that!” said Zaidie, stopping in her walk just in front of her chaperon's chair. “Can't you see that there's nothing extraordinary about the circumstances except this wonderful ship? I have told you how Pop and I met Lord Redgrave in our tour through the Canadian Rockies two or three years ago. No, it's two years and nine months next June; and how he took an interest in Pop's theories and ideas about this same ship that we are on now—”

“Oh yes,” said Mrs. Van Stuyler rather acidly, “and not only in the abstract ideas, but apparently in a certain concrete reality.”

“Mrs. Van,” laughed Zaidie, with a cunning twist on her heel, “I know you don't mean to be rude, but—well, now did any one ever call you a concrete reality? Of course it's correct just as a scientific definition, perhaps—still, anyhow, I guess it's not much good going on about that. The facts are just this way. I consented to marry that Byfleet marquis just out of sheer spite and blank ignorance. Lord Redgrave never actually asked me to marry him when we were in the Rockies, but he did say when he went back to England that as soon as he had realised my father's ideal he would come over and try and realise one of his own. He was looking at me when he said it, and he looked a good deal more than he said. Then he went away, and poor Pop died. Of course I couldn't write and tell him, and I suppose he was too proud to write before he'd done what he undertook to do, and I, like most girl-fools in the same place would have done, thought that he'd given the whole thing up and just looked upon the trip as a sort of interlude in globe-trotting, and thought no more about Pop's ideas and inventions than he did about his daughter.”

“Very natural, of course,” said Mrs. Van Stuyler, somewhat mollified by the subdued passion which Zaidie had managed to put into her commonplace words; “And so as you thought he had forgotten you and was finding a wife in his own country, and a possible husband came over from that same country with a coronet—”

“That'll do, Mrs. Van, thank you,” interrupted Miss Zaidie, bringing her daintily-shod foot down on the deck this time with an unmistakable stamp. “We'll consider that incident dosed if you please. It was a miserable, mean, sordid business altogether; I am utterly, hopelessly ashamed of it and myself too. Just to think that I could ever—”

Mrs. Van Stuyler cut short her indignant flow of words by a sudden uplifting of her eyelids and a swift turn of her head towards the companion way. Zaidie stamped again, this time more softly, and walked away to have another look at the clouds.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Why, what on earth is the matter?” she exclaimed, shrinking back from the glass wall. “There's nothing—we're not anywhere!”

“Pardon me, Miss Rennick, you are on board the Astronef,” said Lord Redgrave, as he reached the top of the companion way, “and the Astronef is at present travelling at about a hundred and fifty miles an hour above the clouds towards Washington. That is why you don't see the clouds and sea as you did after we left the St. Louis. At a speed like this they simply make a sort of grey-green blur. We shall be in Washington this evening, I hope.”

“To-night, sir—I beg your pardon, my Lord!” gasped Mrs. Van Stuyler. “A hundred and fifty miles an hour! Surely that's impossible.”

“My dear Mrs. Van Stuyler,” said Redgrave, with a side-look at Zaidie, “nowadays 'impossible' is hardly an English or even an American word. In fact, since I have had the honour of realising some of Professor Rennick's ideas it has been relegated to the domain of mathematics. Not even he could make two and two more or less than four, but—well, would you like to come into the conning-tower and see for yourselves? I can show you a few experiments that will, at any rate, help to pass the time between here and Washington.”

“Lord Redgrave,” said Mrs. Van Stuyler, dropping gracefully back into her wicker armchair, “if I may say so, I have seen quite enough impossibilities, and—er, well—other things since we left the deck of the St. Louis to keep me quite satisfied until, with your Lordship's permission, I set foot on solid ground again, and I should also like to remind you that we have left everything behind us on the St. Louis, everything except what we stand up in, and—and—”

“And therefore it will be a point of honour with me to see that you want for nothing while you are on board the Astronef, and that you shall be released from your durance—”

“Now don't say vile, Lenox—I mean—”

“It is perfectly plain what you mean, Zaidie,” said Mrs. Van Stuyler, in a tone which seemed to send a chill through the deck-chamber. “Really, the American girl—”

“Just wants to tell the truth,” laughed Zaidie, going towards Redgrave. “Lord Redgrave, if you like it better, says he wants to marry me, and, peer or peasant, I want to marry him, and that's all there is to it. You don't suppose I'd have—”

“My dear girl, there's no need to go into details,” interrupted Mrs. Van Stuyler, inspired by fond memories of her own youth; “we will take that for granted, and as we are beyond the social region in which chaperons are supposed to be necessary, I think I will have a nap.”

“And we'll go to the conning-tower, eh?”

“Breakfast will be ready in about half an hour,” said Redgrave, as he took Zaidie by the arm and led her towards the forward end of the deck-chamber. “Meanwhile, au revoir! If you want anything, touch the button at your right hand, just as you would on board the St. Louis.”

“I thank your lordship,” said Mrs. Van Stuyler, half melting and half icy still. “I shall be quite content to wait until you come back. Really I feel quite sleepy.”

“That's the effect of the elevation on the dear old lady's nerves,” Redgrave whispered to Zaidie as he helped her up the narrow stairway which led to the glass domed conning-tower, in which in days to come she was destined to pass some of the most delightful and the most terrible moments of her life.

“Then why doesn't it affect me that way?” said Zaidie, as she took her place in the little chamber, steel-walled and glass-roofed, and half filled with instruments of which she, Vassar girl and all as she was, could only guess the use.

“Well, to begin with, you are younger, which is an absolutely unnecessary observation; and in the second place, perhaps you were thinking about something else.”

“By which I suppose you mean your lordship's noble self.”

This was said in such a tone and with such an indescribable smile that there immediately ensued a gap in the conversation, and a silence which was a great deal more eloquent than any words could have made it.

When Miss Zaidie had got free again she put her hands up to her hair, and while she was patting it into something like shape again she said:

“But I thought you brought me here to show me some experiments, and not to—”

“Not to take advantage of the first real opportunity of tasting some of the dearest delights that mortal man

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

ever stole from earth or sea? Do you remember that day when we were coming down from the big glacier—when your foot slipped and I just caught you and saved a sprained ankle?”

“Yes, you wretch, and went away next day and left something like a broken heart behind you! Why didn't you—Oh what idiots you men can be when you put your minds to it!”

“It wasn't quite that, Zaidie. You see, I'd promised your father the day before—of course I was only a younger son then—that I wouldn't say anything about realising my ideal until I had realised his, and so—”

“And so I might have gone to Europe with Uncle Russell's millions to buy that man Byfleet's coronet, and pay the price—

“Don't, Zaidie, don't! That is quite too horrible to think of, and as for the coronet, well, I think I can give you one about as good as his, and one that doesn't want re-gilding. Good Lord, fancy you married to a thing like that! What could have made you think of it?”

“I didn't think,” she said angrily; “I didn't think and I didn't feel. Of course I thought that I'd dropped right out of your life, and after that I didn't care. I was mad right through, and I'd made up my mind to do what others did—take a title and a big position, and have the outside as bright as I could get it, whatever the inside might be like. I'd made up my mind to be a society queen abroad, and a miserable woman at home—and, Lenox, thank God and you, that I wasn't!”

Then there was another interlude, and at the end of it Redgrave said:

“Wait till we've finished our honeymoon in space, and come back to earth. You won't want any coronets then, although you'll have one, for all the lands of earth won't hold another woman like yourself—your own sweet self! Of course it doesn't now, but there, you know what I mean. You'll have been to other worlds, you'll have made the round trip of the Solar System, so to say, and—”

“And I think, dear, that is about promise of wonders enough, and of other things too—no, you're really quite too exacting. I thought you brought me here to show me some of the wonders that this marvellous ship of yours can work.”

“Then just one more and I'll show you. Now you stand up there on that step so that you can see all round, and watch with all your eyes, because you are going to see something that no woman ever saw before.”

Chapter IV

ABOVE a tiny little writing-desk fixed to the wall of the conning-tower there was a square mahogany board with six white buttons in pairs. On one side of the board hung a telephone and on the other a speaking-tube. To the right hand opposite where Zaidie stood were two nickel-plated wheels and behind each of them a white disc, one marked off into 360 degrees, and the other into 100 with subdivisions of tens. Overhead hung an ordinary tell-tale compass, and compactly placed on other parts of the wall were barometers, thermometers, barographs, and, in fact, practically every instrument that the most exacting of aeronauts or space-explorers could have asked for.

“You see, Zaidie, this is what one might call the cerebral chamber of the Astronef and, granted that my engines worked all right, I could make her do anything I wanted without moving out of here, but as a rule, of course, Murgatroyd is in the engine-room. If he wasn't the most whole-souled Wesleyan that Yorkshire ever produced, I believe he'd become an idolater and worship the Astronef's engines.”

“And who is Murgatroyd, please?”

“In the first place he is what I might call an hereditary retainer of the House of Redgrave. His ancestors have served mine for the last seven hundred years. When my ancestors were burglar-barons, his were men-at-arms. When we went on the Crusades they went too; when we raised a regiment for the King against the Parliament they were naturally the first to enlist in it; and as we gradually settled down into peaceful respectability they did the same. Lastly, when we went into trade as ironmasters and engineers they went in too. This Murgatroyd, for instance, was master-foreman of my works at Smeaton, and he was the only man I dared trust with the secrets of the Astronef, and the only one I would trust myself on board her with, and that's why we're a crew of two. You see the command of a vessel like this is a fairly big business, and if it got into the wrong sort of hands—”

“Yes, I see,” said Zaidie with a little nod. “It would be just too awful to think about. Why you might keep the world in terror with it; but I know you wouldn't do that, because, for one thing, I wouldn't let you.”

“Gently, gently, Ma'm'selle; permit me most humbly to remind you that you are still my prisoner, and that I am still Commander of the Astronef.”

“Oh, very well then,” said Zaidie, interrupting him with a pretty little gesture of impatience, “and now suppose you let me see what the Astronef's commander can do with her.”

“Certainly,” replied Redgrave, “and with the greatest pleasure—but, by the way, that reminds me you haven't paid your footing yet.”

When due payment had been given and taken, or perhaps it would be more correct to say taken and given, Redgrave put his finger on one of the buttons.

Immediately Zaidie heard the swish of the air past the smooth wall of the conning-tower grow fainter and fainter. Then there came a little check which nearly upset her balance, and presently the clouds beneath them began to take shape and great white continents of them with grey oceans in between went sweeping silently and swiftly away behind them.

Redgrave turned the wheel in front of the 100-degree disc a little to the left. The next instant the clouds rose up. For a moment Zaidie could see nothing but white mist on all sides. Then the atmosphere cleared again, and she saw far below her what looked like a vast expanse of ocean that had been suddenly frozen solid.

There were the long Atlantic rollers tipped with snowy foam. Here and there at wide intervals were little black dots, some of them with brown trails behind them, others with little patches of white which showed up distinctly against the dark grey-blue of the sea. Every moment they grew bigger. Then the white-crested waves began to move, and the big ocean steamers and full-rigged sailing ships looked less and less like toys. Just under them there was a very big one with four funnels pouring out dense volumes of black smoke. Redgrave took up a pair of glasses, looked at her for a moment and said:

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“That's the Deutschland, the new Hamburg–American record–breaker. Suppose we go down and have a lark with her. I wonder if she's taking news of the war. We're in with Germany, and they may know something about it.”

“That would be just too lovely!” said Zaidie. “Let's go and show them how we can break records. I suppose they've seen us by this time and are just wondering with all their wits what we are. I guess they'll feel pretty tired about poor Count Zeppelin's balloon when they see us.”

Redgrave noted the “we” and the “us” with much secret satisfaction.

“All right,” he said, “we'll go and give them a bit of a startler.”

In front of the conning–tower there was a steel flagstaff about tell feet high, with halliards rove through a sheer in the top. He took a little roll of bunting out of a locker under the desk, opened a glass slide, brought in the halliards and bent the flag on.

Meanwhile the long shape of the great liner was getting bigger and bigger. Her decks were black with people staring up at this strange apparition which was dropping upon them from the clouds. Another minute and the Astronef had dropped to within five hundred feet of the water, and about half a mile astern of the Deutschland. Redgrave turned the wheel back two or three inches and touched a second button.

The Astronef stopped her descent instantly, and then she shot forward. The new greyhound was making her twenty–two and a half knots, hurling a broad white torrent of foam away from under her counters. But in half a minute the Astronef was alongside her.

Redgrave ran the roll of bunting up to the top of the flagstaff, pulled one of the halliards, and the White Ensign of England floated out. Almost at the same moment the German flag went up to the staff at the stern of the Deutschland, and they heard a roar of cheers, mingled with cries of wonder, come up from her swarming decks.

Each flag was dipped thrice in due course. Redgrave took off his cap and bowed to the Captain on the bridge. Zaidie nodded and fluttered her handkerchief in reply to hundreds of others that were waving on the decks. Mrs. Van Stuyler woke up in wonder and waved hers instinctively, half longing to change crafts. In fact, if it hadn't been for her absolute devotion to the proprieties she would have obeyed her first impulse and asked Lord Redgrave to put her on board the steamer.

While the officers and crew and passengers of the Deutschland were staring wide–eyed and open–mouthed at the graceful glittering shape of the Astronef, Redgrave touched the first button in the second row once, moved the 100–degree wheel on a few degrees, and then gave the other a quarter turn. Then he closed the window slide, and the next moment Zaidie saw the great liner sink down beneath them in a curious twisting sort of way. She seemed to stop still and then spin round on her centre, getting smaller and smaller every moment.

“What's the matter, Lenox?” she said, with a little gasp. “What's the Deutschland doing? She seems to be spinning round on her own axis like a top.”

“That's only the point of view, dear. She's just plugging along straight on her way to New York, and we've been making rings round her and going up all the time. But of course you don't notice the motion here any more than you would if you were in a balloon.”

“But I thought you were going to speak to them. Surely you don't mean to say that you intended that just as a little bit of showing off?”

“That's about what it comes to, I suppose, but you must not think it was altogether vanity. You see the German Government has bought Count Zeppelin's air–ship or steerable balloon, as it ought to be called, always supposing that they can steer it in a wind, and of course their idea is to make a fighting machine of it. Now Germany is engaged to stand by us in this trouble that's coming, and by way of cementing the alliance I thought it was just as well to let the wily Teuton know that there's something flying the British flag which could make very small mincemeat of their gas–bags.”

“And what about Old Glory?” said Miss Zaidie. “The Astronef was built with English money and English skill, but—”

“She is the creature of American genius. Of course she is. In fact she is the first concrete symbol of the Anglo–American Alliance, and when the daughter of her creator has gone into partnership with the man who made her we'll have two flagstaffs, and the Jack and Old Glory will float side by side.”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“And meanwhile where are we going?” Asked Zaidie, after a moment's interval. “Ah, there we are through the clouds again. What makes us rise? Is that the force that Pop told me he discovered?”

“I'll answer the last question first,” said Redgrave. “That was the greatest of your father's discoveries. He got at the secret of gravitation, and was able to analyse it into two separate forces just as Volta did with electricity—positive and negative, or, to put it better, attractive and repulsive.

“Three out of the five sets of engines in the Astronef develop the R. Force, as I call it for short. This wheel with the hundred degrees marked behind it regulates the development. The further I turn it this way to the right, the more the R. Force overcomes the attractive force of the earth or any other planet that we may visit. Turn it back, and gravitation asserts itself. If I put this arrow-head on the wheel opposite zero the weight of the Astronef is about a hundred and fifty tons, and of course she would go down like a stone, and a very big one at that. At ten she weighs nothing; that is to say the R Force exactly counteracts gravitation. At eleven she begins to rise. At a hundred she would be hurled away from the earth like a shell from a twelve-inch gun, or even faster. Now, watch.”

He took up the speaking-tube. “Is she all tight everywhere, Andrew?”

“Yes, my Lord,” came gurgling through the tube.

Then Redgrave slowly turned the wheel till the indicator pointed to twenty-five. Zaidie, all eyes and wonder, saw a vast sea of glittering white spread out beneath them, an ocean of snow with grey-blue patches here and there. It sank away from under them till the patches became spots and the sunlit clouds a vast, luminous blur. The air about them grew marvellously clear and limpid. The sun blazed down on them with a tenfold intensity of light, but Zaidie was astonished to find that very little heat penetrated the glass walls and roof of the conning-tower.

“What an awful height!” she exclaimed, looking round at him with something like fear in her eyes. “How high are we, Lenox?”

“You'll find afterwards that the Astronef doesn't take any account of high or low or up or down,” he replied, looking at the dial of an aneroid barometer by the side of him. “Roughly speaking, we're rather over 60,000 feet—say ten miles—from the surface of the Atlantic. That's why I asked Andrew whether everything was tight. You see we couldn't breathe the air there is outside there—too thin and cold—and so the Astronef makes her own atmosphere as we go along. But I won't spoil what you're going to see by any more of this. So if you please, we'll go down now and get along to Washington. Anyhow, I hope I've convinced you so far that I've kept my promise.”

“Yes, dear, you have, and splendidly! I've only one regret. If he was only here now, what a happy man he'd be! Still, I daresay he knows all about it and is just as happy. In fact he must be. I feel certain he must. The very soul of his intellect was in the dream of this ship, and now that it's a reality he must be here still. Isn't it part of himself? Isn't it his mind that's working in these wonderful engines of yours, and isn't it his strength that lifts us up from the earth and takes us down again just as you please to turn that wheel?”

“There's little doubt about that, Zaidie,” said Redgrave quietly, but earnestly. “You know we North-country folk all have our traditions and our ghosts; and what more likely than that the spirit of a dead man or a man gone to other worlds should watch over the realisation of his greatest work on earth? Why shouldn't we believe that, we who are going away from this world to other ones?”

“Why not?” Interrupted Zaidie, “why, of course we will. And now suppose we come down in more ways than one and go and give poor Mrs. Van Stuyler something to eat and drink. The dear old girl must be frightened half out of her wits by this time.”

“Very well,” replied Redgrave; “But we'll come down, literally first, so that we can get the propellers to work.”

He turned the wheel back till the indicator pointed to five. The cloud-sea came up with a rush. They passed through it, and stopped about a thousand feet above the sea. Redgrave touched the first button twice, and then the next one twice. The air began to hiss past the walls of the conning-tower. The crest-crowned waves of the Atlantic seemed to sweep in a hurrying torrent behind them, and then Redgrave, having made sure that Murgatroyd was at the after-wheel, gave him the course for Washington, and then went down to induct his bride-elect into the art and mystery of cooking by electricity as it was done in the kitchen of the Astronef.

Chapter V

As this narrative is the story of the personal adventures of Lord Redgrave and his bride, and not an account of events at which all the world has already wondered, there is no necessity to describe in any detail the extraordinary sequence of circumstances which began when the Astronef dropped without warning from the clouds in front of the White House at Washington, and his lordship, after paying his respects to the President, proceeded to the British Embassy and placed the copy of the Anglo–American agreement in Lord Pauncefote's hands.

Mrs. Van Stuyler's spirits had risen as the Astronef descended towards the lights of Washington, and when the President and Lord Pauncefote paid a visit to the wonderful craft, the joint product of American genius and English capital and constructive skill, she immediately assumed, at Redgrave's request, the position of lady of the house pro tem, and described the “change of plans,” as she called it, which led to their transfer from the St. Louis to the Astronef with an imaginative fluency which would have done credit to the most enterprising of American interviewers.

“You see, my dear,” she said to Zaidie afterwards, “as everything turned out so very happily, and as Lord Redgrave behaved in such a splendid way, I thought it was my duty to make everything appear as pleasant to the President and Lord Pauncefote as I could.”

“It was real good of you, Mrs. Van,” said Zaidie. “If I hadn't been paralysed with admiration I believe I should have laughed. Now if you'll just come with us on our trip, and write a book about it afterwards just as you told—I mean as you described what happened between the St. Louis and Washington, to the President and Lord Pauncefote, you'd make a million dollars out of it. Say now, won't you come?”

“My dear Zaidie,” Mrs. Van Stuyler replied, “you know that I am very fond of you. If I'd only had a daughter I should have wanted her to be just like you, and I should have wanted her to marry a man just like Lord Redgrave. But there's a limit to everything. You say that you are going to the moon and the stars, and to see what the other planets are like. Well, that's your affair. I hope God will forgive you for your presumption, and let you come back safe, but I—No. Ten—twenty millions wouldn't pay me to tempt Providence like that.”

The Astronef had landed in front of the White House, as everybody knows, on the eve of the Presidential election. After dinner in the deck–saloon, as the Space Navigator lay in the midst of a square of troops, outside which a huge crowd surged and struggled to get a look at the latest miracle of constructive science, the President and the British Ambassador said goodbye, and as soon as the gang–way ladder was drawn in the Astronef, moved by no visible agency, rose from the ground amidst a roar of cheers coming from a hundred thousand throats. She stopped at a height of about a thousand feet, and then her forward searchlight flashed out, swept the horizon, and vanished. Then it flashed out again intermittently in the longs and shorts of the Morse Code, and these, when translated, read:

“Vote for sound men and sound money!”

In five minutes the wires of the United States were alive with the terse, pregnant message, and under the ocean in the dark depths of the Atlantic ooze, vivid narratives of the coming of the miracle went flashing to a hundred newspaper offices in England and on the Continent. The New York correspondent of the London Daily Express added the following paragraph to his account of the strange occurrence:

“The secret of this amazing vessel, which has proved itself capable of traversing the Atlantic in a day, and of soaring beyond the limits of the atmosphere at will, is possessed by one man only, and that man is an English nobleman. The air is full of rumours of universal war. One vessel such as this could scatter terror over a continent in a few days, demoralise armies and fleets, reduce Society to chaos, and establish a one–man despotism on the ruins of all the Governments of the world. The man who could build one ship like this could build fifty, and, if his country asked him to do it, no doubt he would. Those who, as we are almost forced to believe, are even now contemplating a serious attempt to dethrone England from her supreme place among the nations of Europe, will do well to take this latest potential factor in the warfare of the immediate future into

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

their most serious consideration.”

This paragraph was not perhaps as absolutely correct as a proposition in Euclid, but it stopped the war. The Deutschland came in the next day, and again the press was flooded, this time with personal narratives, and brilliantly imaginative descriptions of the vision which had descended from the clouds, made rings round the great liner going at her best speed, and then vanished in an instant beyond the range of field-glasses and telescopes.

Thus did the creature of Professor Rennick's inventive genius play its first part as the peacemaker of the world.

When the Astronef's message had been duly given and recorded, her propellers began to revolve, and her head swung round to the north-east. So began, as all the world now knows, the most extraordinary electioneering trip that ever was known. First Baltimore, then Philadelphia, and then New York saw the flashes in the sky. There were illuminations, torchlight processions, and all the machinery of American electioneering going at full blast. But when people saw, far away up in the starlit night, those swiftly-changing beams glittering down, as it were, out of infinite Space, and when the telegraph operators caught on to the fact that they were signals, a sort of awe seemed to come over both Republicans and Democrats alike. Even Tammany's thoughts began to lift above the sordid level of boodle. It was almost like a message from another world. There was something supernatural about it, and when it was translated and rushed out in extra editions of the evening papers: “Vote for sound men and sound money” became the watchword of millions.

From New York to Boston, Boston to Albany, and then across country to Buffalo, Cleveland, Chicago, Omaha—then westward to St. Paul and Minneapolis, and northward to Portland and Seattle, southward to San Francisco and Monterey, then eastward again to Salt Lake City, and then, after a leap across the Rockies which frightened Mrs Van Stuyler almost to fainting point and made Zaidie gasp for breath, away southward to Santa Fe and New Orleans.

Then northward again up the Mississippi Valley to St. Louis, and thence eastward across the Alleghanies back to Washington—such was the famous night-voyage of the Astronef, and so by means of that long silver tongue of light did she spread the message of common-sense and commercial honesty throughout the length and breadth of the Great Republic. The world knows how America received and interpreted it the next day.

Meanwhile Mr. Russell Rennick had taken train to Washington, and the day after the election he willingly took back all that he had intended with regard to the Marquis of Byfleet, accepted Lord Redgrave in his stead, and bestowed his avuncular blessing at the wedding breakfast held in the deck-chamber of the Astronef poised in mid-air, five hundred feet above the dome of the Capitol, a week later. To this he added a cheque for a million dollars—payable to the Countess of Redgrave on her return from her wedding trip.

Breakfast over, the wedding party made an inspection of the wonderful vessel under the guidance of her Commander. After this, while they were drinking their coffee and liqueurs, and the men were smoking their cigars in the deck-chamber, a score of the most distinguished men and women in the United States experienced the novel sensation of sitting quietly in deck-chairs while they were being hurled at the rate of a hundred and fifty miles an hour through the atmosphere.

They ran up to Niagara, dropped to within a few feet of the surface of the Falls, passed over them, fell to the Rapids, and drifted down them within a couple of yards of the raging waters. Then in an instant they leapt up into the clouds, dropped again, and took a slanting course for Washington at a speed incredible, but to them quite imperceptible, save for the blurred rush of the half-visible earth behind them.

That night the Astronef rested again in front of the steps of the White House, and Lord and Lady Redgrave were the guests at a semi-official banquet given by the newly re-elected President. The speech of the evening was made by the President himself in proposing the health of the bride and bridegroom, and this is the way he ended:

“There is something more in the ceremony which we have been privileged to witness than the union of a man and a woman in the bonds of holy matrimony. Lord Redgrave, as you know, is the descendant of one of the noblest and most ancient families in the Motherland of New Nations. Lady Redgrave is the daughter of the oldest and, I hope I may be allowed to say without offence, the greatest of those nations. It is, perhaps, early days to talk about a formal federation of the Anglo-Saxon people, but I think I am only voicing the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

sentiments of every good American when I say that, if the rumours which have drifted over and under the Atlantic, rumours of a determined attempt on the part of certain European powers to assault and, if possible, destroy that magnificent fortress of individual liberty and collective equity which we call the British Empire should unhappily prove to be true, then it may be that the rest of the world will find that America does not speak English for nothing.

“But I must also remind you that a few yards from the doors of the White House there lies the greatest marvel, I had almost said the greatest miracle, that has ever been accomplished by human genius and human industry. That wonderful vessel in which some of us have been privileged to take the most marvellous journey in the history of mechanical locomotion was thought out by an American man of science, the man whose daughter sits on my right hand tonight. In her concrete material form this vessel, destined to navigate the shoreless Ocean of Space, is English. But she is also the result of the belief and the faith of an Englishman in an American ideal. So when she leaves this earth, as she will do in an hour or so, to enter the confines of other worlds than this—and, it may be, to make the acquaintance of peoples other than those who inhabit the earth—she will have done infinitely more than she has already done, incredible as that seems. She will not only have convinced this world that the greatest triumph of human genius is of Anglo-Saxon origin, but she will carry to other worlds than this the truth which this world will have learnt before the nineteenth century ends.

“England in the person of Lord Redgrave, and America in the person of his Countess, leave this world to-night to tell the other worlds of our system, if haply they may find some intelligible means of communication, what this world, good and bad, is like. And it is within the bounds of possibility that in doing so they may inaugurate a wider fellowship of created beings than the limits of this world permit; a fellowship, a friendship, and, as the Astronef entitles us to believe, even a physical communication of world with world which, in the dawn of the twentieth century, may transcend in sober fact the wildest dreams of all the philanthropists and the philosophers who have sought to educate humanity from Socrates to Herbert Spencer.”

Chapter VI

AFTER the Astronef's forward searchlight had flashed its farewells to the thronging, cheering crowds of Washington, her propellers began to whirl, and she swung round northward on her way to say goodbye to the Empire City.

A little before midnight her two lights flashed down over New York and Brooklyn, and were almost instantly answered by hundreds of electric beams streaming up from different parts of the Twin Cities, and from several men-of-war lying in the bay and the river.

"Goodbye for the present! Have you any messages for Mars?" Flickered out from above the Astronef's conning-tower.

What Uncle Sam's message was, if he had one, was never deciphered, for fifty beams began dotting and dashing at once, and the result was that nothing but a blur of many mingled rays reached the conning-tower from which Lord Redgrave and his bride were taking their last look at human habitations.

"You might have known that they would all answer at once," said Zaidie. "I suppose the news papers, of course, want interviews with the leading Martians, and the others want to know what there is to be done in the way of trade. Anyhow, it would be a feather in Uncle Sam's cap if he made the first Reciprocity Treaty with another world."

"And then proceeded to corner the commerce of the Solar System," laughed Redgrave. "Well, we'll see what can be done. Although I think, as an Englishman, I ought to look after the Open Door."

"So that the Germans could get in before you, eh? That's just like you dear, good-natured English. But look," she went on, pointing downwards, "they're signalling again, all at once this time."

Half a dozen beams shone out together from the principal newspaper offices of New York. Then simultaneously they began the dotting and dashing again. Redgrave took them down in pencil, and when the signalling had stopped he read off:

"No war. Dual Alliance climbs down. Don't like idea of Astronef. Cables just received. Goodbye, and good luck! Come back soon, and safe!"

"What? We have stopped the war!" exclaimed Zaidie, clasping his arm. "Well, thank God for that. How could we begin our voyage better? You remember what we were saying the other day, Lenox. If that's only true, my father somewhere knows now what a blessing he has given his brother men! We've stopped a war which might have deluged the world in blood. We've saved perhaps hundreds of thousands of lives, and kept sorrow from thousands of homes. Lenox, when we get back, you and the States and the British Government will have to build a fleet of these ships, and then the Anglo-Saxon race must say to the rest of the world—"

"The millennium has come and its presiding goddess is Zaidie Redgrave. If you don't stop fighting, disband your armies and turn your fleets into liners and cargo boats, she'll proceed to sink your ships and decimate your armies until you learn sense. Is that what you mean, dear?" laughed Redgrave, as he slipped his left hand round her waist and laid his right on the searchlight-switch to reply to the message.

"Don't be ridiculous, Lenox. Still, I suppose that is something like it. They wouldn't deserve anything else if they were fools enough to go on fighting after they knew we could wipe them out.

"Exactly. I perfectly agree with your Ladyship, but still sufficient unto the day is the Armageddon thereof. Now I suppose we'd better say goodbye and be off."

"And what a goodbye," whispered Zaidie, with an upward glance into the starlit ocean of Space which lay above and around them. "Goodbye to the world itself! Well, say it, Lenox, and let us go; I want to see what the others are like."

"Very well then; goodbye it is," he said, beginning to jerk the switch backwards and forwards with irregular motions, sending short flashes and longer beams down towards the earth.

The Empire City read the farewell message.

"Thank God for the peace. Goodbye for the present. We shall convey the joint compliments of John Bull

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

and Uncle Sam to the peoples of the planets when we find them. Au revoir!”

The message was answered by the blaze of the concentrated searchlights from land and sea all directed on the Astronef. For a moment her shining shape glittered like a speck of diamond in the midst of the luminous haze far up in the sky, and then it vanished for many an anxious day from mortal sight.

A few moments later Zaidie pointed over the stern and said:

“Look, there's the moon! Just fancy—our first stopping place! Well, it doesn't look so very far off at present.”

Redgrave turned and saw the pale yellow crescent of the new moon swimming high above the eastern edge of the Atlantic Ocean.

“It almost looks as if we could steer straight to it right over the water—only, of course, it wouldn't wait there for us,” she went on.

“Oh, it'll be there when we want it, never fear,” he laughed, “and, after all, it's only a mere matter of about two hundred and forty thousand miles away, and what's that in a trip that will cover hundreds of millions? It will just be a sort of jumping-off place into Space for us.”

“Still, I shouldn't like to miss seeing it,” she said. “I want to see what there is on that other side which nobody has ever seen yet, and settle that question about air and water. Won't it just be heavenly to be able to come back and tell them all about it at home? But just fancy me talking stuff like this when we are going, perhaps, to solve some of the hidden mysteries of Creation, and, may be, look upon things that human eyes were never meant to see,” she went on, with a sudden change in her voice.

He felt a little shiver in the arm that was resting upon his, and his hand went down and caught hers.

“Well, we shall see a good many marvels, and, perhaps, miracles, before we come back, but why should there be anything in Creation that the eyes of created beings should not look upon? Anyhow, there's one thing we shall do I hope, we shall solve once and for all the great problem of the worlds.

“Look, for instance,” he went on, turning round and pointing to the west, there is Venus following the sun. In a few days I hope you and I will be standing on her surface, perhaps trying to talk by signs with her inhabitants, and taking photographs of her scenery. There's Mars too, that little red one up yonder. Before we come back we shall have settled a good many problems about him, too. We shall have navigated the rings of Saturn, and perhaps graphed them from his surface. We shall have crossed the bands of Jupiter, and found out whether they are clouds or not; perhaps we shall have landed on one of his moons and taken a voyage round him.

“Still, that's not the question just now, and if you are in a hurry to circumnavigate the moon we'd better begin to get a wriggle on us as they say down yonder; so come below and we'll shut up. A bit later I'll show you something that no human eyes have ever seen.”

“What's that?” she asked as they turned away towards the companion ladder.

“I won't spoil it by telling you,” he said, stopping at the top of the stairs and taking her by the shoulders. “By the way,” he went on, “I may remind your Ladyship that you are just now drawing the last breaths of earthly air which you will taste for some time, in fact until we get back. And you may as well take your last look at earth as earth, for the next time you see it it will be a planet.”

She turned to the open window and looked over into the enormous void beneath, for all this time the Astronef had been mounting swiftly towards the zenith.

She could see, by the growing moonlight, vast, vague shapes of land and sea. The myriad lights of New York and Brooklyn were mingled in a tiny patch of dimly luminous haze. The air about her had suddenly grown bitterly cold, and she saw that the stars and planets were shining with a brilliancy she had never seen before. Redgrave came back to her, and laying his arm across her shoulder, said:

“Well, have you said goodbye to your native world? It is a bit solemn, isn't it, saying goodbye to a world that you have been born on; which contains everything that has made up your life, everything that is dear to you?”

“Not quite everything,” she said, looking up at him—“At least I don't think so.”

He lost no time in making the only reply which was appropriate under the circumstances; and then he said, drawing her close to him:

“Nor I, as you know, darling. This is our world, a world travelling among worlds, and since I have been

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

able to bring the most delightful of the daughters of Terra with me, I, at any rate, am perfectly happy. Now, I think it's getting on to supper time, so if your Ladyship will go to your household duties, I'll have a look at my engines and make everything snug for the voyage."

The first thing he did when he left the conning-tower was to hermetically close every external opening in the ship. Then he went and carefully inspected the apparatus for purifying the air and supplying it with fresh oxygen from the tanks in which it was stored in liquid form. Lastly he descended into the lower hold and turned on the energy of repulsion to its fullest extent, at the same time stopping the engines which had been working the propellers.

It was now no longer necessary or even possible to steer the Astronef. She was directed solely by the repulsive force which would carry her with ever increasing swiftness, as the attraction of the earth diminished, towards that neutral point at which the attraction of the earth is exactly balanced by the moon. Her momentum would carry her past this point, and then the "R. Force" would be gradually brought into play in order to avert the unpleasant consequences of a fall of some forty odd thousand miles.

Andrew Murgatroyd, relieved from his duties in the wheel-house, made a careful inspection of the auxiliary machinery, which was under his special charge, and then retired to his quarters in the after end of the vessel to prepare his own evening meal.

Meanwhile, her Ladyship with the help of the ingenious contrivances with which the kitchen of the Astronef was stocked, had prepared a dainty little Souper a deux. Her husband opened a bottle of the finest champagne that the cellars of Smeaton could supply, to drink to the prosperity of the voyage, and the health of his beautiful fellow-voyager. When he had filled the two tall glasses the wine began to run over the side which was toward the stern of the vessel. They took no notice of this at first, but when Zaidie put her glass down she stared at it for a moment, and said, in a half-frightened voice "why, what's the matter, Lenox? Look at the wine! It won't keep straight, and yet the table's perfectly level—and see! the water in the jug looks as though it were going to run up the side."

Redgrave took up the glass and held it balanced in his hand. When he had got the surface of the wine level the glass was no longer perpendicular to the table.

"Ah, I see what it is," he said, taking another sip and putting the glass down. "You notice that, although the wine isn't lying straight in the glass, it isn't moving about. It's just as still as it would be on earth. That means that our centre of gravity is not exactly in line with the centre of the earth. We haven't quite swung into our proper position, and that reminds me, dear. You will have to be prepared for some rather curious experiences in that way. For instance, just see if that jug of water is as heavy as it ought to be."

She took hold of the handle, and exerting, as she thought, just enough force to lift the jug a few inches, was astonished to find herself holding it out at arm's length with scarcely any effort. She put it down again very carefully as though she were afraid it would go floating off the table, and said, looking rather scared:

"That's very strange, but I suppose it's all perfectly natural?"

"Perfectly; it merely means that we have left Mother Earth a good long way behind us."

"How far?" she asked.

"I can't tell you exactly," he replied, "until I go to the instrument-room and take the angles, but I should say roughly about seventy thousand miles. When we've finished we'll go and have coffee on the upper deck, and then we shall see something of the glories of Space as no human eyes have ever seen them before."

"Seventy thousand miles away from home already, and we only started a couple of hours ago!" Zaidie found the idea a trifle terrifying, and finished her meal almost in silence. When she got up she was not a little disconcerted when the effort she made not only took her off her chair but off her feet as well. She rose into the air nearly to the surface of the table.

"Sakes!" she said, "this is getting quite a little embarrassing; I shall be hitting my head against the roof next."

"Oh, you'll soon get used to it," he laughed, pulling her down on to her feet by the skirt of her dress; "Always remember to exert very little strength in everything you do, and don't forget to do everything very slowly."

When the coffee was made he carried the apparatus up into the deck-chamber. Then he came back and said:

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“You'd better wrap yourself up warmly. It's a good deal colder up there than it is here.”

When she reached the deck and took a first glance about her, Zaidie seemed suddenly to lapse into a state of somnambulism.

The whole heavens above and around were strewn with thick clusters of stars which she had never seen before. The stars she remembered seeing from the earth were only pin-points in the darkness compared with the myriads of blazing orbs which were now shooting their rays across the black void of Space.

So many millions of new ones had come into view, that she looked in vain for the familiar constellations. She saw only vast clusters of living gems of every colour crowding the heavens on every side of her.

She walked slowly round the deck, gazing to right and left and above, incapable for the moment either of thought or speech, but only of dumb wonder, mingled with a dim sense of overwhelming awe. Presently she craned her neck backwards and looked straight up to the zenith. A huge silver crescent, supporting, as it were, a dim greenish-coloured body in its arms, stretched overhead across nearly a sixth of the heavens.

Then Redgrave came to her side, took her in his arms, lifted her as if she had been a little child, and laid her in a long, low deck-chair, so that she could look at it without inconvenience.

The splendid crescent seemed to be growing visibly bigger, and as she lay there in a trance of wonder and admiration she saw point after point of dazzling white light flash out in the dark portions, and then begin to send out rays as though they were gigantic volcanoes in full eruption, and were pouring torrents of living fire from their blazing craters.

“Sunrise on the Moon!” said Redgrave, who had stretched himself on another chair beside her. “A glorious sight, isn't it? But nothing to what we shall see tomorrow morning—only there doesn't happen to be any morning just about here.”

“Yes,” she said dreamily, “glorious, isn't it? That and all the stars—but I can't think anything yet, Lenox, it's all too mighty and too marvellous. It doesn't seem as though human eyes were meant to look upon things like this. But where's the earth? We must be able to see that still.”

“Not from here,” he said, “because it's underneath us. Come below now, and you shall see what I promised you.”

They went down into the lower part of the vessel and to the after end behind the engine-room. Redgrave switched on a couple of electric lights, and then pulled a lever attached to one of the side-walls. A part of the flooring about six feet square slid noiselessly away; then he pulled another lever on the opposite side and a similar piece disappeared, leaving a large space covered only by a thick plate of absolutely transparent glass. He switched off the lights again and led her to the edge of it, and said:

“There is your native world, dear. That is your Mother Earth.”

Wonderful as the moon had seemed, the gorgeous spectacle which lay seemingly at her feet was infinitely more magnificent. A vast disc of silver grey, streaked and dotted with lines and points of dazzling lights, and more than half covered with vast, glimmering, greyish-green expanses, seemed to form the floor of the tremendous gulf beneath them. They were not yet too far away to make out the general features of the continents and oceans, and fortunately the hemisphere presented to them happened to be singularly free from clouds.

To the right spread out the majestic outlines of the continents of North and South America, and to the left Asia, the Malay Archipelago, and Australia. At the top was a vast, roughly circular area of dazzling whiteness, and Redgrave, pointing to this, said:

“There, look up a little further north than the middle of that white patch, and you'll see what eyes but yours and mine have ever seen—the North Pole! When we come back we shall see the South Pole, because we shall approach the earth from the other end, as it were.

“I suppose you recognise a good deal of the picture. All that bright part up to the north, with the black spots on it, is Canada. The black spots are forests. That long white line to the left is the Rockies. You see they're all bright at the north, and as you go south you only see a few bright dots. Those are the snow-peaks.

“Those long thin white lines in South America are the tops of the Andes, and the big, dark patches to the right of them are the forests and plains of Brazil and the Argentine. Not a bad way of studying geography, is it? If we stopped here long enough we should see the whole earth spin right round under us, but we haven't time for that. We shall be in the moon before it's morning in New York, but we shall probably get a glimpse

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

of Europe to-morrow.”

Zaidie stood gazing for nearly an hour at this marvellous vision of the home-world which she had left so far behind her before she could tear herself away and allow her husband to shut the slides again. The greatly diminished weight of her body destroyed the fatigue of standing almost entirely. In fact, on board the Astronef just then it was almost as easy to stand as it was to lie down.

There was of course very little sleep for the travellers on this first night of their wonderful voyage, but towards the sixth hour after leaving the earth, Zaidie, overcome as much by the emotions which had been awakened within her as by physical fatigue, went to bed, after making her husband promise that he would wake her in good time to see the descent upon the moon. Two hours later she was awake and drinking the coffee which he had prepared for her. Then she went on to the upper deck.

To her astonishment she found, on one hand, day more brilliant than she had ever seen it before, and on the other hand darkness blacker than the blackest earthly night. On the right was an intensely brilliant orb, about half as large again as the full moon seen from the earth, shining with inconceivable brightness out of a sky black as midnight and thronged with stars. It was the Sun; the Sun shining in the midst of airless Space.

The tiny atmosphere enclosed in the glass-domed deck-space was lighted brilliantly, but it was not perceptibly warmer, though Redgrave warned her not to touch anything upon which the sun's rays fell directly, as she might find it uncomfortably hot. On the other side was the same black immensity which she had seen the night before, an ocean of darkness clustered with islands of light. High above in the zenith floated the great silver-grey disc of earth, a good deal smaller now. But there was another object beneath them which was at present of far more interest to her.

Looking down to the left, she saw a vast semi-luminous area in which not a star was to be seen. It was the earth-lit portion of the long familiar and yet mysterious orb which was to be their resting place for the next few hours.

“The sun hasn't risen over there yet,” said Redgrave, as she was peering down into the void. “It's earth-light still. Now look at the other side.”

She crossed the deck, and saw the strangest scene she had yet beheld. Apparently only a few miles below her was a huge crescent-shaped plain arching away for hundreds of miles on either side. The outer edge had a ragged look, and little excrescences, which soon took the shape of flat-topped mountains, projected from it and stood out bright and sharp against the black void beneath, out of which the stars shone up, as it seemed, a few feet beyond the edge of the disc.

The plain itself was a scene of awful and utter desolation. Huge mountain-walls, towering to immense heights and enclosing great circular and oval plains, one side of them blazing with intolerable light, and the other side black with impenetrable obscurity; enormous valleys reaching down from brilliant day into rayless night—perhaps down into the very bowels of the dead world itself; vast grey-white plains lying round the mountains, crossed by little ridges and by long black lines, which could only be immense fissures with perpendicular sides—but all hard, grey-white and black, all intolerable brightness or inky gloom; not a sign of life anywhere; no shady forests, no green fields, no broad, glittering oceans; only a ghastly wilderness of dead mountains and dead plains.

“What an awful place,” Zaidie whispered. “Surely we can't land there. How far are we from it?”

“About fifteen hundred miles,” replied Redgrave, who was sweeping the scene below him with one of the two powerful telescopes which stood on the deck. “No, it doesn't look very cheerful, does it? But it's a marvellous sight for all that, and one that a good many people on earth would give one of their eyes to see from here. I'm letting her drop pretty fast, and we shall probably land in a couple of hours or so. Meanwhile you may as well get out your moon atlas, and study your lunography. I'm going to turn the power a bit astern so that we shall go down obliquely, and see more of the lighted disc. We started at new moon so that you should have a look at the full earth, and also so that we could get round to the invisible side while it is lighted up.” They both went below, he to deflect the repulsive force so that one set of engines should give them a somewhat oblique direction, while the other, acting directly on the surface of the moon, simply retarded their fall; and she to get out her maps.

When they got back the Astronef had changed her apparent position, and, instead of falling directly on to the moon, was descending towards it in a slanting direction. The result of this was that the sunlit crescent

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

rapidly grew in breadth. Peak after peak and range after range rose up swiftly out of the black gulf beyond. The sun climbed quickly up through the star-strewn, mid-day heavens, and the full earth sank more swiftly still behind them.

Another hour of silent, entranced wonder and admiration followed, and then Redgrave said:

“Don't you think it's about time we were beginning to think of breakfast, dear—or do you think you can wait till we land?”

“Breakfast on the moon!” she exclaimed. “That would be just too lovely for words—of course we'll wait!”

“Very well,” he said; “you see that big black ring nearly below us?—that, as I suppose you know, is the celebrated Mount Tycho. I'll try and find a convenient spot on the top of the ring to drop on, and then you will be able to survey the scenery from seventeen or eighteen thousand feet above the plains.”

About two hours later a slight, jarring tremor ran through the frame of the vessel, and the first stage of the voyage was ended. After a passage of less than twelve hours the Astronef had crossed a gulf of nearly two hundred and fifty thousand miles, and rested on the untrodden surface of the lunar world.

Chapter VII

“WELL, Madame, we've arrived. This is the moon and there is the earth. To put it into plain figures, you are now two hundred and forty thousand odd miles away from home. I think you said you would like breakfast on the surface of the World that Has Been, and so, as it's about eleven o'clock earth-time, we'll call it a dejeuner, and then we'll go and see what this poor old skeleton of a world is like.”

“Oh, then we shan't actually have breakfast on the moon?”

“My dear child, of course you will. Isn't the Astronef resting now—right now as they say in some parts of the States on the top of the crater wall of Tycho? Aren't we really and actually on the surface of the moon? Just look at this frightful black and white, god-forsaken landscape! Isn't it like everything that you've ever learnt about the moon? Nothing but light and shade, black and white, peaks of mountains blazing in sunlight, and valleys underneath them as black as the hinges of” —Tophet,” said Zaidie, interrupting him quickly. “Yes, I see what you mean. So we'll have our dejeuner here, breathing our own nice atmosphere, and eating and drinking what was grown on the soil of dear old Mother Earth. It's a wee bit paralysing to think of, isn't it, dear? Two hundred and forty thousand miles across the gulf of Space—and we sitting here at our breakfast table just as comfortable as though we were in the Cecil in London, or the Waldorf-Astoria in New York!”

“There's nothing much in that, I mean as regards distance. You see, before we've finished we shall probably, at least I hope we shall, be eating a breakfast or a dinner together a thousand million miles or more from New York or London. Your Ladyship must remember that this is only the first stage on the journey, the jumping-off place as you called it. You see the distance from Washington to New York is—well, it isn't even a hop, skip and a jump in comparison with—”

“Oh yes, I see what you mean of course, and so I suppose I had better cut off or short-circuit such sympathies with Mother Earth as are not connected with your noble self, and get breakfast ready. How's that?”

“Well,” said Lord Redgrave, looking at her as she rose from the table, I think our honeymoon in Space is young enough yet to make it possible for me to say that your Ladyship's opinion is exactly right.

“That's a hopeless commonplace! Really, Lenox, I thought you were capable of something better than that.”

“My dear Zaidie, it has been my fate to have many friends who have had honeymoons on earth, and some of their experience seems to be that the man who contradicts his wife during the first six weeks of matrimony simply makes an ass of himself. He offends her and makes himself unhappy, and it sometimes takes six months or more to get back to bearings.”

“What a lot of silly men and women you must have known, Lenox. Is that the way Englishmen start marriage in England? If it is, I don't wonder at Englishmen coming across the Atlantic in liners and air-ships and so on to get American wives. I guess you can't understand your own womenfolk.”

“Or perhaps they don't understand us; but anyhow, I don't think I've made any great mistake.”

“No, I don't think you have. Of course if I thought so I wouldn't be here now. But this is very well for a breakfast talk; all the same, I should like to know how we are going to take the promenade you promised me on the surface of the moon?”

“Your Ladyship has only to finish her breakfast, and then everything shall be made plain to her, even the deepest craters of the mountains of the moon.”

“Very well, then, I will eat swiftly and in obedience; and meanwhile, as your Lordship seems to have finished, perhaps—”

“Yes, I will go and see to the mechanical necessities,” said Redgrave, swallowing his last cup of coffee, and getting up. “If you'll come down to the lower deck when you've finished, I'll have your breathing-suit ready for you, and then we'll go into the air-chamber.”

“Thanks, dear, yes,” she said, putting out her hand to him as he left the table, the ante-chamber to other worlds. “Isn't it just lovely? Fancy me being able to leave one world and land on another, and have you to say

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

just those few words which make it all possible. I wonder what all the girls of all the civilised countries of earth would give just to be me right now.”

“They could none of them give what you gave me, Zaidie, because you see from my point of view there's only one Zaidie in the world—or as perhaps I ought to say just now, in the Solar System.”

“Very prettily said, sir!” she laughed, when she had given him his due reward for his courtly speech. “I am too dazed with all these wonders about me to—”

“To reply to it? You've given me the most convincing reply possible. Now finish your breakfast, and I'll tell you when the breathing—dresses and the air—chamber are ready. By the way, don't forget your cameras. It's quite possible we may find something worth taking pictures of, and you needn't trouble much about the weight. You know, you and I and all that we carry will only weigh about a sixth of what we did on the earth.”

“Very well, then, I'll take the whole—plate apparatus as well as the Kodak and the panorama camera. When I'm ready, Murgatroyd will tell you to come down.”

“But isn't he coming with us too?”

“My dear girl, if I were to ask Murgatroyd to leave the Astronef there'd be a mutiny on board—a mutiny of one against one. No, he's left his native world; but he says he's done it in a ship that's made with British steel out of English iron mines, smelted, forged and fashioned in English works, and so to him it's a bit of England, however far away from Mother Earth it may be; and if you ever see Andrew Murgatroyd's big head and good, ungainly body outside the Astronef in any of the worlds, dead or alive, that we're going to visit—well, when we get back to Mother Earth you may ask me—”

“I don't think I'll have to ask you for anything, Lenox. I believe if I wanted anything you'd know before I did, so go away and get those breathing—dresses ready. I didn't come to the moon to talk commonplaces with a husband I've been married to for nearly three days.”

“Is it really as long as that?”

“Oh, don't be ridiculous, even if you are beyond the limits of earthly conventionalities. Anyhow, I've been married long enough to want my own way, and just now I want a promenade on the moon.”

“The will of her Ladyship is a law unto her servant, and that which she hath said shall be done! If you come down on to the lower deck in ten minutes everything shall be ready.”

With this he disappeared down the companion—way.

About five minutes afterwards Andrew Murgatroyd showed his grizzled, long—bearded face with its high forehead, heavy brows, and broad—set eyes, long nose and shaven upper lip, just above the stairway and said, for all the world as though he might have been giving out the number of the hymn in his beloved Ebenezer at Smeaton:

“If it pleases yer Ladyship, his Lordship is ready, and if you'll please come down I'll show you the way.”

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Murgatroyd!” said Zaidie, getting up and going towards the companion—way; “But I'm afraid you don't think that—I mean you don't seem to take very much interest—”

“If your Ladyship will pardon me,” said the old man, standing aside to let her go down, “it is not my business to think on board his Lordship's vessel. I am his servant, and my fathers have been his fathers' servants for more years than I'd like to count. If it wasn't that way I wouldn't be here. Will your Ladyship please to come down?”

Zaidie bowed her beautiful head in recognition of this ages—old devotion, and said as she passed him, more sweetly than he had ever heard human lips speak:

“Thank you, Mr. Murgatroyd. You've taught me something in those few words that we have no knowledge of in the States. Good service is as honourable as good mastership. Thank you.”

Murgatroyd put up his lower lip and half smiled with his upper, for he was not yet quite sure of this radiant beauty, who, according to his ideas, should have been English and wasn't. Then, with a rather clumsy and yet eloquent gesture, he showed her the way down to the air—chamber.

She nodded to him with a smile as she passed in through the air—tight door, and when she heard the levers swing to and the bolts shoot into their places she felt as though, for the time being, she had said goodbye to a friend.

Her husband was waiting for her almost fully clad in his breathing—dress. He had hers all ready to put on, and when the necessary changes and investments had been made, Zaidie found herself clad in a costume

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

which was not by any means unlike the diving-dresses of common use, save that they were very much lighter in construction.

The helmets were smaller, and not having to withstand outside pressure they were made of welded aluminium, lined thickly with asbestos, not to keep the cold out, but the heat in. On the back of the dress there was a square case, looking like a knap-sack, containing the expanding apparatus, which would furnish breathable air for an almost unlimited time as long as the liquefied air from a cylinder hung below it passed through the cells in which the breathed air had been deprived of its carbonic acid gas and other noxious ingredients.

The pressure of air inside the helmet automatically regulated the supply, which was not permitted to circulate through the other portions of the dress, The reasons for this precaution were very simple. Granted the absence of atmosphere on the moon, any air in the dress, which was woven of a cunning compound of silk and asbestos, would instantly expand with irresistible force, burst the covering, and expose the limbs of the explorers to a cold which would be infinitely more destructive than the hottest of earthly fires. It would wither them to nothing in a moment.

A human hand or foot—we won't say anything about faces exposed to the summer or winter temperature of the moon—that is to say, to its sunlight and its darkness—would be shrivelled into dry bone in a moment, and therefore Lord Redgrave, foreseeing this, had provided the breathing-dresses. Lastly, the two helmets were connected, for purposes of conversation by a light wire, the two ends of which were connected with a little telephonic receiver and transmitter inside each of the head-dresses.

“Well, now I think we're ready,” said Redgrave, putting his hand on the lever which opened the outer door.

His voice sounded a little queer and squeaky over the wire, and for the matter of that so did Zaidie's as she replied:

“Yes, I'm ready, I think. I hope these things will work all right.”

“You may be quite sure that I shouldn't have put you into one of them if I hadn't tested them pretty thoroughly,” he replied, swinging the door open and throwing out a light folding iron ladder which was hinged to the floor.

They were in the shade cast by the hull of the Astronef. For about ten yards in front of her Zaidie saw a dense black shadow, and beyond it a stretch of grey-white sand lit up by a glare of sunlight which would have been intolerable if it had not been for the smoke-coloured slips of glass which had been fitted behind the glass visors of the helmets.

Over it were thickly scattered boulders and pieces of rock bleached and desiccated, and each throwing a black shadow, fantastically shaped and yet clearly defined on the grey-white sand behind it. There was no soil, and all the softer kind of rock and stone had crumbled away ages ago. Every particle of moisture had long since evaporated; even chemical combinations had been dissolved by the alternations of heat and cold known only on earth to the chemist in his laboratory.

Only the hardest rocks, such as granites and basalts, remained. Everything else had been reduced to the universal grey-white impalpable powder into which Zaidie's shoes sank when she, holding her husband's hand, went down the ladder and stood at the foot of it—first of the earth-dwellers to set foot on another world.

Redgrave followed her with a little spring from the centre of the ladder which landed him with strange gentleness beside her. He took both her gloved hands and pressed them hard in his. He would have kissed his welcome to the World that Had Been if he could, but that of course was out of the question, and so he had to be content with telling her that he wanted to.

Then, hand in hand, they crossed the little plateau towards the edge of the tremendous gulf, fifty-four miles across and nearly twenty thousand feet deep, which forms the crater of Tycho. In the middle of it rose a conical mountain about five thousand feet high, the summit of which was just beginning to catch the solar rays. Half of the vast plain was already brilliantly illuminated, but round the central cone was a semicircle of shadow of impenetrable blackness.

“Day and night in this same valley, actually side by side!” said Zaidie. Then she stopped and pointed down into the brightly lit distance, and went on hurriedly, “Look, Lenox; look at the foot of the mountain there! Doesn't that seem like the ruins of a city?”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

"It does," he said, "and there's no reason why it shouldn't be. I've always thought that, as the air and water disappeared from the upper parts of the moon, the inhabitants, whoever they were, must have been driven down into the deeper parts. Shall we go down and see?"

"But how?" she said.

He pointed towards the Astronef. She nodded her helmeted head, and they went back towards the vessel.

A few minutes later the Space-Navigator had risen from her resting-place with an impetus which rapidly carried her over half of the vast crater, and then she began to drop slowly into the depths. She grounded gently, and presently they were standing on the ground about a mile from the central cone. This time, however, Redgrave had taken the precaution to bring a magazine rifle and a couple of revolvers with him in case any strange monsters, relics of the vanished fauna of the moon, might still be taking refuge in these mysterious depths. Zaidie, although like a good many American girls she could shoot excellently well, carried no weapon more offensive than the photographic apparatus aforesaid.

The first thing that Redgrave did when they stepped out on to the sandy surface of the plain was to stoop down and strike a wax match. There was a tiny glimmer of light, which was immediately extinguished.

"No air here," he said, "so we shall find no living beings—at any rate, none like ourselves."

They found the walking exceedingly easy, although their boots were purposely weighted in order to counteract, to some extent, the great difference in gravity. A few minutes brought them to the outskirts of the city. It had no walls and exhibited no signs of any devices for defence. Its streets were broad and well-paved, and the houses, built of great blocks of grey stone joined together with white cement, looked as fresh and unworn as though they had only been built a few months, whereas they had probably stood for hundreds of thousands of years. They were flat-roofed, all of one storey and practically of one type.

There were very few public buildings, and absolutely no attempt at ornamentation was visible. Round some of the houses were spaces which might once have been gardens. In the midst of the city, which appeared to cover an area of about four square miles, was an enormous square paved with flag-stones, which were covered to the depth of a couple of inches with a light grey dust, which, as they walked across it, remained perfectly still save for the disturbance caused by their footsteps. There was no air to support it, otherwise it might have risen in clouds about them.

From the centre of this square rose a huge pyramid nearly a thousand feet in height, the sole building of the great silent city which appeared to have been raised most probably as a temple by the hands of its long-dead inhabitants.

When they got nearer they saw a white fringe round the steps by which it was approached, and they soon found that this fringe was composed of millions of white-bleached bones and skulls, shaped very much like those of terrestrial men, save that they were very much larger, and that the ribs were out of all proportion to the rest of the skeleton. They stopped awe-stricken before this strange spectacle. Redgrave stooped down and took hold of one of the bones, a huge femur. It broke in two as he tried to lift it, and the piece which remained in his hand crumbled instantly to white powder.

"Whoever they were," he said, "they were giants. When air and water failed above, they came down here by some means and built this city. You see what enormous chests they must have had. That would be Nature's last struggle to enable them to breathe the diminishing atmosphere. These, of course, were the last descendants of the fittest to breathe it; this was their temple, I suppose, and here they came to die—I wonder how many thousand years ago—perishing of heat, and cold, and hunger, and thirst; the last tragedy of a race, which, after all, must have been something like ourselves."

"It's just too awful for words," said Zaidie. "Shall we go into the temple? That seems one of the entrances up there, only I don't like walking over all those bones."

"I don't suppose they'll mind if we do," replied Redgrave, "only we mustn't go far in. It may be full of cross passages and mazes, and we might never get out. Our lamps won't be much use in there, you know, for there's no air. They'll just be points of light, and we shan't see anything but them. It's very aggravating, but I'm afraid there's no help for it. Come along."

They ascended the steps, crushing the bones and skulls to powder beneath their feet, and entered the huge, square doorway, which looked like a rectangle of blackness against the grey-white of the wall. Even through their asbestos-woven clothing they felt a sudden shock of icy cold. In those few steps they had passed from a

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

temperature of tenfold summer heat into one below that of the coldest spots on earth They turned on the electric lamps which were fitted to the breastplates of their dresses, but they could see nothing save the thin thread of light straight in front of them. It did not even spread. It was like a polished needle on a background of black velvet.

All about them was darkness impenetrable, and so they reluctantly turned back to the doorway, leaving all the mysteries which that vast temple of a long-vanished people might contain to remain mysteries to the end of time.

They passed down the steps again and crossed the square, and for the next half-hour Zaidie was busy taking photographs of the pyramid with its ghastly surroundings, and a few general views of this strange City of the Dead.

Chapter VIII

WHEN they got back they found Murgatroyd pacing up and down the floor of the deck-chamber, looking about him with serious eyes, but betraying no other visible sign of anxiety. The Astronef was at once his home and his idol, and, as Redgrave had said, even his own direct orders would hardly have induced him to leave her even in a world in which there was not a living human being to dispute possession of her.

When they had resumed their ordinary clothing the Astronef rose from the surface of the plain, crossed the encircling wall at the height of a few hundred feet, and made her way at a speed of about fifty miles an hour towards the regions of the South Pole.

Behind them to the north-west they could see from their elevation of nearly thirty thousand feet the vast expanse of the Sea of Clouds. Dotted here and there were the shining points and ridges of light marking the peaks and crater-walls which the rays of the rising sun had already touched. Before them and to the right and left rose a vast maze of ragged, splintery peaks and huge ramparts of mountain-walls enclosing plains so far below their summits that the light of neither sun nor earth ever reached them.

By directing the force exerted by what might now be called the propelling part of the engines against the mountain masses which they crossed to right and left and behind, Redgrave was able to take a zigzag course that carried them over many of the walled plains which were wholly or partially lit up by the sun, and in nearly all of the deepest their telescopes revealed something like what they had found within the crater of Tycho. At length, pointing to a gigantic circle of white light fringing an abyss of utter darkness, he said: "There is Newton, the greatest mystery of the moon. Those inner walls are twenty-four thousand feet high; that means that the bottom, which has never been seen by human eyes, is about five thousand feet below the surface of the moon. What do you say, dear—shall we go down and see if the searchlight will show us anything? You know there may be something like breathable air down there, and perhaps living creatures who call breathe it."

"Certainly!" replied Zaidie decisively; "Haven't we come to see things that nobody else has ever seen?"

Redgrave went down to the engine-room, and presently the Astronef changed her course, and in a few minutes was hanging with her polished hull bathed in sunlight, like a star suspended over the unfathomable gulf of darkness below.

As they sank below the level of the sun-rays, Murgatroyd turned on both the searchlights. They dropped down ever slowly and more slowly until gradually the two long, thin streams of light began to spread themselves out; the lower they went the more the beams spread out, and by the time the Astronef came gently to a rest they were swinging round her in broad fans of diffused light over a dark, marshy surface, with scattered patches of grey moss and reeds, with dull gleams of stagnant water showing between them.

"Air and water at last! I thought so," said Redgrave, as he rejoined her on the upper deck; "Air and water and eternal darkness! Well, we shall find life on the moon here if anywhere."

"I suppose we had better put on our breathing-dresses, hadn't we?" Asked Zaidie.

"Certainly," he replied, "because, although there is some sort of air, we don't know yet whether we shall be able to breathe it. It may be half carbon dioxide for all we know; but a few matches will soon tell us that."

Within a quarter of an hour they were again standing on the surface. Murgatroyd had orders to follow them as far as possible with the head searchlight, which, in the comparatively rarefied atmosphere, appeared to have a range of several miles. Redgrave struck a match, and held it up level with his head; it burnt with a clear, steady, yellow flame.

"Where a match will burn a man should be able to breathe," he said. "I'm going to see what lunar air is like."

"For Heaven's sake be careful, dear," came the reply in pleading tones across the wire.

"All right; but don't open your helmet until I tell you."

He then raised the hermetically closed slide of glass, which formed the front of the helmets, half an inch or

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

so. Instantly he felt a sensation like the drawing of a red-hot iron across his skin. He snapped the visor down and clasped it in its place. For a moment or two he gasped for breath, and then he said rather faintly:

“It's no good, it's too cold. It would freeze the blood of a salamander. I think we'd better go back and explore this place under cover. We can't do anything in the dark, and we can see just as well from the upper deck with the searchlights. Besides, as there's air and water here, there's no telling but there may be inhabitants of sorts such as we shouldn't care to meet.”

He took her hand, and to Murgatroyd's great relief they went back to the vessel.

Redgrave then raised the *Astronef* a couple of hundred feet and, by directing the repulsive force against the mountain walls, developed just sufficient energy to keep them moving at about twelve miles an hour.

They began to cross the plain with their searchlights flashing out in all directions. They had scarcely gone a mile before the head-light fell upon a moving form half walking, half crawling among some stunted brown-leaved bushes by the side of a broad, stagnant stream.

“Look!” said Zaidie, clasping his arm, “is that a gorilla, or—no, it can't be a man.”

The light was turned full upon the object. If it had been covered with hair it might have passed for some strange type of the ape tribe, but its skin was smooth and of a livid grey. Its lower limbs were evidently more powerful than its upper; its chest was enormously developed, but the stomach was small. The head was big and round and smooth. As they came nearer they saw that in place of fingernails it had long white feelers which it kept extended and constantly waving about as it groped its way towards the water. As the intense light flashed full on it, it turned its head towards them. It had a nose and a mouth—the nose, long and thick, with huge mobile nostrils; the mouth forming an angle something like a fish's lips. Teeth there seemed none. At either side of the upper part of the nose there were two little sunken holes—in which this thing's ancestors of countless thousands of years ago had once had eyes.

As she looked upon this awful parody of what had once perhaps been a human face, Zaidie covered hers with her hands and uttered a little moan of horror.

“Horrible, isn't it?” said Redgrave. “I suppose that's what the last remnants of the Lunarians have come to. Evidently once men and women, something like ourselves. I daresay the ancestors of that thing have lived here in coldness and darkness for hundreds of generations. It shows how tremendously tenacious Nature is of life.

“Ages ago, no doubt, that brute's ancestors lived up yonder when there were seas and rivers, fields and forests, just as we have them on earth, among men and women who could see and breathe and enjoy everything in life and had built up civilisations like ours!

“Look, it's going to fish or something. Now we shall see what it feeds on. I wonder why the water isn't frozen. I suppose there must be some internal heat left still. A few patches with lakes of lava under them. Perhaps this valley is just over one, and that's why these creatures have managed to survive.

“Ah! there's another of them, smaller, not so strongly formed. That thing's mate, I suppose—female of the species. Ugh! I wonder how many hundred of thousands of years it will take for our descendants to come to that.”

“I hope our dear old earth will hit something else and be smashed to atoms before that happens!” exclaimed Zaidie, whose curiosity had now partly overcome her horror. “Look, it's trying to catch something!”

The larger of the two creatures had groped its way to the edge of the sluggish, oily water and dropped, or rather rolled, quietly into it. It was evidently cold-blooded, or nearly so, for no warm-blooded animal would have taken to such water so naturally. Presently the other dropped in too, and both disappeared for some moments. Then, in the midst of a violent commotion in the water a few yards away, they rose to the surface of the water, the larger with a wriggling, eel-like fish between its jaws.

They both groped their way towards the edge, and had just reached it and were pulling themselves out when a hideous shape rose out of the water behind them. It was like the head of an octopus joined to the body of a boa-constrictor, but head and neck were both of the same ghastly, livid grey as the other two creatures. It was evidently blind, too, for it took no notice of the brilliant glare of the searchlight, but it moved rapidly towards the two scrambling forms, its long white feelers trembling out in all directions. Then one of them touched the smaller of the two shapes. Instantly the rest shot out and closed round it, and with scarcely a

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

struggle it was dragged beneath the water and vanished.

Zaidie uttered a little low scream and covered her face again, and Redgrave said:

“The same old brutal law you see, life preying upon life even on a dying world, a world that is more than half dead itself. Well, I think we've seen enough of this place. I suppose those are about the only types of life we should meet anywhere, and I don't want to know much more about them. I vote we go and see what the invisible hemisphere is like.”

“I have had all I want of this side,” said Zaidie, looking away from the scene of the hideous tragedy, “so the sooner we go, the better I shall like it.”

A few minutes later the Astronef was again rising towards the stars with her searchlights still flashing down into the Valley of Expiring Life, which had seemed to them even worse than the Valley of Death. As he followed the rays with a pair of powerful field glasses, Redgrave fancied that he saw huge, dim shapes moving about the stunted shrubbery and through the slimy pools of the stagnant rivers, and once or twice he got a glimpse of what might well have been the ruins of towns and cities, but the gloom soon became too deep and dense for the searchlights to pierce and he was glad when the Astronef soared up into the brilliant sunlight once more. Even the ghastly wilderness of the lunar landscape was welcome after the nameless horrors of that hideous abyss.

After a couple of hours' rapid travelling, Redgrave pointed down to a comparatively small, deep crater, and said:

“There, this is Malapert. It is almost exactly at the south pole of the moon, and there,” he went on, pointing ahead, “is the horizon of the hemisphere which no earthborn eyes have ever seen.”

“Except ours,” said Zaidie somewhat inconsequently, “and I wonder what we shall see.”

“Probably something very like what we have seen on this side,” replied Redgrave, and as the event proved, he was right.

Contrary to many ingenious speculations which have been indulged in by both scientist and romancer, they found that the hemisphere, which for countless ages had never been turned towards the earth, was almost an exact replica of the visible one. Fully three-fourths of it was brilliantly illuminated by the Sun, and what they saw through their glasses was practically the same as what they had beheld on the earthward side; huge groups of enormous craters and ringed mountains, long, irregular chains crowned with sharp, splintery peaks, and between these vast, deeply depressed areas, ranging in colour from dazzling white to grey-brown, marking the beds of the vanished lunar seas.

As they crossed one of these, Redgrave allowed the Astronef to sink to within a few thousand feet of the surface, and then he and Zaidie swept it with their telescopes. Their chance search was rewarded by something they had not seen in the sea-beds of the other hemisphere.

These depressions were far deeper than the others, evidently many thousands of feet below the average surface, but the sun's rays were blazing full into this one, and, dotted round its slopes at varying elevations, they made out little patches which seemed to differ from the general surface.

“I wonder if those are the remains of cities,” said Zaidie. “Isn't it possible that the old peoples of the moon might have built their cities along the seas just as we do, and that their descendants may have followed the waters as they retreated, I mean as they either dried up or disappeared into the centre?”

“Very probable indeed, dearest of philosophers,” he said, picking her up with one arm and kissing the smiling lips which had just uttered this most reasonable deduction. “Now we'll go down and see.”

He diminished the vertically repulsive force a little, and the Astronef dropped slantingly towards the bed of what might once have been the Pacific of the Moon.

When they were within about a couple of thousand feet of the surface it became perfectly plain that Zaidie was correct in her hypothesis. The vast sea floor was thickly strewn with the ruins of countless cities and towns, which had been inhabited by an equally countless series of generations of men and women, who had perhaps lived and loved in the days when our own world was a glowing mass of molten rock, surrounded by the envelope of vapours which has since condensed to form our oceans.

They dropped still lower and ran diagonally across the ocean-bed, and as they did so Zaidie's proposition was more and more completely confirmed, for they saw that the towns and cities which stood highest were the most dilapidated, and that the buildings had evidently been torn and crumbled away by the action of wind and

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

water, snow and ice.

The nearer they approached to the central and deepest depression, the better preserved and the simpler the buildings became, until down in the lowest depths they found a collection of low-built square edifices, scarcely better than huts, which had clustered round the little lake into which, ages before, the ocean had dwindled. But where the lake had been there was now only a shallow depression covered with grey sand and brown rock.

Into this they descended and touched the lunar surface for the last time. A couple of hours' excursion among the houses proved that they had been the last refuge of the last descendants of a dying race, a race which had socially degenerated just as the succession of cities had done architecturally, age by age, as the long-drawn struggle for mere existence had become keener and keener until the two last essentials, air and water, had failed—and then the end had come.

The streets, like the square of the great Temple of Tycho, were strewn with myriads and myriads of bones, and there were myriads more scattered round what had once been the shores of the dwindling lake. Here, as elsewhere, there was not a sign or a record of any kind—carving or sculpture. If there were any such on the surface of the moon they had not discovered them. The buildings which they had seen evidently belonged to the decadent period during which the dwindling remnants of the Selenites asked only to eat and drink and breathe.

Inside the great Pyramid of the City of Tycho they might, perhaps, have found something—some stone or tablet which bore the mark of the artist's hand; elsewhere, perhaps, they might have found cities reared by older races, which might have rivalled the creations of Egypt and Babylon, but they had neither time nor inclination to look for these.

All that they had seen of the Dead World had only sickened and saddened them. The untravelled regions of Space peopled by living worlds more akin to their own were before them. The red disc of Mars was glowing in the zenith among the diamond-white clusters which gemmed the black sky behind him.

More than a hundred millions of miles had to be traversed before they would be able to set foot on his surface, and so, after one last look round the Valley of Death about them, Redgrave turned on the full energy of the repulsive force in a vertical direction, and the Astronef leapt upwards in a straight line for her new destination. The Unknown Hemisphere spread out in a vast plain beneath them, the blazing sun rose on their left, and the brilliant silver orb of the earth on their right, and so, full of wonder and yet without regret, they bade farewell to the World that Had Been.

Chapter IX

THE Earth and the Moon were more than a hundred Million miles behind in the depths of Space, and the Astronef had crossed this immense gap in eleven days and a few hours; but this apparently inconceivable speed was not altogether due to the powers of the Navigator of the Stars, for Lord Redgrave had taken advantage of the passage of the planet along its orbit towards that of the earth; therefore, while the Astronef was approaching Mars with ever-increasing speed, Mars was travelling towards the Astronef at the rate of sixteen miles a second.

The great silver disc of the earth had diminished until it looked only a little larger than Venus appears from the earth. In fact the planet Terra is to the inhabitants of Mars what Venus is to us, the star of the morning and evening.

Breakfast on the morning of the twelfth day—or, since there is neither day nor night in Space, it would be more correct to say the twelfth period of twenty-four earth-hours as measured by the chronometers—was just over, and Redgrave was standing with his bride in the forward end of the deck-chamber looking downwards at a vast crescent of rosy light which stretched out over an arc of more than ninety degrees. Two tiny black spots were travelling towards each other across it.

“Ah!” she said, going towards one of the telescopes, “there are the moons. I was reading my Gulliver last night. I wonder what the old Dean would have given to be here, and see how true his guess was. Are we going to land on them?”

“I don't see why we shouldn't,” he said. “I think we might find them convenient stopping-places; besides, you know that this isn't only a pleasure-trip. We have to add as much as we can to the sum of human knowledge, and so of course we shall have to find out whether the moons of Mars have atmospheres and inhabitants.”

“What, people living on those wee things?” she laughed, “why, they're only about thirty or forty miles round, aren't they?”

“About,” he said, “but that's just one of the points I want to solve; and as for life, it doesn't always mean people, you know. We are only a few hundred miles away from Deimos, the outer one, and he is twelve thousand five hundred miles from Mars. I vote we drop on him first and let him carry us towards Phobos. And then when we've examined him we'll pay a visit to his brother and take a trip round Mars on him. Phobos does the journey in about seven hours and a half, and as he's only three thousand seven hundred miles above the surface, we ought to get a very good view of our next stopping-place.”

“That ought to be quite delightful,” said Zaidie, “but how commonplace you are getting, Lenox. That's so like you Englishmen. We are doing what has only been dreamt of before, and here you are talking about moons and planets as if they were railway stations.”

“Well, if your ladyship prefers it, we will call them undiscovered islands and continents in the Ocean of Space. That does sound a little bit better, doesn't it? Now I must go down and see to my engines.”

When he had gone, Zaidie sat down to the telescope again and kept it focussed on one of the little black spots travelling across the crescent of Mars. Both it and the other spot rapidly grew larger, and the features of the planet itself became more distinct. Soon even with her unaided eyes she could make out the seas and continents and the mysterious canals quite plainly through the clear, rosy atmosphere, and, with the aid of the telescope, she could even make out the glimmering twilight which the inner moon threw upon the unlighted portion of the planet's disc.

Deimos grew bigger and bigger, and in about half an hour the Astronef grounded gently on what looked to Zaidie like a dimly lighted circular plain, but which, when her eyes became accustomed to the light, was more like the summit of a conical mountain. Redgrave raised the keel a little from the surface again and steered towards a thin circle of light on the tiny horizon.

As they crossed into the sunlit portion it became quite plain that Deimos, at any rate, was as airless and

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

lifeless as the moon. The surface was composed of brown rock and red sand broken up into miniature hills and valleys. There were a few traces of bygone volcanic action, but it was evident that the internal fires of this tiny world must have burnt themselves out very quickly.

“Not much to be seen here,” said Redgrave as he came up the companion way, “and I don't think it would be safe to go out. The attraction is so weak here that we might find ourselves falling off with very little exertion. Still, you may as well take a couple of photographs of the surface, and then we'll be off to Phobos.”

Zaidie got her apparatus to work, and when she had taken her slides down to the dark-room, Redgrave turned the R. Force on very slightly and Phobos began to sink away beneath them. The attraction of Mars now began to make itself strongly felt, and the Astronef dropped rapidly through the eight thousand miles which separate the inner and outer satellites.

As they approached Phobos they saw that half the little disc was brilliantly lighted by the same rays of the sun which were glowing on the rapidly increasing crescent of Mars beneath them. By careful manipulation of his engines Lord Redgrave managed to meet the approaching satellite with a hardly perceptible shock about the centre of its lighted portion, that is to say the side turned towards the planet.

Mars now appeared as a gigantic rosy moon filling the whole vault of the heavens above them. Their telescopes brought the three thousand seven hundred and fifty miles down to about fifty. The rapid motion of the tiny satellite afforded them a spectacle which might be compared to the rising of a moon glowing with rosy light and hundreds of times larger than the earth. The speed of the vehicle of which they had taken possession, something like four thousand two hundred miles an hour, caused the surface of the planet to apparently sweep away from below them, just as the earth appears to slip away from under the car of a balloon.

Neither of them left the telescopes for more than a few minutes during this aerial circumnavigation. Murgatroyd, outwardly impassive, but inwardly filled with solemn fears for the fate of this impiously daring voyage, brought them wine and sandwiches, and later on tea and toast and more sandwiches; but they took no moment's heed of these, so absorbed were they in the wonderful spectacle which was swiftly passing under their eyes.

The main armament of the Astronef consisted of four pneumatic guns, which could be mounted on swivels, two ahead and two astern, which carried a shell containing either one of two kinds of explosives invented by her creator.

One of these was a solid, and burst on impact with an explosive force equal to about twenty pounds of lyddite. The other consisted of two liquids separated by a partition in the shell, and these, when mixed by the breaking of the partition, burst into a volume of flame which could not be extinguished by any known human means. It would burn even in a vacuum, since it supplied its own elements of combustion. The guns would throw these shells to a distance of about seven terrestrial miles. On the upper deck there were also stands for a couple of light machine guns capable of discharging seven hundred explosive bullets a minute.

Professor Rennick, although a man of peace, had little sympathy with the laws of “civilised” warfare which permit men to be blown into rags of flesh and splinters of bone by explosive shells of a pound weight and upwards, and only allow projectiles of less weight to be used against “savages”. He believed that when war was necessary it had to be war—and the sooner it was over the better for everybody concerned.

The small arms consisted of a couple of heavy ten-bore elephant guns carrying three-ounce melinite shells; a dozen rifles and fowling pieces of different makes of which three, a single and a double-barrelled rifle and a double-barrelled shot-gun, belonged to her ladyship, as well as a dainty brace of revolvers, one of half-a-dozen brace of various calibres which completed the minor armament of the Astronef.

The guns were got up and mounted while the attraction of the planet was comparatively feeble, and the guns themselves therefore of very little weight. On the surface of the earth a score of men could not have done the work, but on board the Astronef, suspended in space, her crew of three found the work easy. Zaidie herself picked up a Maxim and carried it about as though it were a toy sewing-machine.

“Now I think we can go down.” said Redgrave, when everything had been put in position as far as possible. “I wonder whether we shall find the atmosphere of Mars suitable for terrestrial lungs. It will be rather awkward if it isn't.”

A very slight exertion of repulsive force was sufficient to detach the Astronef from the body of Phobos.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

She dropped rapidly towards the surface of the planet, and within three hours they saw the sunlight, for the first time since they had left the Earth, shining through an unmistakable atmosphere, an atmosphere of a pale, rosy hue, instead of the azure of the earthly skies. An angular observation showed that they were within fifty miles of the surface of the undiscovered world.

“Well, we shall find air here of some sort, there's no doubt. We'll drop a bit further and then Andrew shall start the propellers. They'll very soon give us an idea of the density. Do you notice the change in the temperature? That's the diffused rays instead of the direct ones. Twenty miles! think that will do. I'll stop her now and we'll prospect for a landing-place.”

He went down to apply the repulsive force directly to the surface of Mars, so as to check the descent, and then he put on his breathing-dress, went into the exit-chamber, closed one door behind him, opened the other and allowed it to fill with Martian air; then he shut it again, opened his visor and took a cautious breath.

It may, perhaps, have been the idea that he, the first of all the sons of Earth, was breathing the air of another world, or it might have been some property peculiar to the Martian atmosphere, but he immediately experienced a sensation such as usually follows the drinking of a glass of champagne. He took another breath, and another, then he opened the inner door and went back to the lower deck, saying to himself: “Well, the air's all right if it is a bit champagny, rich in oxygen, I suppose, with perhaps a trace of nitrous-oxide in it. Still, it's certainly breathable and that's the principal thing.

“It's all right, dear,” he said as he reached the upper deck where Zaidie was walking about round the sides of the glass dome gazing with all her eyes at the strange scene of mingled cloud and sea and land which spread for an immense distance on all sides of them. “I have breathed the air of Mars, and even at this height it is distinctly wholesome, though of course it's rather thin, and I had it mixed with some of our own atmosphere. Still I think it will agree all right with us lower down.”

“Well, then,” said Zaidie, “suppose we get down below those clouds and see what there really is to be seen.”

“As there's a fairly big problem to be solved shortly I'll see to the descent myself,” he replied, going towards the stair-way.

In a couple of minutes she saw the cloud belt below them rising rapidly. When Redgrave returned the Astronef was plunging into a sea of rosy mist.

“The clouds of Mars,” she exclaimed, “fancy a world with pink clouds! I wonder what there is on the other side.”

The next moment they saw. Just below them, at a distance of about five earth-miles, lay an irregularly triangular island, a detached portion of the Continent of Huygens almost equally divided by the Martian equator, and lying with another almost similarly shaped island between the fortieth and fiftieth meridians of west longitude. The two islands were divided by a broad, straight stretch of water about the width of the English Channel between Folkestone and Boulogne. Instead of the bright blue-green of terrestrial seas, this connecting link between the great Northern and Southern Martian oceans had an orange tinge.

The land immediately beneath them was of a gently undulating character, something like the Downs of South-Eastern England. No mountains were visible in any direction. The lower portions, particularly along the borders of the canals and the sea, were thickly dotted with towns and cities, apparently of enormous extent. To the north of the Island Continent there was a peninsula, which was covered with a vast collection of buildings, which, with the broad streets and spacious squares which divided them, must have covered an area of something like two hundred square miles.

“There's the London of Mars!” said Redgrave, pointing down towards it; “where the London of Earth will be in a few thousand years, close to the equator. And you see, all those other towns and cities crowded round the canals! I daresay when we go across the northern and southern temperate zones we shall find them in about the state that Siberia or Patagonia are in.”

“I dare say we shall,” replied Zaidie, “Martian civilisation is crowding towards the equator, though I should call that place down there the greater New York of Mars, and—see—there's Brooklyn just across the canal. I wonder what they're thinking about us down there.”

Phobos revolves from west to east almost along the plane of the planet's equator. To left and right they saw the huge ice-caps of the South and North Poles gleaming through the red atmosphere with a pale sunset

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

glimmer. Then came the great stretches of sea, often obscured by vast banks of clouds, which, as the sunlight fell upon them, looked strangely like the earth—clouds at sunset.

Then, almost immediately underneath them, spread out the great land areas of the equatorial region. The three continents of Halle, Gallileo, and Tychoiland; then Huygens—which is to Mars what Europe, Asia, and Africa are to the earth, then Herschell and Copernicus. Nearly all of these land masses were split up into semi-regular divisions by the famous canals which have so long puzzled terrestrial observers.

“Well, there is one problem solved at any rate,” said Redgrave, when after a journey of nearly four hours they had crossed the western hemisphere. “Mars is getting, very old, her seas are diminishing, and her continents are increasing. Those canals are the remains of gulfs and straits which have been widened and deepened and lengthened by human, or I should say Martian, labour, partly, I’ve no doubt, for purposes of navigation, and partly to keep the inhabitants of the interior of the continent within measurable distance of the sea. There’s not the slightest doubt about that. Then, you see, there are scarcely any mountains to speak of so far, only ranges of low hills.”

“And that means, I suppose,” said Zaidie, “that they’ve all been worn down as the mountains of the earth are being. I was reading Flammarion’s ‘End of the World’ last night, and he, you know, describes the earth at the last as just one big plain of land, no hills or mountains, no seas, and only sluggish rivers draining into marshes.

“I suppose that’s what they’re coming to down yonder. Now, I wonder what sort of civilisation we shall find. Perhaps we shan’t find any at all. Suppose all their civilisations have worn out, and they are degenerating into the same struggle for sheer existence those poor creatures in the moon must have had.”

“Or suppose,” said his lordship rather seriously, “we find that they have passed the zenith of civilisation, and are dropping back into savagery, but still have the use of weapons and means of destruction which we, perhaps, have no notion of, and are inclined to use them. We’d better be careful, dear.”

“What do you mean, Lenox?” she said. “They wouldn’t try to do us any harm, would they? Why should they?”

“I don’t say they would,” he replied, “but still you never know. You see, their ideas of right and wrong and hospitality and all that sort of thing might quite different to what we have on the earth. In fact, they may not be men at all, but just a sort of monster with perhaps a superhuman intellect, with all sorts of extra-human ideas in it.”

“Then there’s another thing,” he went on. “Suppose they fancied a trip through Space, and thought that they had as good a right to the Astronef as we have? I daresay they’ve seen us by this time if they’ve got telescopes, as no doubt they have, perhaps a good deal more powerful than ours, and they may be getting ready to receive us now. I think I’ll get the guns in place before we go down, in case their moral ideas, as dear old Hans Breitmann called them, are not quite the same as ours.”

Chapter X

The words were hardly out of his mouth before Zaidie, who still had her glasses to her eyes, and was looking down towards the great city whose glazed roofs were flashing with a thousand tints in the pale crimson sunlight, said with a little tremor in her voice:

“Look, Lenox, down there—don't you see something coming up? That little black thing. Just look how fast it's coming up; it's quite distinct already. It's a sort of flying-ship, only it has wings and, I think, masts too. Yes, I can see three masts, and there's something glittering on the tops of them. I wonder if they're coming to pay us a polite morning call, or whether they're going to treat us like trespassers in their atmosphere.”

“There's no telling, but those things on top of the masts look like revolving helices,” replied Redgrave, after a brief look through his telescope. “He's screwing himself up into the air. That shows that they must either have stronger and lighter machinery here than we have, or, as the astronomers have thought, this atmosphere is denser than ours and therefore easier to fly in. Then, of course, things are only half their earthly weight here.”

“Well, whether it's peace or war, I suppose we may as well let them come and reconnoitre. Then we shall see what kind of creatures they are. Ah! there are a lot more of them, some coming from Brooklyn, too, as you call it. Come up into the conning-tower and I'll relieve Murgatroyd, so that he can go and look after his engines. We shall have to give these gentlemen a lesson in flying. Meanwhile, in case of accidents, we may as well make ourselves as invulnerable as possible.”

A few minutes later they were in the conning-tower again, watching the approach of the Martian fleet through the thick windows of toughened glass which enabled them to look in every direction except straight down. The steel coverings had been drawn down over the glass dome of the deck-chamber, and Murgatroyd had gone down to the engine-room. Fifty feet ahead of them stretched out the long shining spur, of which ten feet were solid steel, a ram which no floating structure built by human hands could have resisted.

Redgrave was standing with his hand on the steering-wheel, looking more serious than he had done so far in the voyage. Zaidie stood beside him with a powerful binocular telescope watching, with cheeks a little paler than usual, the movements of the Martian air-ships. She counted twenty-five vessels rising round them in a wide circle.

“I don't like the idea of a whole fleet coming up,” said Redgrave, as he watched them rising, and the ring narrowing round the still motionless Astronef. “If they only wanted to know who and what we are, or to leave their cards on us, as it were, and bid us welcome to the world, one ship could have done that just as well as a fleet. This lot coming up looks as if they wanted to get round and capture us.”

“It does look like it!” said Zaidie, with her glasses fixed on the nearest of the vessels; “and now I can see they've guns, too, something like ours, and, perhaps, as you said just now, they may have explosives that we don't know anything about. Oh, Lenox, suppose they were able to smash us up with a single shot!”

“You needn't be afraid of that, dear!” He said, putting his arm round her shoulders; “Of course it's perfectly natural that they should look upon us with a certain amount of suspicion, dropping like this on them from the stars. Can you see anything like men on board them yet?”

“No, they're all closed in just as we are,” she replied; “but they've got conning-towers like this, and something like windows along the sides; that's where the guns are, and the guns are moving. They're pointing them at us. Lenox, I'm afraid they're going to shoot.”

“Then we may as well spoil their aim,” he said, pressing an electric button three times, and then once more after a little interval.

In obedience to the signal Murgatroyd turned on the repulsive force to half power, and the Astronef leapt up vertically a couple of thousand feet; then Redgrave pressed the button once and she stopped. Another signal set the propellers in motion, and as she sprang forward across the circle formed by the Martian air-ships, they looked down and saw that the place which they had just left was occupied by a thick,

greenish–yellow cloud.

“Look, Lenox, what on earth is that?” exclaimed Zaidie, pointing down to it.

“What on Mars would be nearer the point, dear,” he said, with what she thought a somewhat vicious laugh. “That, I'm afraid, means anything but a friendly reception for us. That cloud is one of two things—it's the smoke of the explosion of twenty or thirty shells, or else it's made of gases intended to either poison us or make us insensible, so that they can take possession of the ship. In either case I should say that the Martians are not what we should call gentlemen.”

“I should think not,” she said angrily. “They might at least have taken us for friends till they had proved us enemies, which they wouldn't have done. Nice sort of hospitality that, considering how far we've come, and we can't shoot back because we haven't got the ports open.”

“And a very good thing too!” laughed Redgrave. “If we had had them open, and that volley had caught us unawares, the Astronef would probably have been full of poisonous gases by this time, and your honeymoon, dear, would have come to a somewhat untimely end. Ah, they're trying to follow us! Well, now we'll see how high they can fly.”

He sent another signal to Murgatroyd, and the Astronef, still beating the Martian air with the fans of her propellers, and travelling forward at about fifty miles an hour, rose in a slanting direction through a dense bank of rosy–tinted clouds, which hung over the bigger of the two cities—New York, as Zaidie had named it.

When they reached the golden red sunlight above it the Astronef stopped her ascent, and then, with half a turn of the steering–wheel, her commander sent her sweeping round in a wide circle. A few minutes later they saw the Martian fleet rise almost simultaneously through the clouds. They seemed to hesitate a moment, and then the prow of every vessel was directed towards the swiftly moving Astronef.

“Well, gentlemen,” said Redgrave, “you evidently don't know anything about Professor Rennick and his R. Force; and yet you ought to know that we couldn't have come through space without being able to get beyond this little atmosphere of yours. Now let us see how fast you can fly.”

Another signal went down to Murgatroyd, the whirling propellers became two intersecting circles of light. The speed of the Astronef increased to a hundred–and–fifty miles an hour, and the Martian fleet began to drop behind and trail out into a triangle like a flock of huge birds.

“That's lovely; we're leaving them!” exclaimed Zaidie leaning forward with the glasses to her eyes and tapping the floor of the conning–tower with her toe as if she wanted to dance, “and their wings are working faster than ever. They don't seem to have any screws.”

“Probably because they've solved the problem of bird's flight,” said Redgrave, “They're not gaining on us, are they?”

“No, they're at about the same distance.”

“Then we'll see how they can soar.”

Another signal went down the tube. The Astronef's propellers slowed down and stopped, and the vessel began to rise swiftly towards the Zenith, which the Sun was now approaching. The Martian fleet continued the impossible chase until the limits of the navigable atmosphere. about eight earth–miles above the surface, was reached. Here the air was evidently too rarefied for their wings to act. They came to a standstill, looking like the links of a broken chain, their occupants no doubt looking up with envious eyes upon the shining body of the Astronef glittering like a tiny star in the sunlight ten thousand feet above them.

“Well, gentlemen,” said Redgrave after a swift glance round. “I think we have shown you that we can fly faster and soar higher than you can. Perhaps you'll be a bit more civil now. If you're not we shall have to teach you manners.”

“But you're not going to fight them all dear, are you? Don't let us be the first to bring war and bloodshed with us into another world.”

“Don't trouble about that, little woman, it's here already,” he replied, a trifle savagely. “People don't have air–ships and guns, which fire shells or poison–bombs, or whatever they were, without knowing what war is. From what I've seen, I should say these Martians have civilised themselves out of all the emotions, and, I daresay, have fought pitilessly for the possession of the last habitable lands of the planet.

“They've preyed upon each other till only the fittest are left, and those, I suppose, were the ones who invented the air–ships and finally got possession of all that was worth having. Of course that would give them

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

the command of the planet, land and sea. In fact, if we are able to make the personal acquaintance of the Martians, we shall probably find them a set of over-civilised savages.”

“That’s a rather striking paradox, isn’t it, dear?” said Zaidie, slipping her hand through his arm; “but still it’s not at all bad. You mean, of course, that they may have civilised themselves out of all the emotions until they’re just a set of cold, calculating, scientific animals. After all they must be something of the sort, for I’m quite sure we would not have done anything like that on earth if we’d had a visitor from Mars. We shouldn’t have got out cannons and shot at him before we’d even made his acquaintance.

“Now, if he, or they, had dropped in America as we were going down there, we should have received them with deputations, given them banquets, which they might not have been able to eat, and speeches, which they would not understand, and photographed them, and filled the newspapers with everything that we could imagine about them, and then put them in a palace car and hustled them round the country for everybody to look at.”

“And meanwhile,” laughed Redgrave, “some of your smart engineers, I suppose, would have gone over the vessel they had come in, found out how she was worked, and taken out a dozen patents for her machinery.”

“Very likely,” replied Zaidie, with a saucy little toss of her chin; “and why not? We like to learn things down there—and anyhow that would be much more really civilised than shooting at them.”

While this little conversation was going on, the *Asfronef* was dropping rapidly into the midst of the Martian fleet, which had again arranged itself in a circle. Zaidie soon made out through her glasses that the guns were pointed upwards.

“Oh, that’s your little game, is it!” said Redgrave, when she told him of this. “Well, if you want a fight, you can have it.”

As he said this, his jaws came together, and Zaidie saw a look in his eyes that she had never seen there before. He signalled rapidly two or three times to Murgatroyd. The propellers began to whirl at their utmost speed, and the *Astronef*, making a spiral downward course, swooped down on to the Martian fleet with terrific velocity. Her last curve coincided almost exactly with the circle occupied by the ships. Half-a-dozen spouts of greenish flame came from the nearest vessel, and for a moment the *Astronef* was enveloped in a yellow mist.

“Evidently they don’t know that we are air-tight, and they don’t use shot or shell. They’ve got past that. Their projectiles kill by poison or suffocation. I daresay a volley like that would kill a regiment. Now I’ll give that fellow a lesson which he won’t live to remember.”

They swept through the poison-mist. Redgrave swung the wheel round. The *Astronef* dropped to the level of the ring of Martian vessels, which had now got up speed again. Her steel ram was directed straight at the vessel which had fired the last shot. Propelled at a speed of nearly two hundred miles an hour, it took the strange-winged craft amidships. As the shock came, Redgrave put his arm round Zaidie’s waist and held her close to him, otherwise she would have been flung against the forward wall of the conning-tower.

The Martian vessel stopped and bent up. They saw human figures more than half as large again as men inside her staring at them through the windows in the sides. There were others at the breaches of the guns in the act of turning the muzzles on the *Astronef*; but this was only a momentary glimpse, for in a second the *Astronef*’s spur had pierced her, the Martian air-ship broke in twain, and her two halves plunged downwards through the rosy clouds.

“Keep her at full speed, Andrew.” said Redgrave down the speaking-tube, “and stand by to jump if we want to.”

“All ready, my lord!” came back up the tube.

The old Yorkshireman during the last few minutes had undergone a transformation which he himself hardly understood. He recognised that there was a fight going on, that it was a case of “burn, sink and destroy,” and the thousand-year-old savage awoke in him just, as a matter of fact, it had done in his lordship.

“They can pick up the pieces down there, what there is left of them,” said Redgrave, still holding Zaidie tight to his side with one hand and working the wheel with the other, “and now we’ll teach them another lesson.”

“What are you going to do, dear?” she said, looking up at him with somewhat frightened eyes.

“You’ll see in a moment,” he said, between his shut teeth. “I don’t care whether these Martians are

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

degenerate human beings or only animals; but from my point of view the reception that they have given us justifies any kind of retaliation. If we'd had a single port hole open during the first volley you and I would have been dead by this time, and I'm not going to stand anything like that without reprisals. They've declared war on us, and killing in war isn't murder."

"Well, no, I suppose not," she said; "but it's the first fight I've been in, and I don't like it. Still, they did receive us pretty meanly, didn't they?"

"Meanly? If there was anything like a code of interplanetary morals, one might call it absolutely caddish. I don't believe even Stead himself could stand that—unless, of course, he wasn't here."

He sent another message to Murgatroyd. The Astronef sprang a thousand feet towards the zenith; another signal, and she stopped exactly over the biggest of the Martian air-ships; another, and she dropped on to it like a stone and smashed it to fragments. Then she stopped and mounted again above the broken circle of the fleet, while the pieces of the air-ship and what was left of her crew plunged downwards through the crimson clouds in a fall of nearly thirty thousand feet.

Within the next few moments the rest of the Martian fleet had followed it, sinking rapidly down through the clouds and scattering in all directions.

"They seem to have had enough of it," laughed Redgrave, as the Astronef, in obedience to another signal, began to drop towards the surface of Mars. "Now we'll go down and see if they're in a more reasonable frame of mind. At any rate we've won our first scrimmage, dear."

"But it was rather brutal, Lenox, wasn't it?"

"When you are dealing with brutes, little woman, it is sometimes necessary to be brutal."

"And you look a wee bit brutal now," she replied, looking up at him with something like a look of fear in her eyes. "I suppose that is because you have just killed somebody—or somethings—whichever they are."

"Do I, really?"

The hard-set jaw relaxed and his lips melted into a smile under his moustache, and he bent down and kissed her.

"Well, what do you suppose I should have thought of them if you had had a whiff of that poison?"

"Yes, dear," she whispered in between the kisses, "I see now."

Chapter XI

The Astronef dropped swiftly down through the crimson-tinged clouds, and a few minutes later they saw that the fleet had scattered in units in all directions, apparently with the intention of getting as far as possible out of reach of that terrible ram. Only one of them, the largest, which carried what looked like a flag of woven gold at the top of its centre mast, remained in sight after a few minutes. It was almost immediately below them when they had passed through the clouds, and they could see it sinking straight down towards the centre of what appeared to be the principal square of the bigger of the two cities which Zaidie had named New York and Brooklyn.

“That fellow has gone to report, evidently,” said Redgrave. “We'll follow him just to see what he's up to, but I don't think we'd better open the ports even then. There's no telling when they might give us a whiff of that poison-mist, or whatever it is.”

“But how are you going to talk to them, then, if they can talk?—I mean, if they know any language that we do?”

“They're something like men, and so I suppose they understand the language of signs, at any rate. Still, if you don't fancy it, we'll go somewhere else.”

“No thanks,” she said. “That's not my father's daughter. I haven't come a hundred million miles from home to go away before the first act's finished. We'll go down to see if we can make them understand.”

By this time the Astronef was hanging suspended over an enormous square about half the size of Hyde Park. It was laid out just as a terrestrial park would be in grassland, flower beds, and avenues, and patches of trees, only the grass was a reddish yellow, the leaves of the trees were like those of a beech in autumn, and the flowers were nearly all a deep violet, or a bright emerald green.

As they descended they saw that the square, or Central Park, as Zaidie at once christened it, was flanked by enormous blocks of buildings, palaces built of a dazzlingly white stone, and topped by domed roofs and lofty cupolas of glass.

“Isn't that just lovely!” she said, swinging her binoculars in every direction. “Talk about your Park Lane and the houses round Central Park; why, it's the Chicago Exposition, and the Paris one, and your Crystal Palace, multiplied by about ten thousand, and all spread out just round this one place. If we don't find these people nice, I guess we'd better go back and build a fleet like this, and come and take it.”

“There spoke the new American imperialism,” laughed Redgrave. “Well, we'll go and see what they're like first, shall we?”

The Astronef dropped a little more slowly than the air-ship had done, and remained suspended a hundred feet or so above her after she had reached the ground. Swarms of human figures, but of more than human stature, clad in tunics and trousers or knickerbockers, came out of the glass-domed palaces from all sides into the park. They were nearly all of the same stature and there appeared to be no difference whatever between the sexes. Their dress was absolutely plain; there was no attempt at ornament or decoration of any kind.

“If there are any of the Martian women among those people,” said her ladyship, “they've taken to rationals and they've grown about as big as the men.”

“That's exactly what's happening on earth, you know, dear. I don't mean about the rationals, but the women growing up, especially in America. I come of a pretty long family—but look!”

“Well, I only come to your ear,” she said.

“And our descendants of ten thousand years hence—”

“Oh, don't bother about them!” she said. “Look; there's someone who seems to want to communicate with us. Why, they're all bald! They haven't got a hair among them—and what a size their heads are!”

“That's brains—too much brains, in fact! These people have lived too long. I daresay they've ceased to be animals—civilised themselves out of everything in the way of passions and emotions, and are just purely intellectual beings, with as much human nature about them as Russian diplomacy or those things we saw at

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

the bottom of Newton crater. I don't like the look of them.”

The orderly swarms of figures, which were rapidly filling the park, divided as he was speaking, making a broad lane from one of its entrances to where the Astronef was hanging above the air-ship. A light four-wheeled vehicle, whose framework and wheels glittered like burnished gold, sped towards them, driven by some invisible agency.

Its only occupant was a huge man, dressed in the universal costume, saving only a scarlet sash in place of the cord-girdle which the others wore round their waists. The vehicle stopped near the air-ship, over which the Astronef was hanging, and, as the figure dismounted, a door opened in the side of the vessel and three other figures, similar both in stature and attire, came out and entered into conversation with him.

“The Admiral of the Fleet is evidently making his report,” said Redgrave. “Meanwhile, the crowd seems to be taking a considerable amount of interest in us.”

“And very naturally, too!” replied Zaidie. “Don't you think we might go down now and see if we can make ourselves understood in any way? You can have the guns ready in case of accidents, but I don't think they'll try and hurt us now. Look, the gentleman with the red sash is making signs.”

“I think we can go down now all right,” replied Redgrave, “because it's quite certain they can't use the poison guns on us without killing themselves as well. Still, we may as well have our own ready. Andrew, get that port Maxim ready. I hope we shan't want it, but we may. I don't quite like the look of these people.”

“They're very ugly, aren't they?” said Zaidie; “and really you can't tell which are men and which are women. I suppose they've civilised themselves out of everything that's nice, and are just scientific and utilitarian and everything that's horrid.”

“I shouldn't wonder. They look to me as if they've just got common sense, as we call it, and hadn't any other sense; but, at any rate, if they don't behave themselves, we shall be able to teach them manners of a sort, though we may possibly have done that to some extent already.”

As he said this Redgrave went into the conning-tower, and the Astronef moved from above the air-ship, and dropped gently into the crimson grass about a hundred feet from her. Then the ports were opened, the guns, which Murgatroyd had loaded, were swung into position, and they armed themselves with a brace of revolvers each, in case of accident.

“What delicious air this is!” said her ladyship, as the ports were opened, and she took her first breath of the Martian atmosphere. “It's ever so much nicer than ours; it's just like breathing champagne.”

Redgrave looked at her with an admiration which was tempered by a sudden apprehension. Even in his eyes she had never seemed so lovely before. Her cheeks were glowing and her eyes were gleaming with a brightness that was almost feverish, and he was himself sensible of a strange feeling of exultation, both mental and physical, as his lungs filled with the Martian air.

“Oxygen,” he said shortly, “and too much of it! Or, I shouldn't wonder if it was something like nitrous-oxide—you know, laughing gas.”

“Don't!” she laughed, “it may be very nice to breathe, but it reminds one of other things which aren't a bit nice. Still, if it is anything of that sort it might account for these people having lived so fast. I know I feel just now as if I were living at the rate of thirty-six hours a day and so, I suppose, the fewer hours we stop here the better.”

“Exactly!” said Redgrave, with another glance of apprehension at her. “Now, there's his Royal Highness, or whatever he is, coming. How are we going to talk to him? Are you all ready, Andrew?”

“Yes, my lord, all ready,” replied the old Yorkshireman, dropping his huge, hairy hand on the breach of the Maxim.

“Very well, then, shoot the moment you see them doing anything suspicious, and don't let anyone except his Royal Highness come nearer than a hundred yards.”

As he said this Redgrave went to the door, from which the gangway steps had been lowered, and, in reply to a singularly expressive gesture from the huge Martian, who seemed to stand nearly nine feet high, he beckoned to him to come up on to the deck.

As he mounted the steps the crowd closed round the Astronef and the Martian air-ship; but, as though in obedience to orders which had already been given, they kept at a respectful distance of a little over a hundred yards away from the strange vessel, which had wrought such havoc with their fleet. When the Martian reached

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

the deck, Redgrave held out his hand and the giant recoiled, as a man on earth might have done if, instead of the open palm, he had seen a clenched hand gripping a knife.

“Take care, Lenox,” exclaimed Zaidie, taking a couple of steps towards him, with her right hand on the butt of one of her revolvers. The movement brought her close to the open door, and in full view of the crowd outside.

If a seraph had come on earth and presented itself thus before a throng of human beings, there might have happened some such miracle as was wrought when the swarm of Martians beheld the strange beauty of this radiant daughter of the earth.

As it seemed to the space-voyagers, when they discussed it afterwards, ages of purely utilitarian civilisation had brought all conditions of Martian life up—or down—to the same level. There was no apparent difference between the males and females in stature; their faces were all the same, with features of mathematical regularity, pale skin, bloodless cheeks, and an expression, if such it could be called, utterly devoid of emotion.

But still these creatures were human, or at least their forefathers had been. Hearts beat in their breasts, blood of a sort still flowed through their veins, and so the magic of this marvellous vision instantly awoke the long-slumbering elementary instincts of a bygone age. A low murmur ran through the vast throng, a murmur half-human, half-brutish, which swiftly rose to a hoarse screaming roar.

“Look out, my lord! Quick! Shut the door, they're coming! It's her ladyship they want; she must look like an angel from Heaven to them. Shall I fire?”

“Yes,” said Redgrave, gripping the lever, and bringing the door down. “Zaidie, if this fellow moves, put a bullet through him. I'm going to talk to that air-ship before he gets his poison guns to work.”

As the last word left his lips, Murgatroyd put his thumb on the spring on the Maxim. A roar such as Martian ears had never heard before resounded through the vast square, and was flung back with a thousand echoes from the walls of the huge palaces on every side. A stream of smoke and flame poured out of the little port-hole, and then the onward-swarving throng seemed to stop, and the front ranks of it began to sink down silently in long rows.

Then through the roaring rattle of the Maxim sounded the deep, sharp bang of Redgrave's gun, as he sent twenty pounds' weight of Rennickite, as he had christened it, into the Martian air-ship. There was the roar of an explosion which shook the air for miles around. A blaze of greenish flame and a huge cloud of steamy smoke showed that the projectile had done its work, and, when the smoke drifted away, the spot on which the air-ship had lain was only a deep, red, jagged gash in the ground. There was not even a fragment of the ship to be seen.

This done, Redgrave went and turned the starboard Maxim on to another swarm which was approaching the Astronef from that side. When he had got the range, he swung the gun slowly from side to side. The moving throng stopped, as the other one had done, and sank down to the red grass, now dyed with a deeper red.

Meanwhile, Zaidie had been holding the Martian at something more than arm's length with her revolver. He seemed to understand perfectly that, if she pulled the trigger, the revolver would do something like what the Maxims had done. He appeared to take no notice whatever either of the destruction of the airship or of the slaughter that was going on around the Astronef. His big pale blue eyes were fixed upon her face. They seemed to be devouring a loveliness such as they had never seen before. A dim, pinky flush stole for the first time into his waxy cheeks, and something like a light of human passion came into his eyes.

Then, to the utter astonishment of both Redgrave and Zaidie, he said slowly and deliberately, and with only just enough tinge of emotion in his voice to make Redgrave want to shoot him:

“Beautiful. Perfect. More perfect than ours. I want it. Give Palace and Garden of Eternal Summer for it. Two thousand work-slaves and fifty—”

“And I'll see you damned first, sir, whoever you are!” said Redgrave, clapping his hand on to the butt of the revolver, and forgetting for the moment that he was speaking in another world than his own. “What the devil do you mean, sir, by insulting my wife—?”

“Insulting. Wife. What is that? We have no words like those.”

“But you speak English,” exclaimed Zaidie, going a little nearer to him, but still keeping the muzzle of her

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

revolver pointing up to his hairless head. "No, Lenox, don't be afraid about me, and don't get angry. Can't you see that this person hasn't got any temper? I suppose it was civilised out of his ancestors ages ago. He doesn't know what a wife or an insult is. He just looks upon me as a desirable piece of property to be bought, and I daresay he offered you a very handsome price. Now, don't look so savage, because you know bargains like that have been made even on our dear old virtuous Mother Earth. For instance, if you hadn't met us in the middle of the Atlantic—"

"That'll do, Zaidie," Redgrave interrupted almost roughly. "That's not exactly the question, but I see what you mean, and it was a bit silly of me to get angry."

"Silly? Angry? What do those words mean?" said the Martian in his slow, passionless, mechanical voice "Who are you? Whence come you?"

"I'll answer the last part first," said Redgrave.

"We come from the earth, the planet which you see after sunset and before sunrise."

"Yes, the Silver Star," said the Martian without any note of wonder or surprise in his voice. "Are all the dwellers there like the gods and angels our children read about in the old legends?"

"Gods and angels!" laughed Zaidie. "There, Lenox, there's a compliment for you. I really think we ought to be as civil to his Royal Highness after that as possible." Then she went on, addressing the Martian, "No, we are not all gods and angels on earth. There are no gods and very few angels. In fact there are none except those which exist in the fancy of certain prejudiced persons. But that doesn't matter, at least not just now," she continued with American directness. "What we want to know just now is, why you speak English, and what sort of a world this Mars is?"

The Martian evidently only understood the most direct essentials of her speech. He saw that she asked two questions, and he answered them.

"Speak English?" He replied, with a little shake of his huge head. "We know not English, but there is no other speech. There is only ours. Cycles ago there were other speeches here, but those who spoke them were killed. It was inconvenient. One speech for a world is best."

"I see what he means," said Redgrave, looking towards Zaidie. "The Martian people have developed along practically the same lines as we are doing, but they have done it faster and got a long way ahead of us. We are finding out that the speech we call English is the shortest and most convenient. The Martians found it out long ago and killed everybody who spoke anything else. After all, what we call speech is only the translation of thoughts into sounds. These people have been thinking for ages with the same sort of brains as ours, and they've translated their thoughts into the same sounds. What we call English they, I daresay, call Martian, and that's all there is in it that I can see."

"Of course," laughed Zaidie. "Wonderful until you know how, eh? Like most things. Still I must say that our friend here speaks English something like a phonograph, and if he'll excuse me saying so, which of course he will, he doesn't seem to have much more human nature about him."

"I'm not quite so sure on that point," said Redgrave, "but—"

"Oh, never mind about that now!" she interrupted, and then, turning towards the Martian, who had been listening intently as though he was trying to make sense out of what they had been saying, she went on speaking slowly and very plainly—

"Tell me, sir, if you please, do you know what 'angry' means? Are you not angry with us for destroying your air-ships up there in the clouds, and the one that came down, and for shooting all those people of yours?"

The Martian looked at her with a little light in his big blue eyes, and two faint little spots of red just under them, and said: "Anger! Yes, I remember, that is what we called brain-heat. Our teachers found it to be madness and it was abolished. It was not convenient. The air-ships were not convenient to you, so you abolished them. The folk, too, that you abolished with those things," pointing to the guns, "they were not convenient. If you hadn't done that they would have abolished you. There is no more to say."

"What brutes," said Zaidie, turning away from him, her head thrown back and her lips curling in unutterable disgust. "Well, if these people have civilised themselves along the same lines that we are doing, thinking the same things and speaking something like the same speech, thank God we shall be dead before our civilisation reaches a stage like this. That's not a man. It's only a machine of flesh and bone and nerves, and I

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

suppose it has blood of some sort.”

A beautiful woman always looks most beautiful when she is just a little angry. Redgrave had never seen Zaidie look quite so lovely as she did just then. The Martian, whose ancestors had for generations forgotten what human emotion was like, only saw in her anger a miracle which made her a thousand times more beautiful than before, and as he looked upon her glowing cheeks and gleaming eyes some instinct insensibly transmitted through many generations awoke to sudden life in some unused corner of his brain.

His pale clear eyes lit up with something like a glow of human passion. The pink spots under his eyes spread downwards over his cheeks. Some half-articulate sounds came from between his thin lips. Then they were drawn back and showed his smooth, toothless gums. He took a couple of long, swift strides towards her, and then bent forward, towering over her with long, outstretched arms, huge, hideous, and half-human.

Zaidie sprang backwards as he came towards her, her right hand went up, and, just as Redgrave levelled his revolver, and Murgatroyd, true to the old Berserk instinct, took a rifle by the barrel and swung the stock above his head, Zaidie pulled her trigger. The bullet cut a clean hole through the smooth, hairless skull of the Martian. A dark, red spot came just between his eyes, his huge frame shrank together and collapsed in a heap on the deck.

“Oh, I've killed him! God forgive me, killed a man!” she whispered, as her hand fell to her side, and the revolver dropped from her fingers. “But, Lenox, do you really think it was a man?”

“That thing a man!” He replied between his clenched teeth. “He wanted you, and spoke English of a sort, so there was something human about him, but anyhow he's better dead. Here, Andrew, open that door again and help me to heave this thing overboard. Then I think we'd better be off before we have the rest of the fleet with their poison guns round us. Zaidie, I think you'd better go to your room for the present. Take a nip of cognac and then lie down, and mind you keep the door tight shut. There's no telling what these animals might do if they had a chance, and just now it's my business and Andrew's to see that they don't.”

Though she would much rather have remained on deck to see anything more that might happen, she saw that he was really in earnest, and so like a wise wife who commands by obeying, she obeyed, and went below.

Then the dead body of the Martian was tumbled out of the side door. The windows through which the guns had been fired were hermetically closed, and a few minutes later the Astronef vanished from the surface of Mars, to remain a memory and a marvel to the dwindling generations of the worn-out world which is as this may be in the far-off days that are to come.

Chapter XII

“How very different Venus looks now to what it does from the earth,” said Zaidie, a couple of mornings later, by earth-time, as she took her eye away from the telescope through which she had been examining an enormous golden crescent which spanned the dark vault of space ahead of and slightly below the Astronef.

“Yes,” replied Redgrave, “she looks—”

“How do you know that she is a she?” said Zaidie, getting up and laying a hand on his shoulder as he sat at his own telescope. “Of course I know what you mean, that according to our own ideas on Earth, it is the planet or the world which has been supposed for ages to, as it were, shine on the lovers of earth with the light reflected from the—the—well, I suppose you know what I mean.”

“Seeing that you are the most perfect terrestrial incarnation of the said goddess that I have seen yet,” he replied, slipping his arm round her waist and pulling her down onto his knees, “I don't think that this is quite the view you ought to take. Surely if Venus ever had a daughter—”

“Oh, nonsense! After we've travelled all these millions of miles together do you really expect me to believe stuff like that?”

“My dear girl-graduate,” he said, tightening his grip round her waist a little, “you know perfectly well that if we had travelled beyond the limits of the Solar System, if we had outsailed old Halley's Comet itself, and dived into the uttermost depths of Space outside the Milky Way, you and I would still be a man and a woman, and, being, as may be presumed, more or less in love with each other—”

“Less indeed!” said Zaidie; “You're speaking for yourself, I hope.”

And then when she had partially disengaged herself and sat up straight, she said between her laughs—

“Really, Lenox, you're quite absurd for a person who has been married as long as you have, I don't mean in time, but in space. Was it a thousand years or a couple of hundred million miles ago that we were married? Really I am getting my ideas of time and space quite mixed up.

“But never mind that! What I was going to say is that, according to all the authorities which your girl-graduate has been reading since we left Mars, Venus—oh, doesn't she look just gorgeous, and our old friend the Sun behind there blazing out of darkness like one of the furnaces at Pittsburg—I beg your pardon, Lenox, I'm afraid I'm getting quite provincial. I suppose we're considerably more than a hundred million miles away?”

“Yes, dear; we're about a hundred and fifty millions, and at that distance, if you'll excuse me saying so, even the United States would seem almost like a province, wouldn't they?”

“Well, yes; that's just where distance doesn't lend enchantment to the view, I suppose.”

“But what was it you were going to say before that—”

“The interlude, eh? Well, before the interlude you were accusing me of being a graduate as well as a girl. Of course I can't help that, but what I was going to say was—”

“If you are going to talk science, dear, perhaps we'd better sit on different chairs. I may have been married for a hundred and fifty million miles, but the honeymoon isn't half way through yet, you know.”

Then there was another interlude of a few seconds' duration. When Zaidie was seated beside her own telescope again, she said, after another glance at the splendid crescent which, as the Astronef approached at a speed of over forty miles a second, increased in size and distinctness every moment:

“What I mean is this. All the authorities are agreed that on Venus, her axis of revolution bang so very much inclined to the plane of her orbit, the seasons are so severe that half the year its temperate zone and its tropics have a summer about twice as hot as ours tropics and the other half they have a winter twice as cold as our coldest. I'm afraid, after all, we shall find the Love-Star a world of salamanders and seals; things that can live in a furnace and bask on an iceberg; and when we get back home it will be our painful duty, as the first explorers of the fields of space, to dispel another dearly-cherished popular delusion.”

“I'm not so very sure about that,” said Lenox, glancing from the rapidly growing crescent, to the sweet

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

smiling face beside him. "Don't you see something very different there to what we saw either on the Moon or Mars? Now just go back to your telescope and let us take an observation."

"Well," said Zaidie, rising, "as our trip is partly, at least, in the interest of science, I will." And then, when she had got her own telescope into focus again—for the distance between the Astronef and the new world they were about to visit was rapidly lessening—she took a long look through it, and said:

"Yes, I think I see what you mean. The outer edge of the crescent is bright, but it gets greyer and dimmer towards the inside of the curve. Of course Venus has an atmosphere. So had Mars; but this must be very dense. There's a sort of halo all round it. Just fancy that splendid thing being the little black spot we saw going across the face of the Sun a few days ago! It makes one feel rather small, doesn't it?"

"That is one of the things which a woman says when she doesn't want to be answered; but, apart from that, you were saying—"

"What a very unpleasant person you can be when you like! I was going to say that on the Moon we saw nothing but black and white, light and darkness. There was no atmosphere, except in those awful places I don't want to think about. Then, as we got near Mars, we saw a pinky atmosphere, but not very dense; but this, you see, is a sort of pearl-grey white shading from silver to black. But look—what are those tiny bright spots? There are hundreds of them."

"Do you remember as we were leaving the earth, how bright the mountain ranges looked; how plainly we could see the Rockies and the Andes?"

"Oh, yes, I see; they're mountains; thirty-seven miles high some of them, they say; and the rest of the silver-grey will be clouds, I suppose. Fancy living under clouds like those."

"Only another case of the adaptation of life to natural conditions, I expect. When we get there, I daresay we shall find that these clouds are just what make it possible for the inhabitants of Venus to stand the extremes of heat and cold. Given elevations, three or four times as high as the Himalayas, it would be quite possible for them to choose their temperature by shifting their altitude.

"But I think it's about time to drop theory and see to the practice," he continued, getting up from his chair and going to the signal board to the conning-tower. "Whatever the planet Venus may be like, we don't want to charge it at the rate of sixty miles a second. That's about the speed now, considering how fast she's travelling towards us."

"And considering that, whether it is a nice world or not, it's nearly as big as the earth, I guess we should get rather the worst of the charge," laughed Zaidie, as she went back to her telescope.

Redgrave sent a signal down to Murgatroyd to reverse engines, as it were, or, in other words, to direct the "R. Force" against the planet, from which they were now only a couple of hundred thousand miles distant. The next moment the sun and stars seemed to halt in their courses. The great golden-grey crescent which had been increasing in size every moment, appeared to remain stationary, and then, when he was satisfied that the engines were developing the Force properly, he sent another signal down, and the Astronef began to descend.

The half-disc of Venus seemed to fall below them, and in a few minutes they could see it from the upper deck spreading out like a huge semi-circular plain of light ahead and on both sides of them. The Astronef was falling upon it at the rate of about a thousand miles a minute towards the centre of the half crescent, and every moment the brilliant spots above the cloud-surface grew in size and brightness.

"I believe the theory about the enormous height of the mountains of Venus must be correct after all," said Redgrave, tearing himself with an evident wrench away from his telescope. "Those white patches can't be anything else but the summits of snow-capped mountains. You know how brilliantly white a snow-peak looks on earth against the whitest of clouds."

"Oh, yes," said Zaidie, "I've often seen that in the Rockies. But it's lunch time, and I must go down and see how my things in the kitchen are getting on. I suppose you'll try and land somewhere where it's morning, so that we can have a good day before us. Really, it's very convenient to be able to make your own morning or night as you like, isn't it? I hope it won't make us too conceited when we get back, being able to choose our mornings and our evenings; in fact, our sunrises and sunsets on any world we like to visit in a casual way like this."

"Well," laughed Redgrave, as she moved away towards the companion stairs, "after all, if you find the United States, or even the planet Terra, too small for you, we've always got the fields of Space open to us. We

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

might take a trip across the Zodiac or down the Milky Way.”

“And meanwhile,” she replied, stopping at the top of the stairs and looking round, “I’ll go down and get lunch. You and I may be king and queen of the realms of Space, and all that sort of thing, but we’ve got to eat and drink, after all.”

“And that reminds me,” said Redgrave, getting up and following her, “we must celebrate our arrival on a new world as usual. I’ll go down and get out the wine. I shouldn’t be surprised if we found the people of the Love–World living on nectar and ambrosia, and as fizz is our nearest approach to nectar—”

“I suppose,” said Zaidie, as she gathered up her skirts and stepped daintily down the companion stairs, “if you find anything human or at least human enough to eat and drink, you’ll have a party and give them champagne. I wonder what those wretches on Mars would have thought of it if we’d only made friends with them?”

Lunch on board the Astronef was about the pleasantest meal of the day. Of course there was neither day nor night, in the ordinary sense of the word, except as the hours were measured off by the chronometers. Whichever side or end of the vessel received the direct rays of the sun, was bathed in blazing heat and dazzling light. Elsewhere there was black darkness, and the more than icy cold of space; but lunch was a convenient division of the waking hours, which began with a stroll on the upper deck and a view of the ever–varying splendours about them, and ended after dinner in the same place with coffee and cigarettes and speculations as to the next day’s happenings.

This lunch hour passed even more pleasantly and rapidly than others had done, for the discussion as to the possibilities of Venus was continued in a quite delightful mixture of scientific disquisition and that converse which is common to most human beings on their honeymoon.

As there was nothing more to be done or seen for an hour or two, the afternoon was spent in a pleasant siesta in the luxurious deck–saloon; because evening to them would be morning on that portion of Venus to which they were directing their course, and, as Zaidie said, when she subsided into her hammock:

It would be breakfast–time before they could get dinner.

As the Astronef fell with ever–increasing velocity towards the cloud–covered surface of Venus, the remainder of her disc, lit up by the radiance of her sister–worlds, Mercury, Mars, and the Earth, and also by the pale radiance of an enormous comet, which had suddenly shot into view from behind its southern limb, became more or less visible.

Towards six o’clock it became necessary to exert the full strength of her engines to check the velocity of her fall. By eight she had entered the atmosphere of Venus, and was dropping slowly towards a vast sea of sunlit cloud, out of which, on all sides, towered thousands of snow–clad peaks, rounded summits, and widespread stretches of upland above which the clouds swept and surged like the silent billows of some vast ocean in Ghostland.

“I thought so!” said Redgrave, when the propellers had begun to revolve and Murgatroyd had taken his place in the conning–tower. “A very dense atmosphere loaded with clouds. There’s the sun just rising, so your ladyship’s wishes are duly obeyed.”

“And doesn’t it seem nice and homelike to see him rising through an atmosphere above the clouds again? It doesn’t look a bit like the same sort of dear old sun just blazing like a red–hot moon among a lot of white hot stars and planets. Look, aren’t those peaks lovely, and that cloud–sea?—Why, for all the world we might be in a balloon above the Rockies or the Alps. And see,” she continued, pointing to one of the thermometers fixed outside the glass dome which covered the upper deck, “it’s only sixty–five even here. I wonder if we can breathe this air, and oh, I do wonder what we shall see on the other side of those clouds.”

“You shall have both questions answered in a few minutes,” replied Redgrave, going towards the conning–tower. “To begin with, I think we’ll land on that big snow–dome yonder, and do a little exploring. Where there are snow and clouds there is moisture, and where there is moisture a man ought to be able to breathe.”

The Astronef, still falling, but now easily under the command of the helmsman, shot forwards and downwards towards a vast dome of snow which, rising some two thousand feet above the cloud–sea, shone with dazzling brilliance in the light of the rising Sun. She landed just above the edge of the clouds. Meanwhile they had put on their breathing–suits, and Redgrave had seen that the air chamber through which they had to

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

pass from their own little world into the new ones that they visited was in working order. When the outer door was opened and the ladder lowered he stood aside, as he had done on the moon, and Zaidie's was the first human foot which made an imprint on the virgin snows of Venus.

The first thing Lenox did was to raise the visor of his helmet and taste the air of the new world. It was cool, and fresh, and sweet, and the first draught of it sent the blood tingling and dancing through his veins. Perfect as the arrangements of the Astronef were in this respect, the air of Venus tasted like clear running spring water would have done to a man who had been drinking filtered water for several days. He threw the visor right up and motioned to Zaidie to do the same. She obeyed, and, after drawing a long breath, she said:

"That's glorious! It's like wine after water, and rather stagnant water too. But what a world, snow-peaks and cloud-sea, islands of ice and snow in an ocean of mist! Just look at them! Did you ever see anything so lovely and unearthly in your life? I wonder how high this mountain is, and what there is on the other side of the clouds. Isn't the air delicious! Not a bit too cold after all—but, still, I think we may as well go back and put on something more becoming. I shouldn't quite like the ladies of Venus to see me dressed like a diver."

"Come along then," laughed Lenox, as he turned back towards the vessel. "That's just like a woman. You're about a hundred and fifty million miles away from Broadway or Regent Street. You are standing on the top of a snow mountain above the clouds of Venus, and the moment that you find the air is fit to breathe you begin thinking about dress. How do you know that the inhabitants of Venus, if there are any, dress at all?"

"What nonsense! Of course they do—at least, if they are anything like us."

As soon as they got back on board the Astronef and had taken their breathing-dresses off, Redgrave and the old engineer, who appeared to take no visible interest in their new surroundings, threw open all the sliding doors on the upper and lower decks so that the vessel might be thoroughly ventilated by the fresh sweet air. Then a gentle repulsion was applied to the huge snow mass on which the Astronef rested. She rose a couple of hundred feet, her propellers began to whirl round, and Redgrave steered her out towards the centre of the vast cloud-sea which was almost surrounded by a thousand glittering peaks of ice and domes of snow.

"I think we may as well put off dinner, or breakfast as it will be now, until we see what the world below is like," he said to Zaidie, who was standing beside him on the conning-tower.

"Oh, never mind about eating just now, this is altogether too wonderful to be missed for the sake of ordinary meat and drink. Let's go down and see what there is on the other side."

He sent a message down the speaking tube to Murgatroyd, who was below among his beloved engines, and the next moment sun and clouds and ice-peaks had disappeared, and nothing was visible save the all-enveloping silver-grey mist.

For several minutes they remained silent, watching and wondering what they would find beneath the veil which hid the surface of Venus from their view. Then the mist thinned out and broke up into patches which drifted past them as they descended on their downward slanting course.

Below them they saw vast, ghostly shapes of mountains and valleys, lakes and rivers, continents, islands, and seas. Every moment these became more and more distinct, and soon they were in full view of the most marvellous landscape that human eyes had ever beheld. The distances were tremendous. Mountains, compared with which the Alps or even the Andes would have seemed mere hillocks, towered up out of the vast depths beneath them.

Up to the lower edge of the all-covering cloud-sea they were clad with a golden-yellow vegetation, fields and forests, open, smiling valleys, and deep, dark ravines through which a thousand torrents thundered down from the eternal snows beyond, to spread themselves out in rivers and lakes in the valleys and plains which lay many thousands of feet below.

"What a lovely world!" said Zaidie, as she at last found her voice after what was almost a stupor of speechless wonder and admiration. "And the light! Did you ever see anything like it? It's neither moonlight nor sunlight. See, there are no shadows down there, it's just all lovely silvery twilight. Lenox, if Venus is as nice as she looks from here I don't think I shall want to go back. It reminds me of Tennyson's Lotus Eaters, 'The land where it is always afternoon.'"

"I think you are right after all. We are thirty million miles nearer to the sun than we were on the earth, and the light and heat have to filter through those clouds. They are not at all like earth-clouds from this side. It's the other way about. The silver lining is on this side. Look, there isn't a black or a brown one, or even a grey

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

one, within sight. They are just like a thin mist, lighted by millions of electric lamps. It's a delicious world, and if it isn't inhabited by angels it ought to be."

Chapter XIII

While they were talking, the Astronef was sweeping swiftly down towards the surface of Venus, through scenery of whose almost inconceivable magnificence no human words could convey any adequate idea. Underneath the cloud-veil the air was absolutely clear and transparent; clearer, indeed, than terrestrial air at the highest elevations, and, moreover, it seemed to be endowed with a strange luminous quality, which made objects, no matter how distant, stand out with almost startling distinctness.

The rivers and lakes and seas which spread out beneath them, seemed never to have been ruffled by the blast of a storm or breath of wind, and their surfaces shone with a soft silvery light, which seemed to come from below rather than from above.

"If this isn't heaven it must be the half-way house," said Redgrave, with what was, perhaps, under the circumstances, a pardonable irreverence. "Still, after all, we don't know what the inhabitants may be like, so I think we'd better close the doors, and drop on the top of that mountain spur running out between the two rivers into the bay. Do you notice how curious the water looks after the earth-seas; bright silver, instead of blue and green?"

"Oh, it's just lovely," said Zaidie. "Let's go down and have a walk. There's nothing to be afraid of. You'll never make me believe that a world like this can be inhabited by anything dangerous.

"Perhaps, but we mustn't forget what happened on Mars, Madonna Mia. still, there's one thing, we haven't been tackled by any aerial fleets yet."

"I don't think the people here want air-ships. They can fly themselves. Look! there are a lot of them coming to meet us. That was a rather wicked remark of yours about the half-way house to Heaven; but those certainly look something like angels."

As Zaidie said this, after a somewhat lengthy pause, during which the Astronef had descended to within a few hundred feet of the mountain-spur, she handed a pair of field-glasses to her husband, and pointed downward towards an island which lay a couple of miles or so off the end of the spur.

Redgrave put the glasses to his eyes, and took a long look through them. Moving them slowly up and down, and from side to side, he saw hundreds of winged figures rising from the island and soaring towards them.

"You were right, dear," he said, without taking the glass from his eyes, "and so was I. If those aren't angels, they're certainly something like men, and, I suppose, women too who can fly. We may as well stop here and wait for them. I wonder what sort of an animal they take the Astronef for."

He sent a message down the tube to Murgatroyd, and gave a turn and a half to the steering wheel. The propellers slowed down and the Astronef dropped with a hardly perceptible shock in the midst of a little plateau covered with a thick, soft moss of a pale yellowish green, and fringed by a belt of trees which seemed to be over three hundred feet high, and whose foliage was a deep golden bronze.

They had scarcely landed before the flying figures reappeared over the tree-tops and swept downwards in long spiral curves towards the Astronef.

"If they're not angels, they're very like them," said Zaidie, putting down her glasses.

"There's one thing," replied her husband; "they fly a lot better than the old masters' angels or Dore's could have done, because they have tails—or at least something that seems to serve the same purpose, and yet they haven't got feathers."

"Yes, they have, at least round the edges of their wings or whatever they are, and they've got clothes, too, silk tunics or something of that sort—and there are men and women."

"You're quite right. Those fringes down their legs are feathers, and that's how they fly. They seem to have four arms."

The flying figures which came hovering near to the Astronef, without evincing any apparent sign of fear, were certainly the strangest that human eyes had looked upon. In some respects they had a sufficient

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

resemblance to human form for them to be taken for winged men and women, while in another they bore a decided resemblance to birds. Their bodies and limbs were almost human in shape, but of slenderer and lighter build; and from the shoulder-blades and muscles of the back there sprang a pair of wings arching up above their heads. Between these and the lower arms, and continued from them down the sides to the ankles, there appeared to be a flexible membrane covered with a light feathery down, pure white on the inside, but on the back a brilliant golden yellow, deepening to bronze towards the edges, round which ran a deep feathery fringe.

The body was covered in front and down the back between the wings with a sort of divided tunic of a light, silken-looking material, which must have been clothing, since there were many different colours all more or less of different hue among them. Below this and attached to the inner sides of the leg from the knee downward, was another membrane which reached down to the heels, and it was this which Redgrave somewhat flippantly alluded to as a tail. Its obvious purpose was to maintain the longitudinal balance when flying.

In stature these inhabitants of the Love-Star varied from about five feet six to five feet, but both the taller and the shorter of them were all of nearly the same size, from which it was easy to conclude that this difference in stature was on Venus, as well as on the Earth, one of the broad distinctions between the sexes.

They flew once or twice completely round the Astronef with an exquisite ease and grace which made Zaidie exclaim:

“Now, why weren't we made like that on Earth!”

To which Redgrave, after a look at the barometer, replied:

“Partly, I suppose, because we weren't built that way, and partly because we don't live in an atmosphere about two and a half times as dense as ours.”

Then several of the winged figures alighted on the mossy covering of the plain and walked towards the vessel.

“Why, they walk just like us, only much more prettily!” said Zaidie. “And look what funny little faces they've got! Half bird, half human, and soft, downy feathers instead of hair. I wonder whether they talk or sing. I wish you'd open the doors again, Lenox. I'm sure they can't possibly mean us any harm; they are far too pretty for that. What lovely soft eyes they have, and what a thousand pities it is we shan't be able to understand them.”

They had left the conning-tower and both his lordship and Murgatroyd were throwing open the sliding doors and, to Zaidie's considerable displeasure, getting the deck Maxims ready for action in case they should be required. As soon as the doors were open Zaidie's judgement of the inhabitants of Venus was entirely justified.

Without the slightest sign of fear, but with very evident astonishment in their round golden-yellow eyes, they came walking close up to the sides of the Astronef. Some of them stroked her smooth, shining sides with their little hands, which Zaidie now found had only three fingers and a thumb. Many ages before they might have been bird's claws, but now they were soft and pink and plump, utterly strange to work as manual work is understood upon Earth.

“Just fancy getting Maxim guns ready to shoot those delightful things,” said Zaidie, almost indignantly, as she went towards the doorway from which the gangway ladder ran down to the soft, mossy turf. “Why, not one of them has got a weapon of any sort; and just listen,” she went on, stopping in the opening of the doorway, “have you ever heard music like that on earth? I haven't. I suppose it's the way they talk. I'd give a good deal to be able to understand them. But still, it's very lovely, isn't it?”

“Ay, like the voices of syrens,” said Murgatroyd, speaking for the first time since the Astronef had landed; for this big, grizzled, taciturn Yorkshireman, who looked upon the whole cruise through Space as a mad and almost impious adventure, which nothing but his hereditary loyalty to his master's name and family could have persuaded him to share in, had grown more and more silent as the millions of miles between the Astronef and his native Yorkshire village had multiplied day by day.

“Syrens—and why not, Andrew?” laughed Redgrave. “At any rate, I don't think they look likely to lure us and the Astronef to destruction.” Then he went on. “Yes, Zaidie, I never heard anything like that before. Unearthly, of course it is; but then we're not on Earth. Now, Zaidie, they seem to talk in song-language. You

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

did pretty well on Mars with your sign-language, suppose we go out and show them that you can speak the song-language, too.”

“What do you mean?” she said; “sing them something?”

“Yes,” he replied, “they’ll try to talk to you in song, and you won’t be able to understand them; at least, not as far as words and sentences go. But music is the universal language on Earth, and there’s no reason why it shouldn’t be the same through the solar system. Come along, tune up, little woman!”

They went together down the gangway stairs, he dressed in an ordinary suit of grey English tweed, with a golf cap on the back of his head, and she in the last and daintiest of costumes which the art of Paris and London and New York had produced before the Astronef soared up from far-off Washington.

The moment that she set foot on the golden-yellow sward she was surrounded by a swarm of the winged, and yet strangely human creatures. Those nearest to her came and touched her hands and face, and stroked the folds of her dress. Others looked into her violet-blue eyes, and others put out their queer little hands and stroked her hair.

This and her clothing seemed to be the most wonderful experience for them, saving always the fact that she had two arms and no wings. Redgrave kept close beside her until he was satisfied that these exquisite inhabitants of the new-found fairyland were innocent of any intention of harm, and when he saw two of the winged daughters of the Love-Star put up their hands and touch the thick coils of her hair, he said:

“Take those pins and things out and let it down. They seem to think that your hair’s part of your head. It’s the first chance you’ve had to work a miracle, so you may as well do it. Show them the most beautiful thing they’ve ever seen.”

“What babies you men can be when you get sentimental!” laughed Zaidie, as she put her hands up to her head. “How do you know that this may not be ugly in their eyes?”

“Quite impossible!” He replied. “They’re a great deal too pretty themselves to think you ugly. Let it down!”

While he was speaking Zaidie had taken off a Spanish mantilla which she had thrown over her head as she came out, and which the ladies of Venus seemed to think was part of her hair. Then she took out the comb and one or two hairpins which kept the coils in position, deftly caught the ends, and then, after a few rapid movements of her fingers, she shook her head, and the wondering crowd about her saw, what seemed to them a shimmering veil, half gold, half silver, in the strange, reflected light from the cloud-veil, fall down from her head over her shoulders.

They crowded still more closely round her, but so quietly and so gently that she felt nothing more than the touch of wondering hands on her arms, and dress, and hair. As Redgrave said afterwards, he was “absolutely out of it.” They seemed to imagine him to be a kind of uncouth monster, possibly the slave of this radiant being which had come so strangely from somewhere beyond the cloud-veil. They looked at him with their golden-yellow eyes wide open, and some of them came up rather timidly and touched his clothes, which they seemed to think were his skin.

Then one or two, more daring, put their little hands up to his face and touched his moustache, and all of them, while both examinations were going on, kept up a running conversation of cooing and singing which evidently conveyed their ideas from one to the other on the subject of this most marvellous visit of these two strange beings with neither wings nor feathers, but who, most undoubtedly, had other means of flying, since it was quite certain that they had come from another world.

Their ordinary speech was a low crooning note, like the language in which doves converse, mingled with a twittering current of undertone. But every moment it rose into higher notes, evidently expressing wonder or admiration, or both.

“You were right about the universal language,” said Redgrave, when he had submitted to the stroking process for a few moments. “These people talk in music, and, as far as I can see or hear, their opinion of us, or, at least, of you, is distinctly flattering. I don’t know what they take me for, and I don’t care, but, as we’d better make friends with them, suppose you sing them ‘Home, Sweet Home,’ or ‘The Swanee River.’ I shouldn’t wonder if they consider our talking voices most horrible discords, so you might as well give them something different.”

While he was speaking the sounds about them suddenly hushed, and, as Redgrave said afterwards, it was

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

something like the silence that follows a cannon shot. Then, in the midst of the hush, Zaidie put her hands behind her, looked up towards the luminous silver surface which formed the only visible sky of Venus, and began to sing "The Swanee River."

The clear, sweet notes rang up through the midst of a sudden silence. The sons and daughters of the Love-Star instantly ceased their own soft musical conversation, and Zaidie sang the old plantation song through for the first time that a human voice had sung it to ears other than human.

As the last note thrilled sweetly from her lips she looked round at the crowd of queer half-human figures about her, and something in their unlikeness to her own kind brought back to her mind the familiar scenes which lay so far away, so many millions of miles across the dark and silent Ocean of Space.

Other winged figures, attracted by the sound of her singing, had crossed the trees, and these, during the silence which came after the singing of the song, were swiftly followed by others, until there were nearly a thousand of them gathered about the side of the Astronef.

There was no crowding or jostling among them. Each one treated every other with the most perfect gentleness and courtesy. No such thing as enmity or ill-feeling seemed to exist among them, and, in perfect silence, they waited for Zaidie to continue what they thought was her long speech of greeting. The temper of the throng somehow coincided exactly with the mood which her own memories had brought to her, and the next moment she sent the first line of "Home Sweet Home" soaring up to the cloud-veiled sky.

As the notes rang up into the still, soft air a deeper hush fell on the listening throng. Heads were bowed with a gesture almost of adoration, and many of those standing nearest to her bent their bodies forward, and expanded their wings, bringing them together over their breasts with a motion which, as they afterwards learnt, was intended to convey the idea of wonder and admiration, mingled with something like a sentiment of worship.

Zaidie sang the sweet old song through from end to end, forgetting for the time being everything but the home she had left behind her on the banks of the Hudson. As the last notes left her lips, she turned round to Redgrave and looked at him with eyes dim with the first tears that had filled them since her father's death, and said, as he caught hold of her outstretched hand:

"I believe they've understood every word of it."

"Or, at any rate, every note. You may be quite certain of that," he replied. "If you had done that on Mars it might have been even more effective than the Maxims."

"For goodness sake don't talk about things like that in a heaven like this! Oh, listen! They've got the tune already!"

It was true! The dwellers of the Love-Star, whose speech was song, had instantly recognised the sweetness of the sweetest of all earthly songs. They had, of course, no idea of the meaning of the words; but the music spoke to them and told them that this fair visitant from another world could speak the same speech as theirs. Every note and cadence was repeated with absolute fidelity, and so the speech, common to the two far-distant worlds, became a link connecting this wandering son and daughter of the Earth with the sons and daughters of the Love-Star.

The throng fell back a little and two figures; apparently male and female, came to Zaidie and held out their right hands and began addressing her in perfectly harmonised song, which, though utterly unintelligible to her in the sense of speech, expressed sentiments which could not possibly be mistaken, as there was a faint suggestion of the old English song running through the little song-speech that they made, and both Zaidie and her husband rightly concluded that it was intended to convey a welcome to the strangers from beyond the cloud-veil.

And then the strangest of all possible conversations began. Redgrave, who had no more notion of music than a walrus, perforce kept silence. In fact, he noticed with a certain displeasure which vanished speedily with a musical and half-malicious little laugh from Zaidie, that when he spoke the Bird-Folk drew back a little and looked in something like astonishment at him; but Zaidie was already in touch with them, and half by song and half by signs she very soon gave them an idea of what they were and where they had come from. Her husband afterwards told her that it was the best piece of operatic acting he had ever seen, and, considering all the circumstances, this was very possibly true.

In the end the two, who had come to give her what seemed to be the formal greeting, were invited into the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Astronef. They went on board without the slightest sign of mistrust, and with only an expression of mild wonder on their beautiful and strangely childlike faces.

Then, while the other doors were being closed, Zaidie stood at the open one above the gangway and made signs showing that they were going up beyond the clouds and then down into the valley, and as she made the signs she sang through the scale, her voice rising and falling in harmony with her gestures. The Bird-Folk understood her instantly, and as the door closed and the Astronef rose from the ground, a thousand wings were outspread and presently hundreds of beautiful soaring forms were circling about the Navigator of the Stars.

“Don't they look lovely!” said Zaidie. “I wonder what they would think if they could see us flying above New York or London or Paris with an escort like this. I suppose they're going to show us the way. Perhaps they have a city down there. Suppose you were to go and get a bottle of champagne and see if Master Cupid and Miss Venus would like a drink. We'll see then if our nectar is anything like theirs.”

Redgrave went below. Meanwhile, for lack of other possible conversation, Zaidie began to sing the last verse of “Never Again.” The melody almost exactly described the upward motion of the Astronef, and she could see that it was instantly understood, for when she had finished, their two voices joined in an almost exact imitation of it.

When Redgrave brought up the wine and the glasses they looked at them without any sign of surprise. The pop of the cork did not even make them look round.

“Evidently a semi-angelic people, living on nectar and ambrosia, with nectar very like our own,” he said, as he filled the glasses. “Perhaps you'd better give it to them. They seem to understand you better than they do me—you being, of course, a good bit nearer to the angels than I am.”

“Thanks!” she said, as she took a couple of glasses up, wondering a little what their visitors would do with them. Somewhat to her surprise, they took them with a little bow and a smile and sipped at the wine, first with a swift glint of wonder in their eyes, and then with smiles which are unmistakable evidence of perfect appreciation.

“I thought so,” said Redgrave, as he raised his own glass, and bowed gravely towards them. “This is our nearest approach to nectar, and they seem to recognise it.”

“And don't they just look like the sort of people who live on it, and, of course, other things?” Added Zaidie, as she too lifted her glass, and looked with laughing eyes across the brim at her two guests.

But meanwhile Murgatroyd had been applying the repulsive force a little too strongly. The Astronef shot up with a rapidity which soon left her winged escort far below. She entered the cloud-veil and passed beyond it. The instant that the unclouded sun-rays struck the glass-roofing of the upper deck, their two guests, who had been moving about examining everything with a childlike curiosity, closed their eyes and clasped their hands over them, uttering little cries, tuneful and musical, but still with a note of strange discord in them.

“Lenox, we must go down again,” exclaimed Zaidie. “Don't you see they can't stand the light; it hurts them. Perhaps, poor dears, it's the first time they've ever been hurt in their lives. I don't believe they have any of our ideas of pain or sorrow or anything of that sort. Take us back under the clouds—quick, or we may blind them.”

Before she had finished speaking, Redgrave had sent a signal down to Murgatroyd, and the Astronef began to drop back again towards the surface of the cloud-sea. Zaidie had, meanwhile, gone to her lady guest and dropped the black lace mantilla over her head, and, as she did so, she caught herself saying:

“There, dear, we shall soon be back in your own light. I hope it hasn't hurt you. It was very stupid of us to do a thing like that.”

The answer came in a little cooing murmur, which said, “Thank you!” quite as effectively as any earthly words could have done, and then the Astronef dropped through the cloud-sea. The soaring forms of her lost escort came into view again and clustered about her; and, surrounded by them, she dropped, in obedience to their signs, down between the tremendous mountains and towards the island, thick with golden foliage, which lay two or three earth-miles out in a bay, where four converging rivers spread out into the sea.

As Lady Redgrave said afterwards to Mrs. Van Stuyler, she could have filled a whole volume with a description of the purely Arcadian delights with which the hours of the next ten days and nights were filled. Possibly if she had been able to do justice to them, even her account might have been received with qualified credence; but still some idea of them may be gathered from this extract of a conversation which took place in

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

the saloon of the Astronef on the eleventh evening.

“But look here, Zaidie,” said his lordship, “as we've found a world which is certainly much more delightful than our own, why shouldn't we stop here a bit? The air suits us and the people are simply enchanting. I think they like us, and I'm sure you're in love with every one of them, male and female. Of course, it's rather a pity that we can't fly unless we do it in the Astronef. But that's only a detail. You're enjoying yourself thoroughly, and I never saw you looking better or, if possible, more beautiful; and why on earth—or Venus—do you want to go?”

She looked at him steadily for a few moments, and with an expression which he had never seen on her face or in her eyes before, and then she said slowly and very sweetly, although there was something like a note of solemnity running through her tone:

“I altogether agree with you, dear; but there is something which you don't seem to have noticed. As you say, we have had a perfectly delightful time. It's a delicious world, and just everything that one would think it to be; but if we were to stop here we should be committing one of the greatest crimes, perhaps the greatest, that ever was committed within the limits of the Solar System.”

“My dear Zaidie, what in the name of what we used to call morals on the earth, do you mean?”

“Just this,” she replied, leaning a little towards him in her deck-chair. “These people, half angels, and half men and women, welcomed us after we dropped through their cloud-veil, as friends; we were a little strange to them, certainly, but still they welcomed us as friends. They had no suspicions of us; they didn't try to poison us or blow us up as those wretches on Mars did. They're just like a lot of grown-up children with wings on. In fact they're about as nearly angels as anything we can think of. They've taken us into their palaces, they've given us, as one might say, the whole planet. Everything was ours that we liked to take. You know we have two or three hundredweight of precious stones on board now, which they would make me take just because they saw my rings.

“We've been living with them ten days now, and neither you nor I, nor even Murgatroyd, who, like the old Puritan that he is, seems to see sin or wrong in everything that looks nice, has seen a single sign among them that they know anything about what we call sin or wrong on Earth. There's no jealousy, no selfishness. In short, no envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness; no vice, or meanness, or cheating, or any of the abominations of the planet Terra, and we come from that planet. Do you see what I mean now?”

“I think I understand what you're driving at,” said Redgrave. “You mean, I suppose, that this world is something like Eden before the fall, and that you and I—oh—but that's all rubbish you know. I've got my own share of original sin, of course, but here it doesn't seem to come in; and as for you, the very idea of you imagining yourself a feminine edition of the Serpent in Eden. Nonsense!”

She got up out of her chair and, leaning over his, put her arm round his shoulder. Then she said very softly:

“I see you understand what I mean, Lenox. That's just it—original sin. It doesn't matter how good you think me or I think you, but we have it. You're an Earth-born man and I'm an earth-born woman, and, as I'm your wife, I can say it plainly. We may think a good bit of each other, but that's no reason why we shouldn't be a couple of plague-spots in a sinless world like this. Surely you see what I mean, I needn't put it plainer, need I?”

Their eyes met, and he read her meaning in hers. He put his arm up over her shoulder and drew her down towards him. Their lips met, and then he got up and went down to the engine-room.

A couple of minutes later the Astronef sprang upwards from the midst of the delightful valley in which she was resting. No lights were shown. In five minutes she had passed through the cloud-veil, and the next morning when their new friends came to visit them and found that they had vanished back into Space, there was sorrow for the first time among the sons and daughters of the Love-Star.

Chapter XIV

“FIVE HUNDRED MILLION miles from the earth and forty–seven million miles from Jupiter,” said his lordship, as he came into breakfast on the morning of the twenty–eighth day after leaving Venus.

During this brief period the Astronef had recrossed the orbits of the Earth and Mars and passed through that marvellous region of the Solar System, the Belt of the Asteroides. Nearly a hundred million miles of their journey had lain through this zone in which hundreds and possibly thousands of tiny planets revolve in vast orbits round the Sun.

Then had come a worldless void of over three hundred million miles, through which the Astronef voyaged alone, surrounded by the ever–constant splendours of the Heavens, but visited only now and then by one of those Spectres of Space, which we call comets.

Astern, the disc of the Sun steadily diminished, and ahead the grey–blue shape of Jupiter, the Giant of the Solar System, had grown larger and larger until now they could see it as it had never been seen before—a gigantic three–quarter moon filling up the whole Heavens in front of them almost from Zenith to Nadir. Three of its four satellites, Europa, Ganymede, and Calisto were distinctly visible to the naked eye, and Europa and Ganymede, happened to be in such a position with regard to the Astronef that her crew could see not only the bright sides turned towards the sun, but also the black shadow–spots which they cast on the cloud–veiled face of the huge planet. Calisto was above the horizon hanging like a tiny flicker of yellowish–red light above the rounded edge of Jupiter, and Io was invisible behind the planet.

“Five hundred million miles!” said Zaidie, with a little shiver, “that seems an awful long way from home—I mean America—doesn't it? I often wonder what they are thinking about us on the dear old Earth. I don't suppose anyone ever expects to see us again. However, it's no good getting homesick in the middle of a journey when you're outward bound. And now what is the program as regards His Majesty King Jove? We shall visit the satellites of course?”

“Certainly,” replied Redgrave; “in fact, I shouldn't be surprised if our visit was confined to them.”

“What! Do you mean to say we shan't land on Jupiter after coming nearly six hundred million miles to see him? That would be disappointing. But why not? don't you think he's ready to be visited yet?”

“I can't say that, but you must remember that no one has the remotest notion of what there is behind the clouds or whatever they are which form those bands. All we really know about Jupiter is his enormous size, for instance, he's over twelve hundred times bigger than the Earth and that his density isn't much greater than that of water—and my humble opinion is that if we're able to go through the clouds without getting the Astronef red–hot we shall find that Jupiter is in the same state as the Earth was a good many million years ago.”

“I see,” said Zaidie, “you mean just a mass of blazing, boiling rock and metal which will make islands and continents some day; and that what we call the cloud bands are the vapours which will one day make its seas. Well, if we can get through these clouds we ought to see something worth seeing. Just fancy a whole world as big as that all ablaze like molten iron! Do you think we shall be able to see it, Lenox?”

“I'm not so sure about that, little woman. We shall have to go to work rather cautiously. You see Jupiter is far bigger than any world we've visited yet, and if we get too close to him the Astronef's engines might not be powerful enough to drive us away again. Then we should either stop there till the R. Force was exhausted or be drawn towards him and perhaps drop into an ocean of molten rock and metal.”

“Thanks!” said Zaidie, with a shrug of her shapely shoulders. “That would be an ignominious end to a journey like this, to say nothing of the boiling oil part of it; so I suppose you'll make stopping–places of the satellites and use their attraction to help you resist His Majesty's.”

“Your Ladyship's reasoning is perfect. I propose to visit them in turn, beginning with Calisto. I shouldn't be at all surprised if we found something interesting on them. You know they're quite little worlds of themselves. They're all bigger than our moon, except Europa. Ganymede, in fact, is two–thirds bigger than

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Mercury, and if old Jupiter is still in a state of fiery incandescence there's no reason why we shouldn't find on Ganymede or one of the others the same state of things that existed on our moon when the Earth was blazing hot."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Zaidie; "I've often heard my father say that that was probably what happened. It's all very marvellous, isn't it? death in one place, life in another, all beginnings and endings, and yet no actual beginning or end of anything anywhere. That's eternity, I suppose."

"It's just about as near as the finite intellect can get to it, I should say," replied Redgrave. "But I don't think metaphysics are much in our line. If you've finished we may as well go and have a look at the realities."

"Which the metaphysicians," laughed Zaidie as she rose, "would tell you are not realities at all, or only realities so far as you can think about them. 'Thinks,' in short, instead of real things. But meanwhile I've got the breakfast things to put away, so you can go up on deck and put the telescopes in order."

When she joined him a few minutes later in the deck-chamber the three-quarter disc of Jupiter was rapidly approaching the full.

Its phases are invisible from the Earth owing to the enormous distance; but from the deck of the Astronef they had been plainly visible for some days, and, since the huge planet turns on its axis in less than ten hours, or with more than twice the speed of the Earth's rotation, the phases followed each other very rapidly.

Thus at twelve o'clock noon by Astronef time they might have seen a gigantic rim of silver-blue over-arching the whole vault of heaven in front of them. By five o'clock it would be a hemisphere, and by five minutes to ten the vast sphere would be once more shining full-orbed upon them. By eight o'clock next morning they would find Jupiter "new" again.

They were now falling very rapidly towards the huge planet, and, since there is no up or down in Space, the nearer they got to it the more it appeared to sink below them and become, as it were, the floor of the Celestial Sphere. As the crescent approached the full they were able to examine the mysterious bands as human observers had never examined them before. For hours they sat almost silent at their telescopes, trying to probe the mystery which has baffled human science since the days of Galileo, and gradually it became plain that Redgrave was correct in the hypothesis which he had derived from Flammarion and one or two others of the more advanced astronomers.

"I believe I was right, or, in other words, those that I got the idea from are," he said, as they approached the orbit of Calisto, which revolves at a distance of about eleven hundred thousand miles from the surface of Jupiter.

"Those belts are made of clouds or vapour in some stage or other. The highest—the ones along the Equator and what we should call the Temperate Zones—are the highest, and therefore coolest and whitest. The dark ones are the lowest and hottest. I daresay they are more like what we should call volcanic clouds. Do you see how they keep changing? That's what's bothered our astronomers. Look at that big one yonder a bit to the north, going from brown to red. I suppose that's something like the famous red spot which they have been puzzling about. What do you make of it?"

"Well," said Zaidie, looking up from her telescope, "it's quite certain that the glare must come from underneath. It can't be sunlight, because the poor old Sun doesn't seem to have strength enough to make a decent sunset or sunrise here, and look how it's running along to the westward! What does that mean, do you think?"

"I should say it means that some half-formed Jovian Continent has been flung sky high by a big burst-up underneath, and that's the blaze of the incandescent stuff running along. Just fancy a continent, say ten times the size of Asia, being split up and sent flying in a few moments like that! Look! there's another one to the north! On the whole, dear, I don't think we should find the climate on the other side of those clouds very salubrious. Still, as they say the atmosphere of Jupiter is about ten thousand miles thick, we may be able to get near enough to see something of what's going on.

"Meanwhile, here comes Calisto. Look at his shadow flying across the clouds. And there's Ganymede coming up after him, and Europa behind him. Talk about eclipses! they must be about as common here as thunderstorms are with us."

"We don't have a thunderstorm every day—at least not at home," corrected Zaidie, "but on Jupiter they must have two or three eclipses every day. Meanwhile, there goes Jupiter himself. What a difference distance

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

makes! This little thing is only a trifle larger than our Moon, and it's hiding everything else.”

As she was speaking the full-orbed disc of Calisto, measuring nearly three thousand miles across, swept between them and the planet. It shone with a clear, somewhat reddish light like that of Mars. The Astronef was feeling his attraction strongly, and Redgrave went to the levers and turned on about a fifth of the R. Force to avoid too sudden contact with it.

“Another dead world!” said Redgrave, as the surface of Calisto revolved swiftly beneath them, “or at any rate a dying one. There must be an atmosphere of some sort, or else that snow and ice wouldn't be there, and everything would be either black or white as it was on the Moon. We may as well land, however, and get a specimen of the rocks and soil to add to the museum, though I don't expect there will be very much to see in the way of life.”

In another hour or so the Astronef had dropped gently on to the surface of Calisto at the foot of a range of mountains crowded with jagged and splintery peaks, and a mile or two from the edge of a sea of snow and ice which stretched away in a vast expanse of rugged frozen billows beyond the horizon. Redgrave, as usual, went into the air-chamber and tried the atmosphere. A second's experience of it was enough for him. It was unbreathably thin and unbearably cold, although, when mixed with the air of the Astronef, it distinctly freshened it up. This proved that its composition was, or had been, fit for human respiration.

“There's only one fault about it,” he said, when he rejoined Zaidie in the sitting-room. “You know what the schoolboy said when he started kissing his first sweetheart, 'It takes too long to get enough of it.'”

“You seem to be very fond of referring to that particular subject, Lenox.”

“Well, yes; to tell you the truth I am,” and then he referred to it again in another form.

After this they went and put on their breathing-dresses and went for a welcome stroll along the arid shores of the frozen sea after their lengthy confinement to the decks of the Astronef. The Sun was still powerful enough to keep them comfortably warm in their dresses, and there was enough atmosphere to make this warmth diffused instead of direct. So they were able to step out briskly, and every now and then open their visors a little and take in a breath or two of the thin, sharp air, which they found quite exhilarating when mixed with the air supplied by their own oxygen apparatus.

The attraction of the satellite being only a little more than that of the Moon—or, say, about a fifth of that of the Earth—they were able to get along with a series of hops, skips, and jumps which might have looked rather ridiculous to terrestrial eyes, but which they found a very pleasant mode of locomotion. They were also able to climb the steepest mountainsides with no more trouble than they would have had in walking along a terrestrial plain.

On the heights they found no sign either of animal or vegetable life—only rocks and gravel and sand of a brownish red, apparently uniform in composition. They took a few lumps of rock and a canvas bag full of sand back with them from the mountain-side. In the valley sloping towards the ice sea they found what had once been watercourses opening out into rivers towards the sea; and in the lowest parts there was a kind of lichen-growth clinging to the rocks under the snow. On the surface of the snow they saw traces of what might have been the tracks of animals, but, as there was no breath of wind in the attenuated atmosphere, it was quite possible that these might have been frozen into permanent shape hundreds or thousands of years before. It was also possible that if they had explored long enough they might have found some low forms of animal life, but as they had landed almost on the equator of the satellite, under the full rays of the Sun, and seen nothing, this was hardly likely.

“I don't think it is worth while stopping here any longer,” said Zaidie, who was getting a little bit blasé with her interplanetary experiences. “We've got lots to see further on, so if you don't mind I think I'll just take two or three photographs, then we can get back to the ship and have dinner and go on and see what Ganymede is like. He's bigger than Mercury, and nearly as big as Mars, so we ought to find something interesting there. This is only a sort of combination of the Moon and the polar regions and I don't think very much of it. Suppose we go back.”

“Just as your Ladyship pleases,” laughed Redgrave over the wire which connected their helmets, as, with joined hands, they turned back and danced along the snow-covered ocean shore towards the Astronef.

Zaidie took a couple of photographs of the mountain range and the ice-sea and another one of the general landscape of Calisto as they rose from the surface. Then, while she went to get lunch ready, Redgrave took the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

pieces of rock and the bag of dust into the laboratory which opened out of the main engine-room and analysed them. When he came out about an hour later he saw Murgatroyd going through his beloved engines with an oil-can and a piece of common cotton-waste which had come from a far away Yorkshire mill.

"Andrew," he said, "should you be surprised if I told you that that moon we've just left seems to be mostly made of a spongy sort of alloy of gold and silver?"

"My lord," said the old engineer, straightening himself up and looking at him with eyes in which this announcement had not seemed to kindle a spark of interest, "after what I have seen so far there's nothing that'll surprise me unless it be that the grace of God allows us to get back safely."

"Amen, Andrew, that's well said," replied Redgrave, and then he went back to the saloon and Murgatroyd went on with his oiling.

When he told her ladyship of his discovery she just looked up from the table she was laying and said:

"Oh, indeed! Well, I'm very glad that it's five or six hundred million miles from the Earth. A dead world bigger than the Moon, and made of gold and silver sponge, wouldn't be a nice thing to have too near the Earth. There's trouble enough about that sort of thing at home as it is. Still, it'll be a nice addition to the museum, and if you'll put it away and go and wash your hands lunch will be ready."

When they got back to the deck-chamber Calisto was already a half moon in the upper sky nearly five hundred thousand miles away, and the full orb of Ganymede, shining with a pale golden light, lay outspread beneath them. A thin, bluish-grey arc of the giant planet overarched its western edge.

"I think we shall find something like a world here," said her ladyship, when she had taken her first look through her telescope; "there's an atmosphere and what look like thin clouds. Continents and oceans too, or something like them, and what is that light shining up between the breaks? Isn't it something like our Aurora?"

"It might be," replied Redgrave, turning his own telescope towards the northern pole of Ganymede, "though I never heard of a satellite having an aurora. Perhaps it's the Sun shining on the ice."

As the Astronef fell towards the surface of Ganymede she crossed his northern pole, and the nearer they got the plainer it became that a light very like the terrestrial Aurora was playing about it, illuminating the thin, yellow clouds with a bluish-violet light, which made magnificent contrasts of colouring amongst them.

"Let us go down there and see what it's like," said Zaidie. "There must be something nice under all those lovely colours."

Redgrave checked the R. Force and the Astronef fell obliquely across the pole towards the equator. As they approached the luminous clouds Redgrave turned it on again, and they sank slowly through a glowing mist of innumerable colours, until the surface of Ganymede came into plain view about ten miles below them.

What they saw then was the strangest sight they had beheld since they had left the Earth. As far as their eyes could reach the surface of the Ganymede was covered with vast orderly patches, mostly rectangular, of what they at first took for ice, but which they soon found to be a something that was self-illuminating.

"Glorified hot-houses, as I'm alive," exclaimed Redgrave. "Whole cities under glass, fields, too, and lit by electricity or something very like it. Zaidie, we shall find human beings down there."

"Well, if we do I hope they won't be like the half-human things we found on Mars! But isn't it all just lovely! Only there doesn't seem to be anything outside the cities, at least nothing but bare, flat ground with a few rugged mountains here and there. See, there's a nice level plain near the big glass city, or whatever it is. Suppose we go down there."

Redgrave checked the after-engine which was driving them obliquely over the surface of the satellite, and the Astronef fell vertically towards a bare flat plain of what looked like deep yellow sand, which spread for miles alongside one of the glittering cities of glass.

"Oh, look, they've seen us!" exclaimed Zaidie. "I do hope they're going to be as friendly as those dear people on Venus were."

"I hope so," replied Redgrave, "but if they're not we've got the guns ready."

As he said this about twenty streams of an intense bluish light suddenly shot up all round them, concentrating themselves upon the hull of the Astronef, which was now about a mile and a half from the surface. The light was so intense that the rays of the Sun were lost in it. They looked at each other, and found that their faces were almost perfectly white in it. The plain and the city below had vanished.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

To look downwards was like staring straight into the focus of a ten thousand candlepower electric arc lamp. It was so intolerable that Redgrave closed the lower shutters, and meanwhile he found that the Astronef had ceased to descend. He shut off more of the R. force, but it produced no effect. The Astronef remained stationary. Then he ordered Murgatroyd to set the propellers in motion. The engineer pulled the starting levers, and then came up out of the engine-room and said to him:

“It's no good my lord; I don't know what devil's world we've got into now, but they won't work. If I thought that engines could be bewitched—”

“Oh, nonsense, Andrew!” said his lordship rather testily. “It's perfectly simple; those people down there, whoever they are, have got some way of demagnetising us, or else they've got the R. Force too, and they're applying it against us to stop us going down. Apparently they don't want us. No, that's just to show us that they can stop us if they want to. The light's going down. Begin dropping a bit. Don't start the propellers, but just go and see that the guns are all right in case of accidents.”

The old engineer nodded and went back to his engines, looking considerably scared. As he spoke the brilliancy of the light faded rapidly and the Astronef began to sink slowly towards the surface.

As a precaution against their being allowed to drop with force enough to cause a disaster, Redgrave turned the R. Force on again and they dropped slowly towards the plain, through what seemed like a halo of perfectly white light. When she was within a couple of hundred yards of the ground a winged car of exquisitely graceful shape rose from the roof of one of the huge glass buildings nearest to them, flew swiftly towards them, and after circling once round the dome of the upper deck, ran close alongside.

The car was occupied by two figures of distinctly human form but rather more than human stature. Both were dressed in long, close-fitting garments of what seemed like a golden brown fleece. Their heads were covered with a close hood and their hands with thin, close-fitting gloves.

“What an exceedingly handsome man!” said Zaidie, as one of them stood up. “I never saw such a noble-looking face in my life; it's half philosopher, half saint. Of course, you won't be jealous.”

“Oh, nonsense!” He laughed. “It would be quite impossible to imagine you in love with either. But he is handsome, and evidently friendly—there's no mistaking that. Answer him, Zaidie; you can do it better than I can.”

The car had now come close alongside. The standing figure stretched its hands out, palms upward, smiled a smile which Zaidie thought was very sweetly solemn, next the head was bowed, and the gloved hands brought back and crossed over his breast. Zaidie imitated the movements exactly. Then, as the figure raised its head, she raised hers, and she found herself looking into a pair of large luminous eyes, such as she could have imagined under the brows of an angel. As they met hers, a look of unmistakable wonder and admiration came into them. Redgrave was standing just behind her; she took him by the hand and drew him beside her, saying with a little laugh:

“Now, please look as pleasant as you can; I am sure they are very friendly. A man with a face like that couldn't mean any harm.”

The figure repeated the motions to Redgrave, who returned them, perhaps a trifle awkwardly. Then the car began to descend, and the figure beckoned to them to follow.

“You'd better go and wrap up, dear. From the gentleman's dress it seems pretty cold outside, though the air is evidently quite breathable,” said Redgrave, as the Astronef began to drop in company with the car. “At any rate, I'll try it first, and, if it isn't, we can put on our breathing-dresses.”

When Zaidie had made her winter toilet, and Redgrave had found the air to be quite respirable, but of Arctic cold, they went down the gangway ladder about twenty minutes later.

The figure had got out of the car which was lying a few yards from them on the sandy plain, and came forward to meet them with both hands outstretched.

Zaidie unhesitatingly held out hers, and a strange thrill ran through her as she felt them for the first time clasped gently by other than earthly hands, for the Venus folk had only been able to pat and stroke with their gentle little paws, somewhat as a kitten might do. The figure bowed its head again and said something in a low, melodious voice, which was, of course, quite unintelligible save for the evident friendliness of its tone. Then, releasing her hands, he took Redgrave's in the same fashion, and then led the way towards a vast, domed building of semi-opaque glass, or rather a substance which seemed to be something like a mixture of

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie
glass and mica, which appeared to be one of the entrance gates of the city.

Chapter XV

The wondering visitors from far-off Terra had hardly halted before the magnificent portal when a huge sheet of frosted glass rose silently from the ground. They passed through, and it fell behind them. They found themselves in a great oval antechamber along each side of which stood triple rows of strangely shaped trees whose leaves gave off a subtle and most agreeable scent. The temperature here was several degrees higher, in fact about that of an English spring day, and Zaidie immediately threw open her big fur cloak saying:

“These good people seem to live in Winter Gardens, don't they? I don't think I shall want these things much while we're inside. I wonder what dear old Andrew would have thought of this if we could have persuaded him to leave the ship.”

They followed their host through the antechamber towards a magnificent pointed arch raised on clusters of small pillars each of a different coloured, highly polished stone, which shone brilliantly in a light which seemed to come from nowhere. Another door, this time of pale, transparent, blue glass, rose as they approached; they passed under it and, as it fell behind them, half-a-dozen figures, considerably shorter and slighter than their host, came forward to meet them. He took off his gloves and cape and thick outer covering, and they were glad to follow his example for the atmosphere was now that of a warm June day.

The attendants, as they evidently were, took their wraps from them, looking at the furs and stroking them with evident wonder; but with nothing like the wonder which came into their wild, soft grey eyes when they looked at Zaidie, who, as usual when she arrived on a new world, was arrayed in one of her daintiest costumes.

Their host was now dressed in a tunic of a light blue material, which glistened with a lustre greater than that of the finest silk. It reached a little below his knees, and was confined at the waist by a sash of the same colour but of somewhat deeper hue. His feet and legs were covered with stockings of the same material and colour, and his feet, which were small for his stature and exquisitely shaped, were shod with thin sandals of a material which looked like soft felt, and which made no noise as he walked over the delicately coloured mosaic pavement of the street—for such it actually was—which ran past the gate.

When he removed his cap they expected to find that he was bald like the Martians, but they were mistaken. His well-shaped head was covered with long, thick hair of a colour something between bronze and grey. A broad band of metal looking like light gold passed round the upper part of his forehead, and from under this the hair fell in gentle waves to below his shoulders.

For a few moments Zaidie and Redgrave stared about them in frank and silent wonder. They were standing in a broad street running in a straight line to what seemed to be several miles along the edge of a city of crystal. It was lined with double rows of trees with beds of brilliantly coloured flowers between them. From this street others went off at right angles and at regular intervals. The roof of the city appeared to be composed of an infinity of domes of enormous extent, supported by tall clusters of slender pillars standing at the street corners. The general level of the roof seemed to be about three hundred feet above the ground, and the summits of the domes some fifty feet higher.

The houses, which were all square, were as a rule about forty feet high. The roofs were covered with gardens and shrubberies, from which creepers, bearing brilliantly coloured leaves and flowers, hung down about the windows in carefully arranged festoons. The walls were composed of the opaque mica-like glass, relieved by pillars and arched doorways and windows. The windows, of French form, were of clear glass and mostly stood open. A sweet cool zephyr of hardly perceptible strength appeared to be blowing along the street and over the house-tops and in the vast airy space above the roof.

Brightly plumaged birds were flitting about among the branches of giant trees, and keeping up a perpetual chorus of song.

Presently their host touched Redgrave on the shoulder and pointed to a four-wheeled car of light framework and exquisite design, containing seats for four besides the driver, or guide, who sat behind. He

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

held out his hand to Zaidie, and handed her to one of the front seats just as an earth-born gentleman might have done. Then he motioned to Redgrave to sit beside her, and mounted behind them.

The car immediately began to move silently, but with considerable speed, along the left-hand side of the outer street, which, like all the others, was divided by narrow strips of russet-coloured grass and flowering shrubs.

In a few minutes it swung round to the right, crossed the road, and entered a magnificent avenue, which, after a run of some four miles, ended in a vast, park-like square, measuring at least a mile each way.

The two sides of the avenue were busy with cars like their own, some carrying six people, and others only the driver. Those on each side of the road all went in the same direction. Those nearest to the broad side-walks between the houses and the first row of trees went at a moderate speed of five or six miles an hour, but along the inner sides, near the central line of trees, they seemed to be running as high as thirty miles an hour. Their occupants were nearly all dressed in clothes made of the same glistening, silky fabric as their host wore, but the colourings were of infinite variety.

It was quite easy to distinguish between the sexes, although in stature they were almost equal. The men were nearly all clothed as their host was. The colours of their garments were quieter, and there was little attempt at personal adornment, though many wore bands of an intensely bright, sky-blue metal round their arms above the elbow, and others wore belts and necklaces of links composed of this and two other metals resembling gold and aluminium, but of an exceedingly high lustre.

The women were dressed in flowing garments something after the Greek style, but they were of brighter hues, and much more lavishly embroidered than the men's tunics were. They also wore much more jewellery. Indeed, some of the younger ones glittered from head to foot with polished metal and gleaming stones. There was one more difference which they quickly noticed. The men's hair, like their host's, was nearly always wavy, but that of the women, especially the younger, was a mass of either natural or artificial curls, short and crisp about the head, and flowing down in glistening ringlets to their waists.

"Could anyone ever have dreamt of such a lovely place?" said Zaidie, after their wondering eyes had become accustomed to the marvels about them, "and yet—oh dear, now I know what it reminds me of! Flammarion's book, 'The End Of The World,' where he describes the remnants of the human race dying of cold and hunger on the Equator in places something like this. I suppose the life of poor Ganymede is giving out, and that's why they've got to live in glorified Crystal Palaces like this, poor things."

"Poor things!" laughed Redgrave, "I'm afraid I can't agree with you there, dear. I never saw a jollier looking lot of people in my life. I daresay you're quite right, but they certainly seem to view their approaching end with considerable equanimity."

"Don't be horrid, Lenox! Fancy talking in that cold-blooded way about such delightful-looking people as these, why, they are even nicer than our dear bird-folk on Venus, and, of course, they are a great deal more like ourselves."

"Wherefore it stands to reason that they must be a great deal nicer!" He replied, with a glance which brought a brighter flush to her cheeks. Then he went on: "Ah, now I see the difference."

"What difference? Between what?"

"Between the daughter of Earth and the daughters of Ganymede," he replied. "You can blush, and I don't think they can. Haven't you noticed that, although they have the most exquisite skins and beautiful eyes and hair and all that sort of thing, not a man or woman of them has any colouring. I suppose that's the result of living for generations in a hothouse."

"Very likely," she said; "but has it struck you also that all the girls and women are either beautiful or handsome, and all the men, except the ones who seem to be servants or slaves, are something like Greek gods, or, at least, the sort of men you see on the Greek sculptures?"

"Survival of the fittest, I presume. These will be the descendants of the highest races of Ganymede; the people who conceived the idea of prolonging the life of their race and were able to carry it out. The inferior races would either perish of starvation or become their servants. That's what will happen on Earth, and there is no reason why it shouldn't have happened here."

As he said this the car swung out round a broad curve into the centre of the great square, and a little cry of amazement broke from Zaidie's lips as her glance roamed over the multiplying splendours about her.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

In the centre of the square, in the midst of smooth lawns and flower beds of every conceivable shape and colour, and groves of flowering trees, stood a great, domed building, which they approached through an avenue of overarching trees interlaced with flowering creepers.

The car stopped at the foot of a triple flight of stairs of dazzling whiteness which led up to a broad, arched doorway. Several groups of people were sprinkled about the avenue and steps and the wide terrace which ran along the front of the building. They looked with keen, but perfectly well-mannered surprise at their strange visitors, and seemed to be discussing their appearance; but not a step was taken towards them nor was there the slightest sign of anything like vulgar curiosity.

“What perfect manners these dear people have!” said Zaidie, as they dismounted at the foot of the staircase. “I wonder what would happen if a couple of them were to be landed from a motor car in front of the Capitol at Washington. I suppose this is their Capitol, and we've been brought here to be put through our facings. What a pity we can't talk to them. I wonder if they'd believe our story if we could tell it.”

“I've no doubt they know something of it already,” replied Redgrave; “they're evidently people of immense intelligence. Intellectually, I daresay, we're mere children compared with them, and it's quite possible that they have developed senses which we have no idea of.”

“And perhaps,” added Zaidie, “all the time that we are talking to each other our friend here is quietly reading everything that is going on in our minds.”

Whether this was so or not their host gave no sign of comprehension. He led them up the steps and through the great doorway, where he was met by three splendidly dressed men even taller than himself.

“I feel beastly shabby among all these gorgeously attired personages,” said Redgrave, looking down at his plain tweed suit, as they were conducted with every manifestation of politeness along the magnificent vestibule into which the door opened.

“And I'm sure that I am quite a dowdy in comparison with these lovely creatures,” added Zaidie, “although this dress was made in Paris. Lenox, if things are for sale here you'll have to buy me one of those costumes, and we'll take it back and get one made like it. I wonder what they'd think of me dressed in one of those costumes at a ball at the Wardolf-Astoria.”

Before he could make a suitable reply, a door at the end of the vestibule opened and they were ushered into a large hall which was evidently a council-chamber. At the further end of it were three semicircular rows of seats made of the polished silvery metal, and in the centre and raised slightly above them another under a canopy of sky-blue silk. This seat and six others were occupied by men of most venerable aspect, in spite of the fact that their hair was just as long and thick and glossy as their host's or even as Zaidie's own.

The ceremony of introduction was exceedingly simple. Though they could not, of course, understand a word he said, it was evident from his eloquent gestures that their host described the way in which they had come from Space, and landed on the surface of the World of the Crystal Cities, as Zaidie subsequently rechristened Ganymede.

The President of the Senate or Council spoke a few sentences in a deep musical tone. Then their host, taking their hands, led them up to his seat, and the the President rose and took them by both hands in turn. Then, with a grave smile of greeting, he bent his head and resumed his seat. They joined hands in turn with each of the six senators present, bowed their farewells in silence, and then went back with their host to the car.

They ran down the avenue, made a curving sweep round to the left—for all the paths in the great square were laid in curves, apparently to form a contrast to the straight streets—and presently stopped before the porch of one of the hundred palaces which surrounded it. This was their host's house, and their home during the rest of their sojourn on Ganymede.

Chapter XVI

The period of Ganymede's revolution round its gigantic primary is seven days, three hours, and forty-three minutes, practically a terrestrial week, and on their return to their native world both the daring navigators of Space describe this as the most interesting and delightful week in their lives, excepting always the period which they spent in the Eden of the Morning Star. Yet in one sense it was even more interesting.

There the inhabitants had never learnt to sin; here they had learnt the lesson that sin is mere foolishness, and that no really sensible or properly educated man or woman thinks crime worth committing.

The life of the Crystal Cities, of which they visited four in different parts of the satellite, using the Astronef as their vehicle, was one of peaceful industry and calm innocent enjoyment. It was quite plain that their first impressions of this aged world were correct. Outside the cities spread a universal desert on which life was impossible. There was hardly any moisture in the thin atmosphere. The rivers had dwindled into rivulets and the seas into vast, shallow marshes. The heat received from the Sun was only about a twenty-fifth of that which falls on the surface of the Earth, and this was drawn to the cities and collected and preserved under their glass domes by a number of devices which displayed superhuman intelligence.

The dwindling supplies of water were hoarded in vast subterranean reservoirs and, by means of a perfect system of redistillation, the priceless fluid was used over and over again both for human purposes and for irrigating the land within the cities. Still the total quantity was steadily diminishing, for it was not only evaporating from the surface, but, as the orb cooled more and more rapidly towards its centre, it descended deeper and deeper below the surface, and could now only be reached by means of marvellously constructed borings and pumping machinery which extended down several miles into the ground.

The fast-failing store of heat in the centre of the little world, which had now cooled through more than half its bulk, was utilised for warming the air of the cities, and to drive the machinery which propelled it through the streets and squares. All work was done by electric energy developed directly from this source, which also actuated the repulsive engines which had prevented the Astronef from descending.

In short, the inhabitants of Ganymede were engaged in a steady, ceaseless struggle to utilise the expiring natural forces of their world to prolong their own lives and the exquisitely refined civilisation to which they had attained to the latest possible date. They were, indeed, in exactly the same position in which the distant descendants of the human race may one day be expected to find themselves.

Their domestic life, as Zaidie and Lenox saw it while they were the guests of their host, was the perfection of simplicity and comfort, and their public life was characterised by a quiet but intense intellectuality which, as Zaidie had said, made them feel very much like children who had only just learnt to speak.

As they possessed magnificent telescopes, far surpassing any on earth, the wanderers were able to survey, not only the Solar System, but the other systems far beyond its limits as no other of their kind had ever been able to do before. They did not look through or into the telescopes. The lens was turned upon the object, which was thrown, enormously magnified, upon screens of what looked something like ground glass some fifty feet square. It was thus that they saw, not only the whole visible surface of Jupiter as he revolved above them and they about him, but also their native Earth, sometimes a pale silver disc or crescent close to the edge of the Sun, visible only in the morning and the evening of Jupiter, and at other times like a little black spot crossing the glowing surface.

But there was another development of the science of the Crystal Cities which interested them far more than this—for after all they could not only see the Worlds of Space for themselves, but circumnavigate them if they chose.

During their stay they were shown on these same screens the pictorial history of the world whose guests they were. These pictures, which they recognised as an immeasurable development of what is called the cinematographic process on Earth, extended through the whole gamut of the satellite's life. They formed, in fact, the means by which the children of Ganymede were taught the history of their world.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

It was, of course, inevitable that the Astronef should prove an object of intense interest to their hosts. They had solved the problem of the Resolution of Forces, as Professor Rennick had done, and, as they were shown pictorially, a vessel had been made which embodied the principles of attraction and repulsion. It had risen from the surface of Ganymede, and then, possibly because its engines could not develop sufficient repulsive force, the tremendous pull of the giant planet had dragged it away. It had vanished through the cloud-belts towards the flaming surface beneath—and the experiment had never been repeated.

Here, however, was a vessel which had actually, as Redgrave had convinced his hosts by means of celestial maps and drawings of his own, left a planet close to the Sun, and safely crossed the tremendous gulf of six hundred and fifty million miles which separated Jupiter from the centre of the system. Moreover he had twice proved her powers by taking his host and two of his newly-made friends, the chief astronomers of Ganymede, on a short trip across Space to Calisto and Europa, the second satellite of Jupiter, which, to their very grave interest, they found had already passed the stage in which Ganymede was, and had lapsed into the icy silence of death.

It was these two journeys which led to the last adventure of the Astronef in the Jovian System. Both Redgrave and Zaidie had determined, at whatever risk, to pass through the cloud-belts of Jupiter, and catch a glimpse, if only a glimpse, of a world in the making. Their host and the two astronomers, after a certain amount of quiet discussion, accepted their invitation to accompany them, and on the morning of the eighth day after their landing on Ganymede, the Astronef rose from the plain outside the Crystal City, and directed her course towards the centre of the vast disc of Jupiter.

She was followed by the telescopes of all the observatories until she vanished through the brilliant cloud-band, eighty-five thousand miles long and some five thousand miles broad, which stretched from east to west of the planet. At the same moment the voyagers lost sight of Ganymede and his sister satellites.

The temperature of the interior of the Astronef began to rise as soon as the upper cloud-belt was passed. Under this, spread out a vast field of brown-red cloud, rent here and there into holes and gaps like those storm-cavities in the atmosphere of the Sun, which are commonly known as sun-spots. This lower stratum of cloud appeared to be the scene of terrific storms, compared with which the fiercest earthly tempests were mere zephyrs.

After falling some five hundred miles further they found themselves surrounded by what seemed an ocean of fire, but still the internal temperature had only risen from seventy to ninety-five. The engines were well under control. Only about a fourth of the total R. Force was being developed, and the Astronef was dropping swiftly, but steadily.

Redgrave, who was in the conning-tower controlling the engines, beckoned to Zaidie and said:

“Shall we go on?”

“Yes,” she said. “Now we've got as far as this I want to see what Jupiter is like, and where you are not afraid to go, I'll go.”

“If I'm afraid at all it's only because you are with me, Zaidie,” he replied, “but I've only got a fourth of the power turned on yet, so there's plenty of margin.”

The Astronef, therefore, continued to sink through what seemed to be a fathomless ocean of whirling, blazing clouds, and the internal temperature went on rising slowly but steadily. Their guests, without showing the slightest sign of any emotion, walked about the upper deck now singly and now together, apparently absorbed by the strange scene about them.

At length, after they had been dropping for some five hours by Astronef time, one of them, uttering a sharp exclamation, pointed to an enormous rift about fifty miles away. A dull, red glare was streaming up out of it. The next moment the brown cloud-floor beneath them seemed to split up into enormous wreaths of vapour, which whirled up on all sides of them, and a few minutes later they caught their first glimpse of the true surface of Jupiter.

It lay as nearly as they could judge, some two thousand miles beneath them, a distance which the telescopes reduced to less than twenty; and they saw for a few moments the world that was in the making. Through floating seas of misty steam they beheld what seemed to them to be vast continents shape themselves and melt away into oceans of flames. Whole mountain ranges of glowing lava were hurled up miles high to take shape for an instant and then fall away again, leaving fathomless gulfs of fiery mist in their place.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Then waves of molten matter rose up again out of the gulfs, tens of miles high and hundreds of miles long, surged forward, and met with a concussion like that of millions of earthly thunder—clouds. Minute after minute they remained writhing and struggling with each other, flinging up spurts of flaming matter far above their crests. Other waves followed them, climbing up their bases as a sea—surge runs up the side of a smooth, slanting rock. Then from the midst of them a jet of living fire leapt up hundreds of miles into the lurid atmosphere above, and then, with a crash and a roar which shook the vast Jovian firmament, the battling lava—waves would split apart and sink down into the all—surrounding fire—ocean, like two grappling giants who had strangled each other in their final struggle.

“It's just Hell let loose!” said Murgatroyd to himself as he looked down upon the terrific scene through one of the portholes of the engine—room; “and, with all respect to my lord and her ladyship, those that come this near almost deserve to stop in it.”

Meanwhile, Redgrave and Zaidie and their three guests were so absorbed in the tremendous spectacle, that for a few moments no one noticed that they were dropping faster and faster towards the world which Murgatroyd, according to his lights, had not inaptly described. As for Zaidie, all her fears were for the time being lost in wonder, until she saw her husband take a swift glance round upwards and downwards, and then go up into the conning—tower. She followed him quickly, and said:

“What is the matter, Lenox, are we falling too quickly?”

“Much faster than we should,” he replied, sending a signal to Murgatroyd to increase the force by three—tenths.

The answering signal came back, but still the Astronef continued to fall with terrific rapidity, and the awful landscape beneath them—a landscape of fire and chaos—broadened out and became more and more distinct.

He sent two more signals down in quick succession. Three—fourths of the whole repulsive power of the engines was now being exerted—a force which would have been sufficient to hurl the Astronef up from the surface of the Earth like a feather in a whirlwind. Her downward course became a little slower, but still she did not stop. Zaidie, white to the lips, looked down upon the hideous scene beneath and slipped her hand through Redgrave's arm. He looked at her for an instant and then turned his head away with a jerk, and sent down the last signal.

The whole energy of the engines was now directing the maximum of the R. Force against the surface of Jupiter, but still, as every moment passed in a speechless agony of apprehension, it grew nearer and nearer. The fire—waves mounted higher and higher, the roar of the fiery surges grew louder and louder. Then in a momentary lull, he put his arm round her, drew her close up to him, and kissed her and said:

“That's all we can do, dear. We've come too close and he's too strong for us.”

She returned his kiss and said quite steadily:

“Well, at any rate, I'm with you, and it won't last long, will it?”

“Not very long now, I'm afraid,” he said between his clenched teeth. And then he pulled her close to him again, and together they looked down into the storm—tossed hell towards which they were falling at the rate of nearly a hundred miles a minute.

Almost the next moment they felt a little jerk beneath their feet—a jerk upwards; and Redgrave shook himself out of the half stupor into which he was falling and said:

“Hallo, what's that! I believe we're stopping—yes, we are—and we're beginning to rise, too. Look, dear, the clouds are coming down upon us—fast too! I wonder what sort of miracle that is. Ay, what's the matter, little woman?”

Zaidie's head had dropped heavily on his shoulder. A glance showed him that she had fainted. He could do nothing more in the conning—tower, so he picked her up and carried her towards the companion—way, past his three guests, who were standing in the middle of the upper deck round a table on which lay a large sheet of paper.

He took her below and laid her on her bed, and in a few minutes he had brought her to and told her that it was all right. Then he gave her a drink of brandy—and—water, and went back on to the upper deck. As he reached the top of the stairway one of the astronomers came towards him with the sheet of paper in his hand, smiling gravely, and pointing to a sketch upon it.

He took the paper under one of the electric lights and looked at it. The sketch was a plan of the Jovian

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

System. There were some signs written along one side, which he did not understand, but he divined that they were calculations. Still, there was no mistaking the diagram. There was a circle representing the huge bulk of Jupiter; there were four smaller circles at varying distances in a nearly straight line from it, and between the nearest of these and the planet was the figure of the Astronef, with an arrow pointing upwards.

“Ah, I see!” He said, forgetting for a moment that the other did not understand him, “That was the miracle! The four satellites came into line with us just as the pull of Jupiter was getting too much for our engines, and their combined pull just turned the scale. Well, thank God for that, sir, for in a few minutes more we should have been cinders!”

The astronomer smiled again as he took the paper back. Meanwhile the Astronef was rushing upward like a meteor through the clouds. In ten minutes the limits of the Jovian atmosphere were passed. Stars and suns and planets blazed out of the black vault of Space, and the great disc of the World that Is to Be once more covered the floor of Space beneath them—an ocean of cloud, covering continents of lava and seas of flame.

They passed Io and Europa, which changed from new to full moons as they sped by towards the Sun, and then the golden yellow crescent of Ganymede also began to fill out to the half and full disc, and by the tenth hour of earth-time after they had risen from its surface, the Astronef was once more lying beside the gate of the Crystal City.

At midnight on the second night after their return, the ringed shape of Saturn, attended by his eight satellites, hung in the zenith magnificently inviting. The Astronef's engines had been replenished after the exhaustion of their struggle with the might of Jupiter. They said farewell to their friends of the dying world. The doors of the air chamber closed. The signal tinkled in the engine-room, and a few moments later a blur of white lights on the brown background of the surrounding desert was all they could distinguish of the Crystal City under whose domes they had seen and learnt so much.

Chapter XVII

THE relative position of the two giants of the Solar System at the moment when the Astronef left the surface of Ganymede, was such that she had to make a journey of rather more than 340,000,000 miles before she passed within the confines of the Saturnine System.

At first her speed, as shown by the observations which Redgrave took by means of instruments designed for such a voyage by Professor Rennick, was comparatively slow. This was due to the tremendous pull of Jupiter and its four moons on the fabric of the vessel. The backward drag rapidly decreased as the pull of Saturn and his System began to overmaster that of Jupiter.

It so happened, too, that Uranus, the next outer planet of the Solar System, 1,700,000,000 miles away from the Sun, was approaching its conjunction with Saturn, and so assisted in producing a constant acceleration of speed.

Jupiter and his satellites dropped behind, sinking, as it seemed to the wanderers, down into the bottomless gulf of Space, but still forming by far the most brilliant and splendid object in the skies. The far-distant Sun which, seen from the Saturnian System, has only about a ninetieth of the superficial extent which he presents to the Earth, dwindled away rapidly until it began to look like a huge planet, with the Earth, Venus, Mars, and Mercury as satellites. Beyond the orbit of Saturn, Uranus, with his eight moons, was shining with the lustre of a star of the first magnitude, and far above and beyond him again hung the pale disc of Neptune, the Outer Guard of the Solar System, separated from the Sun by a gulf of more than 2,750,000,000 miles.

When two-thirds of the distance between Jupiter and Saturn had been traversed, Ringed Orb lay beneath them like a vast globe surrounded by an enormous circular ocean of many-coloured fire, divided, as it were, by circular shores of shade and darkness. On the side opposite to them a gigantic conical shadow extended beyond the confines of the ocean of light. It was the shadow of half the globe of Saturn cast by the Sun across his rings. Three little dark spots were also travelling across the surface of the rings. They were the shadows of Mimas, Enceladus, and Tethys, the three inner satellites. Japetus, the most distant, which revolves at a distance ten times greater than that of the Moon from the Earth, was rising to their left above the edge of the rings, a pale, yellow, little disc shining feebly against the black background of Space. The rest of the eight satellites were hidden behind the enormous bulk of the planet, and the infinitely vaster area of the rings.

Day after day Zaidie and her husband had been exhausting the possibilities of the English language in attempting to describe to each other the multiplying marvels of the wondrous scene which they were approaching at a speed of more than a hundred miles a second, and at length Zaidie, after nearly an hour's absolute silence, during which they sat with eyes fastened to their telescopes, looked up and said:

"It's no use, Lenox, all the fine words that we've been trying to think of have just been wasted. The angels may have a language that you could describe that in, but we haven't. If it wouldn't be something like blasphemy I should drop down to the commonplace, and call Saturn a celestial spinning-top, with bands of light and shadow instead of colours all round it."

"Not at all a bad simile either," laughed Redgrave, as he got up from his chair with a yawn and a stretch of his athletic limbs, "still, it's as well that you said celestial, for, after all, that's about the best word we've found yet. Certainly the ringed world is the most nearly heavenly thing we've seen so far."

"But," he went on, "I think it's about time we were stopping this headlong fall of ours. Do you see how the landscape is spreading out round us? That means that we're dropping pretty fast. Whereabouts would you like to land? At present we're heading straight for Saturn's north pole."

"I think I'd rather see what the rings are like first," said Zaidie; "couldn't we go across them?"

"Certainly we can," he replied, "only we'll have to be a bit careful."

"Careful, what of—collisions? I suppose you're thinking of Proctor's explanation that the rings are formed of multitudes of tiny satellites?"

"Yes, but I should go a little farther than that, I should say that his rings and his eight satellites are to

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Saturn what the planets generally and the ring of the Asteroides are to the Sun, and if that is the case—I mean if we find the rings made up of myriads of tiny bodies flying round with Saturn—it might get a bit risky.

“You see the outside ring is a bit over 160,000 miles across, and it revolves in less than eleven hours. In other words we might find the ring a sort of celestial maelstrom, and if we once got into the whirl, and Saturn exerted his full pull on us, we might become a satellite, too, and go on swinging round with the rest for a good bit of eternity.”

“Very well, then,” she said, “of course we don't want to do anything of that sort, but there's something else I think we could do,” she went on, taking up a copy of Proctor's “Saturn and its System,” which she had been reading just after breakfast. “You see those rings are, all together, about 10,000 miles broad; there's a gap of about 1700 miles between the big dark one and the middle bright one, and it's nearly 10,000 miles from the edge of the bright ring to the surface of Saturn. Now why shouldn't we get in between the inner ring and the planet? If Proctor was right and the rings are made of tiny satellites and there are myriads of them, of course they'll pull up while Saturn pulls down. In fact Flammarion says somewhere, that along Saturn's equator there is no weight at all.”

“Quite possible,” said Redgrave, “and, if you like, we'll go and prove it. Of course, if the Astronef weighs absolutely nothing between Saturn and the rings, we can easily get away. The only thing that I object to is getting into this 170,000 mile vortex, being whizzed round with Saturn every ten and a half hours, and sauntering round the Sun at 21,000 miles an hour.”

“Don't!” she said, “really it isn't good to think about these things, situated as we are. Fancy, in a single year of Saturn there are nearly 25,000 days. Why, we should each of us be about thirty years older when we got round, even if we lived, which, of course, we shouldn't. By the way, how long could we live for, if the worst came to the worst?”

“Given water, about one earth-year at the outside,” he replied, “but, of course, we shall be home long before that.”

“If we don't become one of the satellites of Saturn,” she replied, “or get dragged away by something into the outer depths of Space.”

Meanwhile the downward speed of the Astronef had been considerably checked. The vast circle of the rings seemed to suddenly expand, and soon it covered the whole floor of the vault of Space.

As the Astronef dropped towards what might be called the limit of the northern tropic of Saturn, the spectacle presented by the rings became every minute more and more marvellous—purple and silver, black and gold, dotted with myriads of brilliant points of many-coloured lights, they stretched upwards like vast rainbows into the Saturnian sky as the Astronef's position changed with regard to the horizon of the planet. The nearer they approached the surface, the nearer the gigantic arch of the many coloured rings approached the zenith. Sun and stars sank down behind it, for now they were dropping through the fifteen-year-long twilight that reigns over that portion of the globe of Saturn which, during half of his year of thirty terrestrial years, is turned away from the Sun.

The further they dropped towards the rings the more certain it became that the theory of the great English astronomer was the correct one. Seen through the telescopes at a distance of only thirty or forty thousand miles, it became perfectly plain that the outer or darker ring as seen from the Earth was composed of myriads of tiny bodies so far separated from each other that the rayless blackness of Space could be seen through them.

“It's quite evident,” said Redgrave, “that those are rings of what we should call meteorites on earth, atoms of matter which Saturn threw off into Space after the satellites were formed.”

“And I shouldn't wonder, if you will excuse my interrupting you,” said Zaidie, “if the moons themselves have been made up of a lot of these things going together when they were only gas, or nebula, or something of that sort. In fact, when Saturn was a good deal younger than he is now, he may have had a lot more rings and no moons, and now these aerolites, or whatever they are, can't come together and make moons, because they've got too solid.”

Meanwhile the Astronef was rapidly approaching that portion of Saturn's surface which was illuminated by the rays of the Sun, streaming under the lower arch of the inner ring.

As they passed under it the whole scene suddenly changed. The rings vanished. Overhead was an arch of brilliant light a hundred miles thick, spanning the whole of the visible heavens. Below lay the sunlit surface of

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Saturn divided into light and dark bands of enormous breadth.

The band immediately below them was of a brilliant silver–grey, very much like the central zone of Jupiter. North of this on the one side stretched the long shadow of the rings, and southward other bands of alternating white and gold and deep purple succeeded each other till they were lost in the curvature of the vast planet. The poles were of course invisible since the Astronef was now too near to the surface; but on their approach they had seen unmistakable evidence of snow and ice.

As soon as they were exactly under the Ring–arch, Redgrave shut off the R. Force, and, somewhat to their astonishment, the Astronef began to revolve slowly on its axis, giving them the idea that the Saturnian System was revolving round them. The arch seemed to sink beneath their feet while the belts of the planet rose above them.

“What on earth is the matter?” said Zaidie. “Everything has gone upside down.”

“Which shows.” replied Redgrave, “that as soon as the Astronef became neutral the rings pulled harder than the planet, I suppose because we're so near to them, and, instead of falling on to Saturn, we shall have to push up at him.”

“Oh yes, I see that,” said Zaidie, “but after all it does look a little bit bewildering, doesn't it, to be on your feet one minute and on your head the next?”

“It is, rather; but you ought to be getting accustomed to that sort of thing now. In a few minutes neither you, nor I, nor anything else will have any weight. We shall be just between the attraction of the Rings and Saturn, so you'd better go and sit down, for if you were to give a bit of an extra spring in walking you might be knocking that pretty head of yours against the roof,” said Redgrave, as he went to turn the R. Force on to the edge of the Rings.

A vast sea of silver cloud seemed now to descend upon them. Then they entered it, and for nearly half–an–hour the Astronef was totally enveloped in a sea of pearl–grey luminous mist.

“Atmosphere!” said Redgrave, as he went to the conning–tower and signalled to Murgatroyd to start the propellers. They continued to rise and the mist began to drift past them in patches, showing that the propellers were driving them ahead.

They now rose swiftly towards the surface of the planet. The cloud wrack got thinner and thinner, and presently they found themselves floating in a clear atmosphere between two seas of cloud, the one above them being much less dense than the one below.

“I believe we shall see Saturn on the other side of that,” said Zaidie, looking up at it. “Oh dear, there we are going round again.”

“Reaching the point of neutral attraction,” said Redgrave; “once more you'd better sit down in case of accidents.”

Instead of dropping into her deck chair as she would have done on Earth, she took hold of the arms and pulled herself into it, saying:

“Really it seems rather absurd to have to do this sort of thing. Fancy having to hold yourself into a chair. I suppose I hardly weigh anything at all now.”

“Not much,” said Redgrave, stooping down and taking hold of the end of the chair with both hands. Without any apparent effort he raised her about five feet from the floor, and held her there while the Astronef made another revolution. For a moment he let go, and she and the chair floated between the roof and the floor of the deck–chamber. Then he pulled the chair away from under her, and as the floor of the vessel once more turned towards Saturn, he took hold of her hands and brought her to her feet on deck again.

“I ought to have had a photograph of you like that!” He laughed. “I wonder what they'd think of it at home?”

“If you had taken one I should certainly have broken the negative. The very idea—a photograph of me standing on nothing! Besides, they'd never believe it on Earth.”

“We might have got old Andrew to make an affidavit to that effect,” he began.

“Don't talk nonsense, Lenox! Look! There's something much more interesting. There's Saturn at last. Now I wonder if we shall find any sort of life there—and shall we be able to breathe the air?”

“I hardly think so,” he said, as the Astronef dropped slowly through the thin cloud–veil. “You know spectrum analysis has proved that there is a gas in Saturn's atmosphere which we know nothing about, and,

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

however good it may be for the Saturnians, it's not very likely that it would agree with us, so I think we'd better be content with our own. Besides, the atmosphere is so enormously dense that even if we could breathe it it might squash us up. You see we're only accustomed to fifteen pounds on the square inch, and it may be hundreds of pounds here."

"Well," said Zaidie, "I haven't got any particular desire to be flattened out like that, or squeezed dry like an orange. It's not at all a nice idea, is it? But, look, Lenox," she went on, pointing downwards, "surely this isn't air at all, or at least it's something between air and water. Aren't these things swimming about in it—something like fish in the sea? They can't be clouds, and they aren't either fish or birds. They don't fly or float. Well, this is certainly more wonderful than anything else we've seen, though it doesn't look very pleasant. They're not nice looking, are they? I wonder if they are at all dangerous!"

While she was saying this Zaidie had gone to her telescope, and was sweeping the surface of Saturn, which was now about a hundred miles distant. Her husband was doing the same. In fact, for the time being they were all eyes, for they were looking on a stranger sight than man or woman had ever seen before.

Underneath the inner cloud-veil the atmosphere of Saturn appeared to them somewhat as the lower depths of the ocean would appear to a diver, granted that he was able to see for hundreds of miles about him. Its colour was a pale greenish yellow. The outside thermometers showed that the temperature was a hundred and seventy-five. In fact, the interior of the Astronef was getting uncomfortably like a Turkish bath, and Redgrave took the opportunity of at once freshening and cooling the air by releasing a little oxygen from the cylinders.

From what they could see of the surface of Saturn it seemed to be a dead level, greyish-brown in colour, and not divided into oceans and continents. In fact there were no signs whatever of water within range of their telescopes. There was nothing that looked like cities, or any human habitations, but the ground, as they got nearer to it, seemed to be covered with a very dense vegetable growth, not unlike gigantic forms of seaweed, and of somewhat the same colour. In fact, as Zaidie remarked, the surface of Saturn was not at all unlike what the floors of the ocean of the Earth might be if they were laid bare.

It was evident that the life of this portion of Saturn was not what, for want of a more exact word, might be called terrestrial. Its inhabitants, however they were constituted, floated about in the depths of this semi-gaseous ocean as the denizens of earthly seas did in the terrestrial oceans. Already their telescopes enabled them to make out enormous moving shapes, black and grey-brown and pale red, swimming about, evidently by their own volition, rising and falling and often sinking down on to the gigantic vegetation which covered the surface, possibly for the purpose of feeding. But it was also evident that they resembled the inhabitants of earthly oceans in another respect, since it was easy to see that they preyed upon each other.

"I don't like the look of those creatures at all," said Zaidie, when the Astronef had come to a stop and was floating about five miles above the surface. "They're altogether too uncanny. They look to me something like jelly-fish about the size of whales, only they have eyes and mouths. Did you ever see such awful looking eyes, bigger than soup-plates and as bright as a cat's. I suppose that's because of the dim light. And the nasty wormy sort of way they swim, or fly, or whatever it is. Lenox, I don't know what the rest of Saturn may be like, but I certainly don't like this part. It's quite too creepy and unearthly for my taste. Look at the horrors fighting and eating each other. That's the only bit of earthly character they've got about them; the big ones eating the little ones. I hope they won't take the Astronef for something nice to eat."

"They'd find her a pretty tough morsel if they did," laughed Redgrave, "but still we may as well get some steering way on her in case of accident."

Chapter XVIII

A FEW moments later he sent a signal to Murgatroyd in the engine-room. The propellers began to revolve slowly, beating the dense air and driving the Star Navigator at a speed of about twenty miles an hour through the depths of this strangely-peopled ocean.

They approached nearer and nearer to the surface, and as they did so the strange creatures about them grew more and more numerous. They were certainly the most extraordinary living things that human eyes had ever looked upon. Zaidie's comparison to the whale and the jelly-fish was by no means incorrect; only when they got near enough to them they found, to their astonishment, that they were double-headed—that is to say, they had a head furnished with mouth, nostrils, ear-holes, and eyes at each end of their bodies.

The larger of the creatures appeared to have a certain amount of respect for each other. Now and then they witnessed a battle-royal between two of the monsters who were pursuing the same prey. Their method of attack was as follows: The assailant would rise above his opponent or prey, and then, dropping on to its back, envelop it and begin tearing at its sides and under parts with huge beak-like jaws, somewhat resembling those of the largest kind of the earthly octopus, only infinitely more formidable. The substance composing their bodies appeared to be not unlike that of a terrestrial jelly-fish, but much denser. It seemed from their motions to have the tenacity of soft India rubber save at the headed ends, where it was much harder. The necks were protected for about fifty feet by huge scales of a dull, greenish hue.

When one of them had overpowered an enemy or a victim the two sank down into the vegetation, and the victor began to eat the vanquished. Their means of locomotion consisted of huge fins, or rather half fins, half wings, of which they had three laterally arranged behind each head, and four much longer and narrower, above and below, which seemed to be used mainly for steering purposes.

They moved with equal ease in either direction, and they appeared to rise or fall by inflating or deflating the middle portions of their bodies, somewhat as fish do with their swimming bladders.

The light in the lower regions of this strange ocean was dimmer than earthly twilight, although the Astronef was steadily making her way beneath the arch of the rings towards the sunlit hemisphere.

"I wonder what the effect of the searchlight would be on these fellows!" said Redgrave. "Those huge eyes of theirs are evidently only suited to dim light. Let's try and dazzle some of them."

"I hope it won't be a case of the moths and the candle!" said Zaidie. "They don't seem to have taken much interest in us so far. Perhaps they haven't been able to see properly, but suppose they were attracted by the light and began crowding round us and fastening on to us, as the horrible things do with each other. What should we do then? They might drag us down and perhaps keep us there; but there's one thing, they'd never eat us, because we could keep closed up and die respectably together."

"Not much fear of that, little woman," he said, "we're too strong for them. Hardened steel and toughened glass ought to be more than a match for a lot of exaggerated jelly-fish like these," said Redgrave, as he switched on the head search-light. "We've come here to see strange things and we may as well see them. Ah, would you, my friend. No, this is not one of your sort, and it isn't meant to eat."

An enormous double-headed monster, apparently some four hundred feet long, came floating towards them as the search-light flashed out, and others began instantly to crowd about them, just as Zaidie had feared.

"Lenox, for Heaven's sake be careful!" cried Zaidie, shrinking up beside him as the huge, hideous head, with its saucer eyes and enormous beak-like jaws wide open, came towards them. "And look, there are more coming. Can't we go up and get away from them?"

"Wait a minute, little woman," replied Redgrave, who was beginning to feel the passion of adventure thrilling in his nerves "If we fought the Martian air fleet and licked it I think we can manage these things. Let's see how he likes the light."

As he spoke he flashed the full glare of the five thousand candle-power lamp full on to the creature's great

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

cat-like eyes. Instantly it bent itself up into an arc. The two heads, each the exact image of the other, came together. The four eyes glared half dazzled into the conning-tower and the four huge jaws snapped viciously together.

“Lenox, Lenox, for goodness sake let us go up!” cried Zaidie shrinking still closer to him. “That thing's too horrible to look at.”

“It is a beast, isn't it?” He said, “but I think we can cut him in two without much trouble.”

He signalled for full speed. The Astronef ought to have sprung forward and driven her ram through the huge, brick-red body of the hideous creature which was now only a couple of hundred yards from them; but instead of that a slow, jarring, grinding thrill seemed to run through her, and she stopped. The next moment Murgatroyd put his head up through the companion-way which led from the upper deck to the conning-tower, and said in a tone whose calm indicated, as usual, resignation to the worst that could happen:

“My lord, two of those beasts, fishes or live balloons, or whatever they are, have come across the propellers. They're cut up a good bit, but I've had to stop the engines, and they're clinging all round the after part. We're going down, too. Shall I disconnect the propellers and turn on the repulsion?”

“Yes, certainly, Andrew!” cried Zaidie, “and all of it, too. Look, Lenox, that horrible thing is coming. Suppose it broke the glass, and we couldn't breathe this atmosphere!”

As she spoke the enormous, double-headed body advanced until it completely enveloped the forward part of the Astronef. The two hideous heads came close to the sides of the conning-tower; the huge, palely luminous eyes looked in upon them. Zaidie, in her terror, even thought that she saw something like human curiosity in them.

Then, as Murgatroyd disappeared to obey the orders which Redgrave had sanctioned with a quick nod, the heads approached still closer, and she heard the ends of the pointed jaws, which she now saw were armed with shark-like teeth, striking against the thick glass walls of the conning-tower.

“Don't be frightened, dear!” He said, putting his arm round her, just as he had done when they thought they were falling into the fiery seas of Jupiter. “You'll see something happen to this gentleman soon. Big and all as he is there won't be much left of him in a few minutes. They are like those monsters they found in the lowest depths of our own seas. They can only live under tremendous pressure. That's why we didn't find any of them up above. This chap'll burst like a bubble presently. Meanwhile, there's no use in stopping here. Suppose you go below and brew some coffee and bring it up on deck, while I go and see how things are looking aft. It doesn't do you any good, you know, to be looking at monsters of this sort. You can see what's left of them later on. You might bring the cognac decanter up too.”

Zaidie was not at all sorry to obey him, for the horrible sight had almost sickened her.

They were still under the arch of the rings, and so, when the full strength of the R. Force was directed against the body of Saturn, the vessel sprang upwards like a projectile fired from a cannon.

Redgrave went back into the conning-tower to see what happened to their assailant. It was already trying vainly to detach itself and sink back into a more congenial element. As the pressure of the atmosphere decreased its huge body swelled up into still huger proportions. The skin on the two heads puffed up as though air was being pumped in under it. The great eyes protruded out of their sockets; the jaws opened widely as though the creature were gasping for breath.

Meanwhile Murgatroyd was seeing something very similar at the after end, and wondering what was going to happen to his propellers, the blades of which were deeply imbedded in the jelly-like flesh of the monsters.

The Astronef leaped higher and higher, and the hideous bodies which were clinging to her swelled out huger and huger, and Redgrave even fancied that he heard something like cries of pain from both heads on either side of the conning-tower. They passed through the inner cloud-veil, and then the Astronef began to turn on her axis, and, just as the outer envelope came into view the enormously distended bulk of the monsters collapsed, and their fragments, seeming now more like the tatters of a burst balloon than portions of a once-living creature, dropped from the body of the Astronef and floated away down into what had once been their native element.

“Difference of environment means a lot, after all,” said Redgrave to himself. “I should have called that either a lie or a miracle if I hadn't seen it, and I'm jolly glad I sent Zaidie down below.”

“Here's your coffee, Lenox,” said her voice from the upper deck the next moment, “only it doesn't seem to

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

want to stop in the cups, and the cups keep getting off the saucers. I suppose we're turning upside down again."

Redgrave stepped somewhat gingerly on to the deck, for his body had so little weight under the double attraction of Saturn and the Rings that a very slight effort would have sent him flying up to the roof of the deck-chamber.

"That's exactly as you please," he said, "just hold that table steady a minute. We shall have our centre of gravity back soon. And now, as to the main question, suppose we take a trip across the sunlit hemisphere of Saturn to, what I suppose we should call, on Earth, the South Pole. We can get resistance from the Rings, and as we are here we may as well see what the rest of Saturn is like. You see, if our theory is correct as to the Rings gathering up most of the atmosphere of Saturn about its equator, we shall get to higher altitudes where the air is thinner and more like our own, and therefore it is quite possible that we shall find different forms of life in it too—or if you've had enough of Saturn and would prefer a trip to Uranus—?"

"No, thanks," said Zaidie quickly. "To tell you the truth, Lenox, I've had almost enough star-wandering for one honeymoon, and though we've seen nice things as well as horrible things—especially those ghastly, slimy creatures down there—I'm beginning to feel a bit homesick for good old mother Earth. You see, we're nearly a thousand million miles from home, and, even with you, it makes one feel a bit lonely. I vote we explore the rest of this hemisphere up to the pole, and then, as they say at sea—I mean our sea—'bout ship, and see if we can find our own old world again. After all, it's more homelike than any of these, isn't it?"

"Just take your telescope and look at it," said Redgrave, pointing towards the Sun, with its little cluster of attendant planets. "It looks something like one of Jupiter's little moons down there, doesn't it, only not quite as big?"

"Yes, it does, but that doesn't matter. The fact is that it's there, and we know what it's like, and it's home, if it is a thousand million miles away, and that's everything."

By this time they had passed through the outer band of clouds. The vast, sunlit arch of the Rings towered up to the zenith, apparently spanning the whole visible heavens. Below and in front of them lay the enormous semi-circle of the hemisphere which was turned towards the Sun, shrouded by its many coloured bands of clouds. The R. Force was directed strongly against the lower Ring, and the Astronef dropped rapidly in a slanting direction through the cloud-bands towards the southern temperate zone of the planet.

They passed through the second, or dark, cloud-band at the rate of about three thousand miles an hour, aided by the Repulsion against the Rings and the attraction of the planet, and soon after lunch, the materials of which now consented to remain on the table, they passed through the clouds and found themselves in a new world of wonders.

On a far vaster scale, it was the Earth during that period of its development which is called the Reptilian Age. The atmosphere was still dense and loaded with aqueous vapour, but the waters had already been divided from the land.

They passed over vast, marshy continents and islands, and warm seas, above which thin clouds of steam still hung, and as they swept southward with the propellers working at their utmost speed, they caught glimpses of giant forms rising out of the steamy waters near the land; of others crawling slowly over it, dragging their huge bulk through a tremendous vegetation, which they crushed down as they passed, as a sheep on earth might push its way through a field of standing corn.

Other and even stranger shapes, broad-winged and ungainly, fluttered with a slow, bat-like motion through the lower strata of the atmosphere.

Every now and then during the voyage across the temperate zone the propellers were slowed down to enable them to witness some Titanic conflict between the gigantic denizens of land and sea and air. But Zaidie had had enough of horrors on the Saturnian equator, and so she was quite content to watch this phase of evolution working itself out (as it had happened on the Earth many thousands of ages ago) from a convenient distance. Wherefore the Astronef sped on southward without approaching the surface nearer than a couple of miles.

"It'll be all very nice to see and remember and dream about afterwards," she said, "but really I don't think I can stand any more monsters just now, at least not at close quarters, and I'm quite sure if those things can live there we couldn't, any more than we could have lived on Earth a million years or so ago. No, really I don't

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

want to land, Lenox; let's go on."

They went on at a speed of about a hundred miles an hour, and, as they progressed southward, both the atmosphere and the landscape rapidly changed. The air grew clearer and the clouds lighter. Lands and seas were more sharply divided, and both teeming with life. The seas still swarmed with serpentine monsters of the saurian type, and the firmer lands were peopled by huge animals, mastodons, bears, giant tapirs, myledons, deinotheriums, and a score of other species too strange for them to recognise by any earthly likeness, which roamed in great herds through the vast twilight forests and over boundless plains covered with grey-blue vegetation.

Here, too, they found mountains for the first time on Saturn; mountains steep-sided, and many earth-miles high.

As the Astronef was skirting the side of one of these ranges Redgrave allowed it to approach more closely than he had so far done to the surface of Saturn.

"I shouldn't wonder if we found some of the higher forms of life up here," he said. "If there is anything here that's going to develop some clay into the human race of Saturn it would naturally get up here."

"I should hope so," said Zaidie, "and just as far as possible out of the reach of those unutterable horrors on the equator. That would be one of the first signs they would show of superior intelligence. Look, I believe there are some of them. Do you see those holes in the mountain side there? And there they are, something like gorillas, only twice as big, and up the trees, too—and what trees! They must be seven or eight hundred feet high."

"Tree and cave-dwellers, and ancestors of the future royal race of Saturn, I suppose!" said Redgrave. "They don't look very nice, do they? Still, there's no doubt about their being far superior in intelligence to what we left behind us. Evidently this atmosphere is too thin for the two-headed jelly-fishes and the saurians to breathe. These creatures have found that out in a few hundreds of generations, and so they have come to live up here out of the way. Vegetarians, I suppose, or perhaps they live on smaller monkeys and other animals, just as our ancestors did."

"Really, Lenox," said Zaidie, turning round and facing him, "I must say that you have a most unpleasant way of alluding to one's ancestors. They couldn't help what they were."

"Well, dear," he said, going towards her, "marvellous as the miracle seems, I'm heretic enough to believe it possible that your ancestors even, millions of years ago, perhaps, may have been something like those; but then, of course, you know I'm a hopeless Darwinian."

"And, therefore, entirely horrid, as I've often said before when you get on subjects like these. Not, of course, that I'm ashamed of my poor relations; and then, after all, your Darwin was quite wrong when he talked about the descent of man—and woman. We—especially the women—have ascended from that sort of thing, if there's any truth in the story at all; though, personally, I must say I prefer dear old Mother Eve."

"Who never had a sweeter daughter than—!" He replied, drawing her towards him.

"Very prettily put, my Lord," she laughed, releasing herself with a gentle twirl; "and now I'll go and get dinner ready," she said. "After all, it doesn't matter what world one's in, one gets hungry all the same."

The dinner, which was eaten somewhere in the middle of the fifteen-year-long day of Saturn, was a very pleasant one, because they were now nearing the turning-point of their trip into the depths of Space, and thoughts of home and friends were already beginning to fly back across the thousand-million-mile gulf which lay between them and the Earth which they had left only a little more than two months ago.

While they were at dinner the Astronef rose above the mountains and resumed her southward course. Zaidie brought the coffee up on deck as usual after dinner, and, while Redgrave smoked his cigar and Zaidie her cigarette, they luxuriated in the magnificent spectacle of the sunlit side of Rings towering up, rainbow built on rainbow, to the zenith of their visible heavens.

"What a pity there aren't any words to describe it!" said Zaidie. "I wonder if the descendants of the ancestors of the future human race on Saturn will invent anything like a suitable language. I wonder how they'll talk about those Rings millions of years hence."

"By that time there may not be any Rings," Lenox replied, blowing a ring of smoke from his own lips. "Look at that—made in a moment and gone in a moment—and yet on exactly the same principle, it gives one a dim idea of the difference between time and eternity. After all it's only another example of Kelvin's theory

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

of vortices. Nebulae, and asteroids, and planet-rings, and smoke-rings are really all made on the same principle.”

“My dear Lenox, if you're going to get as philosophical and as commonplace as that I'm going to bed. Now that I come to think of it, I've been about fifteen earth-hours out of bed, so it's about time I went. It's your turn to make the coffee in the morning—our morning I mean—and you'll wake me in time to see the South Pole of Saturn, won't you? You're not coming yet, I suppose?”

“Not just yet, dear. I want to see a bit more of this, and then I must go through the engines and see that they're all right and ready for that thousand million mile homeward voyage you're talking about. You can have a good ten hours' sleep without missing much, I think, for there doesn't seem to be anything more interesting than our own Arctic life down there. So good-night, little woman, don't have too many nightmares.”

“Good-night!” she said, “if you hear me shout you'll know that you've to come and protect me from monsters. Weren't those two-headed brutes just too horrid for words? Good-night, dear!”

Chapter XIX

A LITTLE before six (Earth time) on the fourth morning after they had cleared the confines of the Saturnian System, Redgrave went as usual into the conning-tower to examine the instruments and to see that everything was in order. To his intense surprise he found, on looking at the gravitational compass, which was to the Astronef what the ordinary compass is to a ship at sea, that the vessel was a long way out of her course.

Such a thing had never yet occurred. Up to now the Astronef had obeyed the laws of gravitation and repulsion with absolute exactness. He made another examination of the instruments; but no, all were in perfect order.

"I wonder what the deuce is the matter," he said, after he had looked for a few moments with frowning eyes at the Heavens before him. "By Jove, we're swinging more. This is getting serious."

He went back to the compass. The long, slender needle was slowly swinging farther and farther out of the middle line of the vessel.

"There can only be two explanations of that," he went on, thrusting his hands deep into his trouser pockets; "either the engines are not working properly, or some enormous and invisible body is pulling us towards it out of our course. Let's have a look at the engines first."

When he reached the engine-room he said to Murgatroyd, who was indulging in his usual pastime of cleaning and polishing his beloved charges:

"Have you noticed anything wrong during the last hour or so, Murgatroyd?"

"No, my lord; at least not so far as concerns the engines. They're all right. Hark now, they're not making more noise than a lady's sewing machine," replied the old Yorkshireman with a note of resentment in his voice. The suspicion that anything could be wrong with his shining darlings was almost a personal offence to him. "But is anything the matter, my Lord, if I might ask?"

"We're a long way off our course, and for the life of me I can't understand it," replied Redgrave. "There's nothing about here to pull us out of our line. Of course the stars—good Lord, I never thought of that! Look here, Murgatroyd, not a word about this to her ladyship. and stand by to raise the power by degrees, as I signal to you."

"Ay, my lord. I hope it's nothing bad."

Redgrave went back to the conning-tower without replying. The only possible solution of the mystery of the deviation had suddenly dawned upon him, and a very serious solution it was. He remembered that there were such things as dead suns—the derelicts of the Ocean of Space—vast, invisible orbs, lightless and lifeless, too distant from any living sun to be illumined by its rays, and yet exercising the only force left to them—the force of attraction. Might not one of these have wandered near enough to the confines of the Solar system to exert this force, a force of absolutely unknown magnitude, upon the Astronef?

He went to a little desk beside the instrument-table and plunged into a maze of mathematics, of masses and weights, angles and distances. Half-an-hour later he stood looking at the last symbol on the last sheet of paper with something like fear. It was the fatal x which remained to satisfy the last equation, the unknown quantity which represented the unseen force that was dragging the Astronef into the outer wilderness of interstellar space, into far-off regions from which, with the remaining force at his disposal, no return would be possible.

He signalled to Murgatroyd to increase the development of the R. Force from a tenth to a half. Then he went to the lower saloon, where Zaidie was busy with her usual morning tidy-up. Now that the mystery was explained there was no reason to keep her in the dark. Indeed, he had given her his word that he would conceal from her no danger, however great, that might threaten them when he had once assured himself of its existence.

She listened to him in silence and without a sign of fear beyond a little lifting of the eyelids and a little fading of the colour in her cheeks.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“And if we can't resist this force,” she said, when he had finished, “it will drag us millions—perhaps millions of millions—of miles away from our own system into outer space, and we shall either fall on the surface of this dead sun and be reduced to a puff of lighted gas in an instant, or some other body will pull us away from it, and then another away from that, and so on, and we shall wander among the stars for ever and ever until the end of time!”

“If the first happens, darling, we shall die—together—without knowing it. It's the second that I'm most afraid of. The Astronef may go on wandering among the stars for ever—but we have only water enough for three weeks more. Now come into the conning-tower and we'll see how things are going.”

As they bent their heads over the instrument-table Redgrave saw that the remorseless needle had moved two degrees more to the right. The keel of the Astronef, under the impulse of the R. Force, was continually turning. The pull of the invisible orb was dragging the vessel slowly but irresistibly out of her line.

“There's nothing for it but this,” said Redgrave, putting out his hand to the signal-board, and signalling to Murgatroyd to put the engines to their highest power. “You see, dear, our greatest danger is this; we have had to exert such a tremendous lot of power that we haven't any too much to spare, and if we have to spend it in counteracting the pull of this dead sun, or whatever it is, we may not have enough of what I call the R. fluid left to get home with.”

“I see,” she said, staring with wide-open eyes at the needle. “You mean that we may not have enough to keep us from falling into one of the planets or perhaps into the sun itself. Well, supposing the dangers are equal, this one is the nearest, and so I guess we've got to fight it first.”

“Spoken like a good American!” He said, putting his arm across her shoulders and looking at once with infinite pride and infinite regret at the calm, proud face which the glory of resignation had adorned with a new beauty.

She bowed her head and then looked away again so that he should not see that there were tears in her eyes. He took his hand from her shoulder and stared in silence down at the needle. It was stationary again.

“We've stopped!” He said, after a pause of several moments. “Now, if the body that's taken us out of our course is moving away from us we win, if it's coming towards us we lose. At any rate, we've done all we can. Come along, Zaidie, let's go and have a walk on deck.”

They had scarcely reached the upper deck when something happened which dwarfed all the other experiences of their marvellous voyage into utter insignificance.

Above and around them the constellations blazed with a splendour inconceivable to an observer on earth, but ahead of them gaped the vast, black void which sailors call “the coal-hole,” and in which the most powerful telescopes have only discovered a few faintly luminous bodies. Suddenly, out of the midst of this infinity of darkness, there blazed a glare of almost intolerably brilliant radiance. Instantly the forward end of the Astronef was bathed in light and heat—the light and heat of a re-created sun, whose elements had been dark and cold for uncounted ages.

Hundreds of tiny points of light, unknown worlds which had been dark for myriads of years, twinkled out of the blackness. Then the fierce glare grew dimmer. A vast mantle of luminous mist spread out with inconceivable rapidity, and in the midst of this blazed the central nucleus—the sun which in far-off ages to come would be the giver of light and heat, of life and beauty to worlds unborn, to planets which were now only little eddies of atoms whirling in that ocean of nebulous flame.

For more than an hour the two voyagers stood motionless and silent, gazing on the indescribable splendours of a spectacle such as no human eyes but theirs had ever beheld. Every earthly thought seemed burnt out of their souls by the glory and the wonder of it. It was almost as though they were standing in the very presence of God, for were they not witnessing the supreme act of omnipotence, a new creation? Their peril, a peril such as had never threatened mortals before, was utterly forgotten. They had even forgotten each other's presence. For the time being they existed only to look and to wonder.

They were called at length out of their trance by the matter-of-fact voice of Murgatroyd saying: “My lord, she's back to her course. Will I keep the power on full?”

“My lord, she's back to her course. Will I keep the power on full?”

“Eh! What's that?” exclaimed Redgrave, as they both turned quickly round. “Oh, it's you, Murgatroyd. The power? Yes, keep it on full till I have taken the bearings.”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Ay, my lord, very good.” replied the engineer.

As he left the deck Redgrave put his arm round Zaidie and drew her gently towards him and said: “Zaidie, truly you are favoured among women! You have seen the beginning of a new creation. You will certainly be saved somehow after that.”

“Yes, and you too, dear,” she murmured, as though still half-dreaming. “It is very glorious and wonderful; but what is it all—I mean, what is the explanation of it?”

“The merely scientific explanation, dear, is very simple. I see it all now. The force that was dragging us out of our course was the united pull of two dead stars approaching each other in the same orbit. They may have been doing that for millions of years. The shock of their meeting has transformed their motion into light and heat. They have united to form a single sun and a nebula, which will some day condense into a system of planets like ours. To-night the astronomers on earth will discover a new star—a variable star as they'll call it—for it will grow dimmer as it moves away from our system. It has often happened before.”

Then they turned back to the conning-tower. The needle had swung to its old position. The new star, henceforth to be known in the annals of astronomy as Lilla-Zaidie, had already set for them to the right of the Astronef and risen on the left, and, at a distance of over nine hundred million miles from the earth, the corner was turned, and the homeward voyage began.

Chapter XX

A week later they crossed the path of Jupiter, but the giant was invisible, far away on the other side of the sun. Redgrave laid his course so as to avail himself to the utmost of the "pull" of the planets without going near enough to them to be compelled to exert too much of the priceless R. Force, which the indicators showed to be running perilously low.

Between the orbits of Jupiter and Mars they made a decided economy by landing on Ceres, one of the largest of the asteroids, and travelling about fifty million miles on her towards the orbit of the earth without any expenditure of force whatever. They found the tiny world possessed of a breathable atmosphere and a fluid resembling water but nearly as dense as mercury. A couple of flasks of it form the greatest treasures of the British Museum and the National Museum at Washington. The vegetable world was represented by coarse grass, lichens, and dwarf shrubs, and the animal by different species of worms, lizards and flies, and small burrowing animals of the rodent type.

As the orbit of Ceres, like that of the other asteroids, is considerably inclined to that of the earth, the Astronef rose from its surface when the plane of the earth's revolution was reached, and the glittering swarm of miniature planets plunged away into space beneath them.

"Where to now?" said Zaidie, as her husband came down on deck from the conning-tower.

"I am going to try to steer a middle course between the orbits of Mercury and Venus," he replied. "They just happen to be so placed now that we ought to be able to get the advantage of the pull of both of them as we pass, and that will save us a lot of power. The only thing I'm afraid of is the pull of the sun, equal to goodness knows how many times the attraction of all the planets put together. You see, little woman, it's like this," he went on, taking out a pencil and going down on one knee on the deck: "Here's the Astronef; there's Venus; there's Mercury; there's the sun; and there, away on the other side of him, is Mother Earth: If we can turn that corner safely and without expending too much power we should be all right."

"And if we can't, what will happen?"

"It will be a choice between morphine and cremation in the atmosphere of the sun, dear, or rather gradually roasting as we fall towards it."

"Then, of course, it will be morphine," she said quite quietly, as she turned away from his diagram and looked at the now fast increasing disc of the sun. A well-balanced mind speedily becomes accustomed even to the most terrible perils, and Zaidie had now looked this one so long and so steadily in the face that for her it had already become merely the choice between two forms of death with just a chance of escape hidden in the closed hand of Fate.

Thirty-six earth-hours later the glorious golden disc of Venus lay broad and bright beneath them. Above was the blazing orb of the Sun, nearly half as big again as it appears from the earth, with Mercury, a round black spot, travelling slowly across it.

"My dear Bird-Folk!" said Zaidie, looking down at the lovely world below them. "If home wasn't home—"

"We can be back among them in a few hours with absolute safety," interrupted her husband, catching at the suggestion. "I've told you the truth about getting back to the earth. It's only a chance at best, and even if we pass the sun we may not have force enough left to prevent the Astronef from being smashed to dust or burnt up in the atmosphere. After all we might do worse—"

"What would you do if you were alone, Lenox?" she said, interrupting him in turn.

"I should take my chance and go on. After all home's home and worth a struggle. But you, dear—"

"I'm you, and so I take the same chances as you do. Besides, we're not perfect enough for a world where there isn't any sin. We should probably get quite miserable there. No, home's home, as you say."

"Then home it is, dear!" He replied.

The vast, resplendent hemisphere of the Love-Star sunk swiftly down into the vault of space, growing swiftly smaller and dimmer as the Astronef sped towards the little black spot on the face of the sun, which to

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

them was like a buoy marking a place of utter and hopeless shipwreck in the ocean of immensity.

The chronometer, still set to Earth time, had now begun to mark the last hours of the Astronef's voyage. She was not only travelling at a speed of which figures could give no comprehensible idea, but the Sun, Mercury, and the Earth were rushing towards her with a compound velocity, composed of the movement of the Solar System through space and of the movement of the two planets round the sun.

Murgatroyd was at his post in the engine-room. Redgrave and Zaidie had gone into the conning-tower, perhaps for the last time. For good fortune or evil, for life or death, they would see the end of the voyage together.

"How far yet, dear?" she said, as Venus began to slip away behind them, rising like a splendid moon in their wake.

"Only sixty million miles or so, a matter of a few hours, more or less—it all depends," he replied, without taking his eyes off the compass.

"Sixty millions! Why I feel almost at home again."

"But we have to turn the corner of the street yet, dear, and after that there's a fall of more than twenty-five million miles on to the more or less kindly breast of Mother Earth."

"A fall! It does sound rather awful when you put it that way; but I am not going to let you frighten me. I believe Mother Earth will receive her wandering children quite as kindly as they deserve."

The moon-like disc of Venus grew swiftly smaller, and the black spot on the face of the sun larger and larger as the Astronef rushed silently and imperceptibly, and yet with almost inconceivable velocity, towards doom or fortune. Neither Zaidie nor Redgrave spoke again for nearly three hours—hours which to them seemed to pass like so many minutes. Their eyes were fixed on the black disc of Mercury, which, as they approached it, expanded with magical rapidity till it completely eclipsed the blazing orb behind it. Their thoughts were far away on the still invisible Earth and all the splendid possibilities that it held for two young lives like theirs.

As the sunlight vanished they looked at each other in the golden moonlight of Venus, and Zaidie let her head rest for a moment on her husband's shoulder. Then a swiftly broadening gleam of light shot out from behind the black circle of Mercury. The first crisis had come. Redgrave put out his hand to the signal-board and rang for full power. The planet seemed to swing round as the Astronef rushed into the blaze. In a few minutes it passed through the phases from "new" to "full." Venus became eclipsed in turn as they swung between Mercury and the Sun, and then Redgrave, after a rapid glance to either side, said:

"If we can only keep the two pulls balanced we shall do it. That will keep us in a straight line, and our own momentum ought to carry us into the Earth's attraction."

Zaidie did not reply. She was shading her eyes with her hand from the almost intolerable brilliance of the sun's rays, and looking straight ahead to catch the first glimpse of the silver-grey orb. Her husband read her thoughts and respected them. But a few minutes later he startled her out of her dream of home by exclaiming:

"Good God, we're turning!"

"What do you say, dear? Turning what?"

"On our own centre. Look! I'm afraid only a miracle can save us now, darling."

She looked to the left-hand side where he was pointing. The sun, no longer now a sun, but a vast ocean of flame filling, nearly a third of the vault of space, was sinking beneath them, on the right Mercury was rising. Zaidie knew only too well what this meant. It meant that the keel of the Astronef was being dragged out of the straight line which would cut the earth's orbit some forty million miles away. It meant that, in spite of the exertion of the full power that the engines could develop, they had begun to fall into the sun.

Redgrave laid his hand on his wife's, and their eyes met. There was no need for words. Perhaps speech just then would have been impossible. In that mute glance each looked into the other's soul and was content. Then he left the conning-tower, and Zaidie dropped on to her knees before the instrument-table and laid her forehead upon her clasped hands.

Her husband went to the saloon, unlocked a little cupboard in the wall and took out a blue bottle of corrugated glass labeled "Morphine, Poison." He took another empty bottle of white glass and measured fifty drops into it. Then he went to the engine-room and said abruptly:

"Murgatroyd, I'm afraid it's all up with us. We're falling into the sun, and you know what that means. In a

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

few hours the Astronef will be red-hot. So it's roasting alive—or this. I recommend this.”

“And what might that be, my lord?” said the old engineer, looking at the bottle which his master held out towards him.

“That's morphine—poison. Fill that up with water, drink it, and in half-an-hour you'll be dead without knowing it. Of course, you won't take it until there's absolutely no hope; but, granted that, you'll find this a better death than roasting or baking alive.” Then his voice changed suddenly as he went on: “Of course, I need not say, Murgatroyd, how deeply I regret now that I asked you to come in the Astronef.”

“My lord, my people have served yours for seven hundred years, and, whether on earth or among the stars, where you go it is my duty to go also. But don't ask me to take the poison. It is not for me to say that a journey like this is tempting Providence, but, by my lights, if I am to die it will be the death that Providence in its wisdom sends.”

“I daresay you're right in one way, Murgatroyd, but it's no time to argue about beliefs now. There's the bottle. Do as you think right. And now, in case the miracle doesn't happen, good-bye.”

“Good-bye, my lord, if it be so,” replied the old Yorkshireman, taking the hand which Redgrave held out to him. “I'll keep the power on to the last, I suppose?”

“Yes, you may as well. If it doesn't keep us away from the Sun it won't be much use to us in two or three hours.”

He left the engine-room and went back to the conning-tower. Zaidie was still on her knees. Beneath and around them the awful gulf of flame was broadening and deepening. Mercury was rising higher and growing smaller. He put the bottle down on the table and waited. Then Zaidie looked up. Her eyes were clear, and her face was perfectly calm. She rose and put her arm through his, and said:

“Well, is there any hope, dear? There can't be now, can there? Is that the morphine?”

“Yes,” he replied, slipping his arm beneath hers and round her waist. “I'm afraid there's not much hope now, little woman. We're using up the last of the power, and you see—”

As he said this he looked at the thermometer. The mercury had risen from 65 degrees Fahrenheit, the normal temperature of the interior of the Astronef, to 93 degrees, and during the half-minute that he watched it rose another degree. There was no mistaking such a warning as that. He had brought two little liqueur glasses in his pocket from the saloon. He divided the morphine between them, and filled them up with water.

“Not until the last moment, dear,” said Zaidie, as he set one of them before her. “We have no right to do it until then.”

“Very well. When the mercury reaches a hundred and fifty. After that it will go up ten and fifteen degrees at a jump, and we—”

“Yes, at a hundred and fifty,” she replied, cutting short a speech she dared not hear the end of. “I understand. It will be impossible to hope any more.”

Now, side by side, they stood and watched the thermometer.

N i n e t y - f i v e — n i n e t y - e i g h t — a h u n d r e d a n d t h r e e — a h u n d r e d a n d t e n — e i g h t e e n — t w e n t y - f o u r — t h i r t y - t w o — f o r t y - o n e .

The silent minutes passed, and with each the silver thread—for them the thread of life—grew, with strange contradiction, longer and longer, and with every minute it grew more quickly.

A hundred and forty-six.

With his right arm Redgrave drew Zaidie still closer to him. He put out his left hand and took up the little glass. She did the same.

“Good-bye, dear, till we have slept and wake again!”

“Good-bye, darling, God grant that we may!” But the agony of that last farewell was more than Zaidie could hear. She looked away at the little glass in her hand, a hand which even now did not tremble. Then she raised her eyes again to take one last look at the glory of the stars, and at the Fate incarnate in flame which lay beneath them.

“The Earth, the Earth—thank God, the Earth!”

With the hand that held the draught of Lethe—which in another moment would have passed her lips—she caught at her husband's hand, pulled the glass out of it, and then with a little sigh she dropped senseless on the floor of the conning-tower. Redgrave looked for a moment in the direction that her eyes had taken. A pale,

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

silver–grey crescent, with a little white spot near it, was rising out of the blackness beyond the edge of the solar ocean of flame. Home was in sight at last, but would they reach it—and how?

He picked her up and carried her to their room and laid her on the bed. Then he went to the medicine chest again, this time for a very different purpose.

An hour later, they were on the upper deck with their telescopes turned on to the rapidly–growing crescent of the home–world, which, in its eternal march through space, had come into the line of direct attraction just in time to turn the scale in which the lives of the star–voyagers were trembling. The higher it rose, the bigger and broader and brighter it grew, and, at last, Zaidie—forgetting in her transport of joy all the perils that were yet to come—sprang to her feet and clapped her hands, and cried:

“There’s America!”

Then she dropped back into her long deck–chair and began a good, hearty, healthy cry.

Epilogue

THERE is little now to be told that all the world does not already know as well as it knows the circumstances of Lord and Lady Redgrave’s departure from the Earth, at the beginning of that marvellous voyage, that desperate plunge into the unknown immensities of Space which began so happily, and yet with so many grave misgivings in the hearts of their friends, and which, after passing many perils, the adventurous voyagers finished even more happily than they had begun.

As I said at the beginning of this narrative the sole purpose of writing it has been to place before the reading public an account of the adventures experienced by Lord Redgrave and his beautiful Countess from the time of their departure from the Earth to the hour of their return to it. Therefore there is no need to re–tell a tale already told, and one that has been read and re–read a thousand times. Every one who has read his or her newspaper from Chamskatska to Cape Horn, and from Alaska to South Australia, knows how the Commander of the Astronef so nursed the remains which were left to him of the R. Force after overcoming the attraction of the Sun, that he was able to steer an oblique course between the Moon and the Earth, and to counteract what Zaidie called the all too–loving attraction of the Mother Planet, and, after sixty hours of agonising suspense, at last re–entered their native atmosphere.

The expenditure of the last few units of the R. Force enabled them to just clear the summits of the Bolivian Andes, to cross the foothills and western slopes of Peru, and finally to let the Astronef drop quietly on to the bosom of the broad Pacific about twenty miles westward of the Port of Mollendo.

All this time thousands of anxious eyes had been peering through telescopes every night in quest of the wanderers who must now be returning if ever they were to return, and a reward of ten thousand dollars, offered conjointly by the British and United States Governments for the first authentic tidings of the Astronef, was won by a smart young Californian, who was Assistant Astronomer at the Harvard University Observatory at Arequipa.

One night when he was on duty watching a lunar occultation, he saw something sweep across the disc of the full moon just as the captain and officers of the St. Louis had seen that same something sweep across the disc of the rising sun. What else could it be if not the Astronef. He rang for another assistant to go on with the occultation, and wired down to the coast requesting the British Consul at Mollendo to look out for an arrival from the skies.

Three hours later the gleam of an electric searchlight flickered down over the huge black cone of the Misti, and by dawn the next morning one of Her Majesty’s cruisers—most appropriately named Astroeia—attached to the Pacific Squadron then en route from Lima to Valparaiso, steamed out westward from Mollendo and found the long, shining hull of the Astronef waiting quietly on the unrippled rollers of the Pacific, and Lord and Lady Redgrave having breakfast in the deck–chamber.

Compliments and congratulations having been duly exchanged, she was taken in tow by the cruiser, and so reached Valparaiso. Here she lay for a few days while the wires of the world were being kept hot with telegraphic accounts of her return to Earth, and while her Commander, with the assistance of the officers of the National Laboratory, was replenishing his stock of the R. Fluid from the chemicals which they had placed at his disposal.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

It would, of course, have been quite possible for him and Zaidie to have taken steamer northward to Panama, crossed the Isthmus, and returned to New York and Washington via Jamaica. The British Admiral even offered to place his fastest cruiser at their disposal for a run to San Francisco, whence the Overland Limited would have landed them in New York in four days and a half, but Zaidie vetoed this as quickly as she had done the other proposition. If she had her way the Astronef should go back to Washington as she had left it, by means of her own motive force, and so, of course, it came to pass.

Even Murgatroyd's grim and homely features seemed irradiated by a glow of what he afterwards thought unholy pride when he once more stood by his levers and heard the familiar signal coming from the conning-tower.

"A tenth."

And then—"Stand by steering-gear."

The next moment there was another tinkle in the engine-room.

Redgrave, standing with Zaidie in the conning-tower, moved the power-wheel through ten degrees, and then to the amazement of tens of thousands of spectators, the hull of the Astronef rose perpendicularly from the waters of the Bay. The British Squadron and a detachment of the Chilian fleet thundered out a salute which was answered a few moments later by the shore batteries, Redgrave went down into the deck-chamber and fired twenty-one shots from one of the Maxim-Nordenfelts—the same with which he had mown down the crowds of Martians in the square of their great city a hundred and thirty million miles away, and while he was doing this Zaidie in the conning-tower ran the White Ensign up to the top of the flagstaff.

Then the glass doors were closed again, the propellers began to revolve at their utmost speed, and the Space-Navigator with one tremendous leap cleared the double chain of the Andes and vanished to the north-eastward.

To describe the reception of Lord and Lady Redgrave when the Astronef dropped a few hours later, on to the very spot in front of the steps of the Capitol at Washington from which she had risen just four months before, would only be to repeat what has already been told in the Press of the world, and especially of the United States, with a far more luxuriant wealth of detail than could possibly be emulated here. Suffice it to say that the first human form that Zaidie embraced after her long wanderings was that of Mrs. Van Stuyler, whom the President of the United States had escorted to the gangway.

The most marvellous of human adventures become commonplace by repetition, and Mrs. Van Stuyler had already spent nearly a fortnight devouring every item, whether of fact or fancy, with which the American Press had embroidered the adventures of the Astronef and her crew. And so when the first embracings and emotions were over, all she could find to say was:

"Well, Zaidie dear, and how did you enjoy it, after all?"

"It was just gorgeous, Mrs. Van, and if there was a more gorgeous word than that in the American language I'd use it," replied Zaidie, with another hug, "Why didn't you come? You'd have been—well no, perhaps I'd better not say what you would have been. But just think of it, or try to—A honeymoon trip of over two thousand million miles, and back—safe—thank God!"

As she said this, Zaidie threw her arm over Mrs. Van Stuyler's shoulder, and drew her away towards the forward end of the deck-chamber. At the same moment the President's hand met Lord Redgrave's in a long, strong grip. They didn't say anything just then. Men seldom do under such circumstances.

THE END

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

The World Peril Of 1910

Prologue — A Race For A Woman

IN Clifden, the chief coast town of Connemara, there is a house at the end of a triangle which the two streets of the town form, the front windows of which look straight down the beautiful harbour and bay, whose waters stretch out beyond the islands which are scattered along the coast and, with the many submerged reefs, make the entrance so difficult.

In the first-floor double-windowed room of this house, furnished as a bed-sitting room, there was a man sitting at a writing-table—not an ordinary writing-table, but one the dimensions of which were more suited to the needs of an architect or an engineer than to those of a writer. In the middle of the table was a large drawing-desk, and on it was pinned a sheet of cartridge paper, which was almost covered with portions of designs.

In one corner there was what might be the conception of an engine designed for a destroyer or a submarine. In another corner there was a sketch of something that looked like a lighthouse, and over against this the design of what might have been a lantern. The top left-hand corner of the sheet was merely a blur of curved lines and shadings and cross-lines, running at a hundred different angles which no one, save the man who had drawn them, could understand the meaning of.

In the middle of the sheet there was a very carefully-outlined drawing in hard pencil of a craft which was different from anything that had ever sailed upon the waters or below them, or, for the matter of that, above them.

To the right hand there was a rough, but absolutely accurate, copy of this same craft leaving the water and flying into the air, and just underneath this a tiny sketch of a flying fish doing the same thing.

The man sitting before the drawing-board was an Irishman. He was one of those men with the strong, crisp hair, black brows and deep brown eyes, straight, strong nose almost in a line with his forehead, thin, nervous lips and pointed jaw, strong at the angles but weak at the point, which come only from one descent.

Nearly four hundred years before, one of the ships of the great Armada had been wrecked on Achill Island, about twenty miles from where he sat. Half a dozen or so of the crew had been saved, and one of these was a Spanish gentleman, captain of Arquebusiers who, drenched and bedraggled as he was when the half-wild Irish fishermen got him out of the water, still looked what he was, a Hidalgo of Spain. He had been nursed back to health and strength in a miserable mud and turf-walled cottage, and, broken in fortune—for he was one of the many gentlemen of Spain who had risked their all on the fortunes of King Philip and the Great Armada, and lost—he refused to go back to his own country a beaten man.

And meanwhile he had fallen in love with the daughter of his nurse, the wife of the fisherman who had taken him more than half dead out of the raging Atlantic surf.

No man ever knew who he was, save that he was a gentleman, a Spaniard, and a Catholic. But when he returned to the perfection of physical and mental health, and had married the grey-eyed, dark-browed girl, who had seemed to him during his long hours of sickness the guardian angel who had brought him back across the line which marks the frontier between life and death, he developed an extraordinary talent in boat-building, which was the real origin of the wonderful sea-worthiness of small craft which to this day brave, almost with impunity, the terrible seas which, after an unbroken run of almost two thousand miles, burst upon the rockbound, island-fenced coast of Connemara.

The man at the table was the descendant in the sixth generation of the unknown Spanish Hidalgo, who

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

nearly four hundred years before had said in reply to a question as to what his name was:

“Juan de Castellano.”

As the generations had passed, the name, as usual, had got modified, and this man's name was John Castellan.

“I think that will about do for the present,” he said, getting up from the table and throwing his pencil down. “I've got it almost perfect now;” and then as he bent down again over the table, and looked over every line of his drawings, “Yes, it's about all there. I wonder what my Lords of the British Admiralty would give to know what that means. Well, God save Ireland, they shall some day!”

He unpinned the paper from the board, rolled it up, and put it into the top drawer of an old oak cabinet, which one would hardly have expected to find in such a room as that, and locked the drawer with a key on his key-chain. Then he took his cap from a peg on the door, and his gun from the corner beside it, and went out.

There are three ways out of Clifden to the west, one to the southward takes you over the old bridge, which arches the narrow rock-walled gorge, which gathers up the waters of the river after they have had their frolic over the rocks above. The other is a continuation of the main street, and this, as it approaches the harbour, where you may now see boats built on the pattern which John Castellan's ancestor had designed, divides into two roads, one leading along the shore of the bay, and the other, rough, stony, and ill-kept, takes you above the coast-guard station, and leads to nowhere but the Atlantic Ocean.

Between these two roads lies in what was once a park, but which is now a wilderness, Clifden Castle. Castle in Irish means country house, and all over the south and west of Ireland you may find such houses as this with doors screwed up, windows covered with planks, roofs and eaves stripped of the lead and slates which once protected them from the storms which rise up from the Atlantic, and burst in wind and rain, snow and sleet over Connemara, long ago taken away to sell by the bankrupt heirs of those who ruined themselves, mortgaged and sold every acre of ground and every stick and stone they owned to maintain what they called the dignity of their families at the Vice-Regal Court in Dublin.

John Castellan took the lower road, looking for duck. The old house had been the home of his grandfather, but he had never lived in it. The ruin had come in his father's time, before he had learned to walk. He looked at it as he passed, and his teeth clenched and his brows came together in a straight line.

Almost at the same moment that he left his house an Englishman came out of the Railway Hotel. He also had a gun over his shoulder, and he took the upper road. These two men, who were to meet for the first time that day, were destined to decide the fate of the world between them.

As John Castellan walked past the ruined distillery, which overlooks the beach on which the fishing boats are drawn up, he saw a couple of duck flying seaward. He quickened his pace, and walked on until he turned the bend of the road, at which on the right-hand side a path leads up to a gate in the old wall, which still guards the ragged domains of Clifden Castle. A few hundred yards away there is a little peninsula, on which stands a house built somewhat in bungalow fashion. The curve of the peninsula turns to the eastward, and makes a tiny bay of almost crescent shape. In this the pair of duck settled.

John Castellan picked up a stone from the road, and threw it into the water. As the birds rose his gun went up. His right barrel banged and the duck fell. The drake flew landward: he fired his left barrel and missed.

Then came a bang from the upper road, and the drake dropped. The Englishman had killed it with a wire cartridge in his choked left barrel.

“I wonder who the devil did that!” said Castellan, as he saw the bird fall. “It was eighty yards if it was an inch, and that's a good gun with a good man behind it.”

The Englishman left the road to pick up the bird and then went down the steep, stony hillside towards the shore of the silver-mouthed bay in the hope of getting another shot farther on, for the birds were now beginning to come over; and so it came about that he and the Irishman met within a few yards of each other, one on either side of a low spit of sand and shingle.

“That was a fine shot you killed the drake with,” said the Irishman, looking at the bird he was carrying by the legs in his left hand.

“A good gun, and a wire cartridge, I fancy, were mainly responsible for his death,” laughed the Englishman. “See you've got the other.”

“Yes, and missed yours,” said the Irishman.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

The other recognised the tone as that of a man to whom failure, even in the most insignificant matter, was hateful, and he saw a quick gleam in his eyes which he remembered afterwards under very different circumstances.

But it so happened that the rivalry between them which was hereafter to have such momentous consequences was to be manifested there and then in a fashion much more serious than the hitting or missing of a brace of wild fowl.

Out on the smooth waters of the bay, about a quarter of a mile from the spit on which they stood, there were two boats. One was a light skiff, in which a girl, clad in white jersey and white flannel skirt, with a white Tam O'Shanter pinned on her head, was sculling leisurely towards the town. From the swing of her body, the poise of her head and shoulders, and the smoothness with which her sculls dropped in the water and left it, it was plain that she was a perfect mistress of the art; wherefore the two men looked at her, and admired.

The other craft was an ordinary rowing boat, manned by three lads out for a spree. There was no one steering and the oars were going in and out of the water with a total disregard of time. The result was that her course was anything but a straight line. The girl's sculls made no noise, and the youths were talking and laughing loudly.

Suddenly the boat veered sharply towards the skiff. The Englishman put his hands to his mouth, and yelled with all the strength of his lungs.

"Look out, you idiots, keep off shore!"

But it was too late. The long, steady strokes were sending the skiff pretty fast through the smooth water. The boat swerved again, hit the skiff about midway between the stem and the rowlocks, and the next moment the sculler was in the water. In the same moment two guns and two ducks were flung to the ground, two jackets were torn off, two pairs of shoes kicked away, and two men splashed into the water. Meanwhile the sculler had dropped quietly out of the sinking skiff, and after a glance at the two heads, one fair and the other dark, ploughing towards her, turned on her side and began to swim slowly in their direction so as to lessen the distance as much as possible.

The boys, horrified at what they had done, made such a frantic effort to go to the rescue, that one of them caught a very bad crab; so bad indeed that the consequent roll of the boat sent him headlong into the water; and so the two others one of whom was his elder brother, perhaps naturally left the girl to her fate, and devoted their energies to saving their companion.

Both John Castellán and the Englishman were good swimmers, and the race was a very close thing. Still, four hundred yards with most of your clothes on is a task calculated to try the strongest swimmer, and, although the student had swum almost since he could walk, his muscles were not quite in such good form as those of the ex-athlete of Cambridge who, six months before, had won the Thames Swimming Club Half-mile Handicap from scratch.

Using side stroke and breast-stroke alternately they went at it almost stroke for stroke about half a dozen yards apart, and until they were within thirty yards or so of the third swimmer, they were practically neck and neck, though Castellán had the advantage of what might be called the inside track. In other words he was a little nearer to the girl than the Englishman.

When circumstances permitted they looked at each other, but, of course, neither of them was fool enough to waste his breath in speech. Still, each clearly understood that the other was going to get the girl first if he could.

So the tenth yard from the prize was reached, and then the Englishman shook his head up an inch, filled his lungs, rolled on to his side, and made a spurt with the reserve of strength which he had kept for the purpose. Inch by inch he drew ahead obliquely across Castellán's course and, less than a yard in front of him, he put his right hand under the girl's right side.

A lovely face, beautiful even though it was splashed all over with wet strands of dark chestnut hair, turned towards him; a pair of big blue eyes which shone in spite of the salt water which made them blink, looked at him; and, after a cough, a very sweet voice with just a suspicion of Boston accent in it, said:

"Thank you so much! It was real good of you! I can swim, but I don't think I could have got there with all these things on, and so I reckon I owe you two gentlemen my life."

Castellán had swum round, and they took her under the arms to give her a rest. The two boys left in the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

boat had managed to get an oar out to their comrade just in time, and then haul him into the boat, which was now about fifty yards away; so as soon as the girl had got her breath they swam with her to the boat, and lifted her hands on to the gunwale.

“If you wouldn't mind, sir, picking up those oars,” said the Englishman, “I will get the young lady into the boat, and then we can row back.”

Castellan gave him another look which said as plainly as words: “Well, I suppose she's your prize for the present,” and swam off for the oars. With the eager help of the boys, who were now very frightened and very penitent, the Englishman soon had the girl in the boat; and so it came about that an adventure which might well have deprived America of one of her most beautiful and brilliant heiresses, resulted in nothing more than a ducking for two men and one girl, a wet, but somehow not altogether unpleasant walk, and a slight chill from which she had quite recovered the next morning.

The after consequences of that race for the rescue were of course, quite another matter. Poke then, all unconsciously. But in the days to come they were fulfilled in such fashion that only one man in all the world had ever dreamed of, and that was the man who had beaten John Castellan by a yard in the swimming race for the rescue of that American girl from drowning.

Chapter II — Norah's Good-Bye

THE scene had shifted back from the royal city of Potsdam to the little coast town in Connemara. John Castellan was sitting on a corner of his big writing-table swinging his legs to and fro, and looking a little uncomfortable. Leaning against the wall opposite the windows, with her hands folded behind her back, was a girl of about nineteen, an almost perfect incarnation of the Irish girl at her best. Tall, black-haired, black-browed, grey-eyed, perfectly-shaped, and with that indescribable charm of feature which neither the pen nor the camera can do justice to—Norah Castellan was facing him, her eyes gleaming and almost black with anger, and her whole body instinct with intense vitality.

“And so Ireland hasn't troubles enough of her own, John, that you must bring new ones upon her, and what for? To realise a dream that was never anything else but a dream, and to satisfy a revenge that is three hundred years old! If that theory of yours about reincarnation is true, you may have been a Spaniard once, but remember that you're an Irishman now; and you're no good Irishman if you sell yourself to these foreigners to do a thing like that, and it's your sister that's telling you.”

“And it's your brother, Norah,” he replied, his black brows meeting almost in a straight line across his forehead, “who tells you that Ireland is going to have her independence; that the shackles of the Saxon shall be shaken off once and for ever, even if all Europe blazes up with war in the doing of it. I have the power and I will use it. Spaniard or Irishman, what does it matter? I hate England and everything English.”

“Hate England, John!” said the girl. “Are you quite sure that it isn't an Englishman that you hate?”

“Well, and what if I do? I hate all Englishmen, and I'm the first Irishman who has ever had the power to put his hatred into acts instead of words—and you, an Irish girl, with six generations of Irish blood in your veins, you, to talk to me like this. What are you thinking about, Norah? Is that what you call patriotism?”

“Patriotism!” she echoed, unclasping her hands, and holding her right hand out towards him. “I'm as Irish as you are, and as Spanish, too, for the matter of that, for the same blood is to the veins of both of us. You're a scholar and a genius, and all the rest of it, I grant you; but haven't you learned history enough to know that Ireland never was independent, and never could be? What brought the English here first? Four miserable provinces that called themselves kingdoms, and all fighting against each other, and the king of one of them stole the wife of the king of another of them, and that's how the English came.

“I love Ireland as well as you do, John, but Ireland is not worth setting the world swimming in blood for. You're lighting a match-box to set the world ablaze with. It isn't Ireland only, remember. There are Irish all over the world, millions of them, and remember how the Irish fought in the African War. I don't mean Lynch and his traitors, but the Dublin boys. Who were the first in and the last out—Irishmen, but they had the sense to know that they were British first and Irish afterwards. I tell you, you shall be shot for what you've done, and if I wasn't the daughter of your father and mother, I'd inform against you now.”

“And if you did, Norah, you would do very little good to the Saxon cause,” replied her brother, pointing with his thumb out of one of the windows. “You see that yacht in the bay there. Everything is on board of her. If you went out into the street now, gave me in charge of the constabulary, to those two men in front of the hotel there, it would make no difference. There's nothing to be proved, no, not even if my own sister tried to swear my life and liberty away. It would only be that the Germans and the Russians, and the Austrians, and the rest of them would work out my ideas instead of me working them out, and it might be that they would make a worse use of them. You've half an hour to give me up, if you like.”

And then he began to collect the papers that were scattered about the big drawing-table, sorting them out and folding them up and then taking other papers and plans from the drawers and packing them into a little black dispatch box.

“But, John, John,” she said, crossing the room, and putting her hand on his shoulder. “Don't tell me that you're going to plunge the world in war just for this. Think of what it means—the tens of thousands of lives that will be lost, the thousands of homes that will be made desolate, the women who will be crying for their

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

husbands, and the children for their fathers, the dead men buried in graves that will never have a name on them, and the wounded, broken men coming back to their homes that they will never be able to keep up again, not only here and in England, but all over Europe and perhaps in America as well! Genius you may be; but what are you that you should bring calamity like this upon humanity?"

"I'm an Irishman, and I hate England, and that's enough," he replied sullenly, as he went on packing his papers.

"You hate that Englishman worse than you hate England, John."

"And I wouldn't wonder if you loved that Englishman more than you loved Ireland, Norah," he replied, with a snarl in his voice.

"And if I did," she said, with blazing eyes and flaming cheeks, "isn't England nearer to Ireland than America?"

"Geographically, perhaps, but in sentiment—"

"Sentiment! Yes, when you have finished with this bloody business of yours that you have begun on, go you through Ireland and England and Europe, and ask the widows and the fatherless, and the girls who kissed their lovers 'good-bye,' and never saw them again, what they think of that sentiment! But it's no use arguing with you now; there's your German yacht. You're no brother of mine. You've made me sorry that we had the same father and mother."

As she spoke, she went to the door, opened it and, before he could reply, slammed it behind her, and went to her room to seek and find a woman's usual relief from extreme mental tension.

John Castellan went on packing his papers, his face grey, and his features hard-set. He loved his beautiful sister, but he thought that he loved his country more. When he had finished he went and knocked at her door, and said "Norah, I'm going. Won't you say 'good-bye?'"

The door was swung open, and she faced him, her face wet with tears, her eyes glistening, and her lips twitching.

"Yes, good-bye, John," she said. "Go to your German friends; but, when all the horrors that you are going to bring upon this country through their help come to pass, remember you have no sister left in Ireland. You've sold yourself, and I have no brother who is a traitor. Good-bye!"

The door swung to and she locked it. John Castellan hesitated for a moment or two, and then with a slow shake of his head he went away down the stairs out into the street, and along to the little jetty where the German yacht's boat was waiting to take him on board.

Norah had thrown herself on her bed in her locked room shedding the first but not the last tear that John Castellan's decision was destined to draw from women's eyes.

About half an hour later the encircling hills of the bay echoed the shriek of a siren. She got up, looked out of the window, and saw the white shape of the German yacht moving out towards the fringe of islands which guard the outward bay.

"And there he goes!" she said in a voice that was almost choked with sobs, "there he goes, my own brother, it may be taking the fate of the world with him—yes, and on a German ship, too. He that knows every island and creek and cove and harbour from Cape Wrath to Cape Clear—he that's got all those inventions in his head, too, and the son of my own father and mother, sold his country to the foreigner, thinking those dirty Germans will keep their word with him.

"Not they, John, not they. The saints forgive me for thinking it, but for Ireland's sake I hope that ship will never reach Germany. If it does, we'll see the German Eagle floating over Dublin Castle before you'll be able to haul up the Green Flag. Well, well, there it is; it's done now, I suppose, and there's no help for it. God forgive you, John, I don't think man ever will!"

As she said this the white yacht turned the southern point of the inner bay, and disappeared to the southward. Norah bathed her face, brushed out her hair, and coiled it up again; then she put on her hat and jacket, and went out to do a little shopping.

It is perhaps a merciful provision of Providence that in this human life of ours the course of the greatest events shall be interrupted by the most trivial necessities of existence. Were it not for that the inevitable might become the unendurable.

The plain fact was that Norah Castellan had some friends and acquaintances coming to supper that

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

evening. Her brother had left at a few hours' notice from his foreign masters, as she called them, and there would have to be some explanation of his absence, especially as a friend of his, Arthur Lismore, the owner of the finest salmon streams for twenty miles round, and a man who was quite hopelessly in love with herself, was coming to brew the punch after the fashion of his ancestors, and so, of course, it was necessary that there should be nothing wanting.

Moreover, she was beginning to feel the want of some hard physical exercise, and an hour or so in that lovely air of Connemara, which, as those who know, say, is as soft as silk and as bright as champagne. So she went out, and as she turned the corner round the head of the harbour to the left towards the waterfall, almost the first person she met was Arthur Lismore himself—a brown-faced, chestnut-haired, blue-eyed, young giant of twenty-eight or so; as goodly a man as God ever put His own seal upon.

His cap came off, his head bowed with that peculiar grace of deference which no one has ever yet been able to copy from an Irishman, and he said in the strong, and yet curiously mellow tone which you only hear in the west of Ireland:

“Good afternoon, Miss Norah. I've heard that you're to be left alone for a time, and that we won't see John to-night.”

“Yes,” she said, her eyes meeting his, “that is true. He went away in that German yacht that left the bay less than an hour ago.”

“A German yacht!” he echoed. “Well now, how stupid of me, I've been trying to think all the afternoon what that flag was she carried when she came in.”

“The German Imperial Yacht Club,” she said, “that was the ensign she was flying, and John has gone to Germany in her.”

“To Germany! John gone to Germany! But what for? Surely now—”

“Yes, to Germany, to help the Emperor to set the world on fire.”

“You're not saying that, Miss Norah?”

“I am,” she said, more gravely than he had ever heard her speak. “Mr Lismore, it's a sick and sorry girl I am this afternoon. You were the first Irishman on the top of Waggon Hill, and you'll understand what I mean. If you have nothing better to do, perhaps you'll walk down to the Fall with me, and I'll tell you.”

“I could have nothing better to do, Norah, and it's yourself that knows that as well as I do,” he replied.

“I only wish the road was longer. And it's yourself that's sick and sorry, is it? If it wasn't John, I'd like to get the reason out of any other man. That's Irish, but it's true.”

He turned, and they walked down the steeply sloping street for several minutes in silence.

Chapter III — Seen Under The Moon

IT was a few minutes after four bells on a grey morning in November 1909 that Lieutenant-Commander Francis Erskine, in command of his Majesty's Fishery Cruiser, the *Cormorant*, got up on to the navigating bridge, and, as usual, took a general squint about him, and buttoned the top button of his oil-skin coat.

The *Cormorant* was just a few yards inside the three-mile limit off Flamborough Head, and, officially, she was looking for trespassers, who either did not fly the British flag, or flew it fraudulently. There were plenty of foreign poachers on the rich fishing grounds to the north and east away to the Dogger, and there were also plenty of floating grog shops from Bremen and Hamburg, and Rotterdam and Flushing, and a good many other places, loaded up to their decks with liquor, whose mission was not only to sell their poison at about four hundred per cent. profit to the British fishers on the Dogger, but also to persuade them, at a price, to smuggle more of the said poison into the British Islands to be made into Scotch and Irish whisky, brandy, Hollands, gin, rum, and even green and yellow Chartreuse, or any other alcoholic potion which simply wanted the help of the chemist to transform potato and beet spirit into anything that would taste like what it was called.

"Beast of a morning, Castellan," he said to his first officer, whom he was relieving, "dirty sea, dirty sky, and not a thing to be seen. You don't have worse weather than this even off Connemara, do you?"

"No," said Castellan, "and I've seen better; but look you, there's the sky clearing to the east; yes, and there's Venus, herald of the sun: and faith, she's bright, too, like a little moon, now isn't she? I suppose it'll be a bit too early for Norah to be looking at her, won't it?"

"Don't talk rot, man," replied the Lieutenant-Commander. "I hope your sister hasn't finished her beauty sleep by this time."

The clouds parted still wider, making a great gap of blue-grey sky to the eastward, as the westward bank drifted downward. The moon sent a sudden flood of white light over their heads, which silvered the edges of the clouds, and then turned the leaden waters into silver as it had done to the grey of the cloud.

"She'd wake fast enough if she had a nightmare or a morning mare, or something of that sort, and could see a thing like that," exclaimed Castellan, gripping the Lieutenant-Commander by the shoulder with his right hand, and pointing to the east with his left. "Look, man, look! By all the Holy Powers, what is it? See there! Thanks for the blessed moonlight that has shown it to us, for I'm thinking it doesn't mean any good to old England or Ireland."

Erskine was an Englishman, and a naval officer at that, and therefore his reply consisted of only a few words hardly fitted for publication. The last words were, "What is it?"

"What is it?" said Castellan with a stamp of his feet on the bridge, "what is it? Now wouldn't I like to know just as well as you would, and don't you think the Lords of the British Admiralty would like to know a lot better? But there's one thing I think I can tell you, it's one of those new inventions that the British Admiralty never buy, and let go to other countries, and what's more, as you've seen with your eyes, as I have with mine, it came out of the water on the edge of that moonlit piece, it flew across it, it sighted us, I suppose, it found it had made a mistake, and it went down again. Now what do you make of that?"

"Combination of submarine and air-ship it looks like," said Erskine, seriously, "and if that doesn't belong to us, it's going to be fairly dangerous. Good Lord! a thing like that might do anything with a fleet, and whatever Power owns it may just as well have a hundred as one. Look here, Castellan, I'm going straight into Scarborough. This is a lot more important than the Dogger Fleet. There's the *Seagull* at Hull. She can relieve us, and Franklin can take this old coffee-grinder round. You and I are going to London as soon as we can get there. Take the latitude, longitude, and exact time, and also the evidence of the watch if any one of them saw it."

"You think it's as serious as that?"

"Certainly. It's one of two things. Either that thing belongs to us or it belongs to a possible enemy. The

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Fleet, even to a humble fishery cruiser, means the eyes and ears of the British Empire. If that belongs to the Admiralty, well and good; we shall get censured for leaving the ship; that's the risk we take. If it doesn't, the Naval Board may possibly have the civility to thank us for telling them about it; but in either case we are going to do our duty. Send Franklin up to the bridge, make the course for Scarborough, get the evidence of any of the watch who saw what we have seen, and I'll go and make the report. Then you can countersign it, and the men can make theirs. I think that's the best we can do."

"I think so, sir," said the Lieutenant, saluting.

The Lieutenant-Commander walked from port to starboard and starboard to port thinking pretty hard until the navigating lieutenant came to take charge of the bridge. Of submarines he knew a good deal. He knew that the British navy possessed the very best type of this craft which navigated the under-waters. He had also, of course, read the aerial experiments which had been made by inventors of what the newspapers called air-ships, and which he, with his hard naval common-sense, called gasbags with motor engines slung under them. He knew the deadly possibilities of the submarine; the flying gasbag he looked upon as gas and not much more. The real flying machine he had considered up till a few moments ago as a dream of the future; but a combination of submarine and flying ship such as he and Castellan, if they had not both been drunk or dreaming, had seen a few moments ago, was quite another matter. The possibilities of a thing like that were absolutely limitless, limitless for good or evil, and if it did belong to a possible enemy of Britain, there was only one conclusion to be arrived at—The Isle Inviolable would be inviolable no more.

Lieutenant Franklin came on to the bridge and saluted; he returned the salute, gave the orders for changing the course, and went down to his cabin, muttering:

"Good Lord, if that's only so. Why, half a dozen things like that could fight a fleet, then go on gaily to tackle the forts. I wonder whether my Lords of the Naval Council will see me to-morrow, and believe me if they do see me."

By great good luck it happened that the Commander of the North-eastern District had come up from Hull to Scarborough for a few days' holiday. When he saw the Cormorant steam into the bay, he very naturally wanted to know what was the matter, and so he went down to the pier-head, and met the Cormorant's cutter. As Erskine came up the steps he recognised him and saluted.

"Good-morning, sir."

"Good-morning, Erskine. What's the matter? You're a little off your ground, aren't you? Of course, there must be a reason for it. Anything serious?" replied the District Commander, as he held out his hand. "Ah, good morning, Castellan. So you've both come ashore. Well, now, what is it?"

Erskine took a rapid glance round at the promenaders who were coming down to have a look at the cruiser, and said in a low tone:

"Yes, sir. I am afraid it is rather serious; but it is hardly the sort of thing one could discuss here. In fact, I was taking the responsibility of going straight to London with Castellan, to present a report which we have drawn up to the Board of Admiralty."

The District Commander's iron-grey eyebrows lifted for the fraction of a minute, and he said:

"H'm. Well, Erskine, I know you're not the sort of man to do that sort of thing without pretty good reason. Come up to the hotel, both of you, and let us go into it."

"Thank you, sir," replied Erskine. "It is really quite fortunate that we met you here, because I think when you've seen the report you will feel justified in giving us formal leave instead of French leave."

"I hope so," he replied, somewhat grimly, for a rule of the Service had been broken all to pieces, and his own sense of discipline was sorely outraged by the knowledge that two responsible officers had left their ship with the intention of going to London without leave.

But when he had locked the door of his sitting-room at the hotel, and heard the amazing story which Erskine and Castellan had to tell, and had read their report, and the evidence of the men who had also seen the strange apparition which had leapt from the sea into the air, and then returned to the waters, he put in a few moments of silent thinking, and then he looked up, and said gravely:

"Well, gentlemen, I know that British naval officers and British seamen don't see things that are not there, as the Russians did a few years ago on the Dogger Bank. I am of course bound to believe you, and I think they will do the same in London. You have taken a very irregular course; but a man who is not prepared to do that

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

at a pinch seldom does anything else. I have seen and heard enough to convince me for the present; and so I shall have great pleasure, in fact I shall only be doing my duty, in giving you both leave for a week.

“I will order the Seagull up from Hull, she's about ready, and I think I can put an Acting-Commander on board the Cormorant for the present. Now, you will just have time for an early lunch with me, and catch the 1.17, which will get you to town at 5.15, and you will probably find somebody at the Admiralty then, because I know they're working overtime. Anyhow, if you don't find Sir John Fisher there, I should go straight to his house, if I were you; and even if you don't see him, you'll be able to get an early appointment for to-morrow.”

“That was a pretty good slice of luck meeting the noble Crocker, wasn't it?” said Castellán, as the train began to move out of the station, about three hours later. They had reserved a compartment in the corridor express, and were able to talk State secrets at their ease.

“We're inside the law now, at any rate.”

“Law or no law, it was good enough to risk a court-martial for,” said Erskine, biting off the end of a cigar. “There's no doubt about the existence of the thing, and if it doesn't belong to us, which is a fact that only my Lords of the Naval Council can know, it simply means, as you must see for yourself, that the invasion of England, which has been a naval and military impossibility for the last seven hundred years or so, will not only become possible but comparatively easy. There's nothing upon the waters or under them that could stand against a thing like that.”

“Oh, you're right enough there,” said Castellán, speaking with his soft West of Ireland brogue. “There's no doubt of that, and it's the very devil. A dozen of those things would play havoc with a whole fleet, and when the fleet's gone, or even badly hurt, what's to stop our good friends over yonder landing two or three million men just anywhere they choose, and doing pretty well what they like afterwards? By the Saints, that would be a horrible thing. We've nothing on land that could stand against them, though, of course, the boys would stand till they fell down; but fall they would.”

“Yes,” said Erskine, seriously. “It wouldn't exactly be a walk over for them, but I'm afraid there couldn't be very much doubt at the end, if the fleet once went.”

“I'm afraid not,” replied Castellán, “and we can only hope that our Lords of the Council will be of the same opinion, or, better still, that the infernal thing we saw belongs to us.”

“I hope so,” said Erskine, gravely. “If it doesn't—well, I wouldn't give half-a-crown for the biggest battleship in the British Navy.”

Chapter IV — The Shadow Of The Terror

BY a curious coincidence which, as events proved, was to have some serious consequences, almost at the same moment that Commander Erskine began to write his report on the strange vision which he and his Lieutenant had seen, Gilbert Lennard came out of the Observatory which Mr Ratliffe Parmenter had built on the south of the Whernside Hills in Yorkshire.

Mr Ratliffe Parmenter had two ambitions in life, one of which he had fulfilled. This was to pile millions upon millions by any possible means. As he used to say to his associates in his poorer days, “You've got to get there somehow, so get there”—and he had “got there.” It is not necessary for the purpose of the present narrative to say how he did it. He had done it, and that is why he bought the Hill of Whernside and about a thousand acres around it and built an Observatory on the top with which, to use his own words, he meant to lick Creation by seeing further into Creation than anyone else had done, and that is just what his great reflector had enabled his astronomer to do.

When he had locked the door Lennard looked up to the eastward where the morning star hung flashing like a huge diamond in splendid solitude against the brightening background of the sky. His face was the face of a man who had seen something that he would not like to describe to any other man. His features were hard set, and there were lines in his face which time might have drawn twenty or thirty years later. His lips made a straight line, and his eyes, although he had hardly slept three hours a night for as many nights, had a look in them that was not to be accounted for by ordinary insomnia.

His work was over for the night, and, if he chose, he could go down to the house three-quarters of a mile away and sleep for the rest of the day, or, at any rate, until lunch time; and yet he looked another long look at the morning star, thrust his hands down into his trousers pockets and turned up a side path that led through the heather, and spent the rest of the morning walking and thinking—walking slowly, and thinking very quickly.

When he came in to breakfast at nine the next morning after he had had a shave and a bath, Mr Parmenter said to him:

“Look here, young man, I'm old enough to be your father, and so you'll excuse me putting it that way; if you're going along like this I reckon I'll have to shut that Observatory down for the time being and take you on a trip to the States to see how they're getting on with their telescopes in the Alleghanies and the Rockies, and maybe down South too in Peru, to that Harvard Observatory above Arequipa on the Misti, as a sort of holiday. I asked you to come here to work, not to wear yourself out. As I've told you before, we've got plenty of men in the States who can sign their cheques for millions of dollars and can't eat a dinner, to say nothing of a breakfast, and you're too young for that.

“What's the matter? More trouble about that new comet of yours. You've been up all night looking at it, haven't you? Of course it's all right that you got hold of it before anybody else, but all the same I don't want you to be worrying yourself for nothing and get laid up before the time comes to take the glory of the discovery.”

While he was speaking the door of the breakfast-room opened and Auriole came in. She looked with a just perceptible admiration at the man who, as it seemed to her, was beginning to show a slight stoop in the broad shoulders and a little falling forward of the head which she had first seen driving through the water to her rescue in the Bay of Connemara. Her eyelids lifted a shade as she looked at him, and she said with a half smile:

“Good morning, Mr Lennard; I am afraid you've been sacrificing yourself a little bit too much to science. You don't seem to have had a sleep for the last two or three nights. You've been blinding your eyes over those tangles of figures and equations, parallaxes and cube roots and that sort of thing. I know something about them because I had some struggles with them myself at Vassar.”

“That's about it, Auriole,” said her father. “Just what I've been saying; and I hope our friend is not going on with this kind of business too long. Now, really, Mr Lennard, you know you must not, and that's all there is to

it.”

“Oh, no, I don't think you need be frightened of anything of that sort,” said Lennard, who had considerably brightened up as Auriole entered the room; “perhaps I may have been going a little too long without sleep; but, you see, a man who has the great luck to discover a new comet is something like one of the old navigators who discovered new islands and continents. Of course you remember the story of Columbus. When he thought he was going to find what is now the country which has had the honour—”

“I know you're going to say something nice, Mr Lennard,” interrupted Auriole, “but breakfast is ready; here it comes. If you take my advice you will have your coffee and something to eat and tell us the rest of it while you're getting something that will do you good. What do you think, Poppa?”

“Hard sense, Auriole, hard sense. Your mother used to talk just like that, and I reckon you've got it from her. Well now, here's the food, let's begin. I've got a hunger on me that I'd have wanted five dollars to stop at the time when I couldn't buy a breakfast.”

They sat down, Miss Auriole at the head of the table and her father and Lennard facing each other, and for the next few minutes there was a semi-silence which was very well employed in the commencement of one of the most important functions of the human day.

When Mr Parmenter had got through his first cup of coffee, his two poached eggs on toast, and was beginning on the fish, he looked across the table and said:

“Well now, Mr Lennard, I guess you're feeling a bit better, as I do, and so, maybe, you can tell us something new about comets.”

“I certainly am feeling better,” said Lennard with a glance at Auriole, “but, you see, I've got into a state of mind which is not unlike the physical state of the Red Indian who starves for a few days and then takes his meals, I mean the arrears of meals, all at once. When I have had a good long sleep, as I am going to have until to-night, I might—in fact, I hope I shall be able to tell you something definite about the question of the comet.”

“What—the question?” echoed Mr Parmenter. “About the comet? I didn't understand that there was any question. You have discovered it, haven't you?”

“I have made a certain discovery, Mr Parmenter,” said Lennard, with a gravity which made Auriole raise her eyelids quickly, “but whether I have found a comet so far unknown to astronomy or not, is quite another matter. Thanks to that splendid instrument of yours, I have found a something in a part of the heavens where no comet, not even a star, has even been seen yet, and, speaking in all seriousness, I may say that this discovery contradicts all calculations as to the orbits and velocities of any known comet. That is what I have been thinking about all night.”

“What?” said Auriole, looking up again. “Really something quite unknown?”

“Unknown except to the three people sitting at this table, unless another miracle has happened—I mean such a one as happened in the case of the discovery of Neptune which, as of course you know, Adams at Cambridge and Le Verrier at Paris—”

“Yes, yes,” said Auriole, “two men who didn't know each other; both looked for something that couldn't be seen, and found it. If you've done anything like that, Mr Lennard, I reckon Poppa will have good cause to be proud of his reflector—”

“And of the man behind it,” added her father. “A telescope's like a gun; no use without a good man behind it. Well, if that's so, Mr Lennard, this discovery of yours ought to shake the world up a bit.”

“From what I have seen so far,” replied Lennard, “I have not the slightest doubt that it will.”

“And when may I see this wonderful discovery of yours, Mr Lennard,” said Auriole, “this something which is going to be so important, this something that no one else's eyes have seen except yours. Really, you know, you've made me quite longing to get a sight of this stranger from the outer wilderness of space.”

“If the night is clear enough, I may hope to be able to introduce you to the new celestial visitor about a quarter-past eleven to-night, or to be quite accurate eleven hours, sixteen minutes and thirty-nine seconds p.m.”

“I think that's good enough, Auriole,” said her father. “If the heavens are only kind enough, we'll go up to the observatory and, as Mr Lennard says, see something that no one else has ever seen.”

“And then,” laughed Auriole, “I suppose you will have achieved the second ambition of your life. You

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

have already piled up a bigger heap of dollars than anybody else in the world, and by midnight you will have seen farther into Creation than anybody else. But you will let me have the first look, won't you?"

"Why, certainly," he replied. "As soon as Mr Lennard has got the telescope fixed, you go first, and I reckon that won't take very long."

"No," replied Lennard, "I've worked out the position for to-night, and it's only a matter of winding up the clockwork and setting the telescope. And now," he continued, rising, "if you will allow me, I will say—well, I was going to say good-night, but of course it's good morning—I'm going to bed."

"Will you come down to lunch, or shall I have some sent up to you?" said Auriole.

"No, thanks. I don't think there will be any need to trouble you about that. When I once get to sleep, I hope I shall forget all things earthly, and heavenly too for the matter of that, until about six o'clock, and if you will have me called then, I will be ready for dinner."

"Certainly," replied Auriole, "and I hope you will sleep as well as you deserve to do, after all these nights of watching."

He did sleep. He slept the sleep of a man physically and mentally tired, in spite of the load of unspeakable anxiety which was weighing upon his mind. For during his last night's work, he had learnt what no other man in the world knew. He had learnt that, unless a miracle happened, or some almost superhuman feat of ingenuity and daring was accomplished, that day thirteen months hence would see the annihilation of every living thing on earth, and the planet Terra converted into a dark and lifeless orb, a wilderness drifting through space, the blackened and desolated sepulchre of the countless millions of living beings which now inhabited it.

Chapter V — A Glimpse Of The Moon

AFTER dinner Lennard excused himself, saying that he wanted to make a few more calculations; and then he got outside and lit his pipe, and walked up the winding path towards the observatory.

“What am I to do?” he said between his teeth. “It’s a ghastly position for a man to be placed in. Fancy—just a poor, ordinary, human being like myself having the power of losing or saving the world in his hands! And then, of course, there’s a woman in the question—the Eternal Feminine—even in such a colossal problem as this!

“It’s mean, and I know it; but, after all, I saved her life—though, if I hadn’t reached her first, that other chap might have got her. I love her and he loves her; there’s no doubt about that, and Papa Parmenter wants to marry her to a coronet. There’s one thing certain, Castellan shall not have her, and I love her a lot too much to see her made My Lady This, or the Marchioness of So—and—so, just because she’s beautiful and has millions, and the other fellow, whoever he may be, may have a coronet that probably wants re-gilding; and yet, after all, it’s only the same old story in a rather more serious form—a woman against the world. I suppose Papa Parmenter would show me the door to-morrow morning if I, a poor explorer of the realm of Space, dared to tell him that I want to marry his daughter.

“And yet how miserable and trivial all these wretched distinctions of wealth and position look now; or would look if the world only knew and believed what I could tell it—and that reminds me—shall I tell her, or them? Of course, I must before long; simply because in a month or so those American fellows will be on it, and they won’t have any scruples when it comes to a matter of scare head-lines. Yes, I think it may as well be to-night as any other time. Still, it’s a pretty awful thing for a humble individual like myself to say, especially to a girl one happens to be very much in love with—nothing less than the death-sentence of Humanity. Ah, well, she’s got to hear it some time and from some one, and why shouldn’t she hear it now and from me?”

When he got back to the house, there was a carriage at the door, and Mr Parmenter was just coming down the avenue, followed by a man with a small portmanteau in his hand.

“Sorry, Mr Lennard,” he said, holding out his hand, “I’ve just had a wire about a company tangle in London that I’ve got to go and shake out at once, so I’ll have to see what you have to show me later on. Still, that needn’t trouble anyone. It looks as if it were going to be a splendid night for star-gazing, and I don’t want Auriole disappointed, so she can go up to the observatory with you at the proper time and see what there is to be seen. See you later, I have only just about time to get the connection for London.”

Lennard was not altogether sorry that this accident had happened. Naturally, the prospect of an hour or so with Auriole alone in his temple of Science was very pleasant, and moreover, he felt that, as the momentous tidings had to be told, he would prefer to tell them to her first. And so it came about.

A little after half-past eleven that night Miss Auriole was looking wonderingly into the eye-piece of the great Reflector, watching a tiny little patch of mist, somewhat brighter towards one end than the other; like a little wisp of white smoke rising from a very faint spark that was apparently floating across an unfathomable sea of darkness.

She seemed to see this through black darkness, and behind it a swarm of stars of all sizes and colours. They appeared very much more wonderful and glorious and important than the little spray of white smoke, because she hadn’t yet the faintest conception of its true import to her and every other human being on earth: but she was very soon to know now.

While she was watching it in breathless silence, in which the clicking of the mechanism which kept the great telescope moving so as to exactly counteract the motion of the machinery of the Universe, sounded like the blows of a sledge-hammer on an anvil, Gilbert Lennard stood beside her, wondering if he should begin to tell her, and what he should say.

At last she turned away from the eye-piece, and looked at him with something like a scared expression in her eyes, and said:

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

"It's very wonderful, isn't it, that one should be able to see all that just by looking into a little bit of a hole in a telescope? And you tell me that all those great big bright stars around your comet are so far away—that if you look at them just with your own eyes you don't even see them—and there they look almost as if you could put out your hand and touch them. It's just a little bit awful, too!" she added, with a little shiver.

"Yes," he said, speaking slowly and even more gravely than she thought the subject warranted, "yes, it is both wonderful and, in a way, awful. Do you know that some of those stars you have seen in there are so far away that the light which you see them by may have left them when Solomon was king in Jerusalem? They may be quite dead and dark now, or reduced into fire—mist by collision with some other star. And then, perhaps, there are others behind them again so far away that their light has not even reached us yet, and may never do while there are human eyes on earth to see it."

"Yes, I know," she said, smiling. "You don't forget that I have been to college—and light travels about a hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second, doesn't it? But come, Mr Lennard, aren't you what they call stretching the probabilities a little when you say that the light of some of them will never get here, as far as we're concerned? I always thought we had a few million years of life to look forward to before this old world of ours gets worn out."

"There are other ends possible for this world besides wearing out, Miss Parmenter," he answered, this time almost solemnly. "Other worlds have, as I say, been reduced to fire—mist. Some have been shattered to tiny fragments to make asteroids and meteorites—stars and worlds, in comparison with which this bit of a planet of ours is nothing more than a speck of sand, a mere atom of matter drifting over the wilderness of immensity. In fact, such a trifle is it in the organism of the Universe, that if some celestial body collided with it—say a comet with a sufficiently solid nucleus—and the heat developed by the impact turned it into a mass of blazing gas; an astronomer on Neptune, one of our own planets, wouldn't even notice the accident, unless he happened to be watching the earth through a powerful telescope at the time."

"And is such an accident, as you call it, possible, Mr Lennard?" she asked, jumping womanlike, by a sort of unconscious intuition, to the very point to which he was so clumsily trying to lead up.

"I thought you spoke rather queerly about this comet of yours at breakfast this morning. I hope there isn't any chance of its getting on to the same track as this terrestrial locomotive of ours. That would be just awful, wouldn't it? Why, what's the matter? You are going to be ill, I know. You had better get down to the house, and go to bed. It's want of sleep, isn't it? You'll be driving yourself mad that way."

A sudden and terrible change had come over him while she was speaking. It was only for the moment, and yet to him it was an eternity. It might, as she said, have been the want of sleep, for insomnia plays strange tricks sometimes with the strongest of intellects.

More probably, it might have been the horror of his secret working on the great love that he had for this girl who was sitting there alone with him in the silence of that dim room and in the midst of the glories and the mysteries of the Universe.

His eyes had grown fixed and staring, and looked sightlessly at her, and his face shone ghastly pale in the dim light of the solitary shaded lamp. Certainly, one of those mysterious crises which are among the unsolved secrets of psychology had come upon him like some swift access of delirium.

He no longer saw her sitting there by the telescope, calm, gracious, and beautiful. He saw her as, by his pitiless calculations, he must do that day thirteen months to come—with her soft grey eyes, starting, horror-driven from their orbits, staring blank and wide and hideous at the overwhelming hell that would be falling down from heaven upon the devoted earth. He saw her fresh young face withered and horror-lined and old, and the bright brown hair grown grey with the years that would pass in those few final moments. He saw the sweet red lips which had tempted him so often to wild thoughts parched and black, wide open and gasping vainly for the breath of life in a hot, burnt-out atmosphere.

Then he saw—no, it was only a glimpse; and with that the strange trance-vision ended. What must have come after that would in all certainty have driven him mad there and then, before his work had even begun; but at that moment, swiftly severing the darkness that was falling over his soul, there came to him an idea, bright, luminous, and lovely as an inspiration from Heaven itself, and with it came back the calm sanity of the sternly-disciplined intellect, prepared to contemplate, not only the destruction of the world he lived in, but even the loss of the woman he loved—the only human being who could make the world beautiful or even

tolerable for him.

The vision was blotted out from the sight of his soul; the darkness cleared away from his eyes, and he saw her again as she still was. It had all passed in a few moments and yet in them he had been down into hell—and he had come back to earth, and into her presence.

Almost by the time she had uttered her last word, he had regained command of his voice, and he began clearly and quietly to answer the question which was still echoing through the chambers of his brain.

“It was only a little passing faintness, thank you; and something else which you will understand when I have done, if you have patience to hear me to the end,” he said, looking straight at her for a moment, and then beginning to walk slowly up and down the room past her chair.

“I am going to surprise you, perhaps to frighten you, and very probably to offend you deeply,” he began again in a quiet, dry sort of tone, which somehow impressed her against all her convictions that he didn't much care whether or not he did any or all of these things: but there was something else in his tone and manner which held her to her seat, silent and attentive, although she was conscious of a distinct desire to get up and run away.

“Your guess about the comet, or whatever it may prove to be, is quite correct. I don't think it is a new one. From what I have seen of it so far, I have every reason to believe that it is Gambert's comet, which was discovered in 1826, and became visible to the naked eye in the autumn of 1833. It then crossed the orbit of the earth one month after the earth had passed the point of intersection. After that, some force divided it, and in '46 and '52 it reappeared as twin comets constantly separating; Now it would seem that the two masses have come together again: and as they are both larger in bulk and greater in density it would appear that, somewhere in the distant fields of Space, they have united with some other and denser body. The result is, that what is practically a new comet, with a much denser nucleus than any so far seen, is approaching our system. Unless a miracle happens, or there is a practically impossible error in my calculations, it will cross the orbit of the earth thirteen months from to-day, at the moment that the earth itself arrives at the point of intersection.”

So far Auriole had listened to the stiff scientific phraseology with more interest than alarm; but now she took advantage of a little pause, and said:

“And the consequences, Mr Lennard? I mean the consequences to us as living beings. You may as well tell me everything now that you've gone so far.”

“I am going to,” he said, stopping for a moment in his walk, “and I am going to tell you something more than that. Granted that what I have said happens, one of two things must follow. If the nucleus of the comet is solid enough to pass through our atmosphere without being dissipated, it will strike the surface with so much force that both it and the earth will probably be transformed into fiery vapour by the conversion of the motion of the two bodies into heat. If not, its contact with the oxygen of the earth's atmosphere will produce an aerial conflagration which, if it does not roast alive every living thing on earth, will convert the oxygen, by combustion, into an irrespirable and poisonous gas, and so kill us by a slower, but no less fatal, process.”

“Horrible!” she said, shivering this time. “You speak like a judge pronouncing sentence of death on the whole human race! I suppose there is no possibility of reprieve? Well, go on!”

“Yes,” he said, “there is something else. Those are the scientific facts, as far as they go. I am going to tell you the chances now—and something more. There is just one chance—one possible way of averting universal ruin from the earth, and substituting for it nothing more serious than an unparalleled display of celestial fireworks. All that will be necessary is perfect calculation and illimitable expenditure of money.”

“Well,” she said, “can't you do the calculations, Mr Lennard, and hasn't dad got millions enough? How could he spend them better than in saving the human race from being burnt alive? There isn't anything else, is there?”

“There was something else,” he said, stopping in front of her again. She had risen to her feet as she said the last words, and the two stood facing each other in the dim light, while the mechanism of the telescope kept on clicking away in its heedless, mechanical fashion.

“Yes, there was something else, and I may as well tell you after all; for, even if you never see or speak to me again, it won't stop the work being done now. I could have kept this discovery to myself till it would have been too late to do anything: for no other telescope without my help would even find the comet for four months to come, and even now there is hardly a day to be lost if the work is to be done in time. And

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

then—well, I suppose I must have gone mad for the time being, for I thought you will hardly believe me, I suppose—that I could make you the price of the world's safety.

“From that, you will see how much I have loved you, however mad I may have been. Losing you, I would have lost the world with you. If my love lives, I thought, the world shall live: if not, if you die, the world shall die. But just now, when you thought I was taken ill, I had a sort of vision, and I saw you,—yes, you, Aurioie as, if my one chance fails, you must infallibly be this night thirteen months hence. I didn't see any of the other millions who would be choking and gasping for breath and writhing in the torture of the universal fire—I only saw you and my own baseness in thinking, even for a moment, that such a bargain would be possible.

“And then,” he went on, more slowly, and with a different ring in his voice, “there are the other men.”

“Which other men?” she asked, looking up at him with a flush on her cheeks and a gleam in her eyes.

“To be quite frank, and in such a situation as this, I don't see that anything but complete candour is of any use,” he replied slowly. “I need hardly tell you that they are John Castellan and the Marquis of Westerham. Castellan, I know, has loved you just as I have done, from the moment we had the good luck to pick you out of the bay at Clifden. Lord Westerham also wants you, so do I. That, put plainly, brutally, if you like, is the situation. Of your own feelings, of course, I do not pretend to have the remotest idea; but I confess that when this knowledge came to me, the first thought that crossed my mind was the thought of you as another man's wife—and then came the vision of the world in flames. At first I chose the world in flames. I see that I was wrong. That is all.”

She had not interrupted even by a gesture, but as she listened, a thousand signs and trifles which alone had meant nothing to her, now seemed to come together and make one clear and definite revelation. This strong, reserved, silent man had all the time loved her so desperately that he was going mad about her—so mad that, as he had said, he had even dreamed of weighing the possession of her single, insignificant self against the safety of the whole world, with all its innumerable millions of people—mostly as good in their way as she was.

Well it might be that the love of such a man was a thing worth to weigh even against a coronet not in her eyes, for there was no question of that now, but in her father's. But that was a matter for future consideration. She drew herself up a little stiffly, and said, in just such a tone as she might have used if what he had just been saying had had no personal interest for her—had, in fact, been about some other girl:

“I think it's about time to be going down to the house, Mr Lennard, isn't it? I am quite sure a night's rest won't do you any harm. No, I'm not offended, and I don't think I'm even frightened yet. It somehow seems too big and too awful a thing to be only frightened at—too much like the Day of Judgment, you know. I am glad you've told me—yes, everything—and I'm glad that what you call your madness is over. You will be able to do your work in saving the world all the better. Only don't tell dad anything except—well—just the scientific and necessary part of it. You know, saving a world is a very much greater matter than winning a woman—at least it is in one particular woman's eyes—and I've learnt somewhere in mathematics something about the greater including the less. And now, don't you think we had better be going down into the house? It's getting quite late.”

Chapter VI — The Note Of War

THE Official Gazette, published November the 25th, 1909, contained the following announcement:—

“Naval Promotions. Lieutenant–Commander Francis Erskine, of H.M. Fishery Cruiser Cormorant, to be Captain of H.M. Cruiser Ithuriel. Lieutenant Denis Castellan, also of the Cormorant, to be First Lieutenant of the Ithuriel.”

On the evening of the same day, Mr Chamberlain, the Prime Minister, rose amidst the tense silence of a crowded House to make another announcement, which was not altogether unconnected with the notice in the Gazette.

“Sir,” he said in a low, but vibrant and penetrating voice, which many years before had helped to make his fame as an orator, “it is my painful duty to inform this honourable House that a state of war exists between His Majesty and a Confederation of European countries, including Germany, Russia, France, Spain, Holland and Belgium.”

He paused for a moment, and looked round at the hundreds of faces, most of them pale and fixed, that were turned toward the front Treasury Bench. Since Mr Balfour, now Lord Whittinghame, and Leader of the Conservative Party in the House of Lords, had made his memorable speech on the 12th of October 1899, informing the House of Commons and the world that the Ultimatum of the South African Republic had been rejected, and that the struggle for the mastery of South Africa was inevitable, no such momentous announcement had been made in the House of Commons.

Mr Chamberlain referred to that bygone crisis in the following terms:

“It will be within the memory of many Members of this House that, almost exactly ten years ago to–day, the British Empire was challenged to fight for the supremacy of South Africa. That challenge was accepted not because there was any desire on the part of the Government or the people of this country to destroy the self–government of what were then the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, but because the Government of her late Majesty, Queen Victoria, knew that the fate of an empire, however great, depends upon its supremacy throughout its dominions.

“To lose one of these, however small and apparently insignificant, is to take a stone out of an arch with the result of inevitable collapse of the whole structure. It is not necessary for me, sir, to make any further allusion to that struggle, save than to say that the policy of Her Majesty's Ministers has been completely justified by the consequences which have followed from it.

“The Transvaal and Orange River Colonies have taken their place among the other self–governing Colonies of the Empire. They are prosperous, contented and loyal, and they will not be the last, I think, to come to the help of the Mother Country in such a crisis as this. But, sir, I do not think that I should be fulfilling the duties of the responsible position which I have the honour to occupy if I did not remind this House, and through this House the citizens of the British Empire, that the present crisis is infinitely more serious than that with which we were faced in 1899. Then we were waging a war in another hemisphere, six thousand miles away. Our unconquered, and, as I hope it will prove, unconquerable Navy, kept the peace of the world, and policed the ocean highways along which it was necessary for our ships to travel. It is true that there were menaces and threats heard in many quarters, but they never passed beyond the region of insult and calumny.

“Our possible enemies then, our actual enemies now, were in those days willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike. To–day, they have lost their fear in the confidence of combination. To–day the war cloud is not six thousand miles away in the southern hemisphere; it is here, in Europe, and a strip of water, twenty–one miles broad, separates us from the enemy, which, even as I am speaking, may already be knocking at our gates. Even now, the thunder of the guns may be echoing along the shores of the English Channel.

“This, sir, is a war in which I might venture to say the most ardent member of the Peace Society would not hesitate to engage. For it involves the most sacred duty of humanity, the defence of our country, and our

homes.

“We remember, sir, the words which Francis Drake wrote, and which have remained true from his day until now: 'The frontiers of an island country are the coasts of its possible enemies.' We remember also that when the great Napoleon had massed nearly half a million men on the heights above Boulogne, and more than a thousand pontoons were waiting to carry that force to the Kentish shore, there was only one old English frigate cruising up and down the Straits of Dover.

“Sir, there is on the heights of Boulogne a monument, built to commemorate the assembly of the Grand Army, and collectors of coins still cherish those productions of the Paris Mint, which bear the legend, 'Napoleon, Emperor, London, 1804.' But, sir, the statue of Napoleon which stands on the summit of that monument faces not westward but eastward. The Grand Army could have crossed that narrow strip of water. It could, no doubt, have made a landing on British soil, but Napoleon, possibly the greatest military genius the world has ever seen, anticipated Field-Marshal von Moltke, who said that he had found eight ways of getting into England, but he had not found one of getting out again, unless it were possible to pump the North Sea dry, and march the men over. In other words, sir, the British Navy was then, as now, paramount on seas; the oceans were our territories, and the coasts of Europe our frontiers.

“Again, sir, we must not forget that those were the days of sails, and that these are the days of steam. What was then a matter of days is now only a matter of hours. It is two hundred and forty-two years since the sound of hostile guns was heard in the city of London. Tomorrow morning their thunder may awaken us.

“It has been said, sir, that Great Britain plays the game of Diplomacy with her cards face upwards on the table. That, in a sense, is true, and His Majesty's Government propose to play the same game now. The demands which have been presented by the Federation of European Powers, at the head of which stands the German Emperor—demands which, it is hardly necessary for me to say, were instantly rejected—are these: That Gibraltar shall be given back to Spain; that Malta shall be dismantled, and cease to be a British naval base; that the British occupation of Egypt and the Soudan shall cease, and that the Suez Canal and the Trans-Continental Railway from Cairo to the Cape shall be handed over to the control of an International Board, upon which the British Empire will be graciously allowed one representative.

“It is further demanded that Singapore, the Gate of the East, shall be placed under the control of the same International Board, and that the fortifications of Hong Kong shall be demolished. That, sir, would amount to the surrender of the British Empire, an empire which can only exist as long as the ocean paths between its various portions are kept inviolate.

“Those proposals, sir, in plain English are threats, and His Majesty's Government has returned the only possible answer to them, and that answer is war—war, let us remember, which may within a few weeks, or even days, be brought to our own doors. Whatever our enemies may have said of us it is still true that Britain stands for peace, security, and prosperity. We have used the force of arms to conquer the forces of barbarism and semi-civilisation, but the most hostile of our critics may be safely challenged to point to any country or province upon which we have imposed the Pax Britannica, which is not now the better for it. It is no idle boast, sir, to say that all the world over, the rule of His Majesty means the rule of peace and prosperity. There are only two causes in which a nation or an empire may justly go to war. One, is to make peace where strife was before, and the other is to defend that which has been won, and made secure by patient toil and endeavour, no less than by blood and suffering. It is that which the challenge of Europe calls upon us now to defend. Our answer to the leagued nations is this: What we have fought for and worked for and won is ours. Take it from us if you can.

“And, sir, I believe that I can say with perfect confidence, that what His Majesty's Government has done His Majesty's subjects will enforce to a man, and, if necessary, countersign the declaration of war in their own blood.

“Let us remember, too, those weighty words of warning which the Laureate of the Empire wrote nearly twenty years ago, of this Imperial inheritance of ours:”

“It is not made with the mountains, it is not one with the deep.

Men, not gods, devised it, men, not gods, must keep.

Men not children, servants, or kinsfolk called from afar.

But each man born in the island broke to the matter of war.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

So ye shall bide, sure—guarded, when the restless lightnings wake.
In the boom of the blotting war—cloud, and the pallid nations quake.
So, at the haggard trumpets, instant your soul shall leap.
Forthright, accoutred, accepting—alert from the wails of sleep.
So at the threat ye shall summon—so at the need ye shall send
Men, not children, or servants, tempered and taught to the end.”

“Sir, it has been said that poets are prophets. The hour of the fulfilment of that prophecy has now come, and I shall be much mistaken in my estimate of the temper of my countrymen and fellow—subjects of His Majesty here in Britain, and in the greater Britains over sea, if, granted the possibility of an armed invasion of the Motherland, every man, soldier or civilian, who is able to use a rifle, will not, if necessary, use it in the defence of his country and his home.”

The Prime Minister sat down amid absolute silence. The tremendous possibilities which he had summed up in his brief speech seemed to have stunned his hearers for the time being. Some members said afterwards that they could hear their own watches ticking. Then Mr John Redmond, the Leader of the Irish Nationalist Party, rose and said, in a slow, and deliberate voice, which contrasted strikingly with his usual style of oratory:

“Sir, this is not a time for what has been with a certain amount of double—meaning described as Parliamentary speeches. Still less is it a time for party or for racial differences. The silence in which this House has received the speech of the Prime Minister is the most eloquent tribute that could be paid to the solemnity of his utterances. But, sir, I have a reason for calling attention to one omission in that speech, an omission which may have been made purposely. The last time that a foeman's foot trod British soil was not eight hundred years ago. It was in December 1796 that French soldiers and sailors landed on the shores of Bantry Bay. Sir, the Ireland of those days was discontented, and, if you please to call it so, disloyal. There are those who say she is so now, but, sir, whatever our domestic difficulties and quarrels may be, and however much I and the party which I have the honour to lead may differ from the home policy of the Right Honourable gentleman who has made this momentous pronouncement, it shall not be said that any of those difficulties or differences will be taken advantage of by any man who is worth the name of Irishman.

“As the Prime Minister has told us, the thunder of the enemy's guns may even now be echoing along our southern coasts. We have, I hope, learnt a little wisdom on both sides of the Irish Sea during the last twenty years, and this time, sir, I think I can promise that, while the guns are talking, there shall be no sound of dispute on party matters in this House as far as we are concerned. From this moment, the Irish Nationalist Party, as such, ceases to exist, at any rate until the war's over.

“In 1796, the French fleet carrying the invading force was scattered over the seas by one of the worst storms that ever was known on the west coast of Ireland. As Queen Elizabeth's medal said of the Spanish Armada, 'God blew, and they were scattered.' With God's help, sir, we will scatter these new enemies who threaten us with invasion and conquest. Henceforth, there must be no more Englishmen, Irishmen, Scotchmen, or Welshmen. We are just subjects of the King, and inhabitants of the British Islands; and the man who does not believe that, and act upon his belief, should get out of these islands as soon as he can, for he isn't fit to live in them.

“I remember, sir, a car—driver in Galway, who was taking an English tourist—and he was a politician as well—around the country about that half—ruined city. The English tourist was inquiring into the troubles of Ireland, and he asked him what was the greatest affliction that Ireland suffered from, and when he answered him he described just the sort of Irishman who won't be wanted in Ireland now. He said, 'It's the absentee landlords, your honour. This unfortunate country is absolutely swarming with them.’”

It was an anti—climax such as only an Irishman could have achieved. The tension which had held every nerve of every member on the stretch while the Prime Minister was speaking was broken. The Irish members, almost to a man, jumped to their feet, as Mr Redmond picked up his hat, waved it round his head, and said, in a tone which rang clear and true through the crowded Chamber:

“God save the King!”

And then for the first time in its history, the House of Commons rose and sang the National Anthem.

There was no division that night. The Prime Minister formally put the motion for the voting of such credit as might be necessary to meet the expenses of the war, and when the Speaker put the question, Ay or Nay,

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

every member stood up bareheaded, and a deep-voiced, thunderous “Ay” told the leagued nations of Europe that Britain had accepted their challenge.

Chapter VII — Caught!

THE events of that memorable night formed a most emphatic contradiction to the prophecy in Macaulay's "Armada"

"Such night in England ne'er had been, nor e'er again shall be."

The speeches in the House of Commons and in the House of Peers were being printed even as they were spoken; hundreds of printing-presses were grinding out millions of copies of newspapers. Thousands of newsboys were running along the pavements, or with great bags of new editions slung on their shoulders tearing through the traffic on bicycles; but all the speeches in the two Houses of Parliament, all the reports and hurriedly-written leaders in the papers just represented to the popular mind one word, and that word was war.

It was true that for over a hundred years no year had passed in which the British Empire had not been engaged in a war of some kind, but they were wars waged somewhere in the outlands of the earth. To the stop-at-home man in the street they were rather more matters of latitude and longitude than battle, murder, and sudden death. The South African War, and even the terrible struggle between Russia and Japan, were already memories drifting out of sight in the rush of the headlong current of twentieth-century life.

But this was quite another matter; here was war—not war that was being waged thousands of miles away in another hemisphere or on another side of the globe—but war within twenty-one miles of English land—within two or three hours, as it were, of every Englishman's front door.

This went home to every man who had a home, or who possessed anything worth living for. It was not now a case of sending soldiers, militia and yeomanry away in transports, and cheering them as they went. Not now, as Kipling too truly had said of the fight for South Africa:

"When your strong men cheered in their millions, while your striplings went to the war."

Now it was the turn of the strong men; the turn of every man who had the strength and courage to fight in defence of all that was nearest and dearest to him.

As yet there was no excitement. At every theatre and every music-hall in London and the great provincial cities and towns, the performances were stopped as soon as the news was received by telegraph. The managers read the news from the stage, the orchestras played the first bar of the National Anthem, the audiences rose to their feet, and all over the British Islands millions of voices sang "God save the King," and then, obeying some impulse, which seemed to have inspired the whole land, burst into the triumphant psalm of "Rule Britannia."

And when the theatres and music-halls closed, men and women went on their way home quietly discussing the tremendous tidings which had been officially announced. There was no attempt at demonstration, there was very little cheering. It was too serious a matter for that. The men and women of Britain were thinking, not about what they should say, but about what they should do. There was no time for shouting, for to-morrow, perhaps even to-night, the guns would be talking—"The drumming guns which have no doubts."

The House rose at half-past eleven, and at ten minutes to twelve Lieutenant Denis Castellan, came into the smoking-room of the Keppel's Head Hotel, Portsmouth, with a copy of the last edition of the Southern Evening News in his hand, and said to Captain Erskine:

"It's all right, my boy. It's war, and you've got the Ithuriel. Your own ship, too. Designer, creator, captain; and I'm your First Luff."

"I think that's about good enough for a bottle of the best, Castellan," said Erskine, in the quiet tone in which the officer of the finest Service in the world always speaks. "Touch the button, will you?"

As Denis Castellan put his finger on the button of the electric bell, a man got up from an armchair on the opposite side of the room, and said, as he came towards the table at which Erskine was sitting:

"You will pardon me, I hope, if I introduce myself without the usual formalities. My name is Gilbert Lennard."

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Then, I take it, you're the man who swam that race with my brother John, in Clifden Bay, when Miss Parmenter was thrown out of her skiff. But he's no brother of mine now. He's sold himself to the Germans, and,” he continued, suddenly lowering his voice almost to a whisper, “come up to my room, we'll have the bottle there, and Mr Lennard will join us. Yes, waiter, you can take it up to No. 24, we can't talk here,” he went on in a louder tone. “There's a German spy in the room, and by the piper that was supposed to play before Moses, if he's here when I come back, I'll throw him out.”

Everyone in the smoking-room looked up. Castellan walked out, looking at a fair-haired, clean-shaven little man, sitting at a table in the right-hand corner of the room from the door. He also looked up, and glanced vacantly about the room; then as the three went out, he took a sip of the whisky and soda beside him, and looked back on to the paper that he was reading.

“Who's that chap?” asked Erskine, as they went upstairs.

“I'll tell you when we're a bit more to ourselves,” replied Castellan; and when they had got into his sitting-room, and the waiter had brought the wine, he locked the door, and said:

“That is Staff-Captain Count Karl von Eckstein, of the German Imperial Navy, and also of His Majesty, the Kaiser's, Secret Service. He knows a little more than we do about every dockyard and fort on the South Coast, to say nothing of the ships. That's his district, and thanks to the most obliging kindness of the British authorities he has made very good use of it.”

“But, surely,” exclaimed Lennard, “now that there is a state of war, such a man as that could be arrested.”

“Faith,” said Denis Castellan, as he filled the glasses. “Law or no law, he will be arrested to-night if he stops here long enough for me to lay hands upon him. Now then, what's the news, Mr Lennard? I'm told that you've just come back from the United States, what's the opinion of things over there?”

Such news that Lennard had was, of course, even more terrible than the news of war and invasion, which was now thrilling through England like an electric shock, and he kept it to himself, thinking quite rightly that the people of England had quite enough to occupy their attention for the immediate present, and so he replied as he raised the glass which Denis had filled for him:

“I am afraid that I have no news except this: that from all I have heard in the States, if it does come to death-grips, the States will be with us. But you see, of course, that I have only just got back, and this thing has been sprung on us so suddenly. In fact, it was only this morning that we got an aerogram from the Lizard as we came up Channel to say that war was almost a certainty, and advising us to get into Southampton as soon as we could.”

“Well,” said Erskine, taking up his glass, “that's all right, as far as it goes. I've always believed that it's all rot saying that blood isn't thicker than water. It is. Of course, relations quarrel more than other people do, but it's only over domestic matters. Let an outsider start a row, and he very soon sees what happens, and that's what I believe our friends on the other side of the Channel are going to find out if it comes to extremities. Well, Mr Lennard, I am very pleased that you have introduced yourself to us to-night. Of course, we have both known you publicly, and therefore we have all the more pleasure in knowing you privately.”

“Thanks,” replied Lennard, putting his hand into the inside pocket of his coat and taking out an envelope. “But to be quite candid with you, although of course I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, I did not introduce myself to you and Mr Castellan only for personal reasons. I have devoted some attention to the higher chemistry as well as the higher mathematics and astronomy, and I have also had the pleasure of going through the designs of the cruiser which you have invented, and which you are now to command. I have been greatly interested in them, and for that reason I think that this may interest you. I brought it here in the hope of meeting you, as I knew that your ship was lying here.”

Erskine opened the envelope, and took out a sheet of notepaper, on which were written just a few chemical formulae and about forty words.

Castellan, who was watching him keenly, for the first time since they had sailed together through stress and storm under the White Ensign, saw him start. The pupils of his eyes suddenly dilated; his eyelids and eyebrows went up for an instant and came down again, and the rigid calm of the British Naval Officer came back. He put the letter into his hip pocket, buttoned it up, and said, very quietly:

“Thank you, Mr Lennard. You have done me a very great personal service, and your country a greater one still. I shall, of course, make use of this. I am afraid if you had sent it to the Ordnance Department you

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

wouldn't have heard anything about it for the next three months or more; perhaps not till the war was over."

"And that is just why I brought it to you," laughed Lennard. "Well, here's good luck to you and the Ithuriel, and all honour, and God save the King!"

"God save the King!" repeated Erskine and Castellan, with that note of seriousness in their tone which you can hear in the voice of no man who has not fought, or is not going to fight; in short, to put his words into action.

They emptied their glasses, and as they put them down on the table again there came a knock at the door, sharp, almost imperative.

"Come in," said Erskine.

The head waiter threw the door open, and a Naval messenger walked in, saluted, handed Erskine an official envelope, and said:

"Immediately, sir. The steam pinnace is down at the end of the Railway Quay."

Erskine tore open the envelope and read the brief order that it contained, and said:

"Very good. We shall be on board in ten minutes."

The messenger, who was a very useful-looking specimen of the handy man, saluted and left the room. Castellan ran out after him, and they went downstairs together. At the door of the hotel the messenger put two fingers into his mouth, and gave three soft whistles, not unlike the sounds of a boatswain's pipe. In two minutes a dozen bluejackets had appeared from nowhere, and just as a matter of formality were asked to have a drink at the bar. Meanwhile Denis Castellan had gone into the smoking-room, where he found the sandy-haired, blue-eyed man still sitting at his table in the corner, smoking his cigar, and looking over the paper. He touched him on the shoulder and whispered, in perfectly idiomatic German:

"I thought you were a cleverer man than that, Count. Didn't I give you a warning? God's thunder, man. You ought to have been miles away by this time; haven't you a motor that would take you to Southampton in an hour, and put you on the last of the German liners that's leaving? You know it will be a shooting or a hanging matter if you're caught here. Come on now. My name's Castellan, and that should be good enough for you. Come on, now, and I'll see you safe."

The name of Castellan was already well known to every German confidential agent, though it was not known that John Castellan had a brother who was a Lieutenant in the British Navy.

Captain Count Karl von Eckstein got up, and took his hat down from the pegs, pulled on his gloves, and said deliberately:

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr Castellan, for your warning, which I ought to have taken at first, but I hope there is still time. I will go and telephone for my motor at once."

"Yes, come along and do it," said Castellan, catching him by the arm. "You haven't much time to lose, I can tell you."

They went out of the smoking-room, turned to the left, and went into the hall. Then Castellan snatched his hand away from Eckstein's arm, took him by the shoulders, and pitched him forward into the middle of the semicircle of bluejackets, who were waiting for him, saying:

"That's your man, boys. Take him down to the pinnace, and put him on board. I'll take the consequences, and I think the owners will, too, when they know the facts."

Von Eckstein tried to shout, but a hand about half the size, of a shoulder of mutton came down hard over his mouth and nose. Other hands, with grips like vices, picked him off his feet, and out he went, half stifled, along the yard, and up to the Railway Pier.

"Rather summary proceedings, weren't they, Castellan?"

Denis drew himself up, formally saluted his superior officer, and said, with a curious mixture of fun and seriousness in his voice:

"That man's the most dangerous German spy in the South of England, sir, and all's fair in war and the other thing. We've got him. In half an hour he'd have been aboard a fast yacht he's got here in the harbour, and across to Dieppe, with a portmanteau full of plans and photographs of our forts that would be worth millions in men and money to the people we've got to fight. I can't say it here, but you know why I know."

Captain Erskine nodded, and did his best to conceal an unofficial smile.

"That's right, Castellan," he said. "I'll take your word for it. Get that chap on board, lads, as quick as you

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

can. We'll follow at once."

Ship's Corporal Sandy M'Grath, the huge Scotsman, whose great fist had stifled Count von Eckstein's attempt to cry out, touched his cap and said: "Awa' wi' him, boys," and out they went at a run. Then Erskine turned to Lennard, and said:

"We can do all this that you've given me on board the Ithuriel. It isn't quite regular, but in consideration of this, if you like to take a cruise, and see your own work done, I'll take the responsibility of inviting you, only mind, there will probably be some fighting."

Even as he spoke two deep dull bangs shook the atmosphere and the windows of the hotel shivered in their frames.

"I'll come," said Lennard. "They seem to have begun already."

"Begorra they have," said Denis Castellan, making a dash to the door. "Come on. If that's so, there'll be blood for supper to-night, and the sooner we're aboard the better."

The next moment the three were outside, and sprinting for the end of the Railway Pier for all they were worth.

Chapter VIII — First Blood

WHEN they got to the end of the Railway Pier where the pinnace was lying panting and puffing, a Flag-Lieutenant touched his cap to Erskine, took him by the arm and led him aside. He took an envelope out of his pocket and said, in a low tone:

“Here are your instructions, Erskine. They've jumped on us a bit more quickly than we thought they would, but the Commander-in-Chief trusts to you and your ship to do the needful. The position is this: one division of the Russian, German and Dutch fleets is making a combined attack on Hull and Newcastle. Two other divisions are going for the mouth of the Thames, and the North Sea Squadron is going to look after them. The French North Sea Squadron is making a rush on Dover, and will get very considerably pounded in the process. Two French fleets from Cherbourg and Brest are coming up Channel, and each of them has a screen of torpedo boats and destroyers. The Southern Fleet Reserve is concentrated here and at Portland. The Channel Fleet is outside, and we hope to get it in their rear, so that we'll have them between the ships and the forts. If we do, they'll have just about as hot a time of it as anybody wants.

“As far as we've been able to learn, the French are going to try Togo's tactics at Port Arthur, and rush Portsmouth with the small craft. You'll find that it's your business to look after them. Sink, smash and generally destroy. Go for everything you see. There isn't a craft of ours within twenty miles outside. Goodbye, and good luck to you!”

“Good-bye!” said Erskine, as they shook hands, “and if we don't come back, give my love to the Lords of the Admiralty and thank them for giving me the chance with the Ithuriel. Bye-bye!”

Their hands gripped again and the captain of the Ithuriel ran down the steps like a boy going to a picnic.

The pinnace gave a little squeak from its siren and sped away down the harbour between the two forts, in which the gunners were standing by the new fourteen-inch wire-wound guns, whose long chases were prevented from drooping after continuous discharge by an ingenious application of the principle of the cantilever bridge, invented by the creator of the Ithuriel. In the breech-chamber of each of them was a thousand-pound shell, carrying a bursting charge of five hundred pounds of an explosive which was an improvement on blasting gelatine, and the guns were capable of throwing these to a distance of twelve miles with precision. They were the most formidable weapons either ashore or afloat.

Just outside the harbour the pinnace swung round to the westward and in a few minutes stopped alongside the Ithuriel.

As far as Lennard could see she was neither cruiser nor destroyer nor submarine, but a sort of compound of all three. She did not appear to be a steamer because she had no funnels. She was not exactly a submarine because she had a signal-mast forward and carried five long, ugly-looking guns, three ahead and two astern, of a type that he had never seen before. Forward of the mast there was a conning-tower of oval shape, with the lesser curves fore and aft. The breech-ends of the guns were covered by a long hood of steel, apparently of great thickness, and that was all.

As soon as they got on board Erskine said to Lennard:

“Come into the conning-tower with me. I believe we can make use of this invention of yours at once. I've got a pretty well-fitted laboratory down below and we might have a try. But you must excuse me a moment, I will just run through this.”

He opened the envelope containing his instructions, put them down on the little desk in front of him and then read a note that was enclosed with them.

“By Jove,” he said, “they're pretty quick up at headquarters. You'll have to excuse me a minute or two, Mr Lennard. Just stand on that side, will you, please? Close up, we haven't too much room here. Good-bye for the present.”

In front of the desk and above the little steering-wheel there was a mahogany board studded with two sets of ivory buttons, disposed in two lines of six each. He touched one of these, and Lennard saw him disappear

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

through the floor of the conning-tower. Within a few moments the portion of the floor upon which he had stood returned to its place, and Lennard said to himself:

“If the rest of her works like that, she ought to be a lovely study in engineering.”

While Captain Erskine is communicating his instructions to his second in command, and arranging the details of the coming fight, there will be time to give a brief description of the craft on board of which Lennard so unexpectedly found himself, and which an invention of his own was destined to make even more formidable than it was.

To put it as briefly as possible, the Ithuriel was a combination of destroyer, cruiser, submarine and ram, and she had cost Erskine three years of hard work to think out. She was three hundred feet long, fifty feet broad, and thirty feet from her upper keel to her deck. This was of course an abnormal depth for a vessel of her length, but then the Ithuriel was quite an abnormal warship. One-third of her depth consisted of a sinking-chamber, protected by twelve-inch armour, and this chamber could be filled in a few minutes with four thousand tons of water. This is of course the same thing as saying she had two waterlines. The normal cruising line gave her a freeboard of ten feet. Above the sinking-tanks her vitals were protected by ten-inch armour. In short, as regards armour, she was an entire reversal of the ordinary type of warship, and she had the advantage of being impervious to torpedo attack. Loaded torpedoes had been fired at her and had burst like eggs against a wall, with no more effect than to make her heel over a few degrees to the other side. Submarines had attacked her and got their noses badly bruised in the process. It was, indeed, admitted by the experts of the Admiralty that under water she was impregnable.

Her propelling power consisted of four sets of engines, all well below the waterline. Three of these drove three propellers astern: the fourth drove a suction screw which revolved just underneath the ram. This was a mass of steel weighing fifty tons and curved upwards like the inverted beak of an eagle. Erskine had taken this idea from the Russian ice-breakers which had been designed by the Russian Admiral Makaroff and built at Elswick. The screw was protected by a steel grating of which the forward protecting girder completed the curve of the stem. Aft there was a similar ram, weighing thirty tons and a like protection to the after-screws.

The driving power was derived from a combination of petrol and pulverised smokeless coal, treated with liquid oxygen, which made combustion practically perfect. There was no boilers or furnaces, only combustion chambers, and this fact made the carrying of the great weight of armour under the waterline possible. The speed of the Ithuriel was forty-five knots ahead when all four screws were driving and pulling, and thirty knots astern when they were reversed. Her total capacity was five thousand two hundred tons.

Behind the three forward guns was a dome-shaped conning-tower of nine-inch steel, hardened like the rest of the armour by an improvement on the Harvey process. Above the conning-tower were two searchlight projectors, both capable of throwing a clear ray to a distance of four miles and controlled from within the conning-tower.

“Well, I am afraid I have kept you waiting, Mr Lennard,” said Erskine, as the platform brought him up again into the conning-tower, in much shorter time than was necessary to make this needful description of what was probably the most formidable craft in the British Navy. “We're off now. I've fitted up half a dozen shells with that diabolical invention of yours. If we run across a battleship or a cruiser, we'll try them. I think our friends the enemy will find them somewhat of a paralysers, and there's nothing like beginning pretty strong.”

“Nothing like hitting them hard at first, and I hope that those things of mine will be what I think they are, and unless all my theories are quite wrong, I fancy you'll find them all right.”

“They would be the first theories of yours that have gone wrong, Mr Lennard,” replied Erskine, “but anyhow, we shall soon see. I have put three of your shells in the forward guns. We'll try them there first, and if they're all right we'll use the other three. I've got the after guns loaded with my own shell, so if we come across anything big, we shall be able to try them against each other. At present, my instructions are to deal with the lighter craft only: destroyers and that sort of thing, you know.”

“But don't you fire on them?” said Lennard. “What would happen if they got a torpedo under you?”

“Well,” said Erskine, “as a matter of fact I don't think destroyers are worth shooting at. Our guns are meant for bigger game. But it's no good trying to explain things now. You'll see, pretty soon, and you'll learn more in half an hour than I could tell you in four hours.”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

They were clear of the harbour by this time and running out at about ten knots between the two old North and South Spithead forts on the top of each of which one of the new fourteen-inch thousand-pounders had been mounted on disappearing carriages.

“Now,” he continued, “if we're going to find them anywhere, we shall find them here, or hereabouts. My orders are to smash everything that I can get at.”

“Fairly comprehensive,” said Lennard.

“Yes, Lennard, and it's an order that I'm going to fill. We may as well quicken up a bit now. You understand, Castellan is looking after the guns, and his sub. Mackenzie is communicating orders to my Chief Engineer, who looks after the speed.”

“And the speed?” asked Lennard.

“I'll leave you to judge that when we get to business,” said Erskine, putting his forefinger on one of the buttons on the left-hand side of the board as he spoke.

The next moment Lennard felt the rubber-covered floor of the conning-tower jump under his feet. All the coast lights were extinguished but there was a half-moon and he saw the outlines of the shore slip away faster behind them. The eastern heights of the Isle of Wight loomed up like a cloud and dropped away astern.

“Pretty fast, that,” he said.

“Only twenty-five knots,” replied Erskine, as he gave the steering-wheel a very gentle movement and swung the Ithuriel's head round to the eastward. “If these chaps are going to make a rush in the way Togo did at Port Arthur, they've got to do it between Selsey Bill and Nettlestone Point. If they're mad enough to try the other way between Round Tower Point and Hurst Castle, they'll get blown out of the water in very small pieces, so we needn't worry about them there. Our business is to keep them out of this side. Ah, look now, there are two or three of them there. See, ahead of the port bow. We'll tackle these gentlemen first.”

Lennard looked out through the narrow semicircular window of six-inch crystal glass running across the front of the conning-tower, which was almost as strong as steel, and saw three little dark, moving spots on the half-moonlit water, about two miles ahead, stealing up in line abreast.

“Those chaps are trying to get in between the Spithead forts,” said Erskine. “They're slowed down to almost nothing, waiting for the clouds to come over the moon, and then they'll make a dash for it. At least, they think they will. I don't.”

As he spoke he gave another turn to the steering-wheel and touched another button. The Ithuriel leapt forward again and swung about three points to the eastward. In three minutes she was off Black Point, and this movement brought her into a straight line with the three destroyers. He gave the steering-wheel another half turn and her head swung round in a short quarter circle. He put his finger on to the bottom button on the right-hand side of the signal board and said to Lennard:

“Hold tight now, she's going.”

Lennard held tight, for he felt the floor jump harder under him this time.

In the dim light he saw the nearest of the destroyers, as it seemed to him, rush towards them sideways. Erskine touched another button. A shudder ran through the fabric of the Ithuriel and her bow rose above five feet from the water. A couple of minutes later it hit the destroyer amidships, rolled her over, broke her in two like a log of wood, amidst a roar of crackling guns and a scream of escaping steam, went over her and headed for the next one.

Lennard clenched his teeth and said nothing. He was thinking too hard to say anything just then.

The second destroyer opened fire with her twelve—and six-pounders and dropped a couple of torpedoes as the Ithuriel rushed at her. The Ithuriel was now travelling at forty knots an hour. The torpedoes at thirty. The combined speed was therefore nearly a hundred statute miles an hour. Erskine saw the two white shapes drop into the water, their courses converging towards him. A half turn of the wheel to port swung the Ithuriel out and just cleared them. It was a fairly narrow shave, for one of them grated along her side, but the Ithuriel had no angles. The actual result was that one of the torpedoes deflected from its course, hit the other one and both exploded. A mountain of foam-crowned water rose up and the commander of the French destroyer congratulated himself on the annihilation of at least one of the English warships, but the next moment the grey-blue, almost invisible shape of the Ithuriel leapt up out of the semi-darkness, and her long pointed ram struck amidships, cut him down to the waterline, and almost before the two halves of his vessel had sunk the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

same fate had befallen the third destroyer.

“Well, what do you think of that?” said Erskine, as he touched a couple more buttons and the Ithuriel swung round to the eastward again.

“Well,” said Lennard, slowly, “of course it's war, and those fellows were coming in to do all the damage they could. But it is just a bit terrible, for all that. It's just seven minutes since you rammed the first boat: you haven't fired a shot and there are three big destroyers and I suppose three hundred and fifty men at the bottom of the sea. Pretty awful, you know.”

“My dear sir,” replied Erskine, without looking round, “all war is awful and entirely horrible, and naval war is of course the most horrible of all. There is no chance for the defeated: my orders do not even allow me to pick up a man from one of those vessels. On the other hand, one must remember that if one of those destroyers had got in, they could have let go half a dozen torpedoes apiece among the ships of the Fleet Reserve, and perhaps half a dozen ships and five or six thousand men might have been at the bottom of the Solent by this time, and those torpedoes wouldn't have had any sentiment in them. Hallo, there's another!”

A long, black shape surmounted by a signal-mast and four funnels slid up and out of the darkness into a patch of moonlight lying on the water. Erskine gave a quarter turn to the wheel and touched the two buttons again. The Ithuriel swung round and ran down on her prey. The two fifteen—and the six twelve-pounder guns ahead and astern and on the broadside of the destroyer crackled out and a hail of shells came whistling across the water. A few of them struck the Ithuriel, glanced off and exploded.

“There,” said Erskine, “they've knocked some of our nice new paint off. Now they're going to pay for it.”

“Couldn't you give them a shot back?” said Lennard. “Not worth it, my dear sir,” said Erskine. “We keep our guns for bigger game. We haven't an angle that a shell would hit. You might just as well fire boiled peas at a hippopotamus as those little things at us. Of course a big shell square amidships would hurt us, but then she's so handy that I think I could stop it hitting her straight.”

While he was speaking the Ithuriel got up to full speed again. Lennard shut his eyes. He felt a slight shock, and then a dull grinding. A crash of guns and a roar of escaping steam, and when he looked out again, the destroyer had disappeared. The next moment a blinding glare of light streamed across the water from the direction of Selsey.

“A big cruiser, or battleship,” said Erskine. “French or German. Now we'll see what those shells of yours are made of.”

Chapter IX — The “Flying Fish”

Appears

A HUGE, black shape loomed up into the moonlight. As she came nearer, Lennard could see that the vessel carried a big mast forward with a fighting-top, two funnels a little aft of it, and two other funnels a few feet forward of the after mast.

Erskine put his glasses up to his eyes and said:

“That's the Dupleix, one of the improved Desaix class. Steams twenty-four knots. I suppose she's been shepherding those destroyers that we've just finished with. I hope she hasn't seen what happened. If she thinks that they've got in all right, we've got her. She has a heavy fore and aft and broadside gunfire, two 6.4 guns ahead and astern and amidships, in pairs, and as I suppose they'll be using melinite shells, we shall get fits unless we take them unawares.”

“And what does that mean?” asked Lennard.

“Show you in a minute,” answered Erskine, touching three or four of the buttons on the right-hand side as he spoke.

Another shudder ran through the frame of the Ithuriel and Lennard felt the deck sink under his feet. If he hadn't had as good a head on him as he had, he would have said something, for the Ithuriel sank until her decks were almost awash. She jumped forward again now almost invisible, and circled round to the south eastward. A big cloud drifted across the moon and Erskine said:

“Thank God for that! We shall get her now.”

Another quarter turn of the wheel brought the Ithuriel's head at right angles to the French cruiser's broadside. He took the transmitter of the telephone down from the hooks and said:

“Are you there, Castellan?”

“Yes. What's that big thing ahead there?”

“It's the Dupleix. Ready with your forward guns. I'm going to fire first, then ram. Stand by, centre first, then starboard and port, and keep your eye on them. These are Mr Lennard's shells and we want to see what they'll do. Are you ready?”

“Yes. When you like.”

“Half speed, then, and tell Mackenzie to stand by and order full speed when I give the word. We shall want it in a jump.”

“Very good, sir. Is that all?”

“Yes, that's all.”

Erskine put the receiver back on the hooks.

“That's it. Now we'll try your shells. If they're what I think they are, we'll smash that fellow's top works into scrap-iron, and then we'll go for him.”

“I think I see,” said Lennard, “that's why you've half submerged her.”

“Yes. The Ithuriel is designed to deal with both light and heavy craft. With the light ones, as you have seen, she just walked over them. Now, we've got something bigger to tackle, and if everything goes right that ship will be at the bottom of the sea in five minutes.”

“Horrible,” replied Lennard, “but I suppose it's necessary.”

“Absolutely,” said Erskine, taking the receiver down from the hooks. “If we didn't do it with them, they'd do it with us. That's war.”

Lennard made no reply. He was looking hard at the now rapidly approaching shape of the big French cruiser, and when men are thinking hard, they don't usually say much.

The Ithuriel completed her quarter-circle and dead head on to the Dupleix, Erskine said, “Centre gun ready, forward-fire. Port and starboard concentrate fire.”

There was no report—only a low, hissing sound—and then Lennard saw three flashes of bluish-green

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

blaze out over the French cruiser.

"Hit her! I think those shells of yours got home," said Erskine between his clenched teeth. And then he added through the telephone, "Well aimed, Castellan! They all got there. Load up again—three more shots and I'm going to ram—quick now, and full speed ahead when you've fired."

"All ready!" came back over the telephone, "I've told Mackenzie that you'll want it."

"Good man," replied Erskine. "When I touch the button, you do the rest. Now—are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Let her have it—then full speed. Ah," Erskine continued, turning to Lennard, "he's shooting back."

The cruiser burst into a thunderstorm of smoke and flame and shell, but there was nothing to shoot at. Only three feet of freeboard would have been visible even in broad daylight. The signal mast had been telescoped. There was nothing but the deck, the guns and the conning-tower to be seen. The shells screamed through the air a good ten feet over her and incidentally wrecked the Marine Hotel on Selsey Bill.

Erskine pressed the top button on the right-hand side three times. The smokeless, flameless guns spoke again, and again the three flashes of blue-green flame broke out on the Frenchman's decks.

"Good enough," said Erskine, taking the transmitter down from the hooks again. "Now, Mr Lennard, just come for'ard and watch."

Lennard crept up beside him and took the glasses.

"Down guns—full speed ahead—going to ram," said Erskine, quietly, into the telephone.

To his utter astonishment, Lennard saw the three big guns sink down under the deck and the steel hoods move forward and cover the emplacements. The floor of the conning-tower jumped under his feet again and the huge shape of the French cruiser seemed to rush towards him. There was a roar of artillery, a thunder of 6.4 guns, a crash of bursting shells, a shudder and a shock, and the fifty-ton ram of the Ithuriel hit her forward of the conning-tower and went through the two-inch armour belt as a knife would go through a piece of paper. The big cruiser stopped as an animal on land does, struck by a bullet in its vitals, or a whale when the lance is driven home. Half her officers and men were lying about the decks asphyxiated by Lennard's shells. The after barbette swung round, and at the same moment, or perhaps half a minute before, Erskine touched two other buttons in rapid succession. The Duplex lurched down on the starboard side, the two big guns went off and hit the water. Erskine touched another button, and the Ithuriel ran back from her victim. A minute later the French cruiser heeled over and sank.

"Good God, how did you do that?" said Lennard, looking round at him with eyes rather more wide open than usual.

"That's the effect of the suction screw," replied Erskine. "I got the idea from the Russian ice-breaker, the Yermack. The old idea was just main strength and stupidity, charge the ice and break through if you could. The better idea was to suck the water away from under the ice and go over it—that's what we've done. I rammed that chap, pulled the water away from under him, and, of course, he's gone down."

He gave the wheel a quarter-turn to starboard, tools down the transmitter and said: "Full speed again—in two minutes, three quarters and then half."

"But surely," exclaimed Lennard, "you can do something to help those poor fellows. Are you going to leave them all to drown?"

"I have no orders, except to sink and destroy," replied Erskine between his teeth. "You must remember that this is a war of one country against a continent, and of one fleet against four. Ah, there's another! A third-class cruiser—I think I know her, she's the old Leger—they must have thought they had an easy job of it if they sent her here. Low free board, not worth shooting at. We'll go over her. No armour—what idiots they are to put a thing like that into the fighting line!"

He took the transmitter down and said:

"Stand by there, Castellan! Get your pumps to work, and I shall want full speed ahead—I'm going to run that old croak down—hurry up."

He put the transmitter back on the hooks and presently Lennard saw the bows of the Ithuriel rise quickly out of the water. The doomed vessel in front of them was a long, low-lying French torpedo-catcher, with one big funnel between two signal-masts, hopelessly out of date, and evidently intended only to go in and take her share of the spoils. Erskine switched off the searchlight, called for full speed ahead and then with clenched

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

teeth and set eyes, he sent the Ithuriel flying at her victim.

Within five minutes it was all over. The fifty-ton ram rose over the Leger's side, crushed it down into the water, ground its way through her, cut her in half and went on.

"That ship ought to have been on the scrap-heap ten years ago," said Erskine as he signalled for half-speed and swung the Ithuriel round to the westward.

"She's got a scrap-heap all to herself now, I suppose," said Lennard, with a bit of a check in his voice. "I've no doubt, as you say, this sort of thing may be necessary, but my personal opinion of it is that it's damnable."

"Exactly my opinion too," said Erskine, "but it has to be done."

The next instant, Lennard heard a sound such as he had never heard before. It was a smothered rumble which seemed to come out of the depths, then there came a shock which flung him off his feet, and shot him against the opposite wall of the conning-tower. The Ithuriel heeled over to port, a huge volume of water rose on her starboard side and burst into a torrent over her decks, then she righted.

Erskine, holding on hard to the iron table to which the signalling board was bolted, saved himself from a fall.

"I hope you're not hurt, Mr Lennard," said he, looking round, "that was a submarine. Let a torpedo go at us, I suppose, and didn't know they were hitting twelve-inch armour."

"It's all right," said Lennard, picking himself up. "Only a bruise or two; nothing broken. It seems to me that this new naval warfare of yours is going to get a bit exciting."

"Yes," said Erskine, "I think it is. Halloo, Great Caesar! That must be that infernal invention of Castellan's brother's; the thing he sold to the Germans—the sweep!"

As he spoke a grey shape leapt up out of the water and began to circle over the Ithuriel. He snatched the transmitter from the hooks, and said, in quick, clear tones

"Castellan—sink—quick, quick as you can."

The pumps of the Ithuriel worked furiously the next moment. Lennard held his breath as he saw the waves rise up over the decks.

"Full speed ahead again, and dive," said Erskine into the transmitter. "Hold tight, Lennard."

The floor of the conning-tower took an angle of about sixty degrees, and Lennard gripped the holdfasts, of which there were two on each wall of the tower. He heard a rush of overwhelming waters—then came darkness. The Ithuriel rushed forward at her highest speed. Then something hit the sea, and a quick succession of shocks sent a shudder through the vessel.

"I thought so," said Erskine. "That's John Castellan's combined airship and submarine right enough, and that was an aerial torpedo. If it had hit us when we were above water, we should have been where those French chaps are now. You're quite right, this sort of naval warfare is getting rather exciting."

Chapter X — First Blows From The Air

THE Flying Fish, the prototype of the extraordinary craft which played such a terrible part in the invasion of England, was a magnified reproduction, with improvements which suggested themselves during construction, of the model whose performances had so astonished the Kaiser at Potsdam. She was shaped exactly like her namesake of the deep, upon which, indeed, her inventor had modelled her. She was one hundred and fifty feet long and twenty feet broad by twenty-five feet deep in her widest part, which, as she was fish-shaped, was considerably forward of her centre.

She was built of a newly-discovered compound, something like papier-maché, as hard and rigid as steel, with only about one-tenth the weight. Her engines were of the simplest description in spite of the fact that they developed enormous power. They consisted merely of cylinders into which, by an automatic mechanism, two drops of liquid were brought every second. These liquids when joined produced a gas of enormously expansive power, more than a hundred times that of steam, which actuated the pistons. There were sixteen of these cylinders, and the pistons all connected with a small engine invented by Castellan, which he called an accelerator. By means of this device he could regulate the speed of the propellers which drove the vessel under water and in the air from sixty up to two thousand revolutions a minute.

The Flying Fish was driven by nine propellers, three of these, four-bladed and six feet diameter, revolved a little forward amidships on either side under what might be called the fins. These fins collapsed close against the sides of the vessel when under water and expanded to a spread of twenty feet when she took the air. They worked on a pivot and could be inclined either way from the horizontal to an angle of thirty degrees. Midway between the end of these and the stern was a smaller pair with one driving screw. The eighth screw was an ordinary propeller at the stern, but the outside portion of the shaft worked on a ball and socket joint so that it could be used for both steering and driving purposes. It was in fact the tail of the Flying Fish. Steering in the air was effected by means of a vertical fin placed right aft.

She was submerged as the Ithuriel was, by pumping water into the lower part of her hull. When these chambers were empty she floated like a cork. The difference between swimming and flying was merely the difference between the revolutions of the screws and the inclination of the fins. A thousand raised her from the water: twelve hundred gave her twenty-five or thirty miles an hour through the air: fifteen hundred gave her fifty, and two thousand gave her eighty to a hundred, according to the state of the atmosphere.

Her armament consisted of four torpedo tubes which swung at any angle from the horizontal to the vertical and so were capable of use both under water and in the air. They discharged a small, insignificant-looking torpedo containing twenty pounds of an explosive, discovered almost accidentally by Castellan and known only to himself, the German Emperor, the Chancellor, and the Commander-in-Chief. It was this which he had used in tiny quantities in the experiment at Potsdam. Its action was so terrific that it did not rend or crack metal or stone which it struck. It overcame the chemical forces by which the substance was held together and reduced them to gas and powder.

And now, after this somewhat formal but necessary description of the most destructive fighting-machine ever created we can proceed with the story.

There were twenty Flying Fishes attached to the Allied Forces, all of them under the command of German engineers, with the exception of the original Flying Fish. Two of these were attached to the three squadrons which were attacking Hull, Newcastle and Dover: three had been detailed for the attack on Portsmouth: two more to Plymouth, two to Bristol and Liverpool respectively, on which combined cruiser and torpedo attacks were to be made, and two supported by a small swift cruiser and torpedo flotilla for an assault on Cardiff, in order if possible to terrorise that city into submission and so obtain what may be called the life-blood of a modern navy. The rest, in case of accidents to any of these, were reserved for the final attack on London.

When the Ithuriel disappeared and his torpedo struck a piece of floating wreckage and exploded with a terrific shock, John Castellan, standing in the conning-tower directing the movements of the Flying Fish,

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

naturally concluded that he had destroyed a British submarine scout. He knew of the existence, but nothing of the real powers of the Ithuriel. The only foreigner who knew that was Captain Count Karl von Eckstein, and he was locked safely in a cabin on board her.

He had been searching the underwaters between Nettlestone Point and Hayling Island for hours on the look-out for British submarines and torpedo scouts, and had found nothing, therefore he was ignorant of the destruction which the Ithuriel had already wrought, and as, of course, he had heard no firing under the water, he believed that the three destroyers supported by the Duplex and Leger had succeeded in slipping through the entrance to Spithead.

He knew that a second flotilla of six destroyers with three swift second-class cruisers were following in to complete the work, which by this time should have begun, and that after them came the main French squadron, consisting of six first-class battleships with a screen of ten first and five second-class cruisers, the work of which would be to maintain a blockade against any relieving force, after the submarines—and destroyers had sunk and crippled the ships of the Fleet Reserve and cut the connections of the contact mines.

He knew also that the *See Adler*, which was *Flying Fish II*, was waiting about the Needles to attack Hurst Castle and the forts on the Isle of Wight side, preparatory to a rush of two battleships and three cruisers through the narrows, while another was lurking under Hayling Island ready to take the air and rain destruction on the forts of Portsmouth before the fight became general.

What thoroughly surprised him, however, was the absolute silence and inaction of the British. True, two shots had been fired, but, whether from fort or warship, and with what intent, he hadn't the remotest notion. The hour arranged upon for the general assault was fast approaching. The British must be aware that an attack would be made, and yet there was not so much as a second-class torpedo boat to be seen outside Spithead. This puzzled him, so he decided to go and investigate for himself. He took up a speaking-tube and said to his Lieutenant, M'Carthy—one of too many renegade Irishmen who in the terrible times that were to come joined their country's enemies as Lynch and his traitors had done in the Boer War:

"I don't quite make it out, M'Carthy. We'll go down and get under—it's about time the fun began—and I haven't heard a shot fired or seen an English ship except that submarine we smashed. My orders are for twelve o'clock, and I'm going to obey them."

There was one more device on board the *Flying Fish* which should be described in order that her wonderful manoeuvring under water may be understood. Just in front of the steering-wheel in the conning-tower was a square glass box measuring a foot in the side, and in the centre of this, attached to top and bottom by slender films of asbestos, was a needle ten inches long, so hung that it could turn and dip in any direction. The forward half of this needle was made of highly magnetised steel, and the other of aluminium which exactly counterbalanced it. The glass case was completely insulated and therefore the extremely sensitive needle was unaffected by any of the steel parts used in the construction of the vessel. But let any other vessel, save of course a wooden ship, come within a thousand yards, the needle began to tremble and sway, and the nearer the *Flying Fish* approached it, the steadier it became and the more directly it pointed towards the object. If the vessel was on the surface, it of course pointed upward: if it was a submarine, it pointed either level or downwards with unerring precision. This needle was, in fact, the eyes of the *Flying Fish* when she was under water.

Castellan swung her head round to the north-west and dropped gently on to the water about midway between Selsey Bill and the Isle of Wight. Then the *Flying Fish* folded her wings and sank to a depth of twenty feet. Then, at a speed of ten knots, she worked her way in a zigzag course back and forth across the narrowing waters, up the channel towards Portsmouth.

To his surprise, the needle remained steady, showing that there was neither submarine nor torpedo boat near. This meant, as far as he could see, that the main approach to the greatest naval fortress in England had been left unguarded, a fact so extraordinary as to be exceedingly suspicious. His water-ray apparatus, a recent development of the X-rays which enabled him to see under water for a distance of fifty yards, had detected no contact mines, and yet Spithead ought to be enstrewn with them, just as it ought to have been swarming with submarines and destroyers. There must be some deep meaning to such apparently incomprehensible neglect, but what was it?

If his brother Denis had not happened to recognise Captain Count Karl von Eckstein and haled him so

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

unceremoniously on board the Ithuriel, and if his portmanteau full of papers had been got on board a French warship, instead of being left for the inspection of the British Admiralty, that reason would have been made very plain to him.

Completely mystified, and fearing that either he was going into some trap or that some unforeseen disaster had happened, he swung round, ran out past the forts and rose into the air again. When he had reached the height of about a thousand feet, three rockets rose into the air and burst into three showers of stars, one red, one white, and the other blue. It was the Tricolour in the air, and the signal from the French Admiral to commence the attack. Castellan's orders were to cripple or sink the battleships of the Reserve Fleet which was moored in two divisions in Spithead and the Solent.

The Spithead Division lay in column of line abreast between Gilkicker Point and Ryde Pier. It consisted of the Formidable, Irresistible, Implacable, Majestic and Magnificent, and the cruisers Hogue, Sutlej, Ariadne, Argonaut, Diadem and Hawke. The western Division consisted of the battleships Prince George, Victoria, Jupiter, Mars and Hannibal, and the cruisers Amphitrite, Spartiate, Andromeda, Europa, Niobe, Blenheim and Blake.

It had of course been perfectly easy for Castellan to mark the position of the two squadrons from the air, and he knew that though they were comparatively old vessels they were quite powerful enough, with the assistance of the shore batteries, to hold even Admiral Durenne's splendid fleet until the Channel Fleet, which for the time being seemed to have vanished from the face of the waters, came up and took the French in the rear.

In such a case, the finest fleet of France would be like a nut in a vice, and that was the reason for the remorseless orders which had been given to him, orders which he was prepared to carry out to the letter, in spite of the appalling loss of life which they entailed; for, as the Flying Fish sank down into the water, he thought of that swimming race in Clifden Bay and of the girl whose marriage with himself, willing or unwilling, was to be one of the terms of peace when the British Navy lay shattered round her shores, and the millions of the League of Nations had trampled the land forces of Britain into submission.

Just as she touched the water a brilliant flash of pink flame leapt up from the eastern fort on the Hillsea Lines, followed by a sharp crash which shook the atmosphere. A thin ray of light fell from the clouds, then came a quick succession of flashes moving in the direction of the great fort on Portsdown, until two rose in quick succession from Portsdown itself, and almost at the same moment another from Hurst Castle, and yet another from the direction of Fort Victoria.

"God bless my soul, what's that?" exclaimed the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir Compton Domville, who had just completed his final inspection of the defences of Portsmouth Harbour, and was standing on the roof of Southsea Castle, taking a general look round before going back to headquarters. "Here, Markham," he said, turning to the Commander of the Fort, "just telephone up to Portsdown at once and ask them what they're up to."

An orderly instantly dived below to the telephone room. The Fort Commander took Sir Compton aside and said in a low voice:

"I am afraid, sir, that the forts are being attacked from the air."

"What's that?" replied Sir Compton, with a start. "Do you mean that infernal thing that Erskine and Castellan and the watch of the Cormorant saw in the North Sea?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "There is no reason why the enemy should not possess a whole fleet of these craft by this time, and naturally they would act in concert with the attack of the French Fleet. I've heard rumours of a terrible new explosive they've got, too, which shatters steel into splinters and poisons everyone within a dozen yards of it. If that's true and they're dropping it on the forts, they'll probably smash the guns as well. For heaven's sake, sir, let me beg of you to go back at once to headquarters! It will probably be our turn next. You will be safe there, for they're not likely to waste their shells on Government buildings."

"Well, I suppose I shall be of more use there," growled Sir Compton.

At this moment the orderly returned, looking rather scared. He saluted and said:

"If you please, sir, they've tried Portsdown and all the Hillsea forts and can't get an answer."

"Good heavens!" said the Commander-in-Chief, "that looks almost as if you were right, Markham. Signal to Squadron A to up-anchor at once and telephone to Squadron B to do the same. Telephone Gilkicker to turn

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

all searchlights on. Now I must be off and have a talk with General Hamilton.”

He ran down to his pinnace and went away full speed for the harbour, but before he reached the pier another flash burst out from the direction of Fort Gilkicker, followed by a terrific roar. To those standing on the top of Southsea Castle the fort seemed turned into a volcano, spouting flame and clouds of smoke, in the midst of which they could see for an instant whirling shapes, most of which would probably be the remains of the gallant defenders, hurled into eternity before they had a chance of firing a shot at the invaders. The huge guns roared for the first and last time in the war, and the great projectiles plunged aimlessly among the ships of the squadron, carrying wreck and ruin along the line.

“Our turn now, I suppose,” said the Fort Commander, quietly, as he looked up and by a chance gleam of moonlight through the breaking clouds saw a dim grey, winged shape drift across the harbour entrance.

They were the last words he ever spoke, for the next moment the roof crumbled under his feet, and his body was scattered in fragments through the air, and in that moment Portsmouth had ceased to be a fortified stronghold.

Chapter XI — The Tragedy Of The Two Squadrons

IT takes a good deal to shake the nerves of British naval officer or seaman, but those on board the ships of the Spithead Squadron would have been something more than human if they could have viewed the appalling happenings of the last few terrible minutes with their accustomed coolness. They were ready to fight anything on the face of the waters or under them, but an enemy in the air who could rain down shells, a couple of which were sufficient to destroy the most powerful forts in the world, and who could not be hit back, was another matter. It was a bitter truth, but there was no denying it. The events of the last ten years had clearly proved that a day must come when the flying machine would be used as an engine of war, and now that day had come and the fighting flying machine was in the hands of the enemy.

The anchors were torn from the ground, signals were flashed from the flag-ship, the Prince George, and within four minutes the squadron was under way to the southeastward. After what had happened the Admiral in command promptly and rightly decided that to keep his ships cramped up in the narrow waters was only to court further disaster. His place was now the open sea, and a general fleet action offered the only means of preventing an occupation of almost defenceless Portsmouth, and the landing of hostile troops in the very heart of England's southern defences.

Fifteen first-class torpedo boats and ten destroyers ran out from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight coasts, ran through the ships, and spread themselves out in a wide curve ahead, and at the same time twenty submarines crept out from the harbour and set to work laying contact mines in the appointed fields across the harbour mouth and from shore to shore behind the Spithead forts.

But the squadron had not steamed a mile beyond the forts before a series of frightful disasters overtook them. First, a huge column of water rose under the stern of the Jupiter. The great ship stopped and shuddered like a stricken animal, and began to settle down stern first. Instantly the Mars and Victorious which were on either side of her slowed down, their boats splashed into the water and set to work to rescue those who managed to get clear of the sinking ship.

But even while this was being done, the Banshee, the Flying Fish which had destroyed the forts, had taken up her position a thousand feet above the doomed squadron. A shell dropped upon the deck of the Spartiate, almost amidships. The pink flash blazed out between her two midship funnels. They crumpled up as if they had been made of brown paper. The six-inch armoured casemates on either side seemed to crumble away. The four-inch steel deck gaped and split as though it had been made of matchboard. Then the Banshee dropped to within five hundred feet and let go another shell almost in the same place. A terrific explosion burst out in the very vitals of the stricken ship, and the great cruiser seemed to split asunder. A vast volume of mingled smoke and flame and steam rose up, and when it rolled away, the Spartiate had almost vanished.

But that was the last act of destruction that the Banshee was destined to accomplish. That moment the moon sailed out into a patch of clear sky. Every eye in the squadron was turned upward. There was the airship plainly visible. Her captain instantly saw his danger and quickened up his engines, but it was too late. He was followed by a hurricane of shells from the three-pound quick-firers in the upper tops of the battleships. Then came an explosion in mid-air which seemed to shake the very firmament itself. She had fifty or sixty of the terrible shells which had wrought so much havoc on board, and as a dozen shells pierced her hull and burst, they too exploded with the shock. A vast blaze of pink flame shone out.

“Talk about going to glory in a blue flame,” said Seaman Gunner Tompkins, who had aimed one of the guns in the fore-top of the Hannibal, and of course, like everybody else, piously believed that his was one of the shells that got there. “That chap's gone to t'other place in a red 'un. War's war, but I don't hold with that sort of fighting; it doesn't give a man a chance. Torpedoes is bad enough, Gawd knows—”

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a shock and a shudder ran through the mighty fabric of the battleship. The water rose in a foam-clad mountain under her starboard quarter. She heeled over to port, and then rolled back to starboard and began to settle.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Torpedoed, by George! What did I tell you?” gasped Gunner Tompkins. The next moment a lurch of the ship hurled him and his mates far out into the water.

Even as his ship went down, Captain Barclay managed to signal to the other ships, “Don't wait—get out.” And when her shattered hull rested on the bottom, the gallant signal was still flying from the upper yard.

It was obvious that the one chance of escaping their terrible unseen foe was to obey the signal. By this time crowds of small craft of every description had come off from both shores to the rescue of those who had gone down with the ships, so the Admiral did what was the most practical thing to do under the circumstances—he dropped his own boats, each with a crew, and ordered the Victorious and Mars to do the same, and then gave the signal for full speed ahead. The great engines panted and throbbed, and the squadron moved forward with ever-increasing speed, the cruisers and destroyers, according to signal, running ahead of the battleships; but before full speed was reached, the Mars was struck under the stern, stopped, shuddered, and went down with a mighty lurch.

This last misfortune convinced the Admiral that the destruction of his battleships could not be the work of any ordinary submarine, for at the time the Mars was struck she was steaming fifteen knots and the underwater speed of the best submarine was only twelve, saving only the Ithuriel, and she did not use torpedoes. The two remaining battleships had now reached seventeen knots, which was their best speed. The cruisers and their consorts were already disappearing round Foreland.

There was some hope that they might escape the assaults of the mysterious and invisible enemy now that the airship had been destroyed, but unless the submarine had exhausted her torpedoes, or some accident had happened to her, there was very little for the Prince George and the Victorious, and so it turned out. Castellan's strict orders had been to confine his attentions to the battleships, and he obeyed his pitiless instructions to the letter. First the Victorious and then the flagship, smitten by an unseen and irresistible bolt in their weakest parts, succumbed to the great gaping wounds torn in the thin under-plating, reeled once or twice to and fro like leviathans struggling for life, and went down. And so for the time being, at least, ended the awful work of the Flying Fish.

Leaving the cruisers and smaller craft to continue their dash for the open Channel, we must now look westward.

When Vice-Admiral Codrington, who was flying his flag on the Irresistible, saw the flashes along the Hillsea ridge and Portsdown height and heard the roar of the explosions, he at once up-anchor and got his squadron under way. Then came the appallingly swift destruction of Hurst Castle and Fort Victoria. Like all good sailors, he was a man of instant decision. His orders were to guard the entrance to the Solent, and the destruction of the forts made it impossible for him to do this inside. How that destruction had been wrought, he had of course no idea, beyond a guess that the destroying agent must have come from the air, since it could not have come from sea or land without provoking a very vigorous reply from the forts. Instead of that they had simply blown up without firing a shot.

He therefore decided to steam out through the narrow channel between Hurst Castle and the Isle of Wight as quickly as possible.

It was a risky thing to do at night and at full speed, for the Channel and the entrance to it was strewn with contact mines, but one of the principal businesses of the British Navy is to take risks where necessary, so he put his own ship at the head of the long line, and with a mine chart in front of him went ahead at eighteen knots.

When Captain Adolph Frenkel, who was in command of the See Adler, saw the column of warships twining and wriggling its way out through the Channel, each ship handled with consummate skill and keeping its position exactly, he could not repress an admiring “Ach!” Still it was not his business to admire, but destroy.

He rose to a thousand feet, swung round to the northeastward until the whole line had passed beneath him, and then quickened up and dropped to seven hundred feet, swung round again and crept up over the Hogue, which was bringing up the rear. When he was just over her fore part, he let go a shell, which dropped between the conning-tower and the forward barbette.

The navigating bridge vanished; the twelve-inch armoured conning-tower cracked like an eggshell; the barbette collapsed like the crust of a loaf, and the big 9.2 gun lurched backwards and lay with its muzzle

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

staring helplessly at the clouds. The deck crumpled up as though it had been burnt parchment, and the ammunition for the 9.2 and the forward six-inch guns which had been placed ready for action exploded, blowing the whole of the upper forepart of the vessel into scrap-iron.

But an even worse disaster than this was to befall the great twelve-thousand-ton cruiser. Her steering gear was, of course, shattered. Uncontrolled and uncontrollable, she swung swiftly round to starboard, struck a mine, and inside three minutes she was lying on the mud.

Almost at the moment of the first explosion, the beams of twenty searchlights leapt up into the air, and in the midst of the broad white glare hundreds of keen angry eyes saw a winged shape darting up into the air, heading southward as though it would cross the Isle of Wight over Yarmouth. Almost simultaneously, every gun from the tops of the battleships spoke, and a storm of shells rent the air.

But Captain Frenkel had already seen his mistake. The *See Adler's* wings were inclined at an angle of twenty degrees, her propellers were revolving at their utmost velocity, and at a speed of nearly a hundred miles an hour, she took the Isle of Wight in a leap. She slowed down rapidly over Freshwater Bay. Captain Frenkel took a careful observation of the position and course of the squadron, dropped into the water, folded his wings and crept round the Needles with his conning-tower just awash, and lay in wait for his prey about two miles off the Needles.

The huge black hull of the *Irresistible* was only a couple of hundred yards away. He instantly sank and turned on his water-ray. As the flagship passed within forty yards he let go his first torpedo. It hit her sternpost, smashed her rudder and propellers, and tore a great hole in her run. The steel monster stopped, shuddered, and slid sternward with her mighty ram high in the air into the depths of the smooth grey sea.

There is no need to repeat the ghastly story which has already been told—the story of the swift and pitiless destruction of these miracles of human skill, huge in size and mighty in armament and manned by the bravest men on land or sea, by a foe puny in size but of awful potentiality. It was a fight, if fight it could be called, between the visible and the invisible, and it could only have one end. Battleship after battleship received her death-wound, and went down without being able to fire a shot in defence, until the *Magnificent*, smitten in the side under her boilers, blew up and sank amidst a cloud of steam and foam, and the Western Squadron had met the fate of the Eastern.

While this tragedy was being enacted, the cruisers scattered in all directions and headed for the open at their highest speed. It was a bitter necessity, and it was bitterly felt by every man and boy on board them; but the captains knew that to stop and attempt the rescue of even some of their comrades meant losing the ships which it was their duty at all costs to preserve, and so they took the only possible chance to escape from this terrible unseen foe which struck out of the silence and the darkness with such awful effect.

But despite the tremendous disaster which had befallen the Reserve Fleet, the work of death and destruction was by no means all on one side. When he sank the *Leger*, Erskine had done a great deal more damage to the enemy than he knew, for she had been sent not for fighting purposes, but as a *dépôt* ship for the *Flying Fishes*, from which they could renew their torpedoes and the gas cylinders which furnished their driving power. Being a light craft, she was to take up an agreed position off Bracklesham Bay three miles to the north-west of Selsey Bill, the loneliest and shallowest part of the coast, with all lights out, ready to supply all that was wanted or to make any repairs that might be necessary. Her sinking, therefore, deprived John Castellan's craft of their base.

After the *Dupleix* had gone down, the *Ithuriel* rose again, and Erskine said to Lennard:

“There must be more of them outside, they wouldn't be such fools as to rush Portsmouth with three destroyers and a couple of cruisers. We'd better go on and reconnoitre.”

The *Ithuriel* ran out south-eastward at twenty knots in a series of broad curves, and she was just beginning to make the fourth of these when six black shapes crowned with wreaths of smoke loomed up out of the semidarkness.

“Thought so—destroyers,” said Erskine. “Yes, and look there, behind them—cruiser supports, three of them—these are for the second rush. Coming up pretty fast, too; they'll be there in half an hour. We shall have something to say about that. Hold on, Lennard.”

“Same tactics, I suppose,” said Lennard.

“Yes,” replied Erskine, taking down the receiver. “Are you there, Castellan? All right. We've six more

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

destroyers to get rid of. Full speed ahead, as soon as you like—guns all ready, I suppose? Good—go ahead.” The Ithuriel was now about two miles to the westward and about a mile in front of the line of destroyers, which just gave her room to get up full speed. As she gathered way, Lennard saw the nose of the great ram rise slowly out of the water. The destroyer's guns crackled, but it is not easy to hit a low-lying object moving at fifty miles an hour, end on, when you are yourself moving nearly twenty-five. Just the same thing happened as before. The point of the ram passed over the destroyer's bows, crumpled them up and crushed them down, and the Ithuriel rushed on over the sinking wreck, swerved a quarter turn, and bore down on her next victim. It was over in ten minutes. The Ithuriel rushed hither and thither among the destroyers like some leviathan of the deep. A crash, a swift grinding scrape, and a mass of crumpled steel was dropping to the bottom of the Channel.

While the attack on the destroyers was taking place, the cruisers were only half a mile away. Their captains had found themselves in curiously difficult positions. The destroyers were so close together, and the movements of this strange monster which was running them down so rapidly, that if they opened fire they were more likely to hit their own vessels than it, but when the last had gone down, every available gun spoke, and a hurricane of shells, large and small, ploughed up the sea where the Ithuriel had been. After the first volley, the captains looked at their officers and the officers looked at the captains, and said things which strained the capabilities of the French language to the utmost. The monster had vanished.

The fact was that Erskine had foreseen that storm of shell, and the pumps had been working hard while the ramming was going on. The result was that the Ithuriel sank almost as soon as her last victim, and in thirty seconds there was nothing to shoot at.

“I shall ram those chaps from underneath,” he said. “They've too many guns for a shooting match.”

He reduced the speed to thirty knots, rose for a moment till the conning-tower was just above the water, took his bearings, sank, called for full speed, and in four minutes the ram crashed into the Alger's stern, carried away her sternpost and rudder, and smashed her propellers. The Ithuriel passed on as if she had hit a log of wood and knocked it aside. A slight turn of the steering-wheel, and within four minutes the ram was buried in the vitals of the Suchet. Then the Ithuriel reversed engines, the fore screw sucked the water away, and the cruiser slid off the ram as she might have done off a rock. As she went down, the Ithuriel rose to the surface. The third cruiser, the Davout, was half a mile away. She had changed her course and was evidently making frantic efforts to get back to sea.

“Going to warn the fleet, are you, my friend?” said Erskine, between his teeth. “Not if I know it!”

He asked for full speed again and the terror-stricken Frenchmen saw the monster, just visible on the surface of the water, flying towards them in the midst of a cloud of spray. A sheep might as well have tried to escape from a tiger. Many of the crew flung themselves overboard in the madness of despair. There was a shock and a grinding crash, and the ram bored its way twenty feet into the unarmoured quarter. Then the Ithuriel's screws dragged her free, and the Davout followed her sisters to the bottom of the Channel.

Chapter XII — How London Took The News

THE awaking of England on the morning of the twenty-sixth of November was like the awaking of a man from a nightmare. Everyone who slept had gone to sleep with one word humming in his brain—war—and war at home, that was the terrible thought which robbed so many millions of eyes of sleep. But even those who slept did not do so for long.

At a quarter to one a sub-editor ran into the room of the chief News Editor of the Daily Telegraph, without even the ceremony of a knock.

“What on earth's the matter, Johnson?” exclaimed the editor. “Seen a ghost?”

“Worse than that, sir. Read this!” said the sub-editor, in a shaking voice, throwing the slip down on the desk.

“My God, what's this?” said the editor, as he ran his eye along the slip. “Portsmouth bombarded from the air. Hillsea, Portsmouth, Gilkicker and Southsea Castle destroyed. Practically defenceless. Fleet Reserve Squadrons sailing.”

The words were hardly out of his mouth before another man came running in with a slip. “Jupiter and Hannibal torpedoed by submarine. Spartiate blown up by aerial torpedo.” Then there came a gap, as though the men at the other end had heard of more news, then followed—“Mars, Prince George, Victorious, all torpedoed. Cruisers escaped to sea. No news of Ithuriel, no torpedo attack up to present.”

“Oh, that's awful,” gasped the editor, and then the professional instinct reasserted itself, for he continued, handing the slip back: “Rush out an edition straight away, Johnson. Anything, if it's only a half-sheet—get it on the streets as quick as you can—there'll be plenty of people about still. If anything else comes bring it up.”

In less than a quarter of an hour a crowd of newsboys were fighting in the passage for copies of the single sheet which contained the momentous news, just as it had come over the wire. The Daily Telegraph was just five minutes ahead, but within half an hour every London paper, morning and evening, and all the great provincial journals had rushed out their midnight specials, and from end to end of England and Scotland, and away to South Wales, and over the narrow seas to Dublin and Cork, the shrill screams of the newsboys, and the hoarse, raucous howls of the newsmen were spreading the terrible tidings over the land. What the beacon fires were in the days of the Armada, these humble heralds of Fate were in the twentieth century.

“War begun—Portsmouth destroyed—Fleet sunk.”

The six terrible words were not quite exact, of course, but they were near enough to the truth to sound like the voice of Fate in the ears of the millions whose fathers and fathers' fathers back through six generations had never had their midnight rest so rudely broken.

Lights gleamed out of darkened windows, and front doors were flung open in street after street, as the war-cry echoed down it. Any coin that came first to hand, from a penny to a sovereign, was eagerly offered for the single hurriedly-printed sheets, but the business instincts of the newsboys rose superior to the crisis, and nothing less than a shilling was accepted. Streams of men and boys on bicycles with great bags of specials slung on their backs went tearing away, head down and pedals whirling, north, south, east and west into the suburbs. Newsagents flung their shops open, and in a few minutes were besieged by eager, anxious crowds, fighting for the first copies. There was no more sleep for man or woman in London that night, though the children slept on in happy unconsciousness of what the morrow was to bring forth.

What happened in London was happening almost simultaneously all over the kingdom. For more than a hundred years the British people had worked and played and slept in serene security, first behind its wooden walls, and then behind the mighty iron ramparts of its invincible Fleets, and now, like a thunderbolt from a summer sky, came the paralysing tidings that the first line of defence had been pierced by a single blow, and the greatest sea stronghold of England rendered defenceless and all this between sunset and midnight of a November day.

Was it any wonder that men looked blankly into each other's eyes, and asked themselves and each other

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

how such an unheard-of catastrophe had come about, and what was going to happen next? The first and universal feeling was one of amazement, which amounted almost to mental paralysis, and then came a sickening sense of insecurity. For two generations the Fleet had been trusted implicitly, and invasion had been looked upon merely as the fad of alarmists, and the theme of sensational story-writers. No intelligent person really trusted the army, although its ranks, such as they were, were filled with as gallant soldiers as ever carried a rifle, but it had been afflicted ever since men could remember with the bane and blight of politics and social influence. It had never been really a serious profession, and its upper ranks had been little better than the playground of the sons of the wealthy and well-born.

Politician after politician on both sides had tried his hand at scheme after scheme to improve the army. What one had done, the next had undone, and the permanent War Office Officials had given more attention to buttons and braids and caps than to business-like organisations of fighting efficiency. The administration was, as it always had been, a chaos of muddle. The higher ranks were rotten with inefficiency, and the lower, aggravated and bewildered by change after change, had come to look upon soldiering as a sort of game, the rules of which were being constantly altered.

The Militia, the Yeomanry, and the Volunteers had been constantly snubbed and worried by the authorities of Pall Mall. Private citizens, willing to give time and money in order to learn the use of the rifle, even if they could not join the Yeomanry or Volunteers, had been just ignored. The War Office could see no use for a million able-bodied men who had learned to shoot straight, besides they were only "damned civilians," whose proper place was in their offices and shops. What right had they with rifles? If they wanted exercise, let them go and play golf, or cricket, or football. What had they to do with the defence of their country and their homes?

But that million of irregular sharpshooters were badly wanted now. They could have turned every hedgerow into a trench and cover against the foe which would soon be marching over the fields and orchards and hop-gardens of southern England. They would have known every yard of the ground and the turn of every path and road, and while the regular army was doing its work they could have prevented many a turning movement of the superior forces, shot down the horses of convoys and ammunition trains, and made themselves generally objectionable to the enemy.

Now the men were there, full of fight and enthusiasm, but they had neither ammunition nor rifles, and if they had had them, ninety per cent. would not have known how to use them. Wherefore, those who were responsible for the land defences of the country found themselves with less than three hundred thousand trained and half-trained men of all arms, to face invading forces which would certainly not number less than a million, every man of which had served his apprenticeship to the grim trade of war, commanded by officers who had taken that same trade seriously, studied it as a science, thinking it of considerably more importance than golf or cricket or football.

It had been said that the British Nation would never tolerate conscription, which might or might not have been true; but now, when the next hour or so might hear the foreign drums thrumming and the foreign bugles blaring, conscription looked a very different thing. There wasn't a loyal man in the kingdom who didn't bitterly regret that he had not been taken in the prime of his young manhood, and taught how to defend the hearth and home which were his, and the wife and children which were so dear to him.

But it was too late now. Neither soldiers nor sharpshooters are made in a few hours or days, and within a week the first battles that had been fought on English ground for nearly eight hundred years would have been lost and won, and nine-tenths of the male population of England would be looking on in helpless fury.

There had been plenty of theorists, who had said that the British Islands needed no army of home defence, simply because if she once lost command of the sea it would not be necessary for an enemy to invade her, since a blockade of her ports would starve her into submission in a month—which, thanks to the decay of agriculture and the depopulation of the country districts, was true enough. But it was not all the truth. Those who preached these theories left out one very important factor, and that was human nature.

For over a century the Continental nations had envied and hated Britain, the land-grabber; Britain who had founded nations while they had failed to make colonies; Britain, who had made the Seven Seas her territories, and the coasts of other lands her frontiers. Surely the leaders of the leagued nations would have been more or less than human had they resisted, even if their people had allowed them to do it, the temptation of trampling

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

these proud Islanders into the mud and mire of their own fields and highways, and dictating terms of peace in the ancient halls of Windsor.

These were the bitter thoughts which were rankling in the breast of every loyal British man during the remainder of that night of horrible suspense. Many still had reason to remember the ghastly blunders and the muddling which had cost so many gallant lives and so many millions of treasure during the Boer War, when it took three hundred thousand British troops to reduce eighty thousand undrilled farmers to submission. What if the same blundering and muddling happened now? And it was just as likely now as then.

Men ground their teeth, and looked at their strong, useless hands, and cursed theorist and politician alike. Anal meanwhile the Cabinet was sitting, deliberating, as best it might, over the tidings of disaster. The House of Commons, after voting full powers to the Cabinet and the Council of Defence, had been united at last by the common and immediate danger, and members of all parties were hurrying away to their constituencies to do what they could to help in organising the defence of their homeland.

There was one fact which stood out before all others, as clearly as an electric light among a lot of candles, and, now that it was too late, no one recognised it with more bitter conviction than those who had made it the consistent policy of both Conservative and Liberal Governments, and of the Executive Departments, to discourage invention outside the charmed circle of the Services, and to drive the civilian inventor abroad.

Again and again, designs of practical airships—not gas-bags which could only be dragged slowly against a moderate wind, but flying machines which conquered the wind and used it as a bird does—had been submitted to the War Office during the last six or seven years, and had been pooh-poohed or pigeon-holed by some sapient permanent official—and now the penalty of stupidity and neglect had to be paid.

The complete descriptions of the tragedy that had been and was being enacted at Portsmouth that were constantly arriving in Downing Street left no possibility of doubt that the forts had been destroyed and the Spartiate blown up by torpedoes from the air—from which fact it was necessary to draw the terrible inference that the enemy had possessed themselves of the command of the air.

What was the command of the sea worth after that? What was the fighting value of the mightiest battleship that floated when pitted against a practically unassailable enemy, which had nothing to do but drop torpedoes, loaded with high explosives, on her decks and down her funnels until her very vitals were torn to pieces, her ammunition exploded, and her crew stunned by concussion or suffocated by poisonous gas?

It was horrible, but it was true. Inside an hour the strongest fortifications in England had been destroyed, and ten first-class battleships and a cruiser had been sent to the bottom of the sea, and so at last her ancient sceptre was falling from the hand of the Sea Queen, and her long inviolate domain was threatened by the armed legions of those whose forefathers she had vanquished on many a stricken field by land and sea.

“Well, gentlemen,” said the Prime Minister to the other members of the Cabinet Council, who were sitting round that historic oval table in the Council Chamber in Downing Street, “we may as well confess that this is a great deal more serious than we expected it to be, and that is to my mind all the better reason why we should strain every nerve to hold intact the splendid heritage which our fathers have left to us—”

Boom! A shudder ran through the atmosphere as he spoke the last words, and the double windows in Downing Street shook with the vibration. The members of the Cabinet started in their seats and looked at each other.

Was this the fulfilment of the half prophecy which the Prime Minister had spoken so slowly and so clearly in the silent, crowded House of Commons?

Almost at the same moment the electric bell at the outer of the double doors rang. The doors were opened, and a messenger came in with a telegram which he handed to the Prime Minister, and then retired. He opened the envelope, and for nearly five minutes of intense suspense he mentally translated the familiar cypher, and then he said, as he handed the telegram to the Secretary for War:

“Gentlemen, I deeply regret to say that the possible prospect which I outlined in the House to-night has become an accomplished fact. Two hundred and forty-three years ago London heard the sound of hostile guns. We have heard them to-night. This telegram is from Sheerness, and it tells, I most deeply regret to say, the same story, or something like it, as the messages from Portsmouth. A Russo-German-French fleet of battleships, cruisers and destroyers, assisted by four airships and an unknown number of submarines, has defeated the Southern portion of the North Sea Squadron, and is now proceeding in two divisions, one up the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Medway towards Chatham, and the other up the Thames towards Tilbury. Garrison Fort is now being bombarded from the Sea and the air, and will probably be in ruins within an hour.”

Chapter XIII — A Crime And A Mistake

WHEN the destruction of the forts and the sinking of the battleships at Portsmouth had been accomplished, John Castellan made about the greatest mistake in his life, a mistake which had very serious consequences for those to whom he had sold himself and his terrible invention.

He and his brother Denis formed a very curious contrast, which is nevertheless not uncommon in Irish families. The British army and navy can boast no finer soldiers or sailors, and the Empire no more devoted servants than those who claim Ireland as the land of their birth, and Denis Castellan was one of these. As the reader may have guessed already, he and Erskine had only been on the Cormorant because it was the policy of the Naval Council to keep two of the ablest men in the service out of sight for a while. Denis, who had a remarkable gift of tongues, was really one of the most skilful naval attachés in service, and what he didn't know about the naval affairs of Europe was hardly worth learning. Erskine had been recognised by the Naval Council which, under Sir John Fisher, had raised the British Navy to a pitch of efficiency that was the envy of every nation in the world, except Japan, as an engineer and inventor of quite extraordinary ability, and while the Ithuriel was building, they had given him the command of the Cormorant, chiefly because there was hardly anything to do, and therefore he had ample leisure to do his thinking.

On the other hand John Castellan was an unhappily brilliant example of that type of Keltic intellect which is incapable of believing the world-wide truism that the day of small states is passed. He had two articles of political faith. One was an unshakable belief in the possibility of Irish independence, and the other, which naturally followed from the first, was implacable hatred of the Saxon oppressor whose power and wealth had saved Ireland from invasion for centuries. He was utterly unable to grasp the Imperial idea, while his brother was as enthusiastic an Imperialist as ever sailed the seas.

Had it not been for this blind hatred, the disaster which had befallen the Reserve Fleet would have been repeated at sea on a much vaster scale; but he allowed his passions to overcome his judgment, and so saved the Channel Fleet. There lay beneath him defenceless the greatest naval port of England, with its docks and dockyards, its barracks and arsenals, its garrisons of soldiers and sailors, and its crowds of workmen. The temptation was too strong for him, and he yielded to it.

When the Prince George had gone down he rose into the air, and ran over the Isle of Wight, signalling to the See Adler. The signals were answered, and the two airships met about two miles south-west of the Needles, and Castellan informed Captain Frenkel of his intention to destroy Portsmouth and Gosport. The German demurred strongly. He had no personal hatred to satisfy, and he suggested that it would be much better to go out to sea and discover the whereabouts of the Channel Fleet; but Castellan was Commander-in-Chief of the Aerial Squadrons of the Allies, and so his word was law, and within the next two hours one of the greatest crimes in the history of civilised warfare was committed.

The two airships circled slowly over Gosport and Portsmouth, dropping their torpedoes wherever a worthy mark presented itself. The first one discharged from the Flying Fish fell on the deck of the old Victory. The deck burst up, as though all the powder she had carried at Trafalgar had exploded beneath it, and the next moment she broke out in inextinguishable flames. The old Resolution met the same fate from the See Adler, and then the pitiless hail of destruction fell on the docks and jetties. In a few minutes the harbour was ringed with flame. Portsmouth Station, built almost entirely of wood, blazed up like matchwood; then came the turn of the dockyards at Portsea, which were soon ablaze from end to end.

Then the two airships spread their wings like destroying angels over Portsmouth town. Half a dozen torpedoes wrecked the Town Hall and set the ruins on fire. This was the work of the See Adler. The Flying Fish devoted her attention to the naval and military barracks, the Naval College and the Gunnery School on Whale Island. As soon as these were reduced to burning ruins, the two airships scattered their torpedoes indiscriminately over churches, shops and houses, and in the streets crowded by terrified mobs of soldiers, sailors and civilians.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

The effect of the torpedoes in the streets was too appalling for description. Everyone within ten or a dozen yards of the focus of the explosion was literally blown to atoms, and for fifty yards round every living creature dropped dead, killed either by the force of the concussion or the poisonous gases which were liberated by the explosion. Hundreds fell thus without the mark of a wound, and when some of their bodies were examined afterwards, it was found that their hearts were split open as cleanly as though they had been divided with a razor, just as are the hearts of fishes which have been killed with dynamite.

John Castellan and his lieutenant, M'Carthy, for the time being gloried in the work of destruction. Captain Frenkel was a soldier and a gentleman, and he saw nothing in it save wanton killing of defenceless people and a wicked waste of ammunition; but the terrible War Lord of Germany had given Castellan supreme command, and to disobey meant degradation, and possibly death, and so the *See Adler* perforce took her share in the tragedy.

In a couple of hours Portsmouth, Gosport and Portsea had ceased to be towns. They were only areas of flaming ruins; but at last the ammunition gave out, and Castellan was compelled to signal the *See Adler* to shape her course for Bracklesham Bay in order to replenish the magazines. They reached the bay, and descended at the spot where the *Leger* ought to have been at anchor. She was not there, for the sufficient reason that the *Ithuriel's* ram had sent her to the bottom of the Channel.

For half an hour the *Flying Fish* and the *See Adler* hunted over the narrow waters, but neither was the *Leger* nor any other craft to be seen between the Selsey coast and the Isle of Wight. When they came together again in Bracklesham Bay, John Castellan's rage against the hated Saxon had very considerably cooled. Evidently something serious had happened, and something that he knew nothing about, and now that the excitement of destruction had died away, he remembered more than one thing which he ought to have thought of before.

The two rushes of the torpedo boats, supported by the swift cruisers, had not taken place. Not a hostile vessel had entered either Spithead or the Solent, and the British cruisers, which he had been ordered to spare, had got away untouched. It was perfectly evident that some disaster had befallen the expedition, and that the *Leger* had been involved in it. In spite of the terrible destruction that the *Flying Fish*, the *See Adler* and the *Banshee* had wrought on sea and land, it was plain that the first part of the invader's programme had been brought to nothing by some unknown agency.

He was, of course, aware of the general plan of attack. He had destroyed the battleships of the Fleet Reserve. While he was doing that the destroyers should have been busy among the cruisers, and then the main force, under Admiral Durenne, would follow, and take possession of Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight. A detachment of cruisers and destroyers was then to be despatched to Littlehampton, and land a sufficient force to seize and hold the railway at Ford and Arundel, so that the coast line of the L.B.S.C.R., as well as the main line to Horsham and London, should be at the command of the invaders.

Littlehampton was also particularly valuable on account of its tidal river and harbour, which would give shelter and protection to a couple of hundred torpedo boats and destroyers, and its wharves from which transports could easily coal. It is hardly worth while to add that it had been left entirely undefended. It had been proposed to mount a couple of 9.2 guns on the old fort on the west side of the river mouth, with half a dozen twelve-pound quick-firers at the Coast-Guard station on the east side to repel torpedo attack, but the War Office had laughed at the idea of an enemy getting within gunshot of the inviolate English shore, and so one of the most vulnerable points on the south coast had been left undefended.

What would Castellan have given now for the torpedoes which the two ships had wasted in the wanton destruction of Portsmouth, and the murder of its helpless citizens. The main French Fleet by this time could not be very far off. Behind it, somewhere, was the British Channel Fleet, the most powerful sea force that had ever ridden the subject waves, and here he was without a torpedo on either of his ships, and no supplies nearer than Kiel. The *Leger* had carried two thousand torpedoes and five hundred cylinders of the gases which supplied the motive power. She was gone, and for all offensive purposes the *Flying Fish* and *See Adler* were as harmless as a couple of balloons.

When it was too late, John Castellan remembered in the bitterness of his soul that the torpedoes which had destroyed Portsmouth would have been sufficient to have wrecked the Channel Fleet, and now there was nothing for it but to leave Admiral Durenne to fight his own battle against the most powerful fleet in the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

world, and to use what was left of the motive power to get back to Kiel, and replenish their magazines.

Horrible as had been the fate which had fallen on the great arsenal of southern England, it had not been sacrificed in vain, and very sick at heart was John Castellan when he gave the order for the two vessels, which a few hours ago had been such terrible engines of destruction, to rise into the air and wing their harmless flight towards Kiel.

When the Flying Fish and the See Adler took the air, and shipped their course eastward, the position of the opposing fleets was somewhat as follows: The cruisers of the A Squadron, Amphitrite, Andromeda, Europa, Niobe, Blenheim and Blake, with fifteen first-class torpedo boats and ten destroyers, had got out to sea from Spithead unharmed. All these cruisers were good for twenty knots, the torpedo boats for twenty-five, and the destroyers for thirty. The Sutlej, Ariadne, Argonaut and Diadem had got clear away from the Solent, with ten first-class torpedo boats and five destroyers. They met about four miles south-east of St Catherine's Point. Commodore Hoskins of the Diadem was the senior officer in command, and so he signalled for Captain Pennell, of the Andromeda, to come on board, and talk matters over with him, but before the conversation was half-way through, a black shape, with four funnels crowned with smoke and flame, came tearing up from the westward, made the private signal, and ran alongside the Diadem.

The news that her commander brought was this—Admiral Lord Beresford had succeeded in eluding the notice of the French Channel Fleet, and was on his way up the south-west with the intention of getting behind Admiral Durenne's fleet, and crushing it between his own force to seaward and the batteries and Reserve Fleet on the landward side. The Commander of the destroyer was, of course, quite ignorant of the disaster which had befallen the battleships of the Reserve Fleet and Portsmouth, and when the captain of the cruiser told him the tidings, though he received the news with the almost fatalistic sang froid of the British naval officer, turned a shade or two paler under the bronze of his skin.

"That is terrible news, sir," he said, "and it will probably alter the Admiral's plans considerably. I must be off as soon as possible, and let him know: meanwhile, of course, you will use your own judgment."

"Yes," replied the Commodore, "but I think you had better take one of our destroyers, say the Greyhound, back with you. She's got her bunkers full, and she can manage thirty-two knots in a sea like this."

At this moment the sentry knocked at the door of the Commodore's room.

"Come in," said Commodore Hoskins. The door opened, a sentry came in and saluted, and said:

"The Ithuriel's alongside, sir, and Captain Erskine will be glad to speak to you."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Commodore, "the very thing. I wonder what that young devil has been up to. Send him in at once, sentry."

The sentry retired, and presently Erskine entered the room, saluted, and said:

"I've come to report, sir, I have sunk everything that tried to get in through Spithead. First division of three destroyers, the old Leger, the Duplex cruiser, six destroyers of the second division, and three cruisers, the Alger Suchet and Davout. They're all at the bottom."

The Commodore stared for a moment or two at the man who so quietly described the terrific destruction that he had wrought with a single ship, and then he said:

"Well, Erskine, we expected a good deal from that infernal craft of yours, but this is rather more than we could have hoped for. You've done splendidly. Now, what's your best speed?"

"Forty-five knots, sir."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the Commander of the Greyhound. "You don't say so."

"Oh, yes," said Erskine with a smile. "You ought to have seen us walk over those destroyers. I hit them at full speed, and they crumpled up like paper boats."

By this time the Commodore had sat down, and was writing his report as fast as he could get his pencil over the paper. It was a short, terse, but quite comprehensive account of the happenings of the last three hours, and a clear statement of the strength and position of the torpedo and cruiser squadron under his command. When he had finished, he put the paper into an envelope, and said to the Commander of the Greyhound:

"I am afraid you are no good here, Hawkins. I shall have to give the message to Captain Erskine, he'll be there and back before you're there. Just give him the bearings of the Fleet and he'll be off at once. There you are, Erskine, give that to the Admiral, and bring me instructions back as soon as you can. You've just time for a whisky-and-soda, and then you must be off."

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Erskine took the letter, and they drank their whisky—and-soda. Then they went on deck. The Ithuriel was lying outside the Greyhound, half submerged—that is to say, with three feet of freeboard showing. Commander Hawkins looked at her with envious eyes. It is an article of faith with all good commanders of destroyers that their own craft is the fastest and most efficient of her class. At a pinch he could get thirty-two knots out of the Greyhound, and here was this quiet, determined-looking young man, who had created a vessel of his own, and had reached the rank of captain by sheer genius over the heads of men ten years older than himself, talking calmly of forty-five knots, and of the sinking of destroyers and cruisers, as though it was a mere matter of cracking egg-shells. Wherefore there was wrath in his soul when he went on board and gave the order to cast loose. Erskine went with him. They shook hands on the deck of the Greyhound, and Erskine went aboard of the Ithuriel, saying:

“Well, Hawkins, I expect I shall meet you coming back.”

“I'm damned if I believe in your forty-five knots,” replied Captain Hawkins, shortly.

“Cast off, and come with me then,” laughed Erskine, “you soon will.”

Inside three minutes the two craft were clear of the Diadem. Erskine gave the Greyhound right of way until they had cleared the squadron. The sea was smooth, and there was scarcely any wind, for it had been a wonderfully fine November. The Greyhound got on her thirty-two knots as soon as there was no danger of hitting anything.

“That chap thinks he can race us,” said Erskine to Lennard, as he got into the conning-tower, “and I'm just going to make him the maddest man in the British navy. He's doing thirty-two—we're doing twenty-five. Now that we're clear I'll wake him up.” He took down the receiver and said:

“Pump her out, Castellan, and give her full speed as soon as you can.”

The Ithuriel rose in the water, and began to shudder from stem to stern with the vibrations of the engines, as they gradually worked up to their highest capacity. Commander Hawkins saw something coming up astern, half hidden by a cloud of spray and foam. It went past him as though he had been standing still instead of steaming at thirty-two knots. A few moments more and it was lost in the darkness.

Chapter XIV — The Eve Of Battle

IN twenty minutes the Ithuriel ran alongside the Britain, which was one of the five most formidable battleships in existence. For five years past a new policy had been pursued with regard to the navy. The flagships, which of course contained the controlling brains of the fleets, were the most powerful afloat. By the time war broke out five of them had been launched and armed, and the Britain was the newest and most powerful of them.

Her displacement was twenty-two thousand tons, and her speed twenty-four knots. She was armoured from end to end with twelve-inch plates against which ordinary projectiles smashed as harmlessly as egg-shells. Twelve fourteen-inch thousand-pounder guns composed her primary battery; her secondary consisted of ten 9.2 guns, and her tertiary of twelve-pounder Maxim-Nordenfeldts in the fighting tops.

It was the first time that Erskine had seen one of these giants of the ocean, and when they got alongside he said to Denis Castellan:

“There's a fighting machine for you, Denis. Great Scott what wouldn't I give to see her at work in the middle of a lot of Frenchmen and Germans, as the Revenge was among the Spaniards in Grenville's time. Just look at those guns.”

“Yes,” replied Castellan, “she's a splendid ship, and those guns look as though they could talk French to the Frenchies and German to the Dutchmen and plain English to the lot in a way that wouldn't want much translating. And what's more, they have the right men behind them, and the best gun in the world isn't much good without that.”

At this moment they heard a shrill voice from the forecastle of the nearest destroyer.

“Hulloa there, what's the matter?” came from the deck of the Britain.

“Four French destroyers coming up pretty fast from the south'ard, sir. Seem to be making for the flagship,” was the reply.

“That's a job for us,” said Erskine, who was standing on the narrow deck of the Ithuriel, waiting to go on board the Britain. “Commander, will you be good enough to deliver this to the Admiral? I must be off and settle those fellows before they do any mischief.”

The commander of the destroyer took the letter, Erskine dived below, a steel plate slid over the opening to the companion-way, and when he got into the conning-tower he ordered full speed.

Four long black shapes were stealing slowly towards the British centre, and no one knew better than he did that a single torpedo well under waterline would send Admiral Beresford's floating fortress to the bottom inside ten minutes, and that was the last thing he wanted to see.

A quartermaster ran down the ladder and caught the letter from the commander just as the Ithuriel moved off.

“Tell the Admiral, with Captain Erskine's compliments, that he'll be back in a few minutes, when he's settled those fellows.”

The quartermaster took the letter, and by the time he got to the top of the ladder, the Ithuriel was flying through a cloud of foam and spray towards the first of the destroyers. He heard a rattle of guns, and then the destroyer vanished. The Ithuriel swung round, hit the next one in the bows, ground her under the water, turned almost at right angles, smashed the stern of the third one into scrap iron, hit the fourth one abreast of the conning-tower, crushed her down and rolled her over, and then slowed down and ran back to the flagship at twenty knots.

“Well!” said Quartermaster Maginniss, who for the last few minutes had been held spellbound at the top of the ladder, in spite of the claims of discipline, “of all the sea-devils of crafts that I've ever heard of, I should say that was the worst. Four destroyers gone in five minutes, and here he is coming back before I've delivered the letter. If we only have a good square fight now, I'll be sorry for the Frenchies.”

The next moment he stiffened up and saluted. “A letter for you, Admiral, left by Captain Erskine before he

went away to destroy those destroyers.”

“And you've been watching the destruction instead of delivering the letter,” laughed Lord Beresford, as he took it from him. “Well, I'll let you off this time. When Captain Erskine comes alongside, ask him to see me in my room at once.”

The Ithuriel ran alongside even as he was speaking. The gangway was manned, and when he reached the deck, Admiral Beresford held out his hand, and said with a laugh:

“Well, Captain Erskine, I understood that you were bringing me a message from Commodore Hoskins, but you seem to have had better game to fly for.”

“My fault, sir,” said Erskine, “but I hope you won't court-martial me for it. You see, there were four French destroyers creeping round, and mine was the only ship that could tackle them, so I thought I'd better go and do it before they did any mischief. Anyhow, they're all at the bottom now.”

“I don't think I should have much case if I court-martialled you for that, Captain Erskine,” laughed the Admiral, “especially after what you've done already, according to Commodore Hoskins' note. That must be a perfect devil of a craft of yours. Can you sink anything with her?”

“Anything, sir,” replied Erskine. “This is the most powerful fighting ship in the world, but I could put you at the bottom of the Channel in ten minutes.”

“The Lord save us! It's a good job you're on our side.”

“And it's a very great pity,” said Erskine, “that the airships are not with us too. I had a very narrow squeak in Spithead about three hours ago from one of their aerial torpedoes. It struck part of a destroyer that I'd just sunk, and although it was nearly fifty yards away, it shook me up considerably.”

“Have you any idea of the whereabouts and formation of the French Fleet? I must confess that I haven't. These infernal airships have upset all the plans for catching Durenne between the Channel Fleet and the Reserve, backed up by the Portsmouth guns, so that we could jump out and catch him between the fleet and the forts. Now I suppose it will have to be a Fleet action at sea.”

“If you care to leave your ship for an hour, sir,” replied Erskine, “I will take you round the French fleet and you shall see everything for yourself. We may have to knock a few holes in something, if it gets in our way, but I think I can guarantee that you shall be back on the Britain by the time you want to begin the action.”

“Absolutely irregular,” said Lord Beresford, stroking his chin, and trying to look serious, while his eyes were dancing with anticipation. “An admiral to leave his flagship on the eve of an engagement! Well, never mind, Courtney's a very good fellow, and knows just as much about the ship as I do, and he's got all sailing orders. I'll come. He's on the bridge now, I'll go and tell him.”

The Admiral ran up on to the bridge, gave Captain Courtney Commodore Hoskins' letter, added a few directions, one of which was to keep on a full head of steam on all the ships, and look out for signals, and five minutes later he had been introduced to Lennard, and was standing beside him in the conning-tower of the Ithuriel listening to Erskine, as he said into the telephone receiver:

“Sink her to three feet, Castellan, and then ahead full speed.”

The pumps worked furiously for a few minutes, and the Ithuriel sank until only three feet of her bulk appeared above the water. Then the Admiral felt the floor of the conning-tower shudder and tremble under his feet. He looked out of the side porthole on the starboard bow, and saw his own fleet dropping away into the distance and the darkness of the November night. The water ahead curled up into two huge swathes, which broke into foam and spray, which lashed hissing along the almost submerged decks.

“You have a pretty turn of speed on her, I must say, Captain Erskine,” said the Admiral, after he had taken a long squint through the semicircular window. “I'm sorry we haven't got a score of craft like this.”

“And we should have had, your lordship,” replied Erskine, “if the Council had only taken the opinion that you gave after you saw the plans.”

“I'd have a hundred like her,” laughed the Admiral, “only you see there's the Treasury, and behind that the most noble House of Commons, elected mostly by the least educated and most short-sighted people in the nation, who scarcely know a torpedo from a common shell, and we should never have got them. We had hard enough work to get this one as an experiment.”

“I quite agree with you, sir,” said Erskine, “and I think Lennard will too. There has never been an instance in history in which democracy did not spell degeneration. It's a pity, but I suppose it's inevitable. As far as my

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

reading has taken me, it seems to be the dry-rot of nations. Halloa, what's that? Torpedo gun-boat, I think! Ah, there's the moon. Now, sir, if you'll just come and stand to the right here, for'ard of the wheel, I'll put the Ithuriel through her paces, and show you what she can do."

A long grey shape, with two masts and three funnels between them, loomed up out of the darkness into a bright patch of moonlight. Erskine took the receiver from the hooks and said:

"Stand by there, Castellan. Forward guns fire when I give the word—then I shall ram."

The Admiral saw the three strangely shaped guns rise from the deck, their muzzles converging on the gunboat. He expected a report, but none came; only a gentle hiss, scarcely audible in the conning-tower. Then three brilliant flashes of flame burst out just under the Frenchman's top-works. Erskine, with one hand on the steering-wheel, and the other holding the receiver, said:

"Well aimed—now full speed. I'm going over him."

"Over him!" echoed the Admiral. "Don't you ram under the waterline?"

"If it's the case of a big ship, sir," replied Erskine, "we sink and hit him where it hurts most, but it isn't worth while with these small craft. You will see what I mean in a minute."

As he spoke a shudder ran through the Ithuriel. The deck began to quiver under the Admiral's feet; the ram rose six feet out of the water. The shape of the gunboat seemed to rush towards them; the ram hit it squarely amidships; then came a shock, a grinding scrape, screams of fear from the terrified sailors, a final crunch, and the gunboat was sinking fifty yards astern.

"That's awful," said the Admiral, with a perceptible shake in his voice. "What speed did you hit her at?"

"Forty-five knots," replied Erskine, giving a quarter turn to the wheel, and almost immediately bringing a long line of battleships, armoured cruisers, protected cruisers and destroyers into view.

The French Channel Fleet was composed of the most powerful ships in the navy of the Republic. The two portions from Brest and Cherbourg had now united their forces. The French authorities had at last learned the supreme value of homogeneity. The centre was composed of six ships of the *Republique* class, all identical in size, armour and armament, as well as speed. They were the *Republique*, *Patrie* flagship, *Justice*, *Democratie*, *Liberte* and *Verite*. They were all of fifteen thousand tons and eighteen knots. To these was added the *Suffren*, also of eighteen knots, but only twelve thousand seven hundred tons: she had come from Brest with a flotilla of torpedo boats.

There were six armoured cruisers, *Jules Ferry*, *Leon Gambetta*, *Victor Hugo*, *Jeanne d'Arc*, *Aube* and *Marseillaise*. These were all heavily armed and armoured vessels, all of them capable of manoeuvring at a speed of over twenty knots. A dozen smaller protected and unprotected cruisers hung on each flank, and a score of destroyers and torpedo boats lurked in between the big ships.

The *Ithuriel* ran quietly along the curving line of battleships and cruisers, turned and came back again without exciting the slightest suspicion.

Erskine would have dearly loved to sink a battleship or one or two cruisers, just to show his lordship how it was done, but the Admiral forbade this, as he wanted to get the Frenchmen, who still thought they were going to easy victory, entangled in the shallows of the narrow waters, and therefore with the exception of rolling over and sinking three submarines which happened to get in the way, no damage was done.

The British Channel Fleet, even not counting the assistance of the terrible *Ithuriel*, was the most powerful squadron that had ever put to sea under a single command. The main line of battle consisted of the flagship *Britain*, and seven ships of the *King Edward* class, *King Edward the Seventh*, *Dominion*, *Commonwealth*, *Hindustan*, *New Zealand*, *Canada* and *Newfoundland*; all over sixteen thousand tons, and of nineteen knots speed. With the exception of the giant flagships, of which there were five in existence—the *Britain*, *England*, *Ireland*, *Scotland* and *Wales*—and two nineteen thousand ton monsters which had just been completed for Japan, these were the fastest and most heavily-armed battleships afloat.

The second line was composed of the armoured cruisers, *Duke of Edinburgh*, *Black Prince*, *Henry the Fourth*, *Warwick*, *Edward the Third*, *Cromwell*, all of over thirteen thousand tons, and twenty-two knots speed; the *Drake*, *King Alfred*, *Leviathan* and *Good Hope*, of over fourteen thousand tons and twenty-four knots speed; and the reconstructed *Powerful*, and *Terrible*, of fourteen thousand tons and twenty-two knots. There was, of course, the usual swarm of destroyers and torpedo boats; and in addition must be counted the ten cruisers, ten destroyers, and fifteen torpedo boats, which had escaped from Spithead and the Solent. These

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

had already formed a junction with the left wing of the British force.

For nearly two hours the two great fleets slowly approached each other almost at a right angle. As the grey dawn of the November morning began to steal over the calm blue-grey water, they came in plain sight of each other, and at once the signal flew from the foreyard of the Britain, "Prepare for action—battleships will cross front column of line ahead—cruisers will engage cruisers individually at discretion of Commanders—destroyers will do their worst."

Chapter XV — The Strife Of Giants

AS it happened, it was a fine, cold wintry day that dawned as the two great fleets drew towards each other. As Denis Castellan said, "It was a perfect jewel of a day for a holy fight," and so it was. The French fleet was advancing at twelve knots. Admiral Beresford made his fifteen, and led the line in the Britain. Erskine had been ordered to go to the rear of the French line and sink any destroyer or torpedo boat that he could get hold of, but to let the battleships and cruisers alone, unless he saw a British warship hard pressed, in which case he was to ram and sink the enemy if he could.

One division of cruisers, consisting of the fastest and most powerful armoured vessels, was to make a half-circle two miles in the rear of the French Fleet. The ships selected for this service were the Duke of Edinburgh, Warwick, Edward III., Cromwell and King Alfred. Outside them, two miles again to the rear, the Leviathan, Good Hope, Powerful and Terrible, the fastest ships in the Fleet, were to take their station to keep off stragglers.

For the benefit of the non-nautical reader, it will be as well to explain here the two principal formations in which modern fleets go into action. As a matter of fact, they are identical with the tactics employed by the French and Spanish on the one side and Nelson on the other, during the Napoleonic wars. Before Nelson's time, it was the custom for two hostile fleets to engage each other in column of line abreast, which means that both fleets formed a double line which approached each other within gunshot, and then opened fire.

At Trafalgar, Nelson altered these tactics completely, with results that everybody knows. The allied French and Spanish fleets came up in a crescent, just in the same formation as Admiral Durenne was advancing on Portsmouth. Nelson took his ships into action in column of line ahead, in other words, in single file, the head of the column aiming for the centre of the enemy's battle line.

The main advantage of this was, first, that it upset the enemy's combination, and, secondly, that each ship could engage two, since she could work both broadsides at once, whereas the enemy could only work one broadside against one ship. These were the tactics which, with certain modifications made necessary by the increased mobility on both sides, Lord Beresford adopted.

With one exception, no foreigner had ever seen the new class of British flagship, and that exception, as we know, was safely locked up on board the Ithuriel, and his reports were even now being carefully considered by the Naval Council.

There are no braver men on land and sea than the officers and crews of the French Navy, but when the giant bulk of the Britain loomed up out of the westward in the growing light, gradually gathering way with her stately train of nineteen-knot battleships behind her, and swept down in front of the French line, many a heart stood still for the moment, and many a man asked himself what the possibilities of such a Colossus of the ocean might be.

They had not long to wait. As the British battleships came on from the left with ever-increasing speed, the whole French line burst into a tornado of thunder and flame, but not a shot was fired from the English lines. Shells hurtled and screamed through the air, topworks were smashed into scrap-iron, funnels riddled, and military masts demolished; but until the Britain reached the centre of the French line not a British gun spoke.

Then the giant swung suddenly to starboard, and headed for the space between the Patrie and the Republique. The Canada, Newfoundland, New Zealand and Hindustan put on speed, passed under her stern, and headed in between the Sufren, Liberte, Verite and Patrie, while the Edward VII, Dominion and Commonwealth turned between the Justice, Democratie, the Aube and Marseillaise.

Within a thousand yards the British battleships opened fire. The first gun from the Britain was a signal which turned them all into so many floating volcanoes. The Britain herself ran between the Patrie and the Republique, vomiting storms of shell, first ahead, then on the broadside and then astern. Her topworks were of course crumpled out of all shape—that was expected; for the range was now only about five hundred yards—but the incessant storm of thousand-pound shells from the fourteen-inch guns, followed by an

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

unceasing hail of three hundred and fifty pound projectiles from the 9.2 quickfirers, reduced the two French battleships to little better than wrecks. The Britain steamed through and turned, and again the awful hurricane burst out from her sides and bow and stern. She swung round again, but now only a few dropping shots greeted her from the crippled Frenchmen.

“I don't think those chaps have much more fight left in them,” said the Admiral to the Captain as they passed through the line for the third time. “We'll just give them one more dose, and then see how the other fellows are getting on.”

Once more the monster swept in between the doomed ships; once more her terrible artillery roared. Two torpedo boats, five hundred yards ahead were rushing towards her. A grey shape rose out of the water, flinging up clouds of spray and foam, and in a moment they were ground down into the water and sunk. The hastily-fired torpedoes diverged and struck the two French battleships instead of the Britain. Two mountains of foam rose up under their sterns, their bows went down and rose again, and with a sternward lurch they slid down into the depths.

The Britain swung round to port, and poured a broadside into the Liberte, which had just crippled the Hindustan, and sunk her with a torpedo. The New Zealand was evidently in difficulties between the Liberte and the Verite. Her upper works were a mass of ruins, but she was still blazing away merrily with her primary battery. The Admiral slowed down to ten knots, and got between the two French battleships; then her big guns began to vomit destruction again, and in five minutes the two French battleships, caught in the triangular fire and terribly mauled, hauled their flags down, and so Lord Beresford's scheme was accomplished. The Dominion and Edward VII. had got between their ships at the expense of a severe handling, and were giving a very good account of them, and the Canada had sunk the Suffren with a lucky shell which exploded in her forward torpedo room and blew her side out.

It was broad daylight by this time, and it was perfectly plain, both to friend and foe, that the French centre could no longer be counted upon as a fighting force. One of the circumstances which came home hardest afterwards to the survivors of the French force was the fact that, as far as they knew, not a single British battleship or cruiser had been struck by a French destroyer or torpedo boat. The reason for this was the very simple fact that Erskine had taken these craft under his charge, and, while the big ships had been thundering away at each other, he had devoted himself to the congenial sport of smashing up the smaller fry. He sent the Ithuriel flying hither and thither at full speed, tearing them into scrap-iron and sending them to the bottom, as if they had been so many penny steamers. He could have sent the battleships to the bottom with equal ease, but orders were orders, and he respected them until his chance came.

The Verite was now the least injured of the French battleships. To look at she was merely a floating mass of ruins, but her engines were intact, and her primary battery as good as ever. Her captain, like the hero that he was, determined to risk his ship and everything in her in the hope of destroying the monster which had wrought such frightful havoc along the line. She carried two twelve-inch guns ahead, a 6.4 on each side of the barbette, and four pairs of 6.4 guns behind these, and the fire of all of them was concentrated ahead.

As the Britain came round for the third time every one of the guns was laid upon her. He called to the engine-room for the utmost speed he could have, and at nineteen knots he bore down upon the leviathan. The huge guns on the Britain swung round, and a tempest of shells swept the Verite from end to end. Her armour was gashed and torn as though it had been cardboard instead of six—and eleven-inch steel; but still she held on her course. At five hundred yards her guns spoke, and the splinters began to fly on board the Britain. The Captain of the Verite signalled for the last ounce of steam he could have—he was going to appeal to the last resort in naval warfare—the ram. If he could once get that steel spur of his into the Britain's hull under her armour, she would go down as certainly as though she had been a first-class cruiser.

When the approaching vessels were a little more than five hundred yards apart, the Ithuriel, who had settled up with all the destroyers and torpedo boats she could find, rose to the north of the now broken French line. Erskine took in the situation at a glance. He snatched the receiver from the hooks, shouted into it:

“Sink—full speed—ram!”

The Ithuriel dived and sprang forward, and when the ram of the Verite was within a hundred yards of the side of the Britain his own ram smashed through her stern, cracked both the propeller shafts, and tore away her rudder as if it had been a piece of paper. She stopped and yawed, broadside on to the Britain. The chases

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

of the great guns swung round in ominous threatening silence, but before they could be fired the Tricolor fluttered down from the flagstaff, and the Verite, helpless for all fighting purposes, had surrendered.

It was now the turn of the big armoured cruisers. They were practically untouched, for the heaviest of the fighting had fallen on the battleships. A green rocket went up from the deck of the Britain, and was followed in about ten seconds by a blue one. The inner line of cruisers made a quarter turn to port, and began hammering into the crippled battleships and cruisers indiscriminately, while the Leviathan, Good Hope, Powerful and Terrible took stations between the Isle of Wight and the Sussex coast.

The Ithuriel rose to her three-foot freeboard, and put in some very pretty practice with her pneumatic guns on the topworks of the cruisers. The six-funnelled Jeanne d'Arc got tired of this, and made a rush at her at her full speed of twenty-three knots, with the result that the Ithuriel disappeared, and three minutes afterwards there came a shock under the great cruiser's stern which sent a shudder through her whole fabric. The engines whirled furiously until they stopped, and a couple of minutes later her captain recognised that she could neither steam nor steer. Meanwhile, the tide was setting strongly in towards Spithead, and the disabled ships were drifting with it, either to capture or destruction.

The French centre had now, to all intents and purposes, ceased to exist. Four out of six battleships were sunk, and one had surrendered, and the Jeanne d'Arc had gone down.

On the British side the Hindustan had been sunk, and the Dominion, Commonwealth and Newfoundland very badly mauled, so badly indeed that it was a matter of dry dock as quickly as possible for them. All the other battleships, including even the Britain herself, were little better than wrecks to look at, so terrible had been the firestorms through which they had passed.

But for the presence of the Ithuriel, the British loss would of course have been much greater. It is not too much to say that her achievements spread terror and panic among the French torpedo flotilla. Under ordinary circumstances they would have taken advantage of the confusion of the battleship action to attack the line of armoured cruisers behind, but between the two lines there was the ever-present destroying angel, as they came to call her, with her silent deadly guns, her unparalleled speed, and her terrible ram. No sooner did a destroyer or torpedo boat attempt to make for a cruiser, than a shell came hissing along the water, and blew the middle out of her, or the ram crashed through her sides, and sent her in two pieces to the bottom.

The result was that when the last French cruiser had hauled down her flag, Admiral Beresford found himself in command of a fleet which was still in being. Of the French battleships the Justice and the Democratie were still serviceable, and of the cruisers, the Jules Ferry, Leon Gambetta, Victor Hugo, Aube and Marseillaise were still in excellent fighting trim, although of course they were in no position to continue the struggle against the now overwhelming force of British battleships and armoured cruisers. This was what Admiral Beresford had fought for: to break the centre and put as many battleships as possible out of action. His orders had been to spare the cruisers as much as possible, because, he said, with a somewhat grim laugh, they might be useful later on.

The idea of their escaping to sea through the double line of British cruisers, to say nothing of the Ithuriel, with her speed of over fifty miles an hour, and her ability to ram them in detail before they were halfway across the Channel, was entirely out of the question. To have attempted such a thing would have been simply a form of collective suicide, so the flags were hauled down, and all that was left of the fleet surrendered.

Another circumstance which had placed the French fleet at a tremendous disadvantage was the absence of the three Flying Fishes, which were to have co-operated with the invading fleet, but of course neither Admiral Durenne, who had gone down with his ship, nor any other of his officers knew that the Banshee had been blown up in mid-air, or that the Ithuriel had destroyed the dépôt ship, and so forced Castellan, after his mad waste of ammunition in the destruction of Portsmouth, to wing his way to Kiel, with the See Adler, in order to replenish his magazines. Had those two amphibious craft been present at the battle, the issue might have been something very different.

The whole fight had only taken a couple of hours from the firing of the first shot to the hauling down of the last flag. Admiral Beresford made direct for Portsmouth to get his lame ducks into dock if possible, and to discover the amount of damage done. As they steamed in through the Spithead Forts, flags went up all along the northern shore of the Isle of Wight, and the guns on the Spithead Forts and Fort Monckton, which the Banshee had been commissioned to destroy, roared out a salute of welcome.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

The signal masts of the sunk battleships showed where their shattered hulls were lying, and as the Britain led the way in between them, Lord Beresford rubbed his hands across his eyes, and said to his Commodore, who was standing on what was left of the navigating bridge.

“Poor fellows, it was hardly fair fighting. We might have had something very like those infernal craft if we'd had men of decent brains at the War Office. Same old story—anything new must be wrong in Pall Mall. Still we've got something of our own back this morning. I hope we shall be able to use some of the docks; if I'm not afraid our lame ducks will have to crawl round to Devonport as best they can. The man in command of those airships must have been a perfect devil to destroy a defenceless town in this fashion. The worst of it is that if they can do this sort of thing here they can do it just as easily to London or Liverpool, or Manchester or any other city. I hope there won't be any more bad news when we get ashore.”

Chapter XVI — How The French Landed At Portsmouth

ALL the ships able to take their place in the fighting—line were left outside. The French prisoners were disembarked and their places taken by drafts from the British warships, who at once set about making such repairs as were possible at sea. Admiral Beresford boarded the *Ithuriel*, which, until the next fight, he proposed to use as a despatch—boat, and ran up the harbour.

He found every jetty, including the North and South Railway piers, mere masses of smoking ruins: but the Ordnance Depot on Priddy's Hard had somehow escaped, probably through the ignorance of the assailants. He landed at Sheer jetty opposite Coaling Point, and before he was half—way up the steps a short, rather stout man, in the undress uniform of a General of Division, ran down and caught him by the hand. After him came a taller, slimmer man with eyes like gimlets and a skin wrinkled and tanned like Russian leather.

The first of the two men was General Sir John French, Commander—in—Chief at Aldershot, and the second was General Sir Ian Hamilton, Commander of the Southern Military District.

“Bravo, Beresford!” said General French, quietly. “Scooped the lot, didn't you?”

“All that aren't at the bottom of the Channel. Good—morning, Hamilton. I've heard that you're in a pretty bad way with your forts here,” replied the Admiral. “By the way, how are the docks? I've got a few lame ducks that want looking after badly.”

“We've just been having a look round,” replied General Hamilton. “The town's in an awful state, as you can see. The Naval and Military barracks, and the Naval School are wrecked, and we haven't been able to save very much from the yards, but I don't think the docks are hurt much. The sweeps went more for the buildings. We can find room for half a dozen, I think, comfortably.”

“That's just about what I want,” said the Admiral. “We've lost the Hindustan and New Zealand. The Canada and Newfoundland are pretty badly mauled, and I've got half a dozen Frenchmen that would be all the better for a look over. The Britain, Edward VII, Dominion and Commonwealth are quite seaworthy, although, as you see, they've had it pretty hot in their topworks. The cruiser squadron is practically untouched. We've got the *Verite*, *Justice* and *Democratie*, but the *Verite* has got her propellers and rudders smashed. By the way, that ship of Erskine's, the *Ithuriel*, has turned out a perfect demon. She smashed up the first attack, sank nine destroyers and two cruisers, one of them was that big chap the *Dupleix*, before we came on the scene. During the action she wiped out I don't know how many destroyers and torpedo boats, sank the *Jeanne d'Arc* and saved my ship from being rammed by crippling the *Verite* just in the nick of time. If we only had a squadron of those boats and made Erskine Commodore, we'd wipe the fleets of Europe out in a month. Now that's my news. What's yours?”

“Bad enough,” replied General French. “A powerful combined fleet of Germans and French, helped by some of these infernal things that seem as much at home in the air as they are in the water, are making a combined attack on Dover, and we seem to be getting decidedly the worst of it. Dover Castle is in flames, and nearly all the forts are in a bad way; so are the harbour fortifications. The Russians and Dutch are approaching London with a string of transports behind them, and four airships above them. Their objectives are supposed to be Tilbury and Woolwich on one hand, and Chatham on the other. By the way, weren't there any transports behind this French Fleet that you've settled up with?”

He had scarcely uttered the last word when a helio began to twinkle from the hill above Foreland.

“That's bad news,” said the Admiral, “but wait now, there's something else. It's a good job the sun's come out, though it doesn't look very healthy.”

The message that the helio twinkled out was as follows:

“Thirty large vessels, apparently transports, approaching from direction of Cherbourg and Brest about ten miles south—east by south.”

“Very good,” said the Admiral, rubbing his hands. “Of course they think we're beaten. I've got five French cruisers that they'll recognise. I'll get crews aboard them at once and convoy those transports in, and the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Commanders will be about the most disgusted men in Europe when they get here.”

Acting on the principle that all is fair in love and war, Admiral Beresford and the two Generals laid as pretty a trap for the French transports as the wit of man ever devised. Ten minutes' conversation among them sufficed to arrange matters. Then the Admiral, taking a list of the serviceable docks with him, went back on board the *Ithuriel* and ran out to the Fleet. He handed over the work of taking care of the lame ducks to Commodore Courtney of the *Britain*; then from the damaged British ships he made up the crews of the French cruisers, the *Jules Ferry*, *Leon Gambetta*, *Victor Hugo*, *Aube* and *Marseillaise*. He took command of the squadron on board the *Victor Hugo*, and to the amazement of officers and men alike, he ordered the Tricolor to be hoisted. At the same time, the White Ensign fluttered down from all the British ships that were not being taken into the dockyard and was replaced by the Tricolor. A few minutes afterward the French flag rose over Fort Monckton and upon a pole mast which had been put up amidst the ruins of Southsea Castle.

The French prisoners of course saw the ruse and knew that its very daring and impudence would command success. Some of them wrung their hands and danced in fury, others wept, and others cursed to the full capability of the French language, but there was no help for it. What was left of Portsmouth was already occupied by twenty thousand men of all arms from the Southern Division. The prisoners were disarmed and their ships were in the hands of the enemy to do what they pleased with, and so in helpless rage they watched the squadron of cruisers steam out to meet the transports, flying the French flag and manned by British crews. It meant either the most appalling carnage, or the capture of the First French Expeditionary Force consisting of fifty thousand men, ten thousand horses, and two hundred guns.

The daringly original stratagem was made all the easier of achievement by the fact that the Commanders of the French transports, counting upon the assistance of the airships and the enormous strength of the naval force which had been launched against Portsmouth, had taken victory for granted, and when the first line came in sight of land, and officers and men saw the smoke-cloud that was still hanging over what twenty-four hours before had been the greatest of British strongholds, cheer after cheer went up. Portsmouth was destroyed and therefore the French Fleet must have been victorious. All that they had to do, therefore, was to steam in and take possession of what was left. At last, after all these centuries, the invasion of England had been accomplished, and Waterloo and Trafalgar avenged!

Happily, in the turmoil of the fight and the suddenness to which the remains of the French Fleet had been forced to surrender, the captain of the *Victor Hugo* had forgotten to sink his Code Book. The result was that when the cruiser squadron steamed out in two divisions to meet the transports, the French private signal, “Complete victory—welcome,” was flying from the signal-yard of the *Victor Hugo*. Again a mighty cheer thundered out from the deck of every transport. The cruisers saluted the transports with seventeen guns, and then the two divisions swung out to right and left, and took their stations on either flank of the transports.

And so, all unsuspecting, they steamed into Spithead, and when they saw the British ships lying at anchor, flying the Tricolor and the same flag waving over Fort Monckton and Southsea Castle, as well as from half a dozen other flagstaves about the dockyards, there could be no doubt as to the magnitude and completeness of the victory which the French Fleet had gained, and moreover, were not those masts showing above the waters of Spithead, the masts of sunken British battleships.

Field-Marshal Purdin de Trevillion, Commander of the Expeditionary Force, accompanied by his staff, was on board the Messageries liner *Australien*, and led the column of transports. In perfect confidence he led the way in between the Spithead Forts, which also flew the Tricolor and saluted him as he went past. As the other vessels of the great flotilla followed in close order, Fort Monckton and the rest of the warships saluted; and then as the last transport entered the narrow waters, a very strange thing happened. The cruisers that had dropped behind spread themselves out in a long line behind the forts; the British ships slipped their moorings and steamed out from Stokes Bay and made a line across to Ryde. Destroyers and torpedo boats suddenly dotted the water with their black shapes, appearing as though from nowhere; then came down every Tricolor on fort and ship, and the White Ensign ran up in its place, and the same moment, the menacing guns swung round and there was the French flotilla, unarmed and crowded with men, caught like a flock of sheep between two packs of wolves.

Every transport stopped as if by common instinct. The French Marshal turned white to the lips. His hands went up in a gesture of despair, and he gasped to his second-in-command, who was standing beside him:

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Mon Dieu! Nous sommes trahis! Ces sacrés perfides Anglais! We are helpless, like rats in a trap. With us it is finished, we can neither fight nor escape.”

While he was speaking, the huge bulk of the Britain steamed slowly towards the Australien, flying the signal “Do you surrender?” Within five hundred yards, the huge guns in her forward barbette swung round and the muzzles sank until the long chases pointed at the Australien's waterline. The Field-Marshal knew full well that it only needed the touch of a finger on a button to smash the Australien into fragments, and he knew too that the first shot from the flagship would be the signal for the whole Fleet to open fire, and that would mean massacre unspeakable. He was as brave a man as ever wore a uniform, but he knew that on the next words he should speak the lives of fifty thousand men depended. He took one more look round the ring of steel which enclosed him on every side, and then with livid lips and grinding teeth gave the order for the flag to be hauled down. The next moment he unbuckled his sword and hurled it into the sea; then with a deep groan he dropped fainting to the deck.

It would be useless to attempt to describe the fury and mortification with which the officers and men of the French Force saw the flags one by one flutter down from end to end of the long line of transports, but it was plain even to the rawest conscript that there was no choice save between surrender and massacre. They cursed and stamped about the decks or sat down and cried, according to temperament, and that, under the circumstances, was about all they could do.

Meanwhile, a steam pinnacle came puffing out from the harbour, and in a few minutes General French was standing on the promenade deck of the Australien. The Field Marshal had already been carried below. A grey-haired officer in the uniform of a general came forward with his sword in his hand and said in excellent English, but with a shake in his voice:

“You are General French, I presume? Our Commander, Field-Marshal Purdin de Trevillion had such an access of anger when he found how we had been duped that he flung his sword into the sea. He then fainted, and is still unconscious. You will, therefore, perhaps accept my sword instead of his.”

General French touched the hilt with his hand, and said:

“Keep it, General Devignes, and I hope your officers will do the same. I will accept your parole for all of them. You are the Field-Marshal's Chief-of-Staff, I believe, and therefore, of course, your word is his. I am very sorry to hear of his illness.”

“You have my word,” replied General Devignes, “for myself and those of my officers who may be willing to give their parole, but for those who prefer to remain prisoners I cannot, of course, answer.”

“Of course not,” replied General French, with a rather provoking genial smile. “Now I will trouble you to take your ships into the harbour. I will put a guard on each as she passes; meanwhile, your men will pile arms and get ready to disembark. We cannot offer you much of a welcome, I'm afraid, for those airships of yours have almost reduced Portsmouth to ruins, to say nothing of sending ten of our battleships and cruisers to the bottom. I can assure you, General, that the losses are not all on your side.”

“No, General,” replied the Frenchman, “but for the present, at least, the victory is on yours.”

Then transport after transport filed into the harbour, and General Hamilton and his staff took charge of the disembarkation. Six of the British lame ducks had been got safely into dock, and every available man was slaving away in deadly earnest to repair the damage done in those terrible two hours. Repairs were also being carried out as rapidly as possible on the cruisers and battleships lying in Spithead, and as shipload after shipload of the disarmed French soldiers were landed, they were set to work, first at clearing up the dockyards and getting them into something like working order, and then clearing up the ruins of the three towns.

The news of Admiral Beresford's magnificent coup had already reached London, and the reply had come back terse and to the point:

“Excellently well done. Congratulate Admiral Beresford and all concerned. We are hard pressed at Dover, and London is threatened. Send Ithuriel to Dover as soon as possible, and let her come on here when she has given any possible help. Land and sea defence of south and south-east at discretion of yourself, Domville and Beresford.

CONNAUGHT.”

By some miracle, the Keppel's Head, perhaps the most famous naval hostelry in the south of England, had escaped the shells from the airships, and so General French had made it his headquarters for the time being.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Sir Compton Domville had received a rather serious injury from a splinter in the left arm during the destruction of the Naval Barracks, but he had had his wounds dressed and insisted, against the advice of the doctors, in driving down to the Hard and talking matters over with General French. They were discussing the disposition of the French prisoners and the huge amount of war material which had been captured, when the telegram was delivered. They had scarcely read it when there was a knock at the door and an orderly entered, and said:

“Captain Erskine, of the Ithuriel, would be pleased to see the General when he's at liberty.”

“The very man!” said General French. “This is the young gentleman,” he continued, turning to Admiral Domville, “who practically saved us from two torpedo attacks, won the Fleet action for us, and saved Beresford from being rammed at the moment of victory.”

The door opened again, and Erskine came in. He saluted and said:

“General, if I may suggest it, I shall not be much more use here, and my lieutenant, Denis Castellan, has just had a telegram from his aunt and sister, who are in London, saying that things are pretty bad there. I fancy I might be of some use if you would let me go, sir.”

“Let you go!” laughed the General. “Why, my dear sir, you've got to go. Here's a telegram that I've just had from His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief, saying that Dover and London are in a bad way, and telling me to send you round at once. When can you start?”

“Well, sir,” replied Erskine, after a moment's thought, “we're not injured in any way, but it will take a couple of hours, I'm afraid, to replenish our motive power, and fill up with shell, and added to that, I should like to have a good overhaul of the machinery.”

“Just listen to that, now!” exclaimed Admiral Beresford, who had entered the room while he was speaking. “Here's a man who has done nearly as much single-handed as the rest of us put together and fought through as stiff a Fleet action as the hungriest fire-eater in the navy wants to see, and tells you he isn't injured, while half of us are knocked to scrap-iron. I wish we had fifty Ithuriels, there'd be very little landing on English shores.”

“I don't think you have very much to complain of in the French landing at Portsmouth, Beresford,” laughed Sir Compton Domville. “I don't want to flatter you, but it was an absolute stroke of genius. We shall have to set those fellows to work on the forts and yards and get some guns into position again. It isn't exactly what they came for but they'll come in very useful. But that can wait. Here's the wire from the Commander-in-Chief. Captain Erskine, you are to get round to Dover and London as soon as possible, and, I presume, do all the damage you can on the way. General French is going to London as soon as a special can be got ready for him.”

“May I ask a great favour, sir?” said Erskine.

“Anything, after what you've done,” replied Sir Compton. “What is it?”

General French and Lord Beresford nodded in agreement, and Erskine continued, addressing Lord Beresford: “That Mr Lennard, whom your lordship met on board the Ithuriel, has given me the formula of a new high explosive. Absurdly simple, but simply terrific in its effect. I made up half a dozen shells with it and tried them. I gave the Dupleax three rounds. They seem to reduce steel to dust, and, as far as we could see every man on the decks dropped as if he had been struck by lightning. From what we have done with them I think they will be of enormous value. Now Mr Lennard is very anxious to get to London and the north of England, and if General French could find him a place in his special—”

“My dear sir,” interrupted the General, “I shall be only too delighted to know your maker of thunderbolts. Is he here now?”

“Yes, sir, he's in the smoking-room with Lieutenant Castellan. And that reminds me, if I am to go to London, I hope you will allow me to hand over the German spy that we caught here as soon as convenient.”

“Bring them both in,” said General French. “Sir Compton and General Hamilton will court-martial your spy this morning, and, I hope, shoot him this evening.”

Within an hour, Lennard, who had something more serious now to think about than even war, was flying away Londonwards in General French's special, with a letter of introduction from Denis Castellan to his aunt and sister, and an hour after the special had started, the Ithuriel had cleared the narrow waters and was tearing up the Channel at fifty miles an hour, to see what havoc she could work on the assailants of London and

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Dover.

Chapter XVII — Away From The Warpath

WHEN Lennard entered the little drawing-room in the house in Westbourne Terrace, where Norah Castellan and her aunt were staying, he had decided to do something which, without his knowing it, probably made a very considerable difference in his own fortunes and those of two or three other people.

During his brief but exciting experiences on board the *Ithuriel*, he had formed a real friendship for both Erskine and Castellan, and he had come to the conclusion that Denis's sister and aunt would be very much safer in the remote seclusion of Whernside than in a city which might within the next few days share the fate of Portsmouth and Gosport. He was instantly confirmed in this resolution when Mrs O'Connor and her niece came into the room. Never had he seen a more perfect specimen of the Irishwoman, who is a lady by Nature's own patent of nobility, than Mrs O'Connor, and, with of course one exception, never had he seen such a beautiful girl as Norah Castellan.

He was friends with them in half an hour, and inside an hour he had accepted their invitation to dine and sleep at the house and help them to get ready for their unexpected journey to the North the next morning.

He went back to the Grand and got his portmanteau and Gladstone bag and returned to Westbourne Terrace in time for afternoon tea. Meanwhile, he had bought the early copies of all the evening papers and read up the condition of things in London, which, in the light of his experiences at Portsmouth, did not appear to him to be in any way promising. He gave Norah and her aunt a full, true and particular account of the assault on Portsmouth, the doings of the *Ithuriel*, the great Fleet action, and the brilliant ruse de guerre which Admiral Beresford had used to capture the First French Army Corps that had landed in England—and landed as prisoners.

The news in the afternoon papers, coupled with what he already knew of the tactics of the enemy, impressed Lennard so gravely that he succeeded in persuading Mrs O'Connor and Norah to leave London by the midnight sleeping-car train from St Pancras for Whernside, since no one knew at what time during the night John Castellan or his lieutenants might not order an indiscriminate bombardment of London from the air. He was also very anxious, for reasons of his own, to get back to his work at the observatory and make his preparations for the carrying out of an undertaking compared with which the war, terrible as it was and would be, could only be considered as the squabbles of children or lunatics.

His task was not one of aggression or conquest, but of salvation, and the enemy he was going to fight was an invader not of states or countries, but of a whole world, and unless the assault of this invader from the outer wilderness of Space were repelled, the result would not be merely the destruction of ships and fortresses, or the killing of a few hundreds or thousands of men on the battlefield; it would mean nothing less than a holocaust which would involve the whole human race, and the simultaneous annihilation of all that the genius of man had so laboriously accumulated during the slow, uncounted ages of his progress from the brute to the man.

They left the train at Settle at six o'clock the next morning, and were at once taken charge of by the stationmaster, who had had his instructions by telephone from the Parmenter mansion on the slopes of Great Whernside. He conducted them at once to the Midland Hotel, where they found a suite of apartments, luxuriously furnished, with fires blazing in the grates, and everything looking very cosy under the soft glow of the shaded electric lights. Baths were ready and breakfast would be on the table at seven. At eight, Mr Parmenter, who practically owned this suite of rooms, would drive over with Miss Parmenter in a couple of motor-cars and take the party to the house.

“Sure, then,” said Mrs O'Connor, when the arrangements had been explained to her, “it must be very comfortable to have all the money to buy just what you want, and make everything as easy as all this, and it's yourself, Mr Lennard we have to thank for making us the guests of a millionaire, when neither Norah nor myself have so much as seen one. Is he a very great man, this Mr Parmenter? It seems to me to be something like going to dine with a duke.”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“My dear Mrs O'Connor,” laughed Lennard, “I can assure you that you will find this master of millions one of Nature's own gentlemen. Although he can make men rich or poor by a stroke of his pen, and, with a few others like him, wield such power as was never in the hands of kings, you wouldn't know him from a plain English country gentleman if it wasn't for his American accent, and there's not very much of that.”

“And his daughter, Miss Auriole, what's she like?” said Norah. “A beauty, of course.”

Lennard flushed somewhat suspiciously, and a keen glance of Norah's Irish eyes read the meaning of that flush in an instant.

“Miss Parmenter is considered to be very beautiful,” he replied, “and I must confess that I share the general opinion.”

“I thought so,” said Norah, with a little nod that had a great deal of meaning in it. “Now, I suppose we'd better go and change, or we'll be late for breakfast. I certainly don't want the beautiful Miss Parmenter to see me in this state for the first time.”

“My dear Miss Castellan, I can assure you that you have not the faintest reason to fear any comparison that might be made,” laughed Lennard as he left the room and went to have his tub.

Punctually at eight a double “Toot-toot” sounded from the street in front of the main entrance to the hotel. Norah ran to the window and saw two splendidly-appointed Napier cars—although, of course, she didn't know a Napier from a Darracq. Something in female shape with peaked cap and goggles, gauntleted and covered from head to foot in a heavy fur coat, got out of the first car, and another shape, rather shorter but almost similarly clad, got out of the second. Five minutes later there was a knock at the door of the breakfast-room. It opened, and Norah saw what the cap and the goggles and the great fur coat had hidden. During the next few seconds, two of the most beautiful girls in the two hemispheres looked at each other, as only girls and women can look. Then Auriole put out both her hands and said, quite simply:

“You are Norah Castellan. I hope we shall be good friends. If we're not, I'm afraid it will be my fault.”

Norah took her hands and said:

“I think it would more likely be mine, after what Mr Lennard has been telling us of yourself and your father.”

At this moment Lennard saved the situation as far as he was concerned by making the other introductions, and Mrs O'Connor took the hand which wielded the terrible power of millions and experienced a curious sort of surprise at finding that it was just like other hands, and that the owner of it was bending over hers with one of those gestures of simple courtesy which are the infallible mark of the American gentleman. In a few minutes they were all as much at home together as though they had known each other for weeks. Then came the preparation of Norah and her aunt for the motor ride, and then the ride itself.

The sun had risen clearly, and there was a decided nip of frost in the keen Northern air. The roads were hard and clean, and the twenty-five-mile run over them, winding through the valleys and climbing the ridges with the heather-clad, rock-crowned hills on all sides, now sliding down a slope or shooting along a level, or taking a rise in what seemed a flying leap, was by far the most wonderful experience that Norah and her aunt had ever had.

Auriole drove the first car, and had Norah sitting beside her on the front seat. Her aunt and the mechanic were sitting in the tonneau behind. Mr Parmenter drove the second car with Lennard beside him. His tonneau was filled with luggage.

At the end of the eighteenth mile the cars, going at a quite illegal speed, jumped a ridge between two heather-clad moors, which in South Africa would have been called a nek, and dived down along a white road leading into a broad forest track, sunlit now, but bordered on either side by the twilight of towering pines and firs through which the sunlight filtered only in little flakes, which lay upon the last year's leaves and cones, somewhat as an electric light might have fallen on a monkish manuscript of the thirteenth century.

Then came two more miles on hard, well-kept roads, so perfectly graded that the upward slope was hardly perceptible.

“We're on our own ground now and I guess I'll let her out,” said Miss Auriole. “Don't be frightened, Norah. These things look big and strong, but it's quite wonderful what they'll do when there's a bit of human sense running them. See that your goggles are right and twist your veil in a bit tighter, I'm going to give you a new sensation.”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

She waved her hand to her father in the car behind and put on the fourth speed lever, and said: "Hold tight now."

Norah nodded, for she could hardly breathe as it was.

Then the pines and firs on either side of the broad drive melted into a green-grey blur. The road under them was like a rapidly unwinding ribbon. The hilltops which showed above the trees rose up now to the right hand and now to the left, as the car swung round the curves. Every now and then Norah looked at the girl beside her, controlling the distance-devouring monster with one hand on a little wheel, her left foot on a pedal and her right hand ready to work the levers if necessary.

The two miles of the drive from the gates to the front door of Wherside House, a long, low-lying two-storeyed, granite-built house, which was about as good a combination of outward solidity and indoor comfort as you could find in the British Islands, was covered in two and a half minutes, and the car pulled up, as Norah thought, almost at full speed and stopped dead in front of the steps leading up from the broad road to the steps leading up to the terrace which ran along the whole southward front of Wherside House.

"I reckon, Miss Castellan—"

"If you say Miss Castellan, I shall get back to Settle by the first conveyance that I can hire."

"Now, that's just nice of you, Norah. What I was going to say, if I hadn't made that mistake was, that this would be about the first time that you had covered two miles along a road at fifty miles an hour, and that's what you've just done. Pretty quick, isn't it? Oh, there's Lord Westerham on the terrace! Come for lunch, I suppose. He's a very great man here, you know. Lord-Lieutenant of the West Riding of Yorkshire, fought through the Boer War, got made a Colonel by some miracle when he was only about twenty-eight, went to Lhassa, and now he's something like Commander-in-Chief of the Yeomanry and Volunteers round here—and without anything of that sort, he's just about the best sort of man you want to meet. Come along, I'll introduce you."

The two cars stopped at the steps leading up to the terrace, a man in khaki, with a stretch of a dozen ribbons across the left side of his tunic, came bareheaded down the steps and opened the side door of Auriole's motor-car. Auriole pushed her goggles up and held out her gauntleted hand, and said:

"What! Lord Westerham! Well now, this is nice of you. Come to lunch, of course. And how's the recruiting going on?"

Then without waiting for a reply, she went on: "Norah, dear, this is Lord Westerham, Lord-Lieutenant of this part of the County of York, Colonel commanding the West Riding Yeomanry and lots of other things that I don't understand."

Norah pushed her goggles up and tilted her hat back. Auriole saw a flash of recognition pass like lightning between their eyes. She noticed that Norah's cheeks were a little bit brighter than even the speed of the car could account for. She saw, too, that there was a flush under the tan of Lord Westerham's face, and to her these were signs of great comfort.

"I don't know how this particular miracle has been arranged," said Lord Westerham, as he gave his hand to Norah and took her out of the car, "but a re-introduction is, if you will allow me to say so, Miss Parmenter, rather superfluous. I have known Miss Castellan for quite two years, at least, I had the pleasure of meeting her in Connemara, and we have fished and shot and sailed together until we became almost friends."

Auriole's eyes, observant at all times, had been working hard during the last two or three minutes, and in those few minutes she had learned a great deal. Arthur Lennard, who also had his eyes wide open, had learnt in his own slow, masculine way about as much, and perhaps a little more. He and Lord Westerham had been school-fellows and college chums and good friends for years, but of late a shadow had come between them, and it's hardly necessary to say that it was the shadow of a woman. He knew perfectly well by this time that Lord Westerham was, in the opinion of Mr Parmenter, the husband-designate, one might say, of Auriole. Young as he was, he already had a distinguished record as a soldier and an administrator, but he was also heir to one of the oldest Marquises in England with a very probable reversion to a dukedom.

This was what he had been thinking of that night in the observatory when he told Auriole of the fate that was approaching the world. No one knew better than he how brilliant a figure she would make in Society as the Marchioness of Westerham, granted always that the Anglo-Saxon would do now as he had ever done, fling the invader back upon his own shores or into the sea which he had crossed: but that swift flash of

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

recognition seen as his car came up behind Auriole's, and the slight but most significant change which had come over the features of both of them as he handed her out of the car, had instantly banished the shadow and made him a happier man than he had been for a good many months past.

Still he was one of those hard-headed, practical men who rightly consider that the very worst enemy either to friendship between man and man, or love between man and woman, is an unexplained misunderstanding, and so in that moment he decided to "have it out" with his lordship on the first possible opportunity.

Chapter XVIII — A Glimpse Of The Peril

THE morning was spent in a general overhaul of the observatory and the laboratory in which Lennard had discovered and perfected the explosive which had been used with such deadly effect in the guns of the Ithuriel. Lunch was an entirely delightful meal, and when it was over Auriole took Mrs O'Connor and Norah up to her own particular domain in the house to indulge in that choicest of feminine luxuries, a good long talk. Mr Parmenter excused himself and disappeared into his study to get ready for the evening mail, and so Lord Westerham and Lennard were left to their own devices for a couple of hours or so. This was just what Lennard wanted, and so he proposed a stroll and a smoke in the Park.

They lit their cigars and walked for a few minutes along a pine-shaded path. His lordship had an intuitive idea that his companion had something to say to him—albeit he was very far from imagining what that something was to be—and so he thought he had better let him begin. When they were out of sight or hearing of anyone, Lennard slowed down his pace a little and said somewhat abruptly:

“Westerham, I am going to ask you a question which you will probably think a rather impertinent one, and, moreover, whether you choose to answer it or not, I hope you will not for the present ask me why I ask it. Now there are a good many 'asks' in that, but as the matter is somewhat important to both of us, I wanted to put the thing plainly, even at the expense of a little tautology.”

Lord Westerham, in addition to being a gentleman and a soldier, was also one of the most frankly open-minded men that another honest man could wish to have anything to do with, and so, after a long pull at his cigar, he looked round and said:

“My dear Lennard, we were schoolfellows once, and we managed to worry through Cambridge together—you with a great deal more kudos than I did—and we have been very good friends since, so there can't be any question of impertinence between us, although there might be some unpleasantness for one or both of us. But, anyhow, whatever it is, out with it. Honestly, I don't think you could offend me if you tried.”

“That's just what I thought you would say,” replied Lennard. “And I think you are about the only man I should like to ask such a question; but after what you've just said I'll put it just as shortly as it can be made.”

“And the question is?” asked Lord Westerham, blowing a long stream of blue smoke up through the still air towards the tops of the pine trees.

There was a little pause, during which Lennard bit off about half an inch of the end of his cigar, spat it out, and took two or three more puffs from what was left. Then he said, in a dry, almost harsh tone:

“The question is quite a short one, Westerham, and you can answer it by a simple yes or no. It's just this: Do you intend to make Miss Parmenter Marchioness of Westerham or not? Other things of course being equal, as we used to say at school.”

Somewhat to Lennard's astonishment, Lord Westerham's cigar shot from his lips like a torpedo from a tube, and after it came an explosion of laughter, which fully accounted for its sudden ejection. His lordship leant up against a convenient pine and laughed till he was almost speechless.

“What the devil's the matter with you, Westerham?” said Lennard, with a note of anger in his voice. “You'll excuse my saying so, but it seems hardly a question for a sort of explosion like that. I have been asking you a question which, as you might have seen, concerns me rather closely.”

Lord Westerham sobered down at once, although his voice was still somewhat tremulous with suppressed laughter when he said:

“My dear chap, I'm very sorry. It was beastly rude of me to laugh, but I'm quite sure you'll forgive me when you know the facts or, at least, the fact, and that is as follows, as they say in the newspapers. When I tell you that your sweetheart drove my sweetheart up to the house to-day from Settle—”

“What, Norah Castellan!” exclaimed Lennard. “I didn't even know that you had met her before.”

“Haven't I!” replied Lord Westerham. “Look here, it was this way.”

And then he began a story of a fishing and shooting trip to Connemara, where he had rented certain salmon

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

streams and shooting moors from a squire of the county, named Lismore, who was very much in love with Norah Castellan, and how he had fished and shot and yachted with her and the brother who had sold his diabolical inventions to the enemies of England, until he had come to love the sister as much as he hated the brother. And when he had done, Lennard told him of the swimming race in Clifden Bay, and many other things to which Lord Westerham listened with an interest which grew more and more intense as every minute passed; until when Lennard stopped, he crossed the road and held out his hand and said:

"I've got the very place to suit you. A cannel-coal mine near Bolton in Lancashire with a perpendicular shaft, twelve hundred feet deep. The very place to do your work. It's yours from to-day, and if the thing comes off, Papa Parmenter shall give a couple of hundred thousand dowry instead of buying the mine. I don't think he'll kick at that. Now, let's go back and have a whisky-and-soda. I've got to be off recruiting to-morrow."

"I wish I could join the Yeomanry and come with you, if you would have me," laughed Lennard, whose spirits had been rising rapidly during the last half-hour or so, "only I reckon, as Mr Parmenter would put it, that I shall have all my work cut out getting ready to give our celestial invader a warm reception. To begin with, it won't exactly be child's play building a cannon twelve hundred feet long."

"I wonder what they'd think of a proposition like that at the War Office?" laughed Lord Westerham in reply. "Several permanent officials would certainly faint on the spot."

A sharp frost set in during the night, and the sky was brilliantly clear. After dinner, when the ladies had left the table, Lennard said to Mr Parmenter:

"I am going to renew my acquaintance with our celestial visitor to-night. I shall want a couple of hours to run over my calculations and verify the position of the comet up to date; and then, say at eleven o'clock, I should like you and Lord Westerham to come up to the observatory and have a somewhat serious talk."

The owner of the great reflector looked up quickly over his wine-glass and said:

"Look here, Mr Lennard, I guess this poor old country of yours has about enough serious matters on hand just now without worrying about comets. What's the trouble now?"

"My dear sir," replied Lennard, gravely "this is a matter which not only England, but every other country in the world, will have to trouble about before very long."

"Say, that sounds pretty serious," said Mr Parmenter. "What's the worry with this old comet of yours, anyhow?"

Lord Westerham smiled, and Lennard could not help smiling too as he replied:

"It is too long a story to tell now, sir, and what is more, I cannot tell it until I have reverified my observations and figures, and, besides, the ladies will be expecting us. I shall be quite ready for you by eleven. By the way, I haven't told you yet that those shells were a perfect success, from our point of view, at least. It seems rather curious how that all came about, I must say. Here's Denis Castellan, the brother of the traitor, a British naval officer, and like his sister an acquaintance of Westerham's. I discover the explosive, tell you about it, you tell Westerham, and send me off to try it on the Ithuriel, and here I come back from London with Miss Castellan and her aunt."

"Quite an excellent arrangement of things on the part of the Fates," remarked Lord Westerham with a meaning which Mr Parmenter did not understand.

"Why, yes," said their host, "quite like a piece out of a story, isn't it? And so that explosive got its work in all right, Mr Lennard?"

"As far as we could see," replied Lennard. "It tore steel armour into shreds as if it had been cardboard, and didn't leave a living thing anywhere within several yards of the focus of the explosion. Erskine and Castellan are filling up with it, and I expect we shall hear something about it from London before long. I am glad to say that Lord Beresford told me that after what he had seen of our fire, Government and private gun factories were going to work night and day turning out pneumatic guns to use it. The effect of it on land if a battery once gets within reach of large masses of men will be something frightful."

"Sounds pretty useful," said Lord Westerham, who was one of those soldiers who rightly believe that the most merciless methods of waging war are in the end most merciful.

By nine o'clock Lennard was in the equatorial chamber of the observatory, taking his first observations since he had left for Portsmouth the week before. The ghostly shape pictured on the great reflector was bigger

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

and brighter now, although, to his great comfort, none of the scientific papers had made any mention of its discovery by other observers. When he had noted its exact position, he went to his desk and plunged into a maze of calculations.

Precisely at eleven, there was a tap at the door and Mr Parmenter and Lord Westerham came in. Lord Westerham, as the guest, had the first look at the approaching World Peril; then Mr Parmenter took a long squint into the eye-piece and then they sat down, and Lennard told Mr Parmenter, in the cold, precise language of science, the story which he had already told to Auriole and Lord Westerham.

The millionaire, who had listened with an attention that even he had never given to any subject before, smoked in silence for a few moments after Lennard had finished, and then he said quietly:

“Well, I reckon that's about the biggest order that two or three human beings have ever been called upon to fill. One thing's certain. It'd make these fighting fellows feel pretty foolish if they could be got to believe it, which they couldn't. No disrespect to you, Lord Westerham, because I take it you do believe it.”

“Certainly I do,” he replied. “Lennard was never known to make a mistake in figures, and I am perfectly certain that he would not make any in working out such a terrific problem as this. I think I may also say that I have equal confidence in his plan for saving humanity from the terrible fate which threatens it.”

“That's good hearing,” said Mr Parmenter, drily. “Personally, I don't quite feel that I've finished up with this old world yet, and if it's a question of dollars—as far as I'm concerned, as I've got a few millions hanging around loose, I might as well use them to help to save the human race from being burnt to death as to run corners and trusts, which won't be much use anyhow if we can't stop this comet, or whatever it is. Now, Mr Lennard, what's your plan for the scientific salvation of the world?”

“There is nothing new about the idea,” replied Lennard, “except its application to the present circumstances. Of course you have read Jules Verne's *Journey to the Moon*? Well, my plan is simply to do the same thing on a much bigger scale, only instead of firing men and dogs and chickens out of my cannon, I am going to fire something like a ton and a half of explosives.

“The danger is in the contact of the nucleus of the comet with the earth's atmosphere. If that can be prevented there is no further cause for alarm; so, to put the matter quite shortly, my projectile will have an initial velocity of ten miles a second, and therefore a range that is practically infinite, for that velocity will carry it beyond the sphere of the earth's attraction.

“Hence, if the gun is properly trained and fired at precisely the right moment, and if the fuse does its work, the projectile will pass into the nucleus of the comet, and, before the heat has time to melt the shell, the charge will explode and the nucleus—the only dangerous part—will either be blown to fragments or dissipated in gas. Therefore, instead of what I might be allowed to call a premature Day of Judgment, we shall simply have a magnificent display of celestial fireworks, which will probably amount to nothing more than an unparalleled shower of shooting stars, as they are popularly called.

“The details of the experiment will be practically the same as those Jules Verne described—I mean as regards the making and firing of the cannon—only, as we haven't time to get a big enough hole dug, I should strongly advise the acceptance of Lord Westerham's very opportune offer.”

“That's so,” said Mr Parmenter, quietly, “but I've got a sort of fancy for running this business myself. My reflector discovered this comet, thanks, of course, to the good use you made of it, and it seems to me that I'm in a way responsible for making it harmless if that can be done, and so I'm not disposed to take that convenient colliery as a gift from anyone, no, not even you, Lord Westerham. You see, my lord, all that I can do here is just finding the dollars, and to a man in your position, doing his best to get as many men and horses and guns together for the defence of his country, money is money. Will you take a quarter of a million pounds for that colliery?”

“No, I won't, Mr Parmenter,” laughed Lord Westerham. “In the first place, the colliery isn't worth a tenth of that, and this country can very well afford to pay for her own defence. Besides, you must remember that you will have to pay for the work: I mean casing the pit-shaft, smelting the metal and building the shell, to say nothing of the thousand and one other expenses of which Lennard can tell you more than I. For one thing, I expect you will have a hundred thousand or so to pay in damage to surrounding property after that cannon has gone off. In other words, if you do save the world you'll probably have to pay pretty stiffly for doing it. They're excellent business people in Lancashire, you know.”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“I don't quite see the logic of that, Lord Westerham,” replied Mr Parmenter a little testily. “If we can put this business through, the dollars couldn't be much better used, and if we can't they won't be much use to me or anyone else. It's worth doing, anyhow, if it's only to show what new-world enterprise helped with old-world brains can do in bringing off a really big thing, and that's why I want to buy that colliery.”

“Well, Mr Parmenter,” laughed Lord Westerham again, “we won't quarrel over that. I'm not a businessman, but I believe it's generally recognised that the essence of all business is compromise. I'll meet you half way. For the present you shall take the pit for nothing and pay all expense connected with making a cannon of it. If that cannon does its work you shall pay me two hundred thousand pounds for the use of it—and I'll take your I.O.U. for the amount now. Will that suit you?”

“That's business,” said Mr Parmenter, getting up and going to Lennard's desk. “There you are, my lord,” he continued, as he came back with a half sheet of notepaper in his hand, “and I only hope I shall have to pay that money.”

Chapter XIX — A Change Of Scene

THE Ithuriel had orders to call at Folkestone and Dover in order to report the actual state of affairs there to the Commander-in-Chief by telegraph if Erskine could get ashore or by flash-signal if he could not, and incidentally to do as much damage as he could without undue risk to his craft if he considered that circumstances demanded it.

He arrived off Folkestone just before dusk, and, as he expected, found that there were half a dozen large transports, carrying probably eight thousand men and a proportionate number of horses and quick-firing guns, convoyed by four cruisers and ten destroyers, lying off the harbour. There were evidently no airships with the force, as, if there had been, they would certainly have been hovering over the town and shelling Shorncliffe Barracks and the forts from the air. A brisk artillery duel was proceeding between the land batteries and the squadron, and the handsome town was already in flames in several places.

Erskine, of course, recognised at once that this attack was simultaneous with that on Dover; the object of the enemy being obviously the capture of the shore line of railway between the two great Channel ports, which would provide the base of a very elongated triangle, the sides of which would be roughly formed by the roads and railways running to the westward and southward through Ashford and Maidstone, and to the northward and eastward through Canterbury, Faversham and Sittingbourne, and meeting at Rochester and Chatham, where the land forces of the invaders would, if all went well, co-operate with the sea forces in a combined attack on London, which would, of course, be preceded by a bombardment of fortified positions from the air.

Knowing what he did of the disastrous results of the battle of Portsmouth, he came to the conclusion that it was his duty to upset this plan of attack at all hazards, so he called Castellan up into the conning-tower and asked his advice on the situation.

"I see just what you mean, Erskine," replied the Lieutenant, when he had taken a good look at the map of Kent, "and it's my opinion that you'll do more to help London from here and Dover just now than you will from the Thames. Those French cruisers are big ones, though I don't quite recognise which they are, and they carry twice or three times the metal that those miserable forts do—which comes of trusting everything to the Fleet, as though these were the days of wooden walls and sails instead of steam battleships, fast cruisers and destroyers, to say nothing of submarines and airships. These Frenchies here don't know anything about the hammering they've got at Portsmouth and the capture of the transports, so they'll be expecting that force to be moving on London by the Brighton and South Coast line instead of re-building our forts and dockyards; so you go in and sink and smash everything in sight. That's just my best advice to you."

"It seems pretty rough on those chaps on the transports, doesn't it?" said Erskine, with a note of regret in his voice. "We sha'n't be able to pick up any of them. It will be pretty like murder."

"And what's that?" exclaimed Castellan, pointing to the fires in the town. "Don't ye call shelling a defenceless watering-place and burning unarmed people to death in their own homes murder? What if ye had your sister, or your mother, or your sweetheart there? How would ye feel about murder then?"

Denis Castellan spoke feelingly, for his captain possessed not only a mother, but also a very charming sister in connection with whom he cherished certain not altogether ill-founded hopes which might perchance be realised now that war had come and promotion was fairly sure for those who "got through all right."

Erskine nodded and said between his teeth:

"Yes, you're right, old man. Such mercy as they give—such shall they have. Get below and take charge. We'd better go for the cruisers first and sink them. That'll stop the shelling of the town anyhow. Then we'll tackle the destroyers, and after that, if the transports don't surrender—well, the Lord have mercy on them when those shells of Lennard's get among them, for they'll want it."

"And divil a bit better do they deserve. What have we done to them that they should all jump on us at once like this?" growled Denis as the platform sank with him. "There isn't one, no, nor two of them that dare tackle

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

the old sea-dog alone.”

Which remark was Irish but perfectly true.

By this time it was dusk enough for the Ithuriel to approach the unsuspecting cruisers unseen, as nothing but her conning-tower was soon visible, even at five hundred yards, and this would vanish when she sank to make her final rush.

The cruisers were the Chayner, Chanzy, Bruix and Latouche-Treille, all of about five thousand tons, and carrying two 7.6 in., six 5.5 in. and six 9 pounders in addition to their small quick-firers. They were steaming in an oval course of about two miles long in line ahead, delivering their bow, stern and broadside fire as they circled. The effect of the shells along the strip of coast was terrible, and by the time the Ithuriel came on the scene of action Sandgate, Shorncliffe and Folkestone were ablaze. The destroyers were of course shepherding the transports until the cruisers had silenced the shore batteries and prepared the way for the landing.

The Latouche-Treille was leading the French line when Erskine gave the order to sink and ram. Her captain never so much as suspected the presence of a British warship until his vessel reeled under the shock of the ram, trembled from stem to stern, and began to settle quickly by the head. Before she had time to sink the Ithuriel had shaken herself free, swung round in half a curve, and ripped the port quarter of the Chanzy open ten feet below the water line. Then she charged the Bruix amidships and nearly cut her in half, and as the Charner steamed up to the rescue of her stricken consorts her screws dragged her back from the sinking ship and her stern ram crashed into the Frenchman's starboard side under the foremast, and in about a quarter of an hour from the delivery of the mysterious attack the four French cruisers were either sunk or sinking.

It would be almost impossible to describe the effect which was produced by this sudden and utterly unexpected calamity, not only upon the astounded invaders, but upon the defenders, who, having received the welcome tidings of the tremendous disaster which had befallen the French Expedition at Portsmouth, were expecting aid in a very different form. Like their assailants, they had seen nothing, heard nothing, until the French cruisers suddenly ceased fire, rolled over and disappeared.

But a few minutes after the Charner had gone down, all anxiety on the part of the defenders was, for the time being, removed. The Ithuriel rose to the surface; her searchlight projector turned inshore, and she flashed in the Private Code:

“Suppose you have the news from Portsmouth. I am now going to smash destroyers and sink transports if they don't surrender. Don't shoot: might hurt me. Get ready for prisoners.

ERSKINE, Ithuriel.”

It was perhaps the most singular message that had ever been sent from a sea force to a land force, but it was as well understood as it was welcome, and soon the answering signals flashed back:

“Well done, Ithuriel. Heard news. Go ahead!”

Then came the turn of the destroyers. The Ithuriel rose out of the water till her forward ram showed its point six feet above the waves. Erskine ordered full speed, and within another twenty-five minutes the tragedy of Spithead had been repeated on a smaller scale. The destroying monster rushed round the transports, hunting the torpilleurs de haute mer down one after the other as a greyhound might run rabbits down, smashed them up and sank them almost before their officers and crew had time to learn what had happened to them—and then with his searchlight Erskine signalled to the transports in the International Code, which is universally understood at sea:

“Transports steam quarter speed into harbour and surrender. If a shot is fired shall sink you as others.”

Five of the six flags came down with a run and all save one of the transports made slowly for the harbour. Their commanders were wise enough to know that a demon of the deep which could sink cruisers before they could fire a shot and smash destroyers as if they were pleasure boats could make very short work of liners and cargo steamers, so they bowed to the inevitable and accepted with what grace they could defeat and capture instead of what an hour or so ago looked like certain victory. But the captain of the sixth, the one that was farthest out to sea, made a dash for liberty—or Dover.

Erskine took down the receiver and said quietly:

“Centre forward gun. Train: fire!”

The next moment a brilliant blaze of flame leapt up between the transport's funnels. They crumpled up like scorched parchment. Her whole super-structure seemed to take fire at once and she stopped.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Again flashed the signal:

“Surrender or I'll ram.”

The Tricolor fluttered slowly down through the damp, still evening air from the transport's main truck, and almost at the same moment a fussy little steam pinnace—which had been keeping itself snugly out of harm's way since the first French cruiser had gone down—puffed busily out of the harbour, and the proudest midshipman in the British Navy—for the time being, at least—ran from transport to transport, crowded with furious and despairing Frenchmen, and told them, individually and collectively, the course to steer if they wanted to get safely into Folkestone harbour and be properly taken care of.

Then out of the growing darkness to the westward long gleams of silver light flashed up from the dull grey water and wandered about the under-surface of the gathering clouds, coming nearer and growing brighter every minute, jumping about the firmament as though the men behind the projectors were either mad or drunk; but the signals spelt out to those who understood them the cheering words:

“All right. We'll look after these fellows. Commander-in-Chief's orders: Concentrate on Chilham, Canterbury and Dover.”

“That's all right,” said Erskine to himself, as he read the signals. “Beresford's got them comfortably settled already, and he's sending someone to help here. Well, I think we've done our share and we'd better get along to Dover and London.”

He flashed the signal: “Good-bye and good luck!” to the shore, and shaped his course for Dover.

So far, in spite of the terrible losses that had been sustained by the Reserve Fleet and the Channel Fleet, the odds of battle were still a long way in favour of Britain, in spite of the enormous forces ranged against her. At least so thought both Erskine and Castellan until they got within about three miles of Dover harbour, and Castellan, looking on sea and land and sky, exclaimed:

“Great Heaven help us! This looks like the other place let loose!”

Chapter XX — The Night Of Terror Begins—

DENIS CASTELLAN had put the situation tersely, but with a considerable amount of accuracy. Earth and sea and sky were ablaze with swarms of shooting, shifting lights, which kept crossing each other and making ever-changing patterns of a magnificent embroidery, and amidst these, huge shells and star-rockets were bursting in clouds of smoke and many-coloured flame. The thunder of the big guns, the grinding rattle of the quick-firers, and the hoarse, whistling shrieks of the shells, completed the awful pandemonium of destruction and death that was raging round Dover.

The truth was that the main naval attack of the Allies was being directed on the south-eastern stronghold. I am aware that this is not the usual plan followed by those who have written romantic forecasts of the invasion of England. It seems at first sight, provided that the enemy could pass the sentinels of the sea unnoticed, easy to land troops on unprotected portions of our shores; but, in actual warfare, this would be the most fatal policy that could be pursued, simply because, whatever the point selected, the invaders would always find themselves between two strong places, with one or more ahead of them. They would thus be outflanked on all sides, with no retreat open but the sea, which is the most easily closed of all retreats.

From their point of view, then, the Allies were perfectly right in their project of reducing the great strongholds of southern and eastern England, before advancing with their concentrated forces upon London. It would, of course, be a costly operation. In fact Britain's long immunity from invasion went far to prove that, to enemies possessing only the ordinary means of warfare, it would have been impossible, but, ever since the success of the experiment at Potsdam, German engineering firms had been working hard under John Castellan's directions turning out improved models of the Flying Fish. The various parts were manufactured at great distances apart, and no one firm knew what the others were doing. It was only when the parts of the vessels and the engines were delivered at the closely-guarded Imperial factory at Potsdam, that, under Castellan's own supervision, they became the terrible fighting machines that they were.

The Aerial Fleet numbered twenty when war broke out, and of these five had been detailed for the attack on Dover. They were in fact the elements which made that attack possible, and, as is already known, four were co-operating with the Northern Division of the Allied Fleets against the forts defending Chatham and London.

Dover was at that time one of the most strongly fortified places in the world. Its magnificent new harbour had been completed, and its fortifications vastly strengthened and re-armed with the new fourteen-inch gun which had superseded the old sixteen-inch gun of position, on account of its greater handiness, combined with greater penetrating power.

But at Dover, as at Portsmouth, the forts were powerless against the assaults of these winged demons of the air. They were able to use their terrible projectiles with reckless profusion, because only twenty-two miles away at Calais there were inexhaustible stores from which they could replenish their magazines. Moreover, the private factory at Kiel, where alone they were allowed to be manufactured, were turning them out by hundreds a day.

They had, of course, formed the vanguard of the attacking force which had advanced in three divisions in column of line abreast from Boulogne, Calais and Antwerp. The Boulogne and Calais divisions were French, and each consisted of six battleships with the usual screens of cruisers, destroyers and torpedo boats: these two divisions constituted the French North Sea Squadron, whose place had been taken by the main German Fleet, assisted by the Belgian and Dutch squadron.

Another German and Russian division was advancing on London. It included four first-class battleships, and two heavily-armed coast defence ships, huge floating fortresses, rather slow in speed, but tremendous in power, which accompanied them for the purpose of battering the fortifications, and doing as much damage to Woolwich and other important places on both sides as their big guns could achieve. Four Flying Fishes accompanied this division.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Such was the general plan of action on that fatal night. Confident in the terrific powers of their Aerial Squadrons, and ignorant of the existence of the Ithuriel, the Allied Powers never considered the possibilities of anything but rapid victory. They knew that the forts could no more withstand the shock of the bombardment from the air than battleships or cruisers could resist the equally deadly blow which these same diabolical contrivances could deliver under the water.

They had not the slightest doubt but that forts would be silenced and fleets put out of action with a swiftness unknown before, and then the crowded transports would follow the victorious fleets, and the military promenade upon London would begin, headed by the winged messengers of destruction, from which neither flight nor protection was possible.

Of course, the leaders of the Allies were in ignorance of the misfortunes they had suffered at Portsmouth and Folkestone. All they knew they learned from aerograms, one from Admiral Durenne off the Isle of Wight saying that the Portsmouth forts had been silenced and the Fleet action had begun, and another from the Commodore of the squadron off Folkestone saying that all was going well, and the landing would shortly be effected: and thus they fully expected to have the three towns and the entrance to the Thames at their mercy by the following day.

Certainly, as far as Dover was concerned, things looked very much as though their anticipations would be realised, for when the Ithuriel arrived upon the scene, Dover Castle and its surrounding forts were vomiting flame and earth into the darkening sky, like so many volcanoes. The forts on Admiralty Pier, Shakespear Cliff, and those commanding the new harbour works, had been silenced and blown up, and the town and barracks were in flames in many places.

The scene was, in short, so inhumanly appalling, and horror followed horror with such paralysing rapidity, that the most practised correspondents and the most experienced officers, both afloat and ashore, were totally unable to follow them and describe what was happening with anything like coherence. It was simply an inferno of death and destruction, which no human words could have properly described, and perhaps the most ghastly feature of it was the fact that there was no human agency visible in it at all. There was no Homeric struggle of man with man, although many a gallant deed was done that night which never was seen nor heard of, and many a hero went to his death without so much as leaving behind him the memory of how he died.

It was a conflict of mechanical giants—giant ships, giant engines, giant guns, and explosives of something more than giant strength. These were the monsters which poor, deluded Humanity, like another Frankenstein, had thought out with infinite care and craft, and fashioned for its own mutual destruction. Men had made a hell out of their own passions and greed and jealousies; and now that hell had opened and mankind was about to descend into it.

The sea-defence of Dover itself consisted of the Home Fleet in three divisions, composed respectively of the England, London, Bulwark and Venerable, Queen and Prince of Wales battleships, and ten first-class armoured cruisers, the Duncan, Cornwallis, Exmouth and Russell battleships, with twelve armoured cruisers, and thirdly, the reconstructed and re-armed Empress of India, Revenge, Repulse and Resolution, with eight armoured cruisers. To the north between Dover and the North Foreland lay the Southern Division of the North Sea Squadron.

When the battle had commenced these three divisions were lying in their respective stations, in column of line ahead about six miles from the English shore. Behind them lay a swarm of destroyers and torpedo boats, ready to dart out and do their deadly work between the ships, and ten submarines were attached to each division. The harbour and approaches were, of course, plentifully strewn with mines.

“It’s an awful sight,” said Castellan, with a note of awe in his voice, when they had taken in the situation with the rapidity and precision of the professional eye. “And to me the worst of it is that it won’t be safe for us to take a share in the row.”

“What!” exclaimed Erskine, almost angrily. “Do you mean to tell me we sha’n’t be able to help our fellows? Then what on earth have we come here for?”

“Just look there, now!” said Castellan, pointing ahead to where huge shapes, enveloped in a mist of flame and smoke, were circling round each other, vomiting their thunderbolts, like leviathans engaged in a veritable dance of death.

“D’ye see that!” continued Denis. “What good would we be among that lot? The Ithuriel hasn’t eyes on her

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

that can see through the dark water, and if she had, how would we tell the bottom of a French or German ship from a Britisher's, and a nice thing it would be for us to go about sinking the King's ships, and helping those foreign devils to land in old England! No, Erskine, this ship of yours is a holy terror, but she's a daylight fighter. Don't you see that we came too late, and wait till tomorrow we can't, and there's the Duke's orders.

"I'll tell you what," he continued more cheerfully, as the Ithuriel cleared the southern part of the battle, "if we could get at the transports we might have some fun with them, but they'll all be safe enough in port, loading up, and there's not much chance that they'll come out till our boys have been beaten and the roads are clear for them. Then they'll go across thinking they'll meet their pals from Portsmouth and Folkestone. Now, you see that line out there to the north-eastward?"

"Yes," said Erskine, looking towards a long row of dim shapes which every now and then were brought out into ominous distinctness by the flashes of the shells and searchlights.

"Well," continued Castellan, "if I know anything of naval tactics, that's the Reserve lot waiting till the battle's over. They think they'll win, and I think so too, thanks to those devil-ships my brother has made for them. Even if Beresford does come up in time, he can no more fight against them than anybody else. Now, there's just one chance that we can give him, and that is sinking the Reserve; for, you see, if we've only half a dozen ships left that can shoot a bit in the morning, they won't dare to put their transports out without a convoy, and unless they land them, well, they're no use."

"Castellan," said Erskine, putting his hand on his shoulder, "you'll be an admiral some day. Certainly, we'll go for the convoy, for I'll be kicked if I can stand here watching all that going on and not have a hand in it. We'd better sink, and use nothing but the ram, I suppose."

"Why, of course," replied Castellan. "It would never do to shoot at them. There are too many, and besides, we don't want them to know that we're here until we've sent them to the bottom."

"And a lot they'll know about it then!" laughed Erskine. "All right," he continued, taking down the receiver. "Courtney and Mac can see to the sinking, so you'd better stop here with me and see the fun."

"That I will, with all the pleasure in life and death," said Castellan grimly, as Erskine gave his orders and the Ithuriel immediately began to sink.

Castellan was perfectly right in his conjecture as to the purpose of the Reserve.

The French and German Squadron, which was intended for the last rush through the remnants of the crippled British fleet, consisted of four French and three German battleships, old and rather slow, but heavily armed, and much more than a match for the vessels which had already passed through the terrible ordeal of battle. In addition there were six fast second-class cruisers, and about a score of torpedo boats.

With her decks awash and the conning-tower just on a level with the short, choppy waves, the Ithuriel ran round to the south of the line at ten knots, as they were anxious not to kick up any fuss in the water, lest a chance searchlight from the enemy might fall upon them, and lead to trouble. She got within a mile of the first cruiser unobserved, and then Erskine gave the order to quicken up. They had noticed that the wind was rising, and they knew that within half an hour the tide would be setting southward like a mill-race through the narrow strait.

Their tactics therefore were very simple. Every cruiser and battleship was rammed in the sternpost; not very hard, but with sufficient force to crumple up the sternpost, and disable the rudder and the propellers, and with such precision was this done, that, until the signals of distress began to flash, the uninjured ships and the nearest of those engaged in the battle were under the impression that orders had been given for the Reserve to move south. But this supposition very soon gave place to panic as ship after ship swung helplessly inshore, impelled by the ever-strengthening tide towards the sands of Calais and the rocks of Gris Nez.

Searchlights flashed furiously, but Erskine and Castellan had already taken the bearings of the remaining ships, and the Ithuriel, now ten feet below the water, and steered solely by compass, struck ship after ship, till the whole of the Reserve was drifting helplessly to destruction.

This, as they had both guessed, produced a double effect on the battle. In the first place it was impossible for the Allies to see their Reserve, upon which so much might depend, in such a helpless plight, and the admirals commanding were therefore obliged to detach ships to help them; and on the other hand, the British were by no means slow to take advantage of the position. A score of torpedo boats, and half as many destroyers, dashed out from behind the British lines, and, rushing through the hurricane of shell that was

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

directed upon them, ran past the broken line of unmanageable cruisers and battleships, and torpedoed them at easy range. True, half of them were crumpled up, and sent to the bottom during the process, but that is a contingency which British torpedo officers and men never take the slightest notice of. The disabled ships were magnificent marks for torpedoes, and they had to go down, wherefore down they went.

Meanwhile the Ithuriel had been having a merry time among the torpedo flotilla of the Reserve Squadron. She rose flush with the water, put on full speed, and picked them up one after another on the end of her ram, and tossed them aside into the depths as rapidly as an enraged whale might have disposed of a fleet of whaleboats.

The last boat had hardly gone down when signals were seen flashing up into the sky from over Dungeness.

“That's Beresford to the rescue,” said Castellán, in a not over-cheerful voice. “Now if it wasn't for those devil-ships of my brother's there'd be mighty little left of the Allied Fleet to-morrow morning; but I'm afraid he won't be able to do anything against those amphibious Flying Fishes, as he calls them. Now, we'd better be off to London.”

Chapter XXI — —And Ends

THE defenders of Dover, terribly as they had suffered, and hopeless as the defence really now seemed to be, were still not a little cheered by the tidings of the complete and crushing defeat which had been inflicted by Admiral Beresford and the *Ithuriel* on the French at Portsmouth and Folkestone, and the brilliant capture of the whole of the two Expeditionary Forces. Now, too, the destruction of the Allied Reserve made it possible to hope that at least a naval victory might be obtained, and the transports prevented from crossing until the remains of the British Fleet Reserve could be brought up to the rescue.

At any rate it might be possible, in spite of sunken ships and shattered fortifications, to prevent, at least for a while, the pollution of English soil by the presence of hostile forces, and to get on with the mobilisation of regulars, militia, yeomanry and volunteers, which, as might have been expected, this sudden declaration of war found in the usual state of hopeless muddle and chaos.

But, even in the event of complete victory by sea, there would still be those terrible cruisers of the air to be reckoned with, and they were known to be as efficient as submarines as they were as airships.

Still, much had been done, and it was no use going to meet trouble halfway. Moreover, Beresford's guns were beginning to talk down yonder to the southward, and it was time for what was left of the North Sea Squadron and the Home Fleet to reform and manoeuvre, so as to work to the north-eastward, and get the enemy between the two British forces.

A very curious thing came to pass now. The French and German Fleets, though still much superior to the defenders, had during that first awful hour of the assault received a terrible mauling, especially from the large guns of the *England* and the *Scotland*—sisters of the *Britain*, and the flagships respectively of the North Sea Squadron and the Home Fleet—and the totally unexpected and inexplicable loss of their reserve; but the guns booming to the south-westward could only be those of Admiral Durenne's victorious fleet. He would bring them reinforcements more than enough, and with him, too, would come the three *Flying Fishes*, which had been commissioned to destroy Portsmouth and the battleships of the British Reserve. There need be no fear of not getting the transports across now, and then the march of victory would begin.

In a few minutes the fighting almost entirely ceased. The ships which had been battering each other so heartily separated as if by mutual consent, and the French and German admirals steamed to the south-westward to join their allies and sweep the Strait of Dover clear of those who had for so many hundred years considered—yes, and kept it—as their own sea-freehold.

At the same time private signals were flashed through the air to the *Flying Fishes* to retire on Calais, replenish their ammunition and motive power, which they had been using so lavishly, and return at daybreak.

Thus what was left of Dover, its furiously impotent soldiery, and its sorely stricken inhabitants, had a respite at least until day dawned and showed them the extent of the ruin that had been wrought.

It was nearly midnight when the three fleets joined, and just about eight bells the clouds parted and dissolved under the impact of a stiff nor'-easter, which had been gathering strength for the last two hours. The war smoke drifted away, and the moon shone down clearly on the now white-crested battlefield.

By its light and their own searchlights the French and German admirals, steaming as they thought to join hands with their victorious friends, saw the strangest and most exasperating sight that their eyes had ever beheld. The advancing force was a curiously composed one. Trained, as they were, to recognise at first sight every warship of every nation, they could nevertheless hardly believe their eyes. There were six battleships in the centre of the first line. One was the *Britain*, three others were of the *Edward the Seventh* class; two were French. Of the sixteen cruisers which formed the wings, seven were French—and every warship of the whole lot was flying the *White Ensign*!

Did it mean disaster—almost impossible disaster—or was it only a ruse de guerre?

They were not left very long in doubt. At three miles from a direction almost due south-east of Dover, the advancing battleships opened fire with their heavy forward guns, and the cruisers spread out in a fan on either

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

side of the French and German Fleets. The Britain, as though glorying in her strength and speed, steamed ahead in solitary pride right into the midst of the Allies, thundering and flaming ahead and from each broadside. The Braunschweig had the bad luck to get in her way. She made a desperate effort to get out of it; but eighteen knots was no good against twenty-five. The huge ram crashed into her vitals as she swerved, and reeling and pitching like some drunken leviathan, she went down with a mighty plunge, and the Britain ploughed on over the eddies that marked her ocean grave.

This was the beginning of the greatest and most decisive sea-fight that had been fought since Trafalgar. The sailors of Britain knew that they were fighting not only for the honour of their King and country, but, as British sailors had not done for a hundred and four years, for the very existence of England and the Empire. On the other hand, the Allies knew that this battle meant the loss or the keeping of the command of the sea, and therefore the possibility or otherwise of starving the United Kingdom into submission after the landing had been effected.

So from midnight until dawn battleship thundered against battleship, and cruiser engaged cruiser, while the torpedo craft darted with flaming funnels in and out among the wrestling giants, and the submarines did their deadly work in silence. Miracles of valour and devotion were achieved on both sides. From admiral and commodore and captain in the conning-towers to officers and men in barbets and casemates, and the sweating stokers and engineers in their steel prisons—which might well become their tombs—every man risked and gave his life as cheerfully as the most reckless commander or seaman on the torpedo flotillas.

It was a fight to the death, and every man knew it, and accepted the fact with the grim joy of the true fighting man.

Naturally, no detailed description of the battle of Dover would be possible, even if it were necessary to the narrative. Not a man who survived it could have written such a description. All that was known to the officials on shore was that every now and then an aerogram came, telling in broken fragments of the sinking of a battleship or cruiser on one side or the other, and the gradual weakening of the enemy's defence; but to those who were waiting and watching so anxiously along the line of cliffs, the only tidings that came were told by the gradual slackening of the battle-thunder, and the ever-diminishing frequency of the pale flashes of flame gleaming through the drifting gusts of smoke.

Then at last morning dawned, and the pale November sun lit up as sorry a scene as human eyes had ever looked upon. Not a fourth of the ships which had gone into action on either side were still afloat, and these were little better than drifting wrecks.

All along the shore from East Wear Bay to the South Foreland lay the shattered, shell-riddled hulks of what twelve hours before had been the finest battleships and cruisers afloat, run ashore in despair to save the lives of the few who had come alive through that awful battle-storm. Outside them showed the masts and fighting-tops of those which had sunk before reaching shore, and outside these again lay a score or so of battleships and a few armoured cruisers, some down by the head, some by the stern, and some listing badly to starboard or port—still afloat, and still with a little fight left in them, in spite of their gashed sides, torn decks, riddled topworks and smashed barbets.

But, ghastly as the spectacle was, it was not long before a mighty cheer went rolling along the cliffs and over the ruined town for, whether flew the French or German flag, there was not a ship that French or German sailor or marine had landed on English soil save as prisoners.

The old Sea Lion had for the first time in three hundred and fifty years been attacked in his lair, and now as then he had turned and rent the insolent intruder limb from limb.

The main German Fleet and the French Channel Fleet and North Sea Squadrons had ceased to exist within twenty-four hours of the commencement of hostilities.

Once more Britain had vindicated her claim to the proud title of Queen of the Seas; once more the thunder of her enemies' guns had echoed back from her white cliffs—and the echo had been a message of defeat and disaster.

If the grim game of war could only have been played now as it had been even five years before, the victory would have already been with her, for the cable from Gibraltar to the Lizard had that morning brought the news from Admiral Commerell, Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, that he had been attacked by, and had almost destroyed, the combined French Mediterranean and Russian Black Sea Fleets, and that, with

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

the aid of an Italian Squadron, he was blockading Toulon, Marseilles and Bizerta. The captured French and Russian ships capable of repair had been sent to Malta and Gibraltar to refit.

This, under the old conditions, would, of course, have meant checkmate in the game of invasion, since not a hostile ship of any sort would have dared to put to sea, and the crowded transports would have been as useless as so many excursion steamers, but—

Chapter XXII — Disaster

ABOUT eight o'clock, as the half-wrecked victors and vanquished were slowly struggling into the half-ruined harbour, five winged shapes became visible against the grey sky over Calais, rapidly growing in size, and a few minutes later two more appeared, approaching from the north-east. They, alas, were the heralds of a fate against which all the gallantry and skill of Britain's best sailors and soldiers would fight in vain.

The two from the north-east were, of course, the Flying Fish and the See Adler; the others were those which had been ordered to load up at the Calais depot, and complete that victory of the Allied Fleets which the science and devotion of British sailors had turned into utter defeat.

John Castellan, standing in the conning-tower of the Flying Fish, looking down over sea and land through his prismatic binoculars, suddenly ground his teeth hard together, and sent a hearty Irish curse hissing between them. He had a complete plan of the operations in his possession, and knew perfectly what to expect—but what was this?

Dover and its fortifications were in ruins, as they ought to have been by this time; but the British Flag still floated over them! The harbour was almost filled with mutilated warships, and others were slowly steaming towards the two entrances; but every one of these was flying the White Ensign of England! There was not a French or German flag to be seen—and there, all along the coast, which should have been in the possession of the Allies by now, lay the ragged line of helpless hulks which would never take the sea again.

What had happened? Where were the splendid fleets which were to have battered the English defence into impotence? Where was the Reserve, which was to have convoyed the transports across the narrow waters? Where were the transports themselves and the half million men, horses and artillery which to-day they were to land upon the stricken shores of Kent?

With that marvellous intuition which is so often allied with the Keltic genius, he saw in a flash all, or something like all, that had really happened as a consequence of the loss of the depot ship at Spithead, and the venting of his own mad hatred of the Saxon on the three defenceless towns. The Channel Fleet had come, after all, in time, and defeated Admiral Durenne's fleet; the Reserve cruisers had escaped, and Portsmouth had been re-taken!

Would that have happened if he had used the scores of shells which he had wasted in mere murder and destruction against the ships of the Channel Fleet? It would not, and no one knew it better than he did.

Still, even now there was time to retrieve that ghastly mistake which had cost the Allies a good deal more than even he had guessed at. He was Admiral of the Aerial Squadrons, and, save under orders from headquarters, free to act as he thought fit against the enemy. If his passion had lost victory he could do nothing less than avenge defeat.

He ran up his telescopic mast and swerved to the southward to meet the squadron from Calais, flying his admiral's flag, and under it the signal:

“I wish to speak to you.”

The Flying Fish and the See Adler quickened up, and the others slowed down until they met about two thousand feet above the sea. Castellan ran the Flying Fish alongside the Commodore of the other Squadron, and in ten minutes he had learned what the other had to tell, and arranged a plan of operations.

Within the next five minutes three of the seven craft had dropped to the water and disappeared beneath it. The other four, led by the Flying Fish, winged their way towards Dover.

The aerial section of the squadron made straight for the harbour. The submarine section made southwestward to cut off the half dozen “lame ducks” which were still struggling towards it. With these, unhappily, was the Scotland, the huge flagship of the North Sea Squadron, which still full of fight, was towing the battleship Commonwealth, whose rudder and propellers had been disabled by a torpedo from a French submarine.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

She was, of course, the first victim selected. Two Flying Fishes dived, one under her bows and one under her stern, and each discharged two torpedoes.

No fabric made by human hands could have withstood the shock of the four explosions which burst out simultaneously. The sore-stricken leviathan stopped, shuddered and reeled, smitten to death. For a few moments she floundered and wallowed in the vast masses of foaming water that rose up round her—and when they sank she took a mighty sideward reel and followed them.

The rest met their inevitable fate in quick succession, and went down with their ensigns and pennants flying—to death, but not to defeat or disgrace.

The ten British submarines which were left from the fight had already put out to try conclusions with the Flying Fishes; but a porpoise might as well have tried to hunt down a northern diver. As soon as each Flying Fish had finished its work of destruction it spread its wings and leapt into the air—and woe betide the submarine whose periscope showed for a moment above the water, for in that moment a torpedo fell on or close to it, and that submarine dived for the last time.

Meanwhile the horrors of the past afternoon and evening were being repeated in the crowded harbour, and on shore, until a frightful catastrophe befell the remains of the British Fleet.

John Castellan, with two other craft, was examining the forts from a height of four thousand feet, and dropping a few torpedoes into any which did not appear to be completely wrecked. The captain of another was amusing himself by dispersing, in more senses than one, the helpless, terror-stricken crowds on the cliffs whence they had lately cheered the last of Britain's naval victories, and the rest were circling over the harbour at a height of three thousand feet, letting go torpedoes whenever a fair mark presented itself.

Of course the fight, if fight it could be called, was hopeless from the first; but your British sailor is not the man to take even a hopeless fight lying down, and so certain gallant but desperate spirits on board the *England*, which was lying under what was left of the Admiralty Pier, got permission to dismount six 3-pounders and remount them as a battery for high-angle fire. The intention, of course, was, as the originator of the idea put it: "To bring down a few of those flying devils before they could go inland and do more damage there."

The intention was as good as it was unselfish, for the ingenious officer in charge of the battery knew as well as his admiral that the fleet was doomed to destruction in detail—but the first volley that battery fired was the last.

A few of the shells must have hit a French Flying Fish, which was circling above the centre of the harbour, and disabled the wings and propellers on one side, for she lurched and wobbled for an instant like a bird with a broken wing. Then she swooped downwards in a spiral course, falling ever faster and faster, till she struck the deck of the *Britain*.

What happened the next instant no one ever knew. Those who survived said that they heard a crashing roar like the firing of a thousand cannon together; a blinding sheet of flame overspread the harbour; the water rose into mountains of foam, ships rocked and crashed against each other—and then came darkness and oblivion.

When human eyes next looked on Dover Harbour there was not a ship in it afloat.

Dover, the great stronghold of the south-east, was now as defenceless as a fishing village, and there was nothing to prevent a constant stream of transports filled with men and materials of war being poured into it, or any other port along the eastern Kentish coast. Then would come seizure of railway stations and rolling stock, rapid landing of men and horses and guns, and the beginning of the great advance.

On the whole, John Castellan was well satisfied with his work. He regretted the loss of his consort; but she had not been wasted. The remains of the British fleets had gone with her to destruction.

Certainly what had been done had brought nearer the time when he, the real organiser of victory, the man who had made the conquest of England possible, would be able to claim his double reward—the independence of Ireland, and the girl whom he intended to make the uncrowned Queen of Erin.

It was a splendid and, to him, a delicious dream as well; but between him and its fulfilment, what a chaos of bloodshed, ruin and human misery lay! And yet he felt not a tremor of compunction or of pity for the thousands of brave men who would be flung dead and mangled and tortured into the bloody mire of battle, for the countless homes that would be left desolate, or for the widows and the fatherless whose agony would cry to Heaven for justice on him.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

No; these things were of no account in his eyes. Ireland must be free, and the girl he had come to love so swiftly, and with such consuming passion, must be his. Nothing else mattered. Was he not Lord of the Air, and should the desire of his heart be denied him?

Thus mused John Castellan in the conning-tower of the Flying Fish, as he circled slowly above the ruins of Dover, while the man who had beaten him in the swimming-race was sitting in the observatory on far-off Whernside, verifying his night's observations and calculating for the hundredth time the moment of the coming of an Invader, compared with which all the armed legions of Europe were of no more importance than a swarm of flies.

When he had satisfied himself that Dover was quite defenceless he sent one of the French Flying Fishes across to Calais with a letter to the District Commander, describing briefly what had taken place, and telling him that it would be now quite safe for the transports to cross the Straits and land the troops at Portsmouth, Newhaven, Folkestone, Dover and Ramsgate.

He would station one of his airships over each of these places to prevent any resistance from land or sea, and would himself make a general reconnaissance of the military dispositions of the defenders. He advised that the three Flying Fishes, which had been reserved for the defence of the Kiel Canal, should be telegraphed for as convoys, as there was now no danger of attack, and that the depot of torpedoes and motive power for his ships should be transferred from Calais to Dover.

As soon as he had despatched this letter, Castellan ordered two of his remaining ships to cruise northward to Ramsgate, keeping mainly along the track of the railway, one on each side of it, and to wreck the first train they saw approaching Dover, Deal, Sandwich and Ramsgate from the north. The other two he ordered to take the Western Coast line as far as Portsmouth, and do the same with trains coming east.

Then he swung the Flying Fish inland, and took a run over Canterbury, Ashford, Maidstone, Tonbridge, Guildford and Winchester, to Southampton and Portsmouth, returning by Chichester, Horsham and Tunbridge Wells.

It was only a tour of observation for the purpose of discovering the main military dispositions of the defenders—who were now concentrating as rapidly as possible upon Folkestone and Dover—but he found time to stop and drop a torpedo or two into each town or fort that he passed over—just leaving cards, as he said to M'Carthy—as a promise of favours to come.

He also wrecked half a dozen long trains, apparently carrying troops, and incidentally caused a very considerable loss of good lives and much confusion, to say nothing of the moral effect which this new and terrible form of attack produced upon the nerves of Mr Thomas Atkins.

When he got back to Dover he found a letter waiting for him from the General informing him that the transports would sail at once, and that his requests would be complied with.

Chapter XXIII — The Other Campaign Begins

IT was on the day following the destruction of Dover that the news of the actual landing of the French and German forces had really taken place at the points selected by Castellan reached Whernside. The little house party were at lunch, and the latest papers had just come over from Settle. Naturally what they contained formed the sole topic of conversation.

“Really, Arnold, I think even you must confess that things are a great deal more serious than anyone could have imagined a few days ago. The very idea—an invasion accomplished in forty–eight hours—Portsmouth, Dover, Sheerness and Tilbury destroyed, and French and German and Russian soldiers actually in arms on English soil. The thing would be preposterous if it were not true!

“And what are we to do now, I should like to know? The Fleet doesn't exist—we have no army in the Continental sense of the word, which of course is the real military sense, thanks to a lot of politicians calling themselves statesmen who have been squabbling about what an army ought to be for the last ten years.

“You will be able to put a million trained and half–trained—mostly half–trained—men into the field, to face millions of highly–trained French, German, Russian and Austrian troops, led by officers who have taken their profession seriously, and not by gentlemen who have gone into the army because it was a nice sort of playground, where you could have lots of fun, and a little amateur fighting now and then. I wonder what they will do now against the men who have made war a science instead of sport!

“I should like to know what the good people who have made such a fuss about the 'tyranny of Conscription' will say now, when they find that we haven't trained men enough to defend our homes. Just as if military service was not the first duty a man owes to his country and to his home. A man has no right to a country nor a home if he isn't able to defend them. Kipling was perfectly right when he said:”

‘What is your boasting worth

If you grudge a year of service to the lordliest life on earth?’

This little lecture was delivered with trembling lips, flushed cheeks and flashing eyes by Lady Margaret Holker, Lord Westerham's sister, who had joined the party that morning to help her brother in his recruiting.

She was an almost perfect type of the modern highly–bred Englishwoman, who knows how to be entirely modern without being vulgarly “up–to–date.” She was a strong contrast to her brother, in that she was a bright brunette—not beautiful, perhaps not even pretty, but for all that distinctly good–looking. Her hair and eyebrows were black, her eyes a deep pansy–blue. A clear complexion, usually pale but decidedly flushed now, and, for the rest, somewhat irregular features which might have been almost plain, but for that indefinable expression of combined gentleness and strength which only the careful selection of long descent can give.

As for her figure, it was as perfect as absolute health and abundant exercise could make it. She could ride, shoot, throw a fly and steer a yacht better than most women and many men of her class; but for all that she could grill steaks and boil potatoes with as much distinction as she could play the piano and violin, and sing in three or four languages.

She also had a grip, not on politics, for which she had a wholesome contempt, but on the affairs of the nations—the things which really mattered. And yet withal she was just an entirely healthy young Englishwoman, who was quite as much at home in the midst of a good singing waltz as she was in an argument on high affairs of State.

“My dear Madge,” said her brother, who had been reading the reports in the second morning edition of the Times aloud, “I am afraid that, after all, you are right. But then, you must not forget that a new enemy has come into the field. I hardly like to say so in Miss Castellan's presence, but it is perfectly clear that, considering what the Fleet did, there would have been no invasion if it had not been for those diabolical contrivances that John Castellan took over to the German Emperor.”

“You needn't have any hesitation in saying what you like about him before me, Lord Westerham,” said

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Norah, flushing. "It's no brother he is of mine now, as I told him the day he went aboard the German yacht at Clifden. I'd see him shot to-morrow without a wink of my eyes. The man who does what he has done has no right to the respect of any man nor the love of any woman—no, not even if the woman is his sister. Think of all the good, loyal Irishmen, soldiers and sailors, that he has murdered by this time. No, I have no brother called John Castellan."

"But you have another called Denis," said Auriole, "and I think you may be well content with him!"

"Ah, Denis!" said Norah, flushing again, but for a different reason, "Denis is a good and loyal man; yes, I am proud of him—God bless him!"

"And I should reckon that skipper of his, Captain Erskine, must be a pretty smart sort of man," said Mr Parmenter, who so far had hardly joined in the conversation, and who had seemed curiously indifferent to the terrible exploits of the Flying Fishes and all that had followed them. "That craft of his seems to be just about as business-like as anything that ever got into the water or under it. I wonder what he is doing with the Russian and German ships in the Thames now. I guess he won't let many of them get back out of there. Quite a young man, too, according to the accounts."

"Oh, yes," said Lady Margaret, "he isn't twenty-nine yet. I know him slightly. He is a son of Admiral Erskine, who commanded the China Squadron about eight years ago, and died of fever after a pirate hunt, and he is the nephew of dear old Lady Caroline Anstey, my other mother as I call her. He is really a splendid fellow, and some people say as good-looking as he is clever; although, of course, there was a desperate lot of jealousy when he was promoted Captain straight away from Lieutenant-Commander of a Fishery cruiser, but I should like to know how many of the wiseacres of Whitehall could have designed that Ithuriel of his."

"It's a pity she can't fly, though, like those others," said Mr Parmenter, with a curious note in his voice which no one at the table but Lennard understood. "She's a holy terror in the water, but the other fellow's got all the call on land. If they get a dozen or so of these aerial submarines as you might call them, in front of the invading forces, I can't see what's going to stop a march on London, and right round it. Your men are just as brave as any on earth, and a bit more than some, if their officers are a bit more gentlemen and sportsmen than soldiers; but no man can fight a thing he can't hit back at, and so I reckon the next thing we shall hear of will be the siege of London. What do you think, Lennard?"

Lennard, who had hardly spoken a word during the meal, looked up, and said in a voice which Lady Madge thought curiously unsympathetic:

"I shouldn't think it would take more than a fortnight at the outside, even leaving these airships out of the question. We haven't three hundred thousand men of all sorts to put into the field, who know one end of a gun from another, or who can sit a horse; and now that the sea's clear the enemy can land two or three millions in a fortnight."

"All our merchant shipping will be absolutely at their mercy, and they will simply have to take them over to France and Germany and load them up with men and horses, and bring them over as if they were coming to a picnic. But, of course, with the airships to help them the thing's a foregone conclusion, and to a great extent it is our own fault. I thoroughly agree with what Lady Margaret says about conscription. If we had had it only five years ago, we should now have three million men, instead of three hundred thousand, trained and ready to take the field. Though, after all—"

"After all—what?" said Lady Margaret, looking sharply round at him.

"Oh, nothing of any importance," he said. "At least, not just at present. I daresay Lord Westerham will be able to explain what I might have said better than I could. There's not time for it just now, I've got to get a train to Bolton in an hour's time."

"And I'll have to be in Glasgow to-night," said Mr Parmenter, rising. "I hope you won't think it very inhospitable of us, Lady Margaret: but business is business, you know, and more so than usual in times like these."

"Now, I had better say good-bye. I have a few things to see to before Mr Lennard and I go down to Settle, but I've no doubt Auriole will find some way of entertaining you till you want to start for York."

At half-past two the motor was at the door to take Mr Parmenter and Lennard to Settle. That evening, in Glasgow, Mr Parmenter bought the Minnehaha, a steel turbine yacht of two thousand tons and twenty-five knots speed, from Mr Hendray Chinnock, a brother millionaire, who had laid her up in the Clyde in

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

consequence of the war the day before. He re-engaged her officers and crew at double wages to cover war risks, and started for New York within an hour of the completion of the purchase.

Lennard took the express to Bolton, with letters and a deed of gift from Lord Westerham, which gave him absolute ownership of the cannell mine with the twelve-hundred-foot vertical shaft at Farnworth.

That afternoon and evening Lady Margaret was more than entertained, for during the afternoon she learned the story of the approaching cataclysm, in comparison with which the war was of no more importance than a mere street riot; and that night Auriole, who had learned to work the great reflector almost as well as Lennard himself, showed her the ever-growing, ever-brightening shape of the Celestial Invader.

Chapter XXIV — Tom Bowcock–Pitman

LENNARD found himself standing outside the Trinity Street Station at Bolton a few minutes after six that evening.

Of course it was raining. Rain and fine-spun cotton thread are Bolton's specialities, the two chief pillars of her fame and prosperity, for without the somewhat distressing superabundance of the former she could not spin the latter fine enough. It would break in the process. Wherefore the good citizens of Bolton cheerfully put up with the dirt and the damp and the abnormal expenditure on umbrellas and mackintoshes in view of the fact that all the world must come to Bolton for its finest threads.

He stood for a moment looking about him curiously, if with no great admiration in his soul, for this was his first sight of what was to be the scene of the greatest and most momentous undertaking that human skill had ever dared to accomplish.

But the streets of Bolton on a wet night do not impress a stranger very favourably, so he had his flat steamer-trunk and hat-box put on to a cab and told the driver to take him to the Swan Hotel, in Deansgate, where he had a wash and an excellent dinner, to which he was in a condition to do full justice—for though nation may rage against nation, and worlds and systems be in peril, the healthy human digestion goes on making its demands all the time, and, under the circumstances, blessed is he who can worthily satisfy them.

Then, after a cup of coffee and a meditative cigar, he put on his mackintosh, sent for a cab, and drove to number 134 Manchester Road, which is one of a long row of small, two-storeyed brick houses, as clean as the all-pervading smoke and damp will permit them to be, but not exactly imposing in the eyes of a newcomer.

When the door opened in answer to his knock he saw by the light of a lamp hanging from the ceiling of the narrow little hall a small, slight, neatly-dressed figure, and a pair of dark, soft eyes looked up inquiringly at him as he said:

“Is Mr Bowcock at home?”

“Yes, he is,” replied a voice softly and very pleasantly tinged with the Lancashire accent. Then in a rather higher key the voice said:

“Tom, ye're wanted.”

As she turned away Lennard paid his cabman, and when he went back to the door he found the passage almost filled by a tall, square-shouldered shape of a man, and a voice to match it said:

“If ye're wantin' Tom Bowcock, measter, that's me. Will ye coom in? It's a bit wet i' t' street.”

Lennard went in, and as the door closed he said:

“Mr Bowcock, my name is Lennard—”

“I thou't it might be,” interrupted the other. “You'll be Lord Westerham's friend. I had a wire from his lordship's morning telling me t' expect you to–night or to–morrow morning. You'll excuse t' kitchen for a minute while t' missus makes up t' fire i' t' sittin'room.”

When Lennard got into the brightly-lighted kitchen, which is really the living-room of small Lancashire houses, he found himself in an atmosphere of modest cosy comfort which is seldom to be found outside the North and the Midland manufacturing districts. It is the other side of the hard, colourless life that is lived in mill and mine and forge, and it has a charm that is all its own.

There was the big range, filling half the space of one of the side-walls, its steel framings glittering like polished silver; the high plate-rack full of shining crockery at one end by the door, and the low, comfortable couch at the other; two lines of linen hung on cords stretched under the ceiling airing above the range, and the solid deal table in the middle of the room was covered with a snow-white cloth, on which a pretty tea-service was set out.

A brightly polished copper kettle singing on the range, and a daintily furnished cradle containing a sleeping baby, sweetly unconscious of wars or world-shaking catastrophes, completed a picture which, considering his errand, affected Gilbert Lennard very deeply.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Lizzie,” said the giant, “this is Mr Lennard as his lordship telegraphed about to-day. I daresay yo can give him a cup of tay and see to t' fire i' t' sittin'-room. I believe he's come to have a bit of talk wi' me about summat important from what his lordship said.”

“I'm pleased to see you, Mr Lennard,” said the pleasant voice, and as he shook hands he found himself looking into the dark, soft eyes of a regular “Lancashire witch,” for Lizzie Bowcock had left despair in the heart of many a Lancashire lad when she had put her little hand into big Tom's huge fist and told him that she'd have him for her man and no one else.

She left the room for a few minutes to see to the sitting-room fire, and Lennard turned to his host and said:

“Mr Bowcock, I have come to see you on a matter which will need a good deal of explanation. It will take quite a couple of hours to put the whole thing before you, so if you have any other engagements for to-night, no doubt you can take a day off to-morrow—in fact, as the pit will have to stop working—”

“T' 'pit stop working, Mr Lennard!” exclaimed the manager. “Yo' dunno say so. Is that his lordship's orders? Why, what's up?”

“I will explain everything, Mr Bowcock,” replied Lennard, “only, for her own sake, your wife must know nothing at present. The only question is, shall we have a talk to-night or not?”

“If it's anything that's bad,” replied the big miner with a deeper note in his voice, “I'd soonest hear it now. Mysteries don't get any t' better for keepin'. Besides, it'll give me time to sleep on't; and that's not a bad thing to do when yo've a big job to handle.”

Mrs Bowcock came back as he said this, and Lennard had his cup of tea, and they of course talked about the war. Naturally, the big miner and his pretty little wife were the most interested people in Lancashire just then, for to no one else in the County Palatine had been given the honour of hearing the story of the great battle off the Isle of Wight from the lips of one who had been through it on board the now famous Ithuriel.

But when Tom Bowcock came out of the little sitting-room three hours later, after Lennard had told him of the approaching doom of the world and had explained to him how his pit-shaft was to be used as a means of averting it—should that, after all, prove to be possible—his interest in the war had diminished very considerably, for he had already come to see clearly that this was undeniably a case of the whole being very much greater than the part.

Tom Bowcock was one of those men, by no means rare in the north, who work hard with hands and head at the same time. He was a pitman, but he was also a scientific miner, almost an engineer, and so Lennard had found very little difficulty in getting him to grasp the details of the tremendous problem in the working out of which he was destined to play no mean part.

“Well, Measter Lennard,” he said, slowly, as they rose from the little table across which a very large amount of business had been transacted. “It's a pretty big job this that yo've putten into our hands, and especially into mine; but I reckon they'll be about big enough for it; and yo've come to t' right place, too. I've never heard yet of a job as Lancashire took on to as hoo didn't get through wi'.

“Now, from what yo've been telling me, yo' must be a bit of an early riser sometimes, so if yo'll come here at seven or so i' t' mornin', I'll fit yo' out wi' pit clothes and we'll go down t' shaft and yo' can see for yoursel' what's wantin' doin'. Maybe that'll help yo' before yo' go and make yo'r arrangements wi' Dobson & Barlow and t'other folk as yo'll want to help yo'.”

“Thank you very much, Mr Bowcock,” replied Lennard. “You will find me here pretty close about seven. It's a big job, as you say, and there's not much time to be lost. Now, if Mrs Bowcock has not gone to bed, I'll go and say good-night.”

“She's no'on to bed yet,” said his host, “and yo'll take a drop o' summat warm before yo' start walkin' to t' hotel, for yo'll get no cab up this way to-neet. She'll just have been puttin' t' youngster to bed—”

Tom Bowcock stopped suddenly in his speech as a swift vision of that same “youngster” and his mother choking in the flames of the Fire-Mist passed across his senses. Lennard had convinced his intellect of the necessity of the task of repelling the Celestial Invader and of the possibility of success; but from that moment his heart was in the work.

It had stopped raining and the sky had cleared a little when they went to the door half an hour later. To the right, across the road, rose a tall gaunt shape like the skeleton of an elongated pyramid crowned with two big wheels. Lights were blazing round it, for the pit was working night and day getting the steam coal to the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

surface.

“Yonder's t' shaft,” said Tom, as they shook hands. “It doesn't look much of a place to save the world in, does it?”

Chapter XXV — Preparing For Action

THE next day was a busy one, not only for Lennard himself but for others whose help he had come to enlist in the working out of the Great Experiment.

He turned up at Bowcock's house on the stroke of seven, got into his pit clothes, and was dropped down the twelve-hundred-foot shaft in the cage. At the bottom of the shaft he found a solid floor sloping slightly eastward, with three drives running in fan shape from north-east and south-east. There were two others running north and north-west.

After ten minutes' very leisurely walk round the base of the shaft, during which he made one or two observations by linear and perpendicular compass, he said to Tom Bowcock:

"I think this will do exactly. The points are absolutely correct. If we had dug a hole for ourselves we couldn't have got one better than this. Yes, I think it will just do. Now, will you be good enough to take me to the surface as slowly as you can?"

"No, but yo're not meanin' that, Measter Lennard," laughed the manager. "Cause if I slowed t' engines down as much as I could you'd be the rest o' t' day getting to t' top."

"Yes, of course, I didn't mean that," said Lennard, "but just slowly—about a tenth of the speed that you dropped me into the bowels of the earth with. You see, I want to have a look at the sides."

"Yo' needna' trouble about that, Mr Lennard, I can give yo' drawin's of all that in t' office, but still yo' can see for yo'rself by the drawin's afterwards."

The cage ascended very slowly, and Lennard did see for himself. But when later on he studied the drawings that Tom Bowcock had made, he found that there wasn't as much as a stone missing. When he had got into his everyday clothes again, and had drunk a cup of tea brewed for him by Mrs Bowcock, he said as he shook hands with her husband:

"Well, as far as the pit is concerned, I have seen all that I want to see, and Lord Westerham was just as right about the pit as he was about the man who runs it. Now, I take it over from to-day. You will stop all mining work at once, close the entrances to the galleries and put down a bed of concrete ten feet thick, level. Then you will go by the drawings that I gave you last night.

"At present, the concreting of the walls in as perfect a circle as you can make them, not less than sixteen feet inner diameter, and building up the concrete core four feet thick from the floor to the top, is your first concern. You will tell your men that they will have double wages for day work and treble for night work, and whether they belong to the Volunteers or Yeomanry or Militia they will not be called to the Colours as long as they keep faith with us; if the experiment turns out all right, every man who sees it through shall have a bonus of a thousand pounds.

"But, remember, that this pit will be watched, and every man who signs on for the job will be watched, and the Lord have mercy on the man who plays us false, for he'll want it. You must make them remember that, Mr Bowcock. This is no childish game of war among nations; this means the saving or the losing of a world, and the man who plays traitor here is not only betraying his own country, but the whole human race, friends and enemies alike."

"I'll see to that, Mr Lennard. I know my chaps, and if there's one or two bad 'uns among 'em, they'll get paid and shifted in the ordinary way of business. But they're mostly a gradely lot of chaps. I've been picking 'em out for his lordship for t' last five yeers, and there isn't a Trade Unionist among 'em. We give good money here and we want good work and good faith, and if we don't get it, the man who doesn't give it has got to go and find another job.

"For wages like that they'd go on boring t' shaft right down through t' earth and out at t' other side, and risk finding Owd Nick and his people in t' middle. A' tell yo' for sure. Well, good-mornin', yo've a lot to do, and so have I. A'll get those galleries blocked and bricked up at once, and as soon as you can send t' concrete along, we'll start at t' floor."

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Lennard's first visit after breakfast was to the Manchester and County Bank in Deansgate, where he startled the manager, as far as a Lancashire business man can be startled, by opening an account for two hundred and fifty thousand pounds, and depositing the title-deeds of the whole of Lord Westerham's properties in and about Bolton.

When he had finished his business at the Bank, he went to the offices of Dobson & Barlow, the great iron-workers, whose four-hundred-and-ten-foot chimney towers into the murky sky so far above all other structures in Bolton that if you are approaching the town by road you see it and its crest of smoke long before you see Bolton itself.

The firm had, of course, been advised of his coming, and he had written a note over-night to say when he would call. The name of Ratcliffe Parmenter was a talisman to conjure with in all the business circles of the world, and so Lennard found Mr Barlow himself waiting for him in his private office.

He opened the matter in hand very quietly, so quietly indeed that the keen-sighted, hard-headed man who was listening to him found that for once in his life he was getting a little out of his depth.

Never before had he heard such a tremendous scheme so quietly and calmly set forth. Bessemer furnaces were to be erected at once all round the pit mouth, meanwhile the firm was to contract with a Liverpool firm for an unlimited supply of concrete cement of the finest quality procurable. The whole staff of Dobson & Barlow's works were to be engaged at an advance of twenty-five per cent. on their present wages for three months to carry out the work of converting the shaft of the Great Lever pit into the gigantic cannon which was to hurl into Space the projectile which might or might not save the human race from destruction.

Even granted Lennard's unimpeachable credentials, it was only natural that the great iron-master should exhibit a certain amount of incredulity, and, being one of the best types of the Lancashire business man, he said quite plainly:

"This is a pretty large order you've brought us, Mr Lennard, and although, of course, we know Mr Parmenter to be good enough for any amount of money, still, you see, contracts are contracts, and what are we to do with those we've got in hand now if you propose to buy up for three months?"

"Yes," replied Lennard, "I admit that that is an important point. The question is, what would it cost you to throw up or transfer to other firms the contracts that you now have in hand?"

There was a silence of two or three minutes between them, during which Mr Barlow made a rapid but comprehensive calculation and Lennard took out his chequebook and began to write a cheque.

"Counting everything," said Mr Barlow, leaning back in his chair and looking up at the ceiling, "the transfer of our existing contracts to other firms of equal standing, so as to satisfy our customers, and the loss to ourselves for the time that you want—well, honestly, I don't think we could do it under twenty-five thousand pounds. You understand, I am saying nothing about the scientific aspect of the matter, because I don't understand it, but that's the business side of it; and that's what it's going to cost you before we begin."

Lennard filled in the cheque and signed it. He passed it across the table to Mr Barlow, and said:

"I think that is a very reasonable figure. This will cover it and leave something over to go on with."

Mr Barlow took the cheque and looked at it, and then at the calm face of the quiet young man who was sitting opposite him.

The cheque was for fifty thousand pounds. While he was looking at it, Lennard took the bank receipt for a quarter of a million deposit from his pocket and gave it to him, saying:

"You will see from this that money is really no object. As you know, Mr Parmenter has millions, more I suppose than he could calculate himself, and he is ready to spend every penny of them. You will take that just as earnest money."

"That's quite good enough for us, Mr Lennard," replied Mr Barlow, handing the bank receipt back. "The contracts shall be transferred as soon as we can make arrangements, and the work shall begin at once. You can leave everything else to us—brickwork, building, cement and all the rest of it—and we'll guarantee that your cannon shall be ready to fire off in three months from now."

"And the projectile, Mr Barlow, are you prepared to undertake that also?" asked Lennard.

"Yes, we will make the projectile according to your specification, but you will, of course, supply the bursting charge and the charge of this new powder of yours which is to send it into Space. You see, we can't do that; you'll have to get a Government permit to have such an enormous amount of explosives in one place,

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

so I'll have to leave that to you."

"I think I shall be able to arrange that, Mr Barlow," replied Lennard, as he got up from his seat and held his hand out across the table. "As long as you are willing to take on the engineering part of the business, I'll see to the rest. Now, I know that your time is quite as valuable as mine is, and I've got to get back to London this afternoon. To-morrow morning I have to go through a sort of cross-examination before the Cabinet—not that they matter much in the sort of crisis that we've got to meet.

"Still, of course, we have to have the official sanction of the Government, even if it is a question of saving the world from destruction, but there won't be much difficulty about that, I think; and at any rate you'll be working on freehold property, and not even the Cabinet can stop that sort of work for the present. As far as everything connected with the mine is concerned, I hope you will be able to work with Mr Bowcock, who seems a very good sort of fellow."

"If we can't work with Tom Bowcock," replied Mr Barlow, "we can't work with anyone on earth, and that's all there is about it. He's a big man, but he's good stuff all through. Lord Westerham didn't make any bad choice when he made him manager. And you won't dine with me to-night?"

"I am sorry, but I must be back to London to-night. I have to catch the 12-15 and have an interview in Downing Street at seven, and when I've got through that, I don't think there will be any difficulty about the explosives."

"According to all accounts, you'll be lucky if you find Downing Street as it used to be," said Mr Barlow. "By the papers this morning it looks as if London was going to have a pretty bad time of it, what with these airships and submarines that sink and destroy everything in sight. Now that they've got away with the fleet, it seems to me that it's only a sort of walk over for them."

"Yes, I'm afraid it will have to be something like that for the next month or so," replied Lennard, thinking of a telegram which he had in his pocket. "But the victory is not all on one side yet. Of course, you will understand that I am not in a position to give secrets away, but as regards our own bargain, I am at liberty to tell you that while you are building this cannon of ours there will probably be some developments in the war which will be, I think, as unexpected as they will be startling.

"In fact, sir," he continued, rising from his seat and holding out his hand across the table, "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet but when the time comes, I think you will find that those who believe that they are conquering England now will be here in Bolton faced by a foe against which their finest artillery will be as useless as an air-gun against an elephant.

"All I ask you to remember now is that at eleven p.m. on the twelfth of May, the leaders of the nations who are fighting against England now will be standing around me in the quarry on the Belmont Road, waiting for the firing of the shot which I hope will save the world. If it does not save it, they will be welcome to all that is left of the world in an hour after that."

"You are talking like a man who believes what he says, Mr Lennard," replied Mr Barlow, "and, strange and all as it seems, I am beginning to believe with you. There never was a business like this given into human hands before, and, for the sake of humanity, I hope that you will be successful. All that we can do shall be done well and honestly. That you can depend on, and for the rest, we shall depend on you and your science. The trust that you have put in our hands to-day is a great honour to us, and we shall do our best to deserve it. Good-morning, sir."

Chapter XXVI — The First Bombardment Of London

WHEN Lennard got out of the train at St Pancras that evening, he found such a sight as until a day or so ago no Londoner had ever dreamed of. But terrible as the happenings were, they were not quite terrible enough to stop the issue of the evening newspapers.

As the train slowed down along the platform, boys were running along it yelling:

“Bombardment of London from the air—dome of St Paul's smashed by a shell—Guildhall, Mansion House, and Bank of England in ruins—orful scenes in the streets. Paper, Sir?”

He got out of the carriage and grabbed the first newspaper that was thrust into his hand, gave the boy sixpence for it, and hurried away towards the entrance. He found a few cab-men outside the station; he hailed one of the drivers, got in, and said:

“Downing Street—quick. There's a sovereign; there'll be another for you when I get there.”

“It's a mighty risky job, guv'nor, these times, driving a keb through London streets. Still, one's got to live, I suppose. 'Old up there—my Gawd, that's another of those bombs! You just got out of there in time, sir.”

Even as though it had been timed, as it might well have been, a torpedo dropped from a ghostly shape drifting slowly across the grey November clouds. Then there came a terrific shock. Every pane in the vast roof and in the St Pancras Hotel shivered to the dust. The engine which had drawn Lennard's train blew up like one huge shell, and the carriages behind it fell into splinters.

If that shell had only dropped three minutes sooner the end of the World war of 1910 would have been very different to what it was; for, as Lennard learned afterwards, of all the porters, officials and passengers, who had the misfortune to be in the great station at that moment, only half a hundred cripples, maimed for life, escaped.

“I wonder whether that was meant for me,” said Lennard as the frightened horse sprang away at a half gallop. “If that's the case John Castellan knows rather more than he ought to do, and, good Lord, if he knows that, he must know where Auriole is, and what's to stop him taking one of those infernal things of his up to Whernside, wrecking the house and the observatory, and taking her off with him to the uttermost ends of the earth if he likes?”

“There must be something in it or that shell would not have dropped just after I got outside the station. They watched the train come in, and they knew I was in it—they must have known.

“What a ghastly catastrophe it would be if they got on to that scheme of ours at the pit. Fancy one of those aerial torpedoes of his dropping down the bore of the cannon a few minutes before the right time! It would mean everything lost, and nothing gained, not even for him.

“Ah, good man Erskine,” he went on, as he opened the paper, and read that every cruiser, battleship and transport that had forced the entrance to the Thames and Medway had been sunk. “That will be a bit of a check for them, anyhow. Yes, yes, that's very good. Garrison Fort, Chatham and Tilbury, of course, destroyed from the air, but not a ship nor a man left to go and take possession of them.”

While he was reading his paper, and muttering thus to himself, the cab was tearing at the horse's best speed down Gray's Inn Road. It took a sudden swing to the right into Holborn, ran along New Oxford Street, and turned down Charing Cross Road, the horse going at a full gallop the whole time.

Happily it was a good horse, or the fate of the world might have been different. There was no rule of the road now, and no rules against furious driving. London was panic-stricken, as it might well be. As far as Lennard could judge the aerial torpedoes were being dropped mostly in the neighbourhood of Regent Street and Piccadilly, and about Grosvenor Place and Park Lane. He half expected to find Parliament Street and Westminster in ruins, but for some mysterious reason they had been spared.

The great City was blazing in twenty places, and scarcely a minute passed without the crash of an explosion and the roar of flame that followed it, but a magic circle seemed to have been drawn round Westminster. There nothing was touched, and yet the wharves on the other side of the river, and the great

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

manufactories behind them, were blazing and vomiting clouds of flame and smoke towards the clouds as though the earth had been split open beneath them and the internal fires themselves let loose.

When the cabman pulled up his sweating and panting horse at the door of Number 2 Downing Street, Lennard got out and said to the cabman:

“You did that very well, considering the general state of things. I don't know whether you'll live to enjoy it or not, but there's a five-pound note for you, and if you'll take my advice you will get your wife and family, if you have one, into that cab, and drive right out into the country. It strikes me London's going to be a very good place to stop away from for the next two or three days.”

“Thank 'ee, sir,” said the cabman, as he gathered up the five-pound note and tucked it down inside his collar. “I don't know who you are, but it's very kind of you; and as you seem to know something, I'll do as you say. What with these devil-ships a-flyin' about the skies, and dropping thunderbolts on us from the clouds, and furreners a-comin' up the Thames as I've heard, London ain't 'ealthy enough for me, nor the missus and the kids, and thanks for your kindness, sir, we're movin' to-night, keb an' all.

“Oh, my Gawd, there's another! 'Otel Cecil and Savoy this time, if I've got my bearin's right. Well, there's one thing, t'ain't on'y the pore what's sufferin' this time; there'll be a lot of rich people dead afore mornin'. A pal of mine told me just now that Park Lane was burnin' from end t' end. Good-evenin', sir, and thank you.”

As the cab drove away Lennard stood for a few moments on the pavement, watching two columns of flame soaring up from the side of the Strand. Perhaps the most dreadful effects produced by the aerial torpedoes were those which resulted from the breaking of the gas mains and the destruction of the electric conduits. Save for the bale-fires of ruin and destruction, half London was in darkness. Miles of streets under which the gas mains were laid blew up with almost volcanic force. The electric mains were severed, and all the contents dislocated, and if ever London deserved the name which James Thompson gave it when he called it “The City of Dreadful Night,” it deserved it on that evening of the 17th of November 1909.

Lennard was received in the Prime Minister's room by Mr Chamberlain, Lord Whittinghame, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Lord Milner and General Lord Kitchener.

It was perhaps the strangest meeting that had ever taken place in that room, not even saving the historic meeting of 1886. There was very little talking. Even in the House of Commons the flood of talk had ebbed away in such a fashion that it made it possible for the nation's business to be got through at a wonderful speed. The fact of the matter was that the guns were talking—talking within earshot of Palace Yard itself, and so men had come to choose their words and make them few.

After the introductions had been made the man who really held the fate of the world in his hands took a long envelope out of the breast-pocket of his coat, and proceeded to explain, somewhat as a schoolmaster might explain to his class, the doom which would overwhelm humanity on the 12th May 1910.

He was listened to in absolute silence, because his hearers were men who had good reason for believing that silence is often worth a good deal more than speech. When he had finished the rustle of his papers as he handed them to the Prime Minister was distinctly audible in the solemn silence. The Prime Minister folded them up, and said:

“There is no necessity for us to go into the figures again. I think we are prepared to take them on the strength of your reputation, Mr Lennard.

“We have asked you here to-night as an adviser, as a man who in more ways than one sees farther than we can. Now, what is your advice? You are aware, I presume, that the German Emperor, the Czar of Russia and the French President landed at Dover this morning, and have issued an ultimatum from Canterbury, calling upon us to surrender London, and discuss terms of peace in the interests of humanity. Now, you occupy a unique point of view. You have told us in your letters that unless a miracle happens the human race will not survive midnight of the 12th of May next. We believe that you are right, and now, perhaps, you will be good enough to let us have your opinions as to what should be done in the immediate present.”

“My opinion is, sir, that for at least forty days you must fight, no matter how great the odds may appear to be. Every ditch and hedgerow, every road and lane, every hill and copse must be defended. If London falls, England falls, and with it the Empire.”

“But how are we to do it?” exclaimed Lord Kitchener. “With these infernal airships flying about above it, and dropping young earthquakes from the clouds? There are no braver men on earth than ours, but it isn't

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

human nature to keep steady under that kind of punishment. Look what they've done already in London! What is there to prevent them, for instance, from dropping a shell through the roof of this house, and blowing the lot of us to eternity in little pieces? It's not the slightest use trying to shoot back at them. You remember what happened to poor Beresford and the rest of his fleet in Dover Harbour. If you can't hit back, you can't fight.”

“That certainly appears to be perfectly reasonable,” said Sir Henry Campbell–Bannerman. “Personally, I must confess, although with the greatest reluctance, that considering the enormous advantage possessed by the enemy in this combination of submarine and flying machine, we have no other alternative but to surrender at discretion. It is a pitiful thing to say I am well aware, but we are fighting forces which would never have been called into being in any other war. I agree with Lord Kitchener that you cannot fight an enemy if you cannot hit him back. I am afraid there is no other alternative.”

“No,” added Lord Whittinghame, “I am afraid there is not. By to–morrow morning there will be three millions of men on British soil, and we haven't a million to put against them—to say nothing of these horrible airships: but, Mr Lennard, if the world is only going to live about six months or so, what is the use of conquering the British Empire? Surely there must be another alternative.”

“Yes, my lord,” replied Lennard, “there is another. I've no doubt your lordship has one of your motors within call. Let us go down to Canterbury, yourself, Lord Kitchener and myself, and I will see if I can't convince the German Emperor that in trying to conquer Britain he is only stabbing the waters. If I only had him at Whernside, I would convince him in five minutes.”

“Then we'd better get hold of him and take him there,” said Lord Kitchener. “But I'm ready for the Canterbury journey.”

“And so am I,” said Lord Whittinghame, “and the sooner we're off the better. I've got a new Napier here that's good for seventy–five miles an hour, so we'd better be off.”

Chapter XXVII — Lennard's Ultimatum

WITHIN five minutes they were seated in the big Napier, with ninety horse-power under them, and a possibility of eighty miles an hour before them. A white flag was fastened to a little flag-staff on the left-hand side. They put on their goggles and overcoats and took Westminster Bridge, as it seemed, in a leap. Rochester was reached in twenty-five minutes, but at the southern side of Rochester Bridge they were held up by German sentries.

“Not a pleasant sort of thing on English soil,” growled Lord Kitchener as Lord Whittinghame stopped the motor.

“Is the German Emperor here yet?” asked Lennard in German.

“No, Herr, he is at Canterbury,” replied the sentry. “Would you like to see the officer?”

“Yes,” said Lennard, “as soon as possible. These gentlemen are Lord Whittinghame and Lord Kitchener, and they wish to meet the Emperor as soon as possible.”

The sentry saluted and retired, and presently a captain of Uhlans came clattering across the street, clicked his heels together, touched the side of his helmet, and said:

“At your service, gentlemen. What can I do for you?”

“We wish to get into communication with the German Emperor as soon as possible,” replied Lord Whittinghame. “Is the telegraph still working from here to Canterbury?”

“It is,” replied the German officer; “if you will come with me to the office you shall be put into communication with His Majesty at once; but it will be necessary for me to hear what you say.”

“We’re only going to try and make peace,” said Lord Kitchener, “so you might as well hear all we’ve got to say. Those infernal airships of yours have beaten us. Will you get in? We’ll run you round to the office.”

“I thank you,” replied the captain of the Uhlans, “but it will be better if I walk on and have the line cleared. I will meet you at the office. Adieu.”

He stiffened up, clicked his heels again, saluted, and the next moment he had thrown his right leg across the horse which the orderly had brought up for him.

“Not bad men, those Uhlans,” said Lord Kitchener, as the car moved slowly towards the telegraph station. “Take a lot of beating in the field, I should say, if it once came to cold steel.”

They halted at the post-office, and the captain of Uhlans, who was in charge of all the telegraph lines of the south-east, was requested to send the following telegram, which was signed by Lord Whittinghame and Lord Kitchener.

“Acting as deputation from British Government we desire interview with your Majesty at Canterbury, with view to putting end to present bloodshed, if possible, also other important news to communicate.”

This telegram was despatched to the Kaiser at the County Hotel, Canterbury, and while they were waiting for the reply a message came in from Whitstable addressed to “Lennard, oyster merchant, Rochester,” which was in the following terms:

“Oyster catch promises well. Advised large purchase to-morrow.—ROBINSON & SMITH.”

“That seems rather a frivolous sort of thing to send one nowadays,” said Lennard, dropping the paper to the floor after reading the telegram aloud. “I have some interest in the beds at Whitstable, and my agents, who don’t seem to know that there’s a war going on, want me to invest. I think it’s hardly good enough, when you don’t know whether you’ll be in little pieces within the next ten minutes.”

“I don’t see why you shouldn’t take on a contract for supplying our friends the enemy,” laughed Lord Kitchener, as the twinkle of an eye passed between them, while the captain of Uhlans’ back was turned for an instant.

“I’m afraid they would be confiscated before I could do that,” said Lennard. “I shan’t bother about answering it. We have rather more serious things than oysters to think about just now.”

The sounder clicked, and the German telegraphist, who had taken the place of the English one, tapped out a

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

message, which he handed to the captain of Uhlans.

“Gentlemen, His Imperial Majesty will be glad to receive you at the County Hotel, Canterbury. I will give you a small flag which shall secure you from all molestation.”

He handed the paper to Lord Whittinghame as he spoke. The Imperial message read:

“Happy to meet deputation. Please carry German flag, which will secure you from molestation en route. I am wiring orders for suspension of hostilities till dawn to-morrow. I hope we may make satisfactory arrangements.—WILHELM.”

“That is quite satisfactory,” said Lord Whittinghame to the captain of Uhlans. “We shall be much obliged to you for the flag, and you will perhaps telegraph down the road saying that we are not to be stopped. I can assure you that the matter is one of the utmost urgency.”

“Certainly, my lord,” replied the captain. “His Majesty's word is given. That is enough for us.”

Ten minutes later the big Napier, flying the German flag on the left-hand side, was spinning away through Chatham, and down the straight road to Canterbury. They slowed up going through Sittingbourne and Faversham, which were already in the hands of the Allied forces, thanks to John Castellan's precautions in blocking all railroads to Dover, and the German flag was saluted by the garrisons, much to Lord Kitchener's quietly-expressed displeasure, but he knew they were playing for a big stake, and so he just touched his cap, as they swung through the narrow streets, and said what he had to say under his breath.

Within forty minutes the car pulled up opposite the County Hotel, Canterbury. The ancient city was no longer English, save as regarded its architecture. Everywhere, the clatter of German hoofs sounded on the streets, and the clink and clank of German spurs and swords sounded on the pavements. The French and Austrians were taking the westward routes by Ashford and Tonbridge in the enveloping movement on London. The War Lord of Germany had selected the direct route for himself.

As the motor stopped panting and throbbing in front of the hotel entrance, a big man in the uniform of the Imperial Guard came out, saluted, and said:

“Lord Whittinghame and Lord Kitchener, with Mr Lennard, I presume?”

“Yes, that's so,” said Lord Kitchener, opening the side door and getting out. “Colonel von Folkerstrom, I believe. I think we've met before. You were His Majesty's attaché with us during the Boer War, I think. This is Lord Whittinghame, and this is Mr Lennard. Is His Majesty within?”

“His Majesty awaits you, gentlemen,” replied the Colonel, formally. And then as he shook hands with Lord Kitchener he added, “I am sorry, sir, that we should meet as enemies on English soil.”

“Just the fortune of war and those damned airships of yours, Colonel,” laughed Lord Kitchener in reply. “If we'd had them this meeting might have been in Berlin or Potsdam. Can't fight against those things, you know. We're only human.”

“But you English are just a little more, I think,” said the Colonel to himself. “Gottes willen! What would my August Master be thinking now if this was in Berlin instead of Canterbury, and here are these Englishmen taking it as quietly as though an invasion of England happened every day.” And when he had said this to himself he continued aloud:

“My lords and Mr Lennard, if you will follow me I will conduct you into His Majesty's presence.”

They followed the Colonel upstairs to the first floor. Two sentries in the uniform of the 1st Regiment of Cuirassiers were guarding the door: their bayoneted rifles came up to the present, the Colonel answered the salute, and they dropped to attention. The Colonel knocked at the door and a harsh voice replied:

“Herein.”

The door swung open and Lennard found himself for the first but not the last time in the presence of the War Lord of Germany.

“Good-evening, gentlemen,” said the Kaiser. “You will understand me when I say I am both glad and sorry to see you.”

“Your Majesty,” replied Lord Whittinghame, in a curiously serious tone, “the time for human joy and sorrow is so fast expiring that almost everything has ceased to matter, even the invasion of England.”

The Kaiser's brows lifted, and he stared in frank astonishment at the man who could say such apparently ridiculous words so seriously. If he had not known that he was talking to the late Prime Minister, and the present leader of the Unionist party in the House of Lords, he would have thought him mad.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Those are very strange words, my lord,” he replied. “You will pardon me if I confess that I can hardly grasp their meaning.”

“If your Majesty has an hour to spare,” said Lord Whittinghame, “Mr Lennard will make everything perfectly plain. But what he has to say, and what he can prove, must be for your Majesty's ears alone.”

“Is it so important as that?” laughed the Kaiser.

“It is so important, sire,” said Lord Kitchener, “that the fate of the whole world hangs upon what you may say or do within the next hour. So far, you have beaten us, because you have been able to bring into action engines of warfare against which we have been unable to defend ourselves. But now, there is another enemy in the field against which we possess the only means of defence. That is what we have come to explain to your Majesty.”

“Another enemy!” exclaimed the Kaiser, “but how can that be. There are no earthly powers left sufficiently strong that we would be powerless against them.”

“This is not an earthly enemy, your Majesty,” replied Lennard, speaking for the first time since he had entered the room. “It is an invader from Space. To put it quite plainly, the terms which we have come to offer your Majesty are: Cessation of hostilities for six months, withdrawal of all troops from British soil, universal disarmament, and a pledge to be entered into by all the Powers of Europe and the United States of America that after the 12th of May next there shall be no more war. Your fleets have been destroyed as well as ours, your armies are here, but they cannot get away, and so we are going to ask you to surrender.”

“Surrender!” echoed the Kaiser, “surrender, when your country lies open and defenceless before us? No, no. Lord Whittinghame and Lord Kitchener I know, but who are you, sir—a civilian and an unknown man, that you should dictate peace to me and my Allies?”

“Only a man, your Majesty,” said Lord Whittinghame, “who has convinced the British Cabinet Council that he holds the fate of the world in the hollow of his hands. Are you prepared to be convinced?”

“Of what?” replied the Kaiser, coldly.

“That there will be no world left to conquer after midnight on the 12th of May next, or to put it otherwise, that unless our terms are accepted, and Mr Lennard carries out his work, there will be neither victors nor vanquished left on earth.”

“Gentlemen,” replied the Kaiser, “you will pardon me when I say that I am surprised beyond measure that you should have come to me with a schoolboy's tale like that. The eternal order of things cannot be interrupted in such a ridiculous fashion. Again, I trust you will forgive me when I express my regret that you should have wasted so much of your own time and mine on an errand which should surely have appeared to you fruitless from the first.

“Whoever or whatever this gentleman may be,” he continued with a wave of his hand towards Lennard, “I neither know nor care; but that yourself and Lord Kitchener should have been deceived so grossly, I must confess passes the limits of my imagination. Frankly, I do not believe in the possibility of such proofs as you allude to. As regards peace, I propose to discuss terms with King Edward—in Windsor—not before, nor with anyone else. Gentlemen, I have other matters to attend to, and I have the honour to bid you good-evening.”

“And that is your Majesty's last word?” said Lord Kitchener. “You mean a fight to the finish?”

“Yes, my lord,” replied the Kaiser, “whether the world finishes with the fight or not.”

“Very well then,” said Lennard, taking an envelope from the breast-pocket of his coat, and putting it down on the table before the Emperor. “If your Majesty has not time to look through those papers, you will perhaps send them to Berlin and take your own astronomer's report upon them. Meanwhile, you will remember that our terms are: Unconditional surrender of the forces invading the British Islands or the destruction of the world. Good-night.”

Chapter XXVIII — Concerning Astronomy And Oysters

IN spite of the bold front that he had assumed during the interview, the strain, not exactly of superstition but rather of supernaturalism which runs so strongly in the Kaiser's family, made it impossible for him to treat such a tremendous threat as the destruction of the world as an alternative to universal peace by any means as lightly as he appeared to his visitors to do; and when the audience was over he picked up the envelope which Lennard had left upon the table, beckoned Count von Moltke into his room behind, locked the door, and said:

“Now, Count, what is your opinion of this? At first sight it looks ridiculous; but whoever this Lennard may be, it seems hardly likely that two men like Lord Whittinghame and Lord Kitchener, two of the coolest-headed and best-balanced men on earth, should take the trouble to come down here as a deputation from the British Cabinet only to make themselves ridiculous. Suppose we have a look at these papers? Everything is in train for the advance. I daresay you and I understand enough of mathematics between us to find out if there is anything serious in them, and if so, they shall go to Herr Döllinger at once.”

“I think it would be at least worth while to look through them, your Majesty,” replied the Count. “Like yourself, I find it rather difficult to believe that this mysterious Mr Lennard, whoever he is, has been able to impose upon the whole British Cabinet, to say nothing of Lord Kitchener, who is about the best engineer and mathematician in the British Army.”

So the Count and the Kaiser sat down, and went through the elaborate and yet beautifully clear calculations and diagrams, page by page, each making notes as he went on. At the end of an hour the Kaiser looked over his own notes, and said to von Moltke:

“Well, what is your opinion, Count?”

“I am not an astronomer, your Majesty, but these calculations certainly appear to me to be correct as far as they go—that is, granted always that the premisses from which Mr Lennard starts are correct. But certainly I think that your Majesty will be wise in sending them as soon as possible to Herr Döllinger.”

“That is exactly the conclusion that I have come to myself,” replied the Kaiser. “I will write a note to Herr Döllinger, and one of the airships must take it across to Potsdam. We can't afford to run any risks of that infernal submarine ram or whatever she is. I would almost give an Army corps for that ship. There's no doubt she's lost us three fleets, a score of transports, and twenty thousand men in the last three days, and she's just as much a mystery as ever. It's the most extraordinary position a conquering army was ever put into before.”

The Kaiser was perfectly right. There could be no doubt that up to the present the invading forces had been victorious, thanks of course mainly to the irresistible advantage of the airships, but also in no small degree to the hopeless unpreparedness of the British home armies to meet an invasion, which both military and naval experts had simply refused to believe possible.

The seizure of the line from Dover to Chatham had been accomplished in a single night. A dozen airships patrolled the air ahead of the advancing German forces, which of course far outnumbered the weak and hastily-collected British forces which could be brought against them, and which, attacked at once by land and from the air, never really had a chance.

It was the most perfectly conducted invasion ever planned. The construction trains which went in advance on both lines carried sections of metals of English gauge, already fastened to sleepers, and ready to lay down. Every little bridge and culvert had been known and was provided for. Not a bolt nor a fishplate had been forgotten, and moreover John Castellan's operations from the air had reduced the destruction to a minimum, and the consequence was that twelve hours after the Kaiser had landed at Dover he found himself in his headquarters at Canterbury, whence the British garrison had been forced to retire after heavy fighting along the lines of wooded hills behind Maidstone.

It was the old, old story, the story of every war that England had gone into and “muddled through” somehow; but with two differences. Her soldiers had never had to fight an enemy in the skies before, and—there was no time now to straighten out the muddle, even if every able-bodied man in the United

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Kingdom had been trained soldiers, as the invaders were.

But there was another element in the situation. Incredible as it might seem to those ignorant of the tremendous forces brought into play, the home fleets of Europe had been destroyed, practically to a ship, within three days and nights. The narrow seas were deserted. On the morning of the seventeenth, four transports attempting to cross from Hamburg to Ramsgate, carrying a force of men, horses and light artillery, which was intended to operate as a flying column along the northern shores of Kent, had been rammed and sent to the bottom within fifteen minutes half way between land and land, and not a man nor an animal had escaped.

There was no news from the expeditions which had been sent against Hull and Newcastle—all the cables had been cut, save the transatlantic lines, the cutting of which the United States had already declared they would consider as an unfriendly act on the part of the Allies, and the British cable from Gibraltar to the Lizard which connected with Palermo and Rome, and so formed the link of communication between Britain and the Mediterranean.

The British Mediterranean Fleet was coming home, so were the West Indian and North American squadrons, while the squadron in the China seas was also ordered home, via the Suez Canal, to form a conjunction with our Italian Allies. Of course, these ships would in due time be dealt with by the aerial submarines, but meanwhile commerce with Europe had become impossible. Imports had stopped at most of the great ports through sheer terror of this demon of the sea, which appeared to be here, there and everywhere at the same time; and with all these powerful squadrons converging upon the shores of Britain the problem of feeding and generally keeping fit for war some three millions of men and over half a million horses would soon begin to look distinctly serious.

Castellan's vessels had hunted in vain for this solitary vessel, which single-handed, marvellous as it seemed, kept the narrow waters clear of invaders. The truth of this matter, however, was very simple. The *Ithuriel* was nearly twice as fast in the water as the *Flying Fishes*, and she carried guns with an effective range of five miles, whereas they only carried torpedoes.

For instance, during the battle of Sheerness, in which the remaining units of the North Sea Squadron had, with the *Ithuriel's* aid, attacked and destroyed every German and Russian battleship and transport, Erskine's craft had done terrible execution without so much as being seen until, when the last of the German Coast Defence ships had gone down with all hands in the Great Nore, off the Nore lighthouse, whence she was shelling Garrison Fort, the *Ithuriel* had risen above the water for a few moments, and Denis Castellan had taken a cockshot with the three forward guns at a couple of *Flying Fishes* that were circling over the town and fort and river mouth.

The shells had time-fuses, and they were timed to the tenth of a second. They burst simultaneously over the airships. Then came a rending of the atmosphere, and descending streams of fire, which burst with a rapid succession of sharp reports as they touched the airships. Then came another blaze of light which seemed to darken the wintry sun for a moment, and then another quaking of the air, after which what was left of the two *Flying Fishes* fell in little fragments into the water, splashing here and there as though they had been shingle ballast thrown out of a balloon.

True, Garrison Fort had been blown up by the aerial torpedoes, and the same fate was befalling the great forts at Tilbury, but their gallant defenders did not die in vain, and, although the remainder of the aerial squadron were able to go on and do their work of destruction on London, whither the *Ithuriel* could not follow them, the wrecks of six battleships, a dozen destroyers and ten transports strewed the approaches to the Thames and the Medway, while nearly thirty thousand soldiers and sailors would never salute the flag of Czar or Kaiser again.

"In all the history of war no such loss of men, ships and material had ever taken place within the short space of three days and a few hours. Four great fleets and nearly a hundred thousand men had been wiped out of existence since the assault on Southern England had begun, and even now, despite the airships, had the millions of Britain's able-bodied men, who were grinding their teeth and clenching their fists in impotent fury, been trained just to shoot and march, it would have been possible to take the invaders between overwhelming masses of men—who would hold their lives as nothing in comparison with their country's honour—and the now impassable sea, and drive them back into it. But although men and youths went in their

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

tens of thousands to the recruiting stations and demanded to be enlisted, it was no use. Soldiers are not made in a day or a week, and the invaders of England had been making them for forty years.

“While the Kaiser and Count von Moltke were going through Lennard's papers, and coming to the decision to send them to Potsdam, Lord Whittinghame's motor, instead of returning to Chatham, was running up to Whitstable to answer the telegram which Lennard had received at Rochester. The German flag cleared them out of Canterbury. It was already known that they had been received by the Kaiser, and therefore their persons were sacred. In consequence of the loss of the squadron attacking the Thames and Medway, and the destruction of the Ramsgate flotilla, the country was not occupied by the enemy north of the great main road through Canterbury and Faversham, and that was just why the Ithuriel was lying snugly in the mouth of the East Swale River, about three miles from the little town, with a shabby-looking lighter beside her, from which she was taking in an extra complement of her own shells and material for making Lennard's explosive, as well as a full load of fuel for her engines. They pulled up at the door of the Bear and Key Hotel, and as the motor came to a standstill a man dressed in the costume of an ordinary worker on the oyster-beds came up, touched his sou'wester, and said:

“Mr Lennard's car, gentlemen?”

“Yes, I'm here,” said Lennard, shortly; “we've just left the Emperor at Canterbury. How about those oysters? I should think you ought to do well with them in Canterbury. Got plenty?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the man. “If you will come down to the wharf I will be able to show you a shipment that I can send along to—night if the train comes from Canterbury.”

“I think we might as well have a drop of something hot first, it's rather cold riding.”

The others nodded, and they went into the hotel without removing their caps or goggles. They asked a waiter to show them into a private room, as they had some business to do, and when four glasses of hot whisky and water had been put on the table, Lennard locked the door and said:

“My lords, allow me to have the pleasure of introducing to you Lieutenant Denis Castellan of His Majesty's cruiser Ithuriel.”

Lord Whittinghame's and Lord Kitchener's hands went out together, and the former said:

“Delighted to meet you, Mr Castellan. You and Captain Erskine have done magnificently for us in spite of all our troubles. In fact, I don't know what we should have done without you and this wonderful craft of yours.”

“With all due deference to the Naval Council,” said 'K. of K.,' rather bluntly, “it's a pity they didn't put down a dozen of her. But what about these oysters that you telegraphed to Mr Lennard about?”

“There is only one oyster in question at present, my lord,” said Denis, with an entirely Irish smile, “but it's rather a big one. It's the German Emperor's yacht, the Hohenzollern. She managed to run across, and get into Ramsgate, while we were up here in the Thames—that's the worst of there being only one of us, as we can only attend to one piece of business at a time. Now, she's lying there waiting the Kaiser's orders, in case he wants to take a trip across, and it seems to me that she'd be worth the watching for a day or two—she'd be a big prize, you know, gentlemen, especially if we could catch her with the War Lord of Germany on board her. I don't think myself that His Majesty would have any great taste for a trip to the bottom of the North Sea, just when he thinks he's beginning the conquest of England so nicely, and, by the Powers, we'd send him there if he got into one of his awkward tempers with us.”

Lord Kitchener, who was in England acting as Chief-of-the-Staff to the Duke of Connaught, and general adviser to the Council of National Defence, took Lord Whittinghame to the other end of the room, and said a few words to him in a low tone, and he came back and said:

“It is certainly worth trying, even if you can only catch the ship; but we don't think you'll catch the Kaiser. The fact is, you seem to have established such a holy terror in these waters that I don't think he would trust his Imperial person between here and Germany. If he did go across, he'd probably go in an airship. But if you can bring the Hohenzollern up to Tilbury—of course, under the German flag—I think we shall be able to make good use of her. If she won't come, sink her.”

“Very good, my lords,” said Denis, saluting. “If she's not coming up the Thames to-morrow night with the Ithuriel under her stern, ye'll know that she's on the bottom in pieces somewhere. And now,” he continued, taking a long envelope from an inner pocket, “here is the full report of our doings since the war began, with

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

return of ships sunk, crippled and escaped; number of men landed, and so on, according to instructions. We will report again to-morrow night, I hope, with the Hohenzollern.”

They shook hands and wished him good-night and food luck, and in half an hour the Ithuriel was running half-dsubmerged eastward along the coast, and the motor was on its way to Faversham by the northern road, as there were certain reasons why it should not go back through Canterbury.

Chapter XXIX — The Lion Wakes

AT daybreak on the nineteenth, to the utter amazement of everyone who was not “in the know,” the Imperial yacht, Hohenzollern, was found off Tilbury, flying the Imperial German Ensign and the Naval flag, as well as a long string of signals ordering the aerial bombardment of London to cease, and all the Flying Fishes to return at once to Canterbury.

The apparent miracle had been accomplished in an absurdly easy fashion. About nine a.m. on the eighteenth a German orderly went into the post-office at Dover and handed in an official telegram signed “Von Roon,” ordering the Hohenzollern to come round at once to Dover, as she was considered too open to attack there.

There was something so beautifully natural and simple in the whole proceeding that, although there were about a dozen German officers and non-commissioned officers in the room at the time that the orderly came and went without suspicion, the telegram was taken by the clerk, read and initialled by the Censor, and passed.

A few minutes later the orderly, marching in perfectly correct German fashion and carrying a large yellow envelope, walked out through the town northwards and climbed the hill to the eastward of the ruined castle. The envelope with its official seal took him past the sentries without question, but, instead of delivering it, he turned down a bypath to Fan Bay, under the South Foreland, gained the beach, took off his uniform in a secluded spot under the cliffs, and went for a swim. The uniform was never reclaimed, for when he reached the submerged Ithuriel Denis Castellan had a rub down and put his own on.

The captain of the Hohenzollern was only too glad to obey the order, for he also thought that it would be better protected from the dreaded ocean terror in Dover, so he lost no time in obeying the order; with the result that, just as he was entering the deserted Downs, the said terror met him and ordered him to the right—about under pain of instant sinking.

After that the rest was easy. The captain and officers raged and stormed, but not even German discipline would have prevented a mutiny if they had not surrendered. It was known that the Ithuriel took no prisoners. In five minutes after the irresistible ram had hit them they would be at the bottom of the sea, and so the Hohenzollern put about and steamed out into the North Sea, with the three wicked forward guns trained upon her, and the ram swirling smoothly through the water fifty yards from her stern.

At nightfall the course was altered for the mouth of the Thames. And so, with all lights out and steered by a thin shifting ray from her captor's conning-tower, the Kaiser's yacht made its strange way to Tilbury.

The instant she dropped her anchor a couple of destroyers ran out from the Gravesend shore and ranged alongside her. The next minute a British captain and three lieutenants followed by a hundred bluejackets had boarded her. The German Commander and his officers gave up their swords, devoutly hoping that they would never meet their War Lord again, and so the incident ended.

It will be easily understood that the Kaiser was about the most infuriated man in the United Kingdom when the Flying Fishes arrived at Canterbury and the Commander of the squadron described the arrival of the Hohenzollern in the Thames and asked for orders.

In the first place no one knew better than William the Second how priceless was the prize won by the impudent audacity of these two young British sailors. In his private apartments on board there were his own complete plans of the campaign—not only for the conquest of Britain, but afterwards for the dismemberment of the British Empire, and its partition among the Allies—exact accounts of the resources of the chief European nations in men, money and ships, plans of fortifications, and even drafts of treaties. In fact, it was such a haul of Imperial and International secrets as had never been made before; and that evening the British Cabinet held in their possession enough diplomatic explosives to blow the European league of nations to pieces.

Erskine and Castellan were honoured by an autograph letter from the King, thanking them heartily for their splendid services up to the present stage of the war, and wishing them all good luck for the future. Then the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Ithuriel slipped down the Thames, towing half a dozen shabby-looking barges behind her, and for some days she disappeared utterly from human ken.

What she was really doing during these days was this. These barges and several others which she picked up now and then were filled with ammunition for her guns and fuel for her engines, and she dropped them here and there in obscure creeks and rock-bound bays from Newcastle to the Clyde, where they lay looking like abandoned derelicts, until such times as they might be wanted.

Meanwhile, very soon after the loss of the Hohenzollern, the Kaiser received two messages which disquieted him very seriously. One of these came by airship from Potsdam. It was an exhaustive report upon the papers which Lennard had left with him on that momentous night as it turned out to be, on which the War Lord had rejected the ultimatum of the Man of Peace. It was signed by Professor Döllinger and endorsed by four of the greatest astronomers of Germany.

Briefly put, its substance amounted to this: Mr Lennard's calculations were absolutely correct, as far as they went. Granted the existence of such a celestial body as he designated Alpha in the document, and its position x on the day of its alleged discovery; its direction and speed designated y and z , then at the time of contact designated n , it would infallibly come into contact with the earth's atmosphere, and the consequences deduced would certainly come to pass, viz., either the earth would combine with it, and be transformed into a semi-incandescent body, or the terrestrial atmosphere would become a fire mist which would destroy all animal and vegetable life upon the planet within, the space of a few minutes.

The second communication was a joint-note from the Emperor of Austria, the President of the Hague Council, the President of the French Republic, and the Tsar of Russia, protesting against the bombardment of London or any other defenceless town by the airships. The note set forth that these were purely engines of war, and ought not to be used for purposes of mere terrorism and murder. Their war employment on land or water, or against fortified positions, was perfectly legitimate, but against unarmed people and defenceless towns it was held to be contrary to all principles of humanity and civilisation, and it was therefore requested by the signatories that, in order to prevent serious differences between the Allies, it should cease forthwith.

The result of this communication was of course a Council of War, which was anything but a harmonious gathering, especially as several of the older officers agreed with the tone of it, and told the Kaiser plainly that they considered that there was quite enough in the actual business of war for the Flying Fishes to do; and the Chancellor did not hesitate to express the opinion that the majority of the peoples of Europe, and possibly large numbers of their own soldiers, who, after all, were citizens first and soldiers afterwards, would strongly resent such operations, especially when it became known that the Emperor's own Allies had protested against it; the result of the Council was that William the Second saw that he was clearly in a minority, and had the good sense to issue a General Order there and then that all aerial bombardments, save as part of an organised attack, should cease from that day.

The events of the next twenty days were, as may well be imagined, full of momentous happenings, which it would require hundreds of pages to describe in anything like detail, and therefore only quite a brief sketch of them can be given here. This will, however, be sufficient to throw a clear light upon the still more stupendous events which were to follow.

In consequence of the almost incredible destruction and slaughter during these first four awful days and nights of the war, both sides had lost the command of the sea, and the capture of the Hohenzollern in broad daylight less than a dozen miles from the English coast had produced such a panic among the rank and file of the invaders, and the reinforcements of men waiting on the other side of the Channel and the North Sea, that communication save by airship had practically stopped.

The consequence of this was that, geographically, the Allied armies, after the release of the prisoners from Portsmouth and Folkestone, amounted to some three million men of all arms, with half a million horses, and two thousand guns—it will be remembered that a vast number of horses, guns and stores had gone to the bottom in the warships which the Ithuriel had sunk—were confined within a district bounded by the coast-line from Ramsgate to the Needles, and thence by a line running north to Southampton; thence, across Hampshire to Petersfield, and via Horsham, Tunbridge Wells, Ashford, and over Canterbury, back to Ramsgate.

In view of the defeat and destruction of the expedition against London, the troops that had been thrown

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

forward to Chatham and Rochester to co-operate with it were re-called, and concentrated between Ashford and Canterbury. The rest of England, Scotland and Ireland was to the present a closed country to them. The blockade on Swansea and Liverpool had been raised by the Ithuriel, and there was nothing to prevent any amount of supplies from the west and south being poured in through half a hundred ports.

Thus the dream of starving the British Islands out had been dissipated at a stroke. True, the dockyards of Devonport and Milford Haven had been destroyed by the airships, but copies of the plans of the Ithuriel had been sent to Liverpool, Barrow, Belfast, the Clyde and the Tyne, and hundreds of men were working at them night and day. Scores of battleships, cruisers and destroyers, belonging both to Britain and other countries, which were nearing completion, were being laboured at with feverish intensity, so that they might be fitted for sea in something like fighting trim; submarines were being finished off by dozens, and Thorneycroft's and Yarrow's yards were, like the rest, working to their full capacity.

The blind frenzy of rage which had swept like an epidemic over the whole kingdom during the first days of disaster had died away and in its place had come the quiet but desperate resolve that if Britain was to be conquered she should be depopulated as well.

All male employment, save that which was necessary to produce coal and iron, to keep the shipyards and the gun factories going, and the shipping on the west coast running, was stopped. In thousands of cases, especially in the north, the places of the men were taken by the women; and in addition to these, every woman and girl, from the match-girls of Whitechapel to the noblest and wealthiest in the land, found some work to do in the service of their country.

Every day, thousands and tens of thousands of the sons of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales were taken in hand by "Mr Sergeant What's-'is-Name," and drilled into shape with miraculous speed; and every day, as detachment after detachment went to the battle front, which now extended from North Foreland to Portland Bill, the magic of patriotism and the long-inherited habits of order and obedience changed the raw recruit into the steady-nerved, strong-hearted soldier, who learnt his duty in the grim school of battle, and was ready to do it to the end.

In less than a month Britain had become a military nation. It seemed at the time and afterwards a miracle, but it was merely the outcome of perfectly natural causes.

After all, every British man has a strain of fighting blood in him. Even leaving out his ancient ancestry, he remains the descendant of families who have given soldier-sons to their country during five hundred years of almost ceaseless war in one part of the world or the other. He is really born with battle-smoke in his nostrils, and the beat of the battle-drum in his heart—and he knows that, neither on land nor sea has he ever been finally beaten.

Remember, too, that this was to him a holy war, the holiest in which the sword can be drawn. He was fighting for freedom, for the possession of his land, for the protection of wife and child and kindred, and the heritage which his fathers of old time had handed down to him. Was it any wonder, then, that within the space of a few weeks the peaceful citizens of Britain, like the fabled harvest of the dragon's teeth, seemed to spring as men full-armed from the very ground? Moreover, this was no skirmishing with sharp-shooters over a vast extent of country, six thousand miles away from home, as it had been in South Africa. This was home itself. There was no right or wrong here, nothing for politicians to wrangle about for party purposes. Here, in a little corner of little England, two mighty hosts were at death-grips day and night, the one fighting for all that is dearest and most sacred to the heart of man; and the other to save itself from what could be nothing less than irretrievable disaster.

Chapter XXX — Mr Parmenter Says

HAPPILY for the defenders of Britain the fleet of aerial submarines, from which so much had been expected for offensive purposes during the proposed “triumphal march” on London, soon became of little or no use in the field.

The reason was this: As, day after day and week after week, that awful struggle continued, it became absolutely necessary for the Allies to obtain men and material to make good the fearful losses which the valour and devotion of what was now a whole nation in arms had inflicted upon them, and so all but four were despatched to guard the route between Dover and Calais—eight under the water and eight in the air—and so make it possible for the transports to cross. Of course, this meant that thousands of fresh men and hundreds of horses and guns could be poured into Kent every day; but it also meant that the greater portion of the defenders' most terrible foes were rendered harmless—and this was not the least of the good work that the Ithuriel had done.

Of course, that famous “sea-devil,” as the invaders called her, was mostly on the spot or thereabouts, and every now and then a crowded transport would lurch over and go down, or a silent, flameless shot would rise up out of some unknown part of the waters and a shell would burst with a firmament-shaking concussion close to one of the airships—after which the airship would burst with a still more frightful shock and distribute herself in very small fragments through the shuddering atmosphere; but this only happened every other day or so, for Erskine and his lieutenant knew a good deal better than to run too many risks, at least just now.

So, for twelve weeks of bitter, bloody and unsparing strife the grim, unceasing struggle for the possession of the Capital of the World went on, and when the eighteenth of March dawned, the out-posts of the Allies were still twelve to fourteen miles from the banks of the Thames. How desperate had been that greatest of all defences since man had made war on man may be dimly guessed from the fact that it cost the invaders two months of incessant fighting and more than a million men before they planted their guns along the ridges of the North Downs and the Surrey Hills.

Meanwhile Gilbert Lennard passed his peaceful though anxious days between Bolton and Whernside, while Auriole, Margaret Holker, Norah Castellan and Mrs O'Connor, with hundreds of other heroines, were doing their work of mercy in the hospital camps at the different bases behind the fighting front. Lord Westerham, who had worked miracles in the way of recruiting, was now in his glory as one of General French's Special Service Officers, which, under such a Commander, is about as dangerous a job as a man can find in the whole bloody business of war.

And still, as the pitiless human strife went on with its ceaseless rattle of rifle fire, and the almost continuous roar of artillery, day by day the Invader from Space grew bigger and brighter in the great reflector, and day by day the huge cannon, which, in the decisive moment of the world's fate, was to do battle with it, approached completion.

At midnight on the twelfth of March Tom Bowcock had announced that all was ready for the casting. Lennard gave the order by electric signal. The hundred converters belched their floods of glowing steel into what had once been Great Lever pit; night was turned into day by a vast glow that shot up to the zenith, and the first part of the great work was accomplished.

At breakfast the next morning Lennard received the following cablegram from Pittsburg:

“All ready. Crossing fourteenth. Give particulars of comet away when you like. Pittsburg Baby doing well. How's yours?—PARMENTER.”

In order to understand the full meaning of Mr Parmenter's curt cablegram it will be necessary to go back for a little space to the day when he made his hurried departure from the Clyde in the Minnehaha. It will be remembered that he had that morning received a cablegram from New York. This message had read thus:

“Complete success at last. Craft built and tried. Action and speed perfect. Dollars out, hurry up.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“HINGESTON.”

Now the signer of this cablegram, Newson Hingeston, was an old college friend of Mr Parmenter's, and therefore a man of about his own age. He was a born mathematician and engineer, and, like many another before him, the dream of his life had been the conquest of the air by means of vessels which flew as a bird flew, that is to say by their own inherent strength, and without the aid of gasbags or buoyancy chambers, which he, like all the disciples of Nadar, Jules Verne, Maxim and Langley, had looked upon as mere devices of quackery, or at the best, playthings of rich people, who usually paid for their amusement with their lives.

His father died soon after he left college, and left him a comfortable little estate on the north-western slopes of the Alleghanies, and a fortune in cash and securities of a million dollars. The estate gave him plenty to live upon comfortably, so he devoted his million to the realisation of his ideal. Ratliffe Parmenter, who only had a few hundred thousand dollars to begin with, laughed at him, but one day, after a long argument, just as a sort of sporting bet, he signed a bond to pay two million dollars for the first airship built by his friend that should fly in any direction independently of the wind, and carry a dead weight of a ton in addition to a crew of four men.

Newson Hingeston registered the bond with all gravity, and deposited it at his bank, and then their life-ways parted. Parmenter plunged into the vortex of speculation, went under sometimes, but always came to the top again with a few more millions in his insatiable grasp, and these millions, after the manner of their kind, had made more millions, and these still more, until he gave up the task of measuring the gigantic pile and let it grow.

Meanwhile, his friend had spent the best twenty-five years of his life, all his fortune, and every dollar he could raise on his estate, in pursuit of the ideal which he had reached a few minutes later than the eleventh hour. Then he had sent that cable. Of course, he wanted the two millions, but what had so suddenly happened in England had instantly convinced him that he was now the possessor of an invention which many millions would not buy, and which might decide the fate of the world.

Within twelve hours of his arrival at his friend's house, Ratliffe Parmenter was entirely convinced that Newson Hingeston had been perfectly justified in calling him across the Atlantic, for the very good reason that he spent the greater part of the night taking flying leaps over the Alleghanies, nerve-shuddering dives through valleys and gorges, and vast, skimming flights over dim, half-visible plains and forests to the west, soaring and swooping, twisting and turning at incredible speeds, in fact, doing everything that any bird that ever flew could do.

When they got back to the house, just as dawn was breaking, and Mr Parmenter had shaken hands with Hiram Roker, a long, lean, slab-sided Yankee, who was Hingeston's head engineer and general manager, and had fought the grim fight through failure to success at his side for twenty years, he said to his friend:

“Newson, you've won, and I guess I'll take that bond up, and I'd like to do a bit more than that. You know what's happening over the other side. There's got to be an Aerial Navigation Trust formed right away, consisting of you, myself and Hiram there, and Max Henschell, my partner, and that syndicate has to have twenty of these craft of yours, bigger if possible, afloat inside three months. The syndicate will commence at once with a capital of fifty millions, and there'll be fifty more behind that if wanted.”

“It's a great scheme,” Hingeston replied slowly, “but I'm afraid the time's too short.”

“Time!” exclaimed Mr Parmenter. “Who in thunder thinks about time when dollars begin to talk? You just let me have all your plans and sections, drawings and the rest of your fixings in time to catch the ten o'clock train to Pittsburg. I'll run up and talk the matter over with Henschell. We'll have fifty workshops turning out the different parts in a week, and you shall have a staff of trustworthy men that we own, body and soul, down here to assemble them, and we'll make the best of those chaps into the crews of the ships when we get them afloat.

“Now, don't talk back, Newson, that's fixed. I'm sleepy, and that trip has jerked my nerves up a bit. Give me a drink, and let's go to bed for two or three hours. You'll have a cheque for five millions before I start, and we shall then consider the Columbia our private yacht. We'll fly her around at night, and just raise Cain in the way of mysteries for the newspapers, but we won't give ourselves away altogether until the fleet's ready.”

As they say on the other side of the Atlantic, what Ratliffe Parmenter said, went. He wielded the irresistible power of almost illimitable wealth, and during the twenty-five years that Hingeston had been working at his ideal, he and Maximilian Henschell, who was a descendant of one of the oldest Dutch families in America, and

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

one of its shrewdest business men to boot, had built up an industrial organisation that was perhaps the most perfect of its kind even in the United States. It was run on lines of absolute despotism, but the despotism was at once intellectual and benevolent. To be a capable and faithful servant of Parmenter and Henschell, even in the humblest capacity, meant, not only good wages and provision for life, but prospects of advancement to the highest posts in the firm, and means of investing money which no outsider would ever hear of.

Wherefore those who worked for Parmenter and Henschell formed an industrial army, some fifty thousand strong, generalised, officered and disciplined to the highest point of efficiency, and faithful to the death. In fact, to be dismissed from any of their departments or workshops was financial death. It was like having a sort of commercial ticket-of-leave, and if such a man tried for work elsewhere, the answer was "If you can't work for P. and H. you must be a crook of some sort. I guess you're no good to us." And the end of that man was usually worse than his beginning.

This was the vast organisation which, when the word went forth from the headquarters at Pittsburg, devoted the best of its brains and skill to the creation of the Aerial Fleet, and, as Mr Parmenter had said, that Fleet was ready to take the air in the time he had allowed for its construction.

But the new ships had developed in the course of making. They were half as long again as the Columbia, and therefore nearly twice as big, with engines four times the power, and they carried three guns ahead and three astern, which were almost exact reproductions of those of the Ithuriel, the plans of which had been brought over by the Minnehaha on her second trip.

The Columbia had a speed of about one hundred miles an hour, but the new models were good for nearly a hundred and fifty. In appearance they were very like broad and shallow torpedo boats, with three aeroplanes on either side, not unlike those of the Flying Fishes, with three lifting fans under each. These could be driven vertically or horizontally, and so when the big twin fans at the stern had got up sufficient way to keep the ship afloat by the pressure under the aeroplanes the lifting fans could be converted into pulling fans, but this was only necessary when a very high speed was desired.

There was a signal mast and yard forward, and a flagstaff aft. The guns were worked under hoods, which protected the gunners from the rush of the wind, and just forward of the mast was an oval conning-tower, not unlike that of the Ithuriel, only, of course, unarmoured, from which everything connected with the working of the ship could be controlled by a single man.

Such is a brief description of the Aerial Fleet which rose from the slopes of the Alleghanies at ten o'clock on the night of the fourteenth of March 1910, and winged its way silently and without lights eastward across the invisible waters of the Atlantic.

There is one other point in Mr Parmenter's cablegram to Lennard which may as well be explained here. He had, of course, confided everything that he knew, not only about the war, but also about the approaching World Peril and the means that were being taken to combat it, to his partner on his first arrival in the States, and had also given him a copy of Lennard's calculations.

Instantly Mr Max Henschell's patriotic ambition was fired. Mr Lennard had mentioned that Tom Bowcock, Lennard's general manager, had proposed to christen the great gun the "Bolton Baby." He had spent that night in calculations of differences of latitude and longitude, time, angles of inclination of the axis of the orbit, points and times of orbital intersection worked out from the horizon of Pittsburg, and when he had finished he solemnly asked himself the momentous question: Why should this world-saving business be left to England alone? After all the "Bolton Baby" might miss fire by a second or two. If it was going to be a matter of comet-shooting, what had America done that she could not have a gun? Were there not hundreds of eligible shafts to be bought round Pittsburg? Yes, America should have that gun, if the last dollar he possessed or could raise by fair means or foul was to be thrown down the bore of it.

And so America had the gun, and therefore in after days the rival of the "Bolton Baby" came to be called the "Pittsburg Prattler."

Chapter XXXI — John Castellan's Thread

LENNARD'S first feelings after the receipt of Mr Parmonter's cablegram, and the casting of the vast mass of metal which was to form the body of the great cannon, were those of doubt and hesitation, mingled, possibly, with that sense of semi-irresponsibility which will for a time overcome the most highly-disciplined mind when some great task has been completed for the time being.

For a full month nothing could be done to the cannon, since it would take quite that time for the metal to cool. Everything else had been done or made ready. The huge projectile which was to wing its way into Space to do battle for the life of humanity was completed. The boring and rifling tools were finished, and all the materials for the driving and the bursting charges were ready at hand for putting into their final form when the work of loading up began. There was literally nothing more to be done. All that human labour, skill and foresight could achieve for the present had been accomplished.

Dearly would he have loved to go south and join the ranks of the fighters; but a higher sense of duty than personal courage forbade that. He was the only man who could perform the task he had undertaken, and a chance bullet or fragment of a shell, to say nothing of the hundred minor chances of the battlefield, might make the doing of that work impossible.

No, his time would come in the awful moment when the fate of humanity would hang in the balance, and his place alike of honour and of duty was now in the equatorial room of the observatory at Wherside, watching through every waking hour of his life the movements of the Invader, that he might note the slightest deviation from its course, or the most trifling change in its velocity. For on such seemingly small matters as these depended, not only the fate of the world, but of the only woman who could make the world at least worth living in for him—and so he went to Wherside by the morning train after a long day's talk with Tom Bowcock over things in general.

“Yo' may be sure that everything will be all right, Mr Lennard,” said Tom, as they shook hands on the platform. “I'll take t' temperatures, top, bottom and middle, every night and morning and post them to yo', and if there's any change that we don't expect, I'll wire yo' at once; and now I've a great favour to ask you, Mr Lennard. I haven't asked it before because there's been too much work to do—”

“You needn't ask it, Tom,” laughed Lennard, as he returned his grip, “but I'm not going to invite you to Wherside just yet, for two reasons. In the first place, I can't trust that metal to anyone else but you for at least a week; and in the second place, when I do send you an invitation from Mr Parmenter I shall not only be able to show you the comet a bit brighter than it is just now, but something else that you may have thought about or read about but never seen yet, and I am going to give you an experience that no man born in England has ever had—but I'm not going to spoil sport by telling you now.”

“Yo've thought it all out afore me, Mr Lennard, as yo' always do everything,” replied Tom. “I'm not much given to compliments, as yo' know, but yo're a wonderful man and if yo've got something to show me, it's bound to be wonderful too, and if it's anything as wonderful as t' lies I've b'n telling those newspaper chaps about t' cannon, I reckon it'll make me open my eyes as wide as they've ever been, for sure. Goodbye.”

During the journey to Settle, Lennard began to debate once more with himself a question which had troubled him considerably since he had received Mr Parmenter's cablegram. Should he publish his calculations to the world at once, give the exact position of the Invader at a given moment in a given part of the sky, and so turn every telescope in the civilised world upon it—or should he wait until some astronomer made the independent discovery which must come within a short time now?

There were reasons both for and against. To do so might perhaps stop the war, and that would, at first sight, be conferring a great blessing upon humanity; but, on the other hand, it might have the very reverse effect upon the millions of men whose blood was now inflamed with the lust of battle. Again it was one thing to convince the rulers of the nations and the scientists of the world that the coming catastrophe was inevitable; but to convince the people who made up those nations would be a very different matter.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

The end of the world had been predicted hundreds of times already, mostly by charlatans, who made a good living out of it, but sometimes by the most august authorities. He had read his history, and he had not forgotten the awful conditions in which the people of Europe fell during the last months of the year 1000, when the Infallible Church had solemnly proclaimed that at twelve o'clock on the night of the 31st of December Satan, chained for a thousand years, would be let loose; that on the morning of the 1st of January 1001 the order of Nature would be reversed, the sun would rise in the west and the reign of Anti-Christ begin. Then the remnants of the European nations had gradually awakened to the fact that Holy Church was wrong, since nothing happened save the results of the madness which her prophecies had produced.

But the catastrophe of which he would have to be the prophet would be worse even than this, and, moreover, as far as human science could tell, it was a mathematical certainty. There would be no miracle, nothing of the supernatural about it—it would happen just as certainly as the earth would revolve on its axis; and yet how many millions of the earth's inhabitants would believe it until with their own eyes they saw the approaching Fate?

In time of peace perhaps he might have obtained a hearing, but who would pause amidst the rush of the armed battalions to listen to him? How could the calm voice of Science make itself heard among the clash and clangour of war? The German Emperor had already laughed in his face, and accepted his challenge with contemptuous incredulity. No doubt his staff and all his officers would do the same. What possibility then would there be to convince the millions who were fighting blindly under their orders? No; it was hopeless. The war must go on. He could only hope that the Aerial Fleet which Mr Parmenter was bringing across the Atlantic would turn the tide of battle in favour of the defenders of Britain.

But there was another matter to be considered. Thanks to the control possessed by the Parmenter Syndicate over the Atlantic cables and the aerograph system of the world, he was kept daily, sometimes hourly, acquainted with everything that was happening. He knew that the Eastern forces of Russia were concentrating upon India in the hope that the disasters in England and the destruction of the Fleet would realise the old Muscovite dream of detaching the natives from their loyalty to the British Crown and so making the work of conquest easy. In the Far East, Japan was recovering from the exhaustion consequent upon her costly victories over Russia, and had formed an ominous alliance with China.

On the other hand Italy, England's sole remaining ally in Europe, had blockaded the French Mediterranean ports, and while the French legions were being drawn northward to the conquest of Britain, the Italian armies had seized the Alpine passes and were preparing an invasion which should avenge the humiliations which Italy had suffered under the first Napoleon.

In a word, everything pointed to universal war. Only the United States preserved an inscrutable silence, which had been broken only by four words: "Hands off our commerce." And to these the Leagued Nations had listened, if rather by compulsion than respect.

Who was he, then, that he should, as it were, sound the trump of approaching doom in the ears of a world round which from east to west and from west again to east the battledrums might any day be sounding and the roar of artillery thundering its answering echo.

But a somewhat different aspect was given to these reflections by a letter which he found waiting for him in the library at Whernside House. It ran thus:

"SIR,—You will not, I suppose, have forgotten a certain incident which happened towards the end of June 1907 in the Bay of Clifden, Connemara. You won that little swimming race by a yard or so, and since then it appears to me that, although you may not be aware of it, you and I have been running a race of a very different sort, although possibly for the same prize.

"You will understand what prize I mean, and by this time you ought to know that I have the power of taking it by force, if I cannot win it in the ordinary way of sport or battle. I am in command of the only really irresistible force in the world. I created that force, and, by doing so, made the invasion of England and the present war possible. I have done so because I hate England, and desire to release my own country from her tyranny and oppression; but I can love as well as I can hate, and whether you understood it or not, I, who had never loved a woman before, loved Auriole Parmenter from the moment that you and I lifted her out of the water, and she smiled on us, and thanked us for saving her life.

"Before we parted that day I could see love in your eyes when you looked at her, if you could not see it in

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

mine. You are her father's private astronomer, and until lately you have lived in almost daily intercourse with her, in which, of course, you have had a great advantage over myself, who have not from that time till now been blessed by even the sight of her.

“But during that time it seems that you have discovered a comet, which is to run into the earth and destroy all human life, unless you prevent it. I know this because I know of the challenge you gave to the German Emperor in Canterbury. I know also of what you have been doing in Bolton. You are turning a coal pit into a cannon, with which you believe that you can blow this comet into thin air or gas before it meets the earth, and you threatened His Majesty that if the war was not stopped the human race should be destroyed.

“That, if you will pardon the expression, was a piece of bluff. You love Miss Parmenter perhaps as much as, though not possibly more than, I do, and therefore you would certainly not destroy the world as long as she was alive in it. You would be more or less than man if you did, and I don't believe you are either, and therefore I think you will understand the proposition I am going to make to you.

“Granted hypothesis that the world will come to an end by means of this comet on a certain day, and granted also that you are able to save it with this cannon of yours, I write now to tell you that, whether the war stops or not in obedience to your threat, I will not allow you to save the world unless Miss Parmenter consents to marry me within two months from now. If she does, the war shall stop, or at any rate I will allow the British forces to conquer the whole of Europe on the sole condition of giving independence to Ireland. They cannot win without my fleet of Flying Fishes, and if I turn that fleet against them they will not only be defeated but annihilated. In other words, with the sole exception of my own country, I offer England the conquest of Europe in exchange for the hand of one woman.

“In the other alternative, that is to say, if Miss Parmenter, her father and yourself do not consent to this proposal, I will not allow you to save the world. I can destroy your cannon works at Bolton as easily as I destroyed the forts at Portsmouth and Dover, and as easily as I can and will kill you, and wreck your observatory. When I have done this I will take possession of Miss Parmenter by force, and then your comet can come along and destroy the world as soon as it likes.

“I shall expect a definite answer to this letter, signed by Mr Parmenter and yourself, within seven days. If you address your letter to Mr James Summers, 28a Carlos Street, Sheerness, it will reach me; but I must warn you that any attempt to discover why it will reach me from that address will be punished by the bombardment and destruction of the town.

“I hope you will see the reasonableness and moderation of my conditions, and remain, yours faithfully.

JOHN CASTELLAN.”

Chapter XXXII — A Vigil In The Night

ALTHOUGH Lennard had always recognised the possibility of such a catastrophe as that which John Castellan threatened, and had even taken such precautions as he could to prevent it, still this direct menace, coming straight from the man himself, brought the danger home to him in a peculiarly personal way.

The look which had passed between them as they were swimming their race in Clifden Bay had just as much meaning for him as for the man who now not openly professed himself his rival, but who threatened to proceed to the last extremities in order to gain possession of the girl they both loved. It was impossible for him not to believe that the man who had been capable of such cold-blooded atrocities as he had perpetrated at Portsmouth, London and other places, would hesitate for a moment in carrying out such a threat, and if he did—No, the alternative was quite too horrible to think of yet.

One thing, however, was absolutely certain. Although no word of love had passed between Auriole and himself since the night when he had shown her the comet and described the possible doom of the world to her, she had in a hundred ways made it plain to him that she was perfectly well aware that he loved her and that she did not resent it—and he knew quite enough of human nature to be well aware that when a woman allows herself to be loved by a man with whom she is in daily and hourly contact, she is already half won; and from this it followed, according to his exact mathematical reasoning, that, whatever the consequences, her reply to John Castellan's letter would be in the negative, and equally, of course, so would her father's be.

“I wonder what the Kaiser's Admiral of the Air would think if he knew how matters really stand,” he said to himself as he read the letter through for a second time. “Quite certain of doing what he threatens, is he? I'm not. Still, after all, I suppose I mustn't blame him too much, for wasn't I in just the same mind myself once—to save the world if she would make it heaven for me, to—well—turn it into the other place if she wouldn't. But she very soon cured me of that madness.

“I wonder if she could cure this scoundrel if she condescended to try, which I am pretty certain she would not. I wonder what she'll look like when she reads this letter. I've never seen her angry yet, but I know she would look magnificent. Well, I shall do nothing till Mr Parmenter gets back. Still, it's a pity that I've got to gravitate between here and Bolton for the next seven weeks. If I wasn't, I'd ask him for one of those airships and I'd hunt John Castellan through all the oceans of air till I ran him down and smashed him and his ship too!”

At this moment the butler came to him and informed him that his dinner was ready and to ask him what wine he would drink.

“Thank you, Simmons,” he replied. “A pint of that excellent Burgundy of yours, please. By the way, have the papers come yet?”

“Just arrived, sir,” said Mr Simmons, making the simple announcement with all the dignity due to the butler to a millionaire.

He went at once into the dining-room and opened the second edition of the Times, which was sent every day to Settle by train and thence by motor-car to Whernside House.

Of course he turned first to the “Latest Intelligence” column. It was headed, as he half expected it to be, “The Great Turning Movement: The Enemy in Possession of Aldershot and advancing on Reading.”

The account itself was one of those admirable combinations of brevity and impartiality for which the leading journal of the world has always been distinguished. What Lennard read ran as follows:

“Four months have now passed since the invading forces of the Allies, after destroying the fortifications of Portsmouth and Dover by means never yet employed in warfare, set foot on English soil. There have been four months of almost incessant fighting, of heroic defence and dearly-bought victory, but, although it is not too much to say in sober language that the defending troops, regulars, militia, yeomanry and volunteers, have accomplished what have seemed to be something like miracles of valour and devotion, the tide of conquest has nevertheless flowed steadily towards London.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Considering the unanimous devotion with which the citizens of this country, English, Scotch, Irish and Welsh, have taken up arms for the defence of their Motherland, there can be no doubt but that, if the war had been fought under ordinary conditions, the tide of invasion would by this time have been rolled back to our coasts in spite of the admitted superiority of the invaders in the technical operations of warfare, and their enormous advantage in numbers to begin with. But the British forces have had to fight under conditions which have never before been known in warfare. Their enemies have not been only those of the land and sea: they have had to fight foes capable of raining destruction upon them from the air as well, and it may well be believed that the leaders of the invading hosts would be the first to admit that without this enormous advantage not even the progress that they have so far made would have been possible.

“The glories of Albuera and Waterloo, of Inkermann and Balaklava, have over and over again been eclipsed by the whole-souled devotion of the British soldiery, fighting, as no doubt every man of them believes, with their backs to the wall, not for ultimate victory perhaps but for the preservation of those splendid traditions which have been maintained untarnished for over a thousand years. It is no exaggeration to say that of all the wars in the history of mankind this has been the deadliest and the bloodiest. Never, perhaps, has so tremendous an attack been delivered, and never has such an attack been met by so determined a resistance. Still, having due regard to the information at our disposal, it would be vain to deny that, tremendous as the cost must have been, the victory so far lies with the invaders.

“After a battle which has lasted almost continuously for a fortnight; a struggle in which battalion after battalion has fought itself to a standstill and the last limits of human endurance have been reached, the fact remains that the enemy have occupied the whole line of the North Downs, Aldershot has ceased to be a British military camp, and is now occupied by the legions of Germany, France and Austria.

“Russia, in spite of the disastrous defeat of the united German and Russian expedition against Sheerness, Tilbury and Woolwich, is now preparing a force for an attack on Harwich which, if it is not defeated by the same means as that upon the Thames was defeated by, will have what we may frankly call the deplorable effect of diverting a large proportion of the defenders of London from the south to the north, and this, unless some other force, at present unheard of, is brought into play in aid of the defenders, can only result in the closing of the attack round London—and after that must come the deluge.

“That this is part of a general plan of operations appears to be quite clear from the desperate efforts which the French, German and Austrian troops are making to turn the position of General French at Reading, to outflank the British left which is resting on the hills beyond Faversham, and, having thus got astride the Thames, occupy the semicircle of the Chiltern Hills and so place the whole Thames valley east of Reading at their mercy.

“In consequence of the ease with which the enemy's airships have destroyed both telegraphic and railway communication, no definite details are at present to hand. It is only known that since the attack on Aldershot the fighting has not only been on a colossal scale, but also of the most sanguinary description, with the advantage slowly but surely turning in favour of the invaders. Such news as reaches us comes entirely by despatch rider and aerogram. We greatly regret to learn, through the former source, that yesterday evening Lord Westerham, the last of the six special Service officers attached to General French's staff, was either killed or captured in a gallant attempt to carry despatches containing an accurate account of the situation up to date from Reading to Windsor, whence it was to be transmitted by the underground telephone cable to His Majesty at Buckingham Palace.”

“That reads pretty bad,” said Lennard, when Mr Simmons had left the room, “especially Westerham being killed or taken prisoner; I don't like that at all. I wish we'd been able to collar His Majesty of Germany on that trip to Canterbury as Lord Kitchener suggested, and put him on board the Ithuriel. He'd have made a very excellent hostage in a case like this. I must say that, altogether, affairs do not look very promising, and we've still two months all but a day or two. Well, if Mr Parmenter doesn't get across with his aerial fleet pretty soon, I shall certainly take steps to convince him and his Allies, who are fighting for a few islands when the whole world is in peril, that my ultimatum was anything but the joke he seemed to take it for.”

He finished his wine, drank a cup of coffee and smoked a meditative cigar in the library, and then went up to the observatory.

It was a lovely night from his point of view; clear, cool and almost cloudless. The young moon was just

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

rising to the eastward, and as he looked up at that portion of the south–western sky from which the Celestial Invader was approaching he could almost persuade himself that he saw a dim ghostly shape of the Spectre from Space.

But when he got to the telescope the Spectre was no longer there. The field of the great reflector was blank, save for the few far–away star–mists, and here and there a dimly–distant star, already familiar to him through many nights of watching.

What had happened? Had some catastrophe occurred in the outer realms of Space in which some other world had been involved in fiery ruin, or had the comet been dragged away from its orbit by the attraction of one of those dead suns, those derelicts of Creation which, dark and silent, drift for age after age through the trackless ocean of Immensity?

There was no cooler–headed man alive than Gilbert Lennard when it came to a matter of his own profession and yet the world did not hold a more frightened man than he was when he went to re–adjust the machinery which regulated the movement of the great telescope, and so began his search for the lost comet all over again. One thing only was certain—that the slightest swerve from its course might make the comet harmless and send it flying through Space millions of miles away from the earth, or bring the threatening catastrophe nearer by an unknown number of days and hours. And that was the problem, here, alone, and in the silence of the night, he had to solve. The great gun at Bolton and the other at Pittsburg might by this time be useless, or, worse still, they might not be ready in time.

It was curious that, even face to face with such a terrific crisis, he had enough human vanity left to shape a half regret that his calculations would almost certainly be falsified.

That, however, was only the sensation of a moment. He ran rapidly over his previous calculations, did about fifteen minutes very hard thinking, and in thirty more he had found the comet. There it was: a few degrees more to the northward, and more inclined to the plane of the earth's orbit; brighter, and therefore nearer; and now the question was, by how much?

Confronted with this problem, the man and the lover disappeared, and only the mathematician and the calculating machine remained. He made his notes and went to his desk. The next three hours passed without any consciousness of existence save the slow ticking of the astronomical clock which governed the mechanism of the telescope. The rest was merely figures and formulae, which might amount to the death–sentence of the human race or to an indefinite reprieve.

When he got up from his desk he had learnt that the time in which it might be possible to save humanity from a still impending fate had been shortened by twelve days, and that the contact of the comet with the earth's atmosphere would take place precisely at twelve o'clock, midnight, on the thirtieth of April.

Then he went back to the telescope and picked up the comet again. Just as he had got its ominous shape into the centre of the field a score of other shapes drifted swiftly across it, infinitely vaster—huge winged forms, apparently heading straight for the end of the telescope, and only two or three yards away.

His nerves were not perhaps as steady as they would have been without the shock which he had already received, and he shrank back from the eye–piece as though to avoid a coming blow. Then he got up from his chair and laughed.

“What an ass I am! That's Mr Parmenter's fleet; but what monsters they do look through a telescope like this!”

Chapter XXXIII — Mr Parmenter Returns

JUST at the north of the summit on the top of which the observatory was built there was an oval valley, or perhaps it might be better described as an escarpment, a digging away by the hand of Nature of a portion of the mountain summit by means of some vast landslide or glacier action thousands of years ago.

As he closed the door of the main entrance to the observatory behind him, he saw these strange, winged shapes circling in the air some three miles away, just dimly visible in the moonlight and starlight. They were hovering about in middle air as though they were birds looking for a foothold. He ran back, switched the electric current off the aerograph machines at the base of the observatory, and turned it on to the searchlight which was on the top of the equatorial dome. A great fan of white light flashed out into the sky, he spelt out "Welcome" in the dot-and-dash code, and then the searchlight fell upon the valley.

"Thanks," came the laconic answer from the foremost airship; and then Lennard saw twenty-five winged shapes circle round the observatory and drop to rest one by one in perfect order, just as a flock of swans might have done, and, as the last came to earth, he turned the switch and shut off the searchlight.

He walked down to the hollow, and in the dim light saw something that he had hardly believed possible for human eyes to see. There, in a space of, perhaps, a thousand yards long and five hundred yards wide, lay, in a perfect oval, a fleet of ships. By all appearances they had no right to be on land. There was no visible evidence that they could rise from the solid earth after once touching it, any more than the albatross can do from a ship's deck.

A light flashed out from a ship lying at the forward end of the ellipse for a moment into the sky and then it swung slowly round until it rested on the path from the observatory to the valley, and Lennard for a moment felt himself blinded by its rays. Then it lifted and a most welcomingly familiar voice said:

"Well, Mr Lennard, here we are, you see, just a bit ahead of time, and how's the comet?"

A ladder, obviously of American design, shot out from the side of the airship as Mr Parmenter spoke, and as soon as the lower end touched the ground he walked down it with his hand outstretched. Lennard walked to the foot of the ladder and took his hand, and said in a low voice:

"This is all very wonderful, Mr Parmenter, but I am glad that you are here ahead of time, because the comet is too; and very considerably, I am sorry to say."

"Eh, what's that you say, Mr Lennard?" replied the millionaire in a hurried whisper. "Nothing serious, I hope. We haven't come too late, have we? I mean too late to stop the war and save the world."

"I don't know about stopping the war," replied Lennard, "but, if no accident happens or is arranged for, we can save the world still, I think."

"Accident arranged for?" echoed Mr Parmenter. "What do you mean by that? Are you talking about John Castellan and those Flying Fish things of his? I reckon we've got enough here to send him and his Flying Fishes into the sea and make them stop there. We've heard all about what they've been doing in the States, and I've got about tired of them. And as for this old invasion of England, it's got to stop right away, or we'll make more trouble for these Germans and Frenchmen and Russians and Austrians than they ever dreamt of."

"Look at that fleet, sir. Twenty-five aerial battleships with a hundred and fifty miles an hour speed in them. Here to London in one hour and twenty-five minutes or less, and guns—you just take a look at those exaggerated peashooters we've got on deck, and believe me, sir, that if we get one of John Castellan's Flying Fishes within six thousand yards of the end of one of those things it will do no more flying, except in very small pieces."

"I'm delighted to hear it, Mr Parmenter," replied Lennard, in a low tone, "for to tell you the truth, we haven't many weeks left now. Something that I can so far neither calculate nor explain has changed the orbit of the comet and it's due here at midnight on the thirtieth of April."

"Great Scott, and this is the nineteenth of March! Not six weeks! I guess we'll have to hurry up with those cannons. I'll send a cable to Pittsburg to-morrow. Anyhow, I reckon the comet can wait for to-night."

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

While Mr Parmenter had been speaking two other men had come down the ladder from the deck of the airship and he continued:

“Now, let me introduce you. This is my old friend and college chum, Newson Hingeston, the man who invented the model we built this fleet on. This is Mr Hiram Roker, chief engineer of the fleet and Lord High Admiral of the air, when Mr Hingeston is not running his own ships.”

Lennard shook hands with Mr Hingeston and Hiram, and was going to say very complimentary things about the fleet which had literally dropped from the clouds, when Mr Parmenter interrupted him again and said:

“You'll excuse me, Mr Lennard, but you'll be better able to talk about these ships when you've had a trip in one of them. We've just crossed the Atlantic in thirty hours, above the clouds, and to-morrow night or morning, if it's cloudy when we've been through things generally, we're going to London in the flagship here—I've called her the Auriole, because she is the daisy of the whole fleet—biggest, fastest and prettiest. You just wait till you see her in daylight. Now we'll go down to the house and hear your news. We're thirty hours behind the times.”

It need hardly be said that no one went to bed for the remainder of that night at Whernside. In one sense it was as busy a time as had been since the war began. The private telephone and telegraph wires between Whernside House and Settle and the aerograph apparatus at the observatory were working almost incessantly till dawn, sending and receiving messages between this remote moorland district and London and the seat of war, as well as Bolton and Pittsburg.

The minutes and the hours passed swiftly, as all Fate-laden time does pass, and so the grey morning of a momentous day dawned over the western Yorkshire moors. Just as they were beginning to think about breakfast one of Lennard's assistants came down from the observatory with a copy of an aerogram which read:

“Begins. PARMENTER, Whernside. Pleased to hear of your arrival. Proposition laid before His Majesty in Council and accepted. Hope to see you and your friends during the day.—CHAMBERLAIN. Ends.”

“Well, I guess that's all right, gentlemen,” said Mr Parmenter, as he handed the aerogram across the big table littered with maps, plans and drawings of localities terrestrial and celestial.

The aerogram passed round and Mr Parmenter continued: “You see, gentlemen, although the United States has the friendliest of feelings towards the British Empire, still, as the President told me the day before yesterday, this invasion of Britain is not our fight, and he does not see his way to making formal declaration of war; so he just gave me a permit for these ships to leave American territory on what the Russians and others call a scientific expedition in order to explore the upper regions of the air and demonstrate the possibility of navigating the air without using gas as lifting power—and that's just how we've got here with our clearance papers and so on all in order; and that means, gentlemen, that we are here, not as citizens of the United States or any other country, but just as a trading company with something to hire out.

“John Castellan, as you will remember from what has been said, sold his Flying Fishes to the German Emperor. Mr Lennard has proved to us by Castellan's own handwriting that he is prepared to sell them back to the British Government at a certain price—and that price is my daughter. Our answer to that is the hiring of our fleet to the British Government, and that offer has been accepted on terms which I think will show a very fair profit when the war is over and we've saved the world.”

“I don't think it will take very long to stop the war,” said the creator of the aerial battle-fleet, in his quiet voice. “Saving the world is, of course, another matter which no doubt we can leave safely in the hands of Mr Lennard. And now,” he continued more gravely, “when is the news of the actual coming of the comet to be made public? It seems to me that everything more or less hangs upon that. The German Emperor, and, therefore, his Allies and, no doubt, half the astronomers of Europe, have been informed of Mr Lennard's discovery. They may or may not believe it, and if they don't we can't blame them because it was only given to them without exact detail.”

“And a very good thing too,” laughed Lennard, “considering the eccentric way in which the comet is behaving. But everything is settled now, unless, of course, some other mysterious influence gets to work; and, another thing, it's quite certain that before many days the comet must be discovered by other observatories.”

“Then, Mr Lennard,” said Mr Parmenter, “we've been first in the field so far and I reckon we'd better stop there. Pike's Peak, Washington and Arequipa are all on to it. Europe and Australia will be getting there pretty

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

soon, so I don't think there's much the matter with you sending a message to Greenwich this morning. The people there will find it all right and we can run across from London when we've had our talk with the Prime Minister and post them up in any other details they want. I'll send a wire to Henschell and tell him to hurry up with his gun at Pittsburg and send on news to all the American observatories. Then we'll have breakfast and, as it's a cloudy morning, I think we might start right away for London in the *Auriole* and get this business fixed up. The enemy doesn't know we're here at all, and so long as we keep above the clouds there's no fear of anyone seeing us. The world has only forty-four more days to live, so we might as well save one of those days while we can."

The result of the somewhat informal council of war, for, in sober truth, it was nothing else, was that the commanders of the airships were invited to breakfast and the whole situation was calmly and plainly discussed by those who from the morning would probably hold the fate of the world in their hands. Not the least important of the aerograms which had been received during the early morning had been one, of course in code, from Captain Erskine of the *Ithuriel* from Harwich, welcoming the aerial fleet and giving details of his movements in conjunction with it for the next ten days. The aerogram also gave the positions of the lighters loaded with ammunition which he had deposited round the English shores in anticipation of its arrival.

Soon after eight o'clock a heavy mist came down over Whernside and its companion heights, and Mr Parmenter went to one of the windows of the big dining-room and said:

"I reckon this will just about fit us, Mr Lennard, so, if you've got your portmanteau packed, have it sent up to the *Auriole* at once, and we'll make a start."

Within thirty minutes the start was made, and with it began the most marvellous experience of Gilbert Lennard's life, not even excepting his battle-trip in the conning-tower of the *Ithuriel*.

Chapter XXXIV — The “Auriole”

“ALL aboard, I think, Captain Roker,” said Mr Parmenter, as he walked last to the top of the gangway ladder, and stood square-footed on the white deck of the Auriole.

“All aboard, sir,” replied Hiram Roker, “and now I reckon you'll have to excuse me, because I've got to go below just to see that everything's in working order.”

“That's all right, Mr Roker. I know where your affections are centred in this ship. You go right along to your engines, and Mr Hingeston will see about the rest of us. Now then, Mr Lennard, you come along into the conning-tower, and whatever you may have seen from the conning-tower of the Ithuriel, I reckon you'll see something more wonderful still before we get to London. You show the way, Newson. See, here it is, just about the same. We've stolen quite a lot of ideas from your friend Erskine; it's a way we've got on our side, you know. But this is going to be one of the exceptions; if we win we are going to pay.”

Lennard followed Mr Parmenter down the companionway into the centre saloon of the Auriole, and through this into a narrow passage which led forward. At the end of this passage was a lift almost identical with that on the Ithuriel. He took his place with Mr Parmenter and Mr Hingeston on this and it rose with them into a little oval chamber almost exactly like the conning-tower of the Ithuriel, with the exception that it was built entirely of hardened papier-maché and glass.

“You see, Mr Lennard,” said Mr Parmenter, “we don't want armour here. Anything that hits us smashes us, and that's all there is to it. Our idea is just to keep out of the way and do as much harm as we can from the other side of the clouds. And now, Newson, if you're ready, we might as well get to the other side and have a look at the sun. It's sort of misty and cheerless down here.”

“Just as easy as saying so, my dear Ratliffe. I reckon Hiram's got about ten thousand horse-power waiting to be let loose; so we may as well let them go. Hold on, Mr Lennard, and don't breathe any more than you can help for a minute or two.”

Lennard, remembering his cruise in the Ithuriel, held on, and also, after filling his lungs, held his breath. Mr Hingeston took hold of the steering-wheel, also very much like that of the Ithuriel, with his left hand, and touched in quick succession three buttons on a signal-board at his right hand.

At the first touch nothing happened as far as Lennard could see or hear. At the second, a soft, whirring sound filled the air, growing swiftly in intensity. At the third, the mist which enveloped Whernside began, as it seemed to him, to flow downwards from the sky in long wreaths of smoke-mingled steam which in a few moments fell away into nothingness. A blaze of sunlight burst out from above—the earth had vanished—and there was nothing visible save the sun and sky overhead, and an apparently illimitable expanse of cloud underneath.

“There's one good thing about airships,” said Mr Hingeston, as he took a quarter turn at the wheel, “you can generally get the sort of climate and temperature you want in them.” He put his finger on a fourth button and continued: “Now, Mr Lennard, we have so far just pulled her up above the mist. You'll have one of these ships yourself one day, so I may as well tell you that the first signal means 'Stand by'; the second, 'Full power on lifting fans'; the third, 'Stand by after screws'; and the fourth—just this—”

He pushed the button down as he spoke, and Lennard saw the brilliantly white surface of the sunlit mist fall away before and behind them. A few moments later he heard a sort of soft, sighing sound outside the conning-tower. It rose quickly to a scream, and then deepened into a roar. Everything seemed lost save the dome of sky and the sun rising from the eastward. There was nothing else save the silver-grey blur beneath them. As far as he was concerned for the present, the earth had ceased to exist for him five minutes ago.

He didn't say anything, because the circumstances in which he found himself appeared to be more suitable for thinking than talking; he just stood still, holding on to a hand-grip in the wall of the conning-tower, and looked at the man who, with a few touches of his fingers, was hurling this aerial monster through the air at a speed which, as he could see, would have left the Ithuriel out of sight in a few minutes.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

In front of Hingeston as he sat at the steering-wheel were two dials. One was that of an aneroid which indicated the height. This now registered four thousand feet. The other was a manometer connected with the speed-gauge above the conning-tower, and the indicator on this was hovering between one hundred and fifty and a hundred and sixty.

"Does that really mean we're travelling over a hundred and fifty miles an hour?" he said.

"Getting on for a hundred and sixty," said Mr Parmenter, taking out his watch. "You see, according to that last wire I sent, we're due in the gardens of Buckingham Palace at ten-thirty sharp, and so we have to hustle a bit."

"Well," replied Lennard, "I must confess that I thought that my little trip in the Ithuriel took me to something like the limits of everyday experience; but this beats it. Whatever you do on the land or in the water you seem to have something under you—something you can depend on, as it were—but here, you don't seem to be anywhere. A friend of mine told me that, after he had taken a balloon trip above the clouds and across the Channel, but he was only travelling forty miles an hour. He had somewhat a trouble to describe that, but this, of course, gets rather beyond the capabilities of the English language."

"Or even the American," added Mr Hingeston, quietly.

"Why, yes," said Mr Parmenter, rolling a cigarette, "I believe we invented the saying about greased lightning, and here we are something like riding on a streak of it."

"Near enough!" laughed Lennard. "We may as well leave it at that, as you say. Still, it is very, very wonderful."

And so it was. As they sped south the mists that hung about the northern moors fell behind, and broken clouds took their place. Through the gaps between these he could see a blur of green and grey and purple. A few blotches of black showed that they were passing over the Lancashire and Midland manufacturing towns; then the clouds became scarcer and an enormous landscape spread out beneath them, intersected by white roads and black lines of railways, and dotted by big patches of woods, long lines of hedgerows and clumps of trees on hilltops. Here and there the white wall of a chalk quarry flashed into view and vanished; and on either side towns and villages came into sight ahead and vanished astern almost before he could focus his field-glasses upon them.

At about twenty minutes after the hour at which they had left Whernside, Mr Hingeston turned to Mr Parmenter and said, pointing downward with the left hand:

"There's London, and the clouds are going. What are we to do? We can't drop down there without being seen, and if we are that will give half the show away. You see, if Castellan once gets on to the idea that we've got airships and are taking them into London, he'll have a dozen of those Flying Fishes worrying about us before we know what we're doing. If we only had one of those good old London fogs under us we could do it."

"Then what's the matter with dropping under the smoke and using that for a fog," said Mr Parmenter, rather shortly. "The enemy is still a dozen miles to southward there; they won't see us, and anyhow, London's a big place. Why, look there now! Talking about clouds, there's the very thing you want. Oceans of it! Can't you run her up a bit and drop through it when the thing's just between us and the enemy?"

As he spoke, Lennard saw what seemed to him like an illimitable sea of huge spumy billows and tumbling masses of foam, which seemed to roll and break over each other without sound. The silent cloud-ocean was flowing up from the sou'west. Mr Hingeston took his bearings by compass, slowed down to fifty miles an hour, and then Lennard saw the masses of cloud rise up and envelop them.

For a few minutes the earth and the heavens disappeared, and he felt that sense of utter loneliness and isolation which is only known to those who travel through the air. He saw Mr Hingeston pull a lever with his right hand and turn the steering-wheel with his left. He felt the blood running up to his head, and then came a moment of giddiness. When he opened his eyes the Auriole was dropping as gently as a bird on the wing towards the trees of the garden behind Buckingham Palace.

"I reckon you did that quite well, Newson," said Mr Parmenter, looking at his watch. "One hour and twenty-five minutes as you said. And now I'm going to shake hands with a real king for the first time."

Chapter XXXV — The “Auriole” Hoists The White Ensign

RATHER to Mr Parmenter's surprise his first interview “with a real king” was rather like other business interviews that he had had; in fact, as he said afterwards, of all the business men he had ever met in his somewhat varied career, this quiet-spoken, grey-haired English gentleman was about the best and 'cutest that it had ever been his good fortune to strike.

The negotiations in hand were, of course, the hiring of the Syndicate's fleet of airships to the British Empire during the course of the war. His Majesty had summoned a Privy Council at the Palace, and again Mr Parmenter was somewhat surprised at the cold grip and clear sight which these British aristocrats had in dealing with matters which he thought ought to have been quite outside their experience. Like many Americans, he had expected to meet a sort of glorified country squire, foxhunter, grouse-killer, trout and salmon-catcher, and so on; but, as he admitted to Lennard later on, from His Majesty downwards they were about the hardest crowd to do business with that he had ever struck.

The terms he offered were half a million a week for the services of twenty-five airships till the war was ended. Two were retained as guardians for Whernside House and the observatory, and three for the Great Lever colliery, and this left twenty, not counting the original Columbia, which Mr Parmenter had bought as his aerial yacht, available for warlike purposes.

The figure was high, as the owners of the aerial battle-fleet admitted, but war was a great deal dearer. They guaranteed to bring the war to a stop within fourteen days, by which time Britain would have a new fleet in being which would be practically the only fleet capable of action in western waters with the exception of the Italian and the American. Given that the Syndicate's airships, acting in conjunction with the Ithuriel and the twelve of her sisters which were now almost ready for launching, could catch and wipe out the Flying Fishes, either above the waters or under them, the result would be that the Allies, cut off from their base of supplies, and with no retreat open to them, would be compelled to surrender; and Mr Parmenter did not consider that five hundred thousand pounds a week was too much to pay for this.

At the conclusion of his speech, setting forth the position of the Syndicate, he said, with a curious dignity which somehow always comes from a sense of power:

“Your Majesty, my Lords and gentlemen, I am just a plain American business man, and so is my friend, the inventor of these ships. We have told you what we believe they can do and we are prepared to show you that we have not exaggerated their powers. There is our ship outside in the gardens. If your Majesty would like to take a little trip through the air and see battle, murder and sudden death—”

“That's very kind of you, Mr Parmenter,” laughed His Majesty, “but, much as I personally should like to come with you, I'm afraid I should play a certain amount of havoc with the British Constitution if I did. Kings of England are not permitted to go to war now, but if you would oblige me by taking a note to the Duke of Connaught, who has his headquarters at Reading, and then, if you could manage it under a flag of truce, taking another note to the German Emperor, who, I believe, has pitched his camp at Aldershot, I should be very much obliged.”

“Anything your Majesty wishes,” replied Mr Parmenter. “Now we've fixed up the deal the fleet is at your disposal and we sail under the British flag; though, to be quite honest, sir, I don't care about flying the white flag first. We could put up as pretty a fight for you along the front of the Allies as any man could wish to see.”

“I am sorry, Mr Parmenter,” laughed His Majesty, “that the British Constitution compels me to disappoint you but, as some sort of recompense, I am sure that my Lords in Council will grant you permission to fly the White Ensign on all your ships and the Admiral's flag on your flagship, which, I presume, is the one in which you have come this morning. It is unfortunate that I can only confer the honorary rank of admiral upon Mr Hingeston, as you are not British subjects.”

“Then, your Majesty,” replied Mr Parmenter, “if it pleases you, I hope you will give that rank to my friend Newson Hingeston, who, as I have told you, has been more than twenty years making these ships perfect. He

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

has created this navy, so I reckon he has got the best claim to be called admiral.”

“Does that meet with your approval, my lords?” said the King.

And the heads of the Privy Council bowed as one in approval.

“I thank your Majesty most sincerely,” said Hingeston, rising. “I am an American citizen, but I have nothing but British blood in my veins, and therefore I am all the more glad that I am able to bring help to the Motherland when she wants it.”

“And I’m afraid we do want it, Mr Hingeston,” said His Majesty. “Make the conditions of warfare equal in the air, and I think we shall be able to hold our own on land and sea. Your patent of appointment shall be made out at once, and I will have the letters ready for you in half an hour. And now, gentlemen, I think a glass of wine and a biscuit will not do any of us much harm.”

The invitation was, of course, in a certain sense, a command, and when the King rose everyone did the same. While they were taking their wine and biscuits in the blue drawing-room overlooking St James's Park, His Majesty, who never lost his grip of business for a moment, took Lennard aside and had a brief but pregnant conversation with him on the subject of the comet, and as a result of this all the Government manufactories of explosives were placed at his disposal, and with his own hand the King wrote a permit entitling him to take such amount of explosives to Bolton as he thought fit. Then there came the letters to the Duke of Connaught and the German Emperor, and one to the Astronomer Royal at Greenwich.

Then His Majesty and the members of the Council inspected the aërial warship lying on the great lawn in the gardens, and with his own hands King Edward ran the White Ensign to the top of the flagstaff aft; at the same moment the Prince of Wales ran the Admiral's pennant up to the masthead. Everyone saluted the flag, and the King said:

“There, gentlemen, the *Auriole* is a duly commissioned warship of the British Navy, and you have our authority to do all lawful acts of war against our enemies. Good-morning! I shall hope to hear from you soon.”

“I'm sorry, your Majesty,” said Mr Parmenter, “that we can't fire the usual salute. These guns of ours are made for business, and we don't have any blank charges.”

“I perfectly understand you, Mr Parmenter,” replied His Majesty with a laugh. “We shall have to dispense with the ceremony. Still, those are just the sort of guns we want at present. Good-morning, again.”

His Majesty went down the gangway and Admiral Hingeston, with Mr Parmenter and Lennard, entered the conning-tower. The lifting-fans began to whirr, and as the *Auriole* rose from the grass the White Ensign dipped three times in salute to the Royal Standard floating from the flagstaff on the palace roof. Then, as the driving propellers whirled round till they became two intersecting circles of light, the *Auriole* swept up over the tree-tops and vanished through the clouds. And so began the first voyage of the first British aerial battleship.

The Duke of Connaught had his headquarters at Amersham Hall School on the Caversham side of the Thames, which was, of course, closed in consequence of the war, and half an hour after the *Auriole* had left the grounds of Buckingham Palace she was settling to the ground in the great quadrangle of the school. The Duke, with Lord Kitchener and two or three other officers of the Staff, were waiting at the upper end where the headmaster's quarters were. As the ship grounded, the gangway ladder dropped and Mr Parmenter said to Lennard:

“That's Lord Kitchener, I see. Now, you know him and I don't so you'd better go and do the talking. We'll come after and get introduced.”

“Ah Mr Lennard,” said Lord Kitchener, holding out his hand. “You're quite a man of surprises. The last time I went with you to see the Kaiser in a motor-car, and now you come to visit His Royal Highness in an airship. Your Royal Highness,” he continued, turning to the Duke, “this is Mr Lennard, the finder of this comet which is going to wipe us all out unless he wipes it out with his big gun, and these will be the other gentlemen, I presume, whom His Majesty has wired about.”

“Yes,” replied Lennard, after he had shaken hands. “This is Mr Parmenter whose telescope enabled me to find the comet, and this is Mr—or I ought now to say Admiral—Hingeston, who had the honour of receiving that rank from His Majesty half an hour ago.”

“What!” exclaimed the Duke. “Half an hour! Are you quite serious, gentlemen? The telegram's only just

got here.”

“Well, your Royal Highness,” said Mr Parmenter, “that may be because we didn't come full speed, but if you would get on board that flagship, sir, we'd take you to Buckingham Palace and back in half an hour, or, if you would like a trip to Aldershot to interview the German Emperor, and then one to Greenwich, we'll engage to have you back here safe by dinner time.”

“Nothing would delight me more,” replied the Duke, smiling, “but at present my work is here and I cannot leave it. Lord Kitchener, how would you like that sort of trip?”

“If you will give me leave till dinner-time, sir,” laughed K. of K., “there's nothing I should like better.”

“Oh, that goes without saying, of course,” replied the Duke, “and now, gentlemen, I understand from the King's telegram that there are one or two matters you want to talk over with us. Will you come inside?”

“If your Royal Highness will excuse me,” said Admiral Hingeston, “I think I'd better remain on board. You see, we may have been sighted, and if there are any of those Flying Fishes about you naturally wouldn't want this place blown to ruins; so, while you are having your talk, I reckon I'll get up a few hundred feet, and be back, say, in half an hour.”

“Very well,” said the Duke. “That's very kind of you. Your ship certainly looks a fairly capable protector. By the way, what is the range of those guns of yours? I must say they have a very business-like look about them.”

“Six thousand yards point blank, your Royal Highness,” replied the Admiral, “and, according to elevation, anything up to fifteen miles; suppose, for instance, that we were shooting at a town. In fact, if we were not under orders from His Majesty to fly the flag of truce I would guarantee to have all the Allied positions wrecked by to-morrow morning with this one ship. As you will see from the papers which Mr Parmenter and Mr Lennard have brought, nineteen other airships are coming south to-night and, unless the German Emperor and his Allies give in, the war will be over in about six days.”

“And when you come back to dinner to-night, Admiral Hingeston, you will have my orders to bring it to an end within that time.”

“I sincerely hope so sir,” replied Admiral Hingeston, as he raised his right hand to the peak of his cap. “I can assure you, that nothing would please me better.”

As the lifting-fans began to spin round and the Auriole rose from the gravelled courtyard, Lord Kitchener looked up with a twinkle in his brilliant blue eyes and said:

“I wonder what His Majesty of Germany will think of that thing when he sees it. I suppose that means the end of fighting on land and sea—at least, it looks like it.”

“I hope to be able to convince your lordship that it does before to-morrow morning,” said Lennard, as they went towards the dining-room.

Then came half an hour's hard work, which resulted in the allotment of the aerial fleet to positions from which the vessels could co-operate with the constantly increasing army of British citizen-soldiers who were now passing southward, eastward and westward, as fast as the crowded trains could carry them. Every position was worked out to half a mile. The details of the newly-created fleet in British waters and of those ships which were arriving from the West Indies and the Mediterranean were all settled, and, as the clock in the drawing-room chimed half-past eleven, the Auriole swung down in a spiral curve round the chimney-pots and came to rest on the gravel.

“There she is; time's up!” said Lord Kitchener, rising from his seat. “I suppose it will only take us half an hour or so to run down to Aldershot. I wonder what His Majesty of Germany will say to us this time. I suppose if he kicks seriously we have your Royal Highness's permission to haul down the flag of truce?”

“Certainly,” replied the Duke. “If he does that, of course, you will just use your own discretion.”

Chapter XXXVI — A Parley At Aldershot

LORD KITCHENER had probably never had so bitter an experience as he had when the *Auriole* began to slow down over the plain of Aldershot. Never could he, or any other British soldier, have dreamt six months ago that the German, Austrian, French and Russian flags would have been seen flying side by side over the headquarters of the great camp, or that the vast rolling plains would be covered, as they were now, by hosts of horse, foot and artillery belonging to hostile nations.

He did not say anything, neither did the others; it was a time for thinking rather than talking; but he looked, and as Lennard watched his almost expressionless face and the angrily-glittering blue eyes, he felt that it would go ill with an enemy whom K. of K. should have at his mercy that day.

But all the bitterness of feeling was by no means on one side. It so happened that the three Imperial leaders of the invaders and General Henriot, the French Commander-in-Chief, were holding a Council of War at the time when the *Auriole* made her appearance. Of course, her arrival was instantly reported, and as a matter of fact the drilling came to a sudden momentary stop at the sight of this amazing apparition. The three monarchs and the great commander immediately went outside, and within a few moments they were four of the angriest men in England. A single glance, even at that distance, was enough to convince them that, at any rate in the air, the Flying Fishes would be no match for an equal or even an inferior number of such magnificent craft as this.

“God's thunder!” exclaimed the Kaiser, using his usual expletive. “She's flying the White Ensign and an admiral's pennant, and, yes, a flag of truce.”

“Yes,” said the Tsar, lowering his glasses, “that is so. What has happened? I certainly don't like the look of her; she's an altogether too magnificent craft from our point of view. In fact it would be decidedly awkward if the English happened to have a fleet of them. They would be terribly effective acting in co-operation with that submarine ram. Let us hope that she has come on a message of peace.”

“I understood, your Majesty,” said the Kaiser, shortly, “that we had agreed to make peace at Windsor, and nowhere else.”

“Of course, I hope we shall do so,” said the Tsar, “but considering our numbers, and the help we have had from Mr Castellan's fleet, I'm afraid we are rather a long time getting there, and we shall be longer still if the British have any considerable number of ships like this one.”

“Airships or no airships,” replied William the Second, “whatever message this ship is bringing, I will listen to nothing but surrender while I have an Army Corps on English soil. They must be almost beaten by this time; they can't have any more men to put in the field, while we have millions. To go back now that we have got so far would be worse than defeat—it would be disaster. Of course, your Majesty can have no more delusions than I have on that subject.”

A conversation on almost similar terms had been taking place meanwhile between the Emperor of Austria and General Henriot. Then the *Auriole*, after describing a splendid curve round the headquarters, dropped as quietly as a bird on the lawn in front the gangway ladder fell over along the side, and Lord Kitchener, in the parade uniform of a general, descended and saluted the four commanders.

“Good-morning, your Majesties. Good-morning, General Henriot.”

“I see that your lordship has come as bearer of the flag of truce this time,” said the Kaiser, when salutes had been exchanged, “and I trust that in the interests of humanity you have come also with proposals which may enable us to put an honourable end to this terrible conflict, and I am sure that my Imperial brothers and the great Republic which General Henriot represents will be only too happy to accede to them.”

The others nodded in approval, but said nothing, as it had been more or less reluctantly agreed by them that the War Lord of Germany was to be the actual head and Commander-in-Chief of the Allies. K. of K. looked at him straight in the eyes—not a muscle of his face moved, and from under his heavy moustache there came in the gentlest of voices the astounding words:

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Yes, I have come from His Majesty King Edward with proposals of surrender—that is to say, for your surrender, and that of all the Allied Forces now on British soil.”

William the Second literally jumped, and his distinguished colleagues stared at him and each other in blank amazement. By this time Lennard had come down the gangway ladder, and was standing beside Lord Kitchener. Mr Parmenter and the latest addition to the British Naval List were strolling up and down the deck of the *Auriole* smoking cigars and chatting as though this sort of thing happened every day.

“I see that your Majesty hardly takes me seriously,” said Lord Kitchener, still in the same quiet voice, “but if your Majesties will do Mr Lennard and myself the favour of an interview in one of the rooms here, which used to belong to me, I think we shall be able to convince you that we have the best of reasons for being serious.”

“Ah, yes Mr Lennard,” replied the Kaiser, looking at him with just a suspicion of anxiety in his glance. “Good—morning. Have you come to tell us something more about this wonderful comet of yours? It seems to me some time making itself visible.”

“It is visible every night now, your Majesty,” said Lennard; “that is, if you know where to look for it.”

“Ah, that sounds interesting,” said the Tsar, moving towards the door. “Suppose we go back into the Council Room and hear something about it.”

As they went in the *Auriole* rose from the ground, and began making a series of slow, graceful curves over the two camps at the height of about a thousand feet. Neither Mr Parmenter, nor his friend the Admiral, knew exactly how far the flag of truce would be respected, and, moreover, a little display of the *Auriole*'s powers of flight might possibly help along negotiations, and, as a matter of fact, they did; for the sight of this huge fabric circling above them, with her long wicked-looking guns pointing in all directions, formed a spectacle which to the officers and men of the various regiments and battalions scattered about the vast plain was a good deal more interesting than it was pleasant. The Staff officers knew, too, that the strange craft possessed two very great advantages over the *Flying Fishes*—she was much faster, and she could rise direct from the ground—whereas the *Fishes*, like their namesakes, could only rise from the water. In short, it did not need a soldier's eye to see that all their stores and magazines, to say nothing of their own persons, were absolutely at the mercy of the British aerial flagship. The *Flying Fishes* were down in the Solent refitting and filling up with motive power and ammunition preparatory to the general advance on London.

As soon as they were seated in the Council Chamber it did not take Lord Kitchener and Lennard very long to convince their Majesties and General Henriot that they were very much in earnest about the matter of surrender. In fact, the only terms offered were immediate retirement behind the line of the North Downs, cessation of hostilities and surrender of the *Flying Fishes*, and all British subjects, including John Castellan, who might be on board them.

“The reason for that condition,” said Lord Kitchener, “Mr Lennard will be able to make plain to your Majesties.”

Then Lennard handed Castellan's letter to the Kaiser, and explained the change of calculations necessitated by the diversion of the planet from its orbit.

“That is not the letter of an honest fighting man. I am sure that your Majesties will agree with me in that. I may say that I have talked the matter over with Mr Parmenter and our answer is in the negative. This is not warfare; it is only abduction, possibly seasoned with murder, and we call those things crimes in England, and if such a crime were permitted by those in whose employment John Castellan presumably is, we should punish them as well as him.”

“What!” exclaimed the Kaiser, clenching his fists, “do you, a civilian, an ordinary citizen, dare to say such words to us? Lord Kitchener, can you permit such an outrage as this?”

“The other outrage would be a much greater one, especially if it were committed with the tacit sanction of the three greatest Powers in Europe,” replied K. of K., quietly. “That is one of our chief reasons for asking for the surrender of the *Flying Fishes*. There is no telling what harm this wild Irishman of yours might do if he got on the loose, not only here but perhaps in your own territories, if he were allowed to commit a crime like this, and then went, as he would have to do, into the outlaw business.”

“I think that there is great justice in what Lord Kitchener says,” remarked His Majesty of Austria. “We must not forget that if this man Castellan did run amok with any of those diabolical contrivances of his, he

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

would be just as much above human law as he would be outside human reach. I must confess that that appears to me to be one of the most serious features in the situation. Your Majesties, as well as the French Government, are aware that I have been all along opposed to the use of these horrible engines of destruction, and now you see that their very existence seems to have called others into being which may be even more formidable.”

“Mr Lennard can tell your Majesties more about that than I can,” said K. of K., with one of his grimmest smiles.

“As far as the air is concerned,” said Lennard, very quietly, “we can both out-fly and out-shoot the Flying Fishes; while as regards the water, eleven more Ithuriels will be launched during the week. We have twenty-five airships ready for action over land or sea, and for my own part, I think that if your Majesties knew all the details of the situation you would consider the terms which his lordship has put before you quite generous. But, after all,” he continued, in a suddenly changed tone, “it seems, if you will excuse my saying so, rather childish to talk about terms of peace or war when the world itself has less than six weeks to live if John Castellan manages to carry out his threat.”

“And you feel absolutely certain of that, Mr Lennard?” asked the Tsar, in a tone of very serious interest. “It seems rather singular that none of the other astronomers of Europe or America have discovered this terrible comet of yours.”

“I have had the advantage of the finest telescope in the world, your Majesty,” replied Lennard, with a smile, “and of course I have published no details. There was no point in creating a panic or getting laughed at before it was necessary. But now that the orbit has altered, and the catastrophe will come so much sooner, any further delay would be little short of criminal. In fact, we have to-day telegraphed to all the principal observatories in the world, giving exact positions for to-night, corrected to differences of time and latitude. We shall hear the verdict in the morning, and during to-morrow. Meanwhile we are going to Greenwich to get the observatory there to work on my calculations, and if your Majesties would care to appoint an officer of sufficient knowledge to come with us, and see the comet for himself, he will, I am sure, be quite welcome.”

“A very good suggestion, Mr Lennard,” said Lord Kitchener, “very.”

“Then,” replied the Tsar, quickly, “as astronomy has always been a great hobby with me, will you allow me to come? Of course, you have my word that I shall see nothing on the journey that you don't want me to see.”

“We shall be delighted,” said the British envoy, cordially, “and as for seeing things, you will be at perfect liberty to use your eyes as much as you like.”

The Tsar's august colleagues entered fully into the sporting spirit in which he had made his proposal, and a verbal agreement to suspend all hostilities till his return was ratified in a glass of His Majesty of Austria's Imperial Tokay.

Chapter XXXVII — The Verdict of Science

ALTHOUGH the Tsar had made trips with John Castellan in the Flying Fish, he had never had quite such an aerial experience as his trip to Greenwich. The Auriole rose vertically in the air, soared upward in a splendid spiral curve, and vanished through the thin cloud layer to the north-eastward. Twenty minutes of wonder passed like so many seconds, and Admiral Hingeston, beside whom he was standing in the conning-tower, said quietly:

“We're about there, your Majesty.”

“Greenwich already,” exclaimed the Tsar, pulling out his watch. “It is forty miles, and we have not been quite twenty minutes yet.”

“That's about it,” said the Admiral, “this craft can do her two miles a minute, and still have a good bit in hand if it came to chasing anything.”

He pulled back a couple of levers as he spoke and gave a quarter turn to the wheel. The great airship took a downward slide, swung round to the right, and in a few moments she had dropped quietly to the turf of Greenwich Park alongside the Observatory.

Lennard's calculations had already reached the Astronomer Royal, and he and his chief assistant had had time to make a rapid run through them, and they had found that his figures, and especially the inexplicable change in the orbit, tallied almost exactly with observations of a possibly new comet for the last two months or so.

They were not quite prepared for the coming of an Imperial—and hostile—visitor in an airship, accompanied by the discoverer of the comet, the millionaire who owned the great telescope, and an American gentleman in the uniform of a British admiral; but those were extraordinary times, and so extraordinary happenings might be expected. The astronomer and his staff, being sober men of science, whose business was with other worlds rather than this one, accepted the situation calmly, gave their visitors lunch, talked about everything but the war, and then they all spent a pleasant and instructive afternoon in a journey through Space in search of the still invisible Celestial Invader.

When they had finished, the two sets of calculations balanced exactly—to the millionth of a degree and the thousandth of a second. At ten seconds to twelve, midnight, May the first, the comet, if not prevented by some tremendously powerful agency, would pierce the earth's atmosphere, as Lennard had predicted.

“It is a marvellous piece of work, Mr Lennard, however good an instrument you had. As an astronomer I congratulate you heartily, but as citizens of the world I hope we shall be able to congratulate you still more heartily on the results which you expect that big gun of yours to bring about.”

“I'm sure I hope so,” said Lennard, toying rather absently with his pencil.

“And if the cannon is not fired, and the Pittsburg one does not happen to be exactly laid, for there is a very great difference in longitude, what will be the probable results, Mr Astronomer?” asked the Tsar, upon whom the lesson of the afternoon had by no means been lost.

“If the comet is what Mr Lennard expects it to be, your Majesty,” was the measured reply, “then, if this Invader is not destroyed, his predictions will be fulfilled to the letter. In other words, on the second of May there will not be a living thing left on earth.”

At three minutes past ten that evening the Tsar looked into the eye-piece of the Greenwich Equatorial, and saw a double-winged yellow shape floating in the centre of the field of vision. He watched it for long minutes, listening to the soft clicking of the clockwork, which was the only sound that broke the silence. During the afternoon he had seen photographs of the comet taken every night that the weather made a clear observation possible. The series tallied exactly with what he now saw. The gradual enlargement and brightening; the ever-increasing exactness of definition, and the separation of the nucleus from the two wings. All that he had seen was as pitilessly inexorable as the figures which contained the prophecy of the world's approaching doom. He rose from his seat and said quietly, yet with a strange impressiveness:

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Gentlemen, I, for one, am satisfied and converted. What the inscrutable decrees of Providence may or may not be, we have no right to inquire; but whether this is a judgment from the Most High brought upon us by our sins, or whether it is merely an ordinary cataclysm of Nature against which we may be able to protect ourselves, does not come into the question which is in dispute amongst us. Humanity has an unquestioned right to preserve its existence as far as it is possible to do so. If it is possible to arrange for another conference at Aldershot to-morrow, I think I may say that there will be a possibility of arriving at a reasonable basis of negotiations. And now, if it is convenient, Lord Kitchener, I should like to get back to camp. Much has been given to me to think about to-night, and you know we Russians have a very sound proverb: 'Take thy thoughts to bed with thee, for the morning is wiser than the evening.'”

“That, your Majesty, has been my favourite saying ever since I knew that men had to think about work before they were able to do it properly.” So spoke the man who had worked for fourteen years to win one battle and crush a whole people at a single stroke—after which he made the best of friends with them, and loyal subjects of his Sovereign.

They took their leave of the astronomer and his staff, and a few minutes later the Auriole, still flying the flag of truce, cleared the tree-tops and rose into the serene starlit atmosphere above them.

When the airship had gained a height of a thousand feet, and was heading south-west towards Aldershot at a speed of about a hundred miles an hour, the Admiral noticed a shape not unlike that of his own vessel, on his port quarter, making almost the same direction as he was. The Tsar and Lord Kitchener were sitting one on either side of him, as he stood at the steering-wheel, as the ominous shape came into view.

“I'm afraid that's one of your Flying Fishes, your Majesty, taking news from the Continent to Aldershot. Yes, there goes her searchlight. She's found us out by now. She knows we're not one of her crowd, and so I suppose we shall have to fight her. Yes, I thought so, she means fight. She's trying to get above us, which means dropping a few of those torpedoes on us, and sending us across the edge of eternity before we know we've got there.”

“You will, of course, do your duty, Admiral,” replied the Tsar very quietly, but with a quick tightening of the lips. “It is a most unfortunate occurrence, but we must all take the fortune of war as it comes. I hope you will not consider my presence here for a moment. Remember that I asked myself.”

“There won't be any danger to us, your Majesty,” replied the Admiral with a marked emphasis on the “us.” “Still, we have too many valuable lives on board to let him get the drop on us.”

As he spoke he thrust one lever on the right hand forward, and pulled another back; then he took the telephone receiver down from the wall, and said:

“See that thing? She's trying to get the drop on us. Full speed ahead: I'm going to rise. Hold on, gentlemen.”

They held on. The Tsar saw the jumping searchlights, which flashed up from the little grey shape to the southward, suddenly fall away and below them. The Admiral touched the wheel with his left hand, and the Auriole sprang forward. The other tried to do the same, but she seemed to droop and fall behind. Admiral Hingeston took down the receiver again and said:

“Ready—starboard guns—now: fire!”

Of course, there was no report; only a brilliant blaze of light to the southward, and an atmospheric shock which made the Auriole shudder as she passed on her way. The Tsar looked out to the spot where the blaze of flame had burst out. The other airship had vanished.

“She has gone. That is awful,” he said, with a shake in his voice.

“As I said before, I'm sorry, your Majesty,” replied the Admiral, “but it had to be done. If he'd got the top side of us we should have been in as little pieces as he is now. I only hope it's John Castellan's craft. If it is it will save a lot of trouble to both sides.”

The Tsar did not reply. He was too busy thinking, and so was Lord Kitchener.

That night there were divided counsels in the headquarters of the Allies at Aldershot, and the Kaiser and his colleagues went to bed between two and three in the morning without having come to anything like a definite decision. As a matter of fact, within the last few hours things had become a little too complicated to be decided upon in anything like a hurry.

While the potentates of the Alliance were almost quarrelling as to what was to be done, the Auriole paid a

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

literally flying visit to the British positions, and then the hospitals. At Caversham, Lennard found Norah Castellan taking her turn of night duty by the bedside of Lord Westerham, who had, after all, got through his desperate ride with a couple of bullets through his right ribs, and a broken left arm; but he had got his despatches in all the same, though nearly two hours late—for which he apologised before he fainted. In one of the wards at Windsor Camp he found Auriole, also on night duty, nursing with no less anxious care the handsome young Captain of Uhlans who had taken Lord Whittinghame's car in charge in Rochester. Mrs O'Connor had got a badly-wounded Russian Vice-Admiral all to herself, and, as she modestly put it, was doing very nicely with him.

Meanwhile the news of the truce was proclaimed, and the opposing millions laid themselves down to rest with the thankful certainty that it would not be broken for at least a night and a day by the whistle of the life-hunting bullet or the screaming roar and heart-shaking crash of the big shell which came from some invisible point five or six miles away. In view of this a pleasant little dinner-party was arranged for at the Parmenter Palace at eight the next evening. There would be no carriages. The coming and parting guests would do their coming and going in airships. Mr Parmenter expressed the opinion that, under the circumstances, this would be at once safer and more convenient.

But before that dinner-party broke up, the world had something very different from feasting and merrymaking, or even invasion and military conquest or defeat, to think of.

The result of Lennard's telegrams and cables had been that every powerful telescope in the civilised world had been turned upon that distant region of the fields of Space out of which the Celestial Invader was rushing at a speed of thousands of miles a minute to that awful trysting-place, at which it and the planet Terra were to meet and embrace in the fiery union of death.

From every observatory, from Greenwich to Arequipa, and from Pike's Peak to Melbourne, came practically identical messages, which, in their combined sense, came to this:

“Lennard's figures absolutely correct. Collision with comet apparently inevitable. Consequences incalculable.”

Chapter XXXVIII — Waiting For Doom

THIS was the all-important news which the inhabitants of every town which possessed a well-informed newspaper read the next morning. It was, in the more important of them, followed by digests of the calculations which had made this terrific result a practical certainty. These, again, were followed by speculations, some deliberately scientific, and some wild beyond the dreams of the most hopeless hysteria.

Men and women who for a generation or so had been making large incomes by prophesying the end of the world as a certainty about every seven years—and had bought up long leaseholds meanwhile—now gambled with absolute certainty on the shortness of the public memory, revised their figures, and proved to demonstration that this was the very thing they had been foretelling all along.

First—outside scientific circles—came blank incredulity. The ordinary man and woman in the street had not room in their brains for such a tremendous idea as this—fact or no fact. They were already filled with a crowd of much smaller and, to them, much more pressing concerns, than a collision with a comet which you couldn't even see except through a big telescope: and then that sort of thing had been talked and written about hundreds of times before and had never come to anything, so why should this?

But when the morning papers dated—somewhat ominously—the twenty-fifth of March, quarter day, informed their readers that, granted fine weather, the comet would be visible to the naked eye from sunset to sunrise according to longitude that night, the views of the man and the woman who had taken the matter so lightly underwent a very considerable change.

While the comet could only be seen, save by astronomers, in the photographs that could be bought in any form from a picture postcard to a five-guinea reproduction of the actual thing, there was still an air of unconvincing unreality about. Of course it might be coming, but it was still very far away, and it might not arrive after all. Yet when that fateful night had passed and millions of sleepless eyes had seen the south-western stars shining through a pale luminous mist extended in the shape of two vast filmy wings with a brighter spot of yellow flame between them, the whole matter seemed to take on a very different and a much more serious aspect.

The fighting had come to a sudden stop, as though by a mutually tacit agreement. Not even the German Emperor could now deny that Lennard had made no idle threat at Canterbury when he had given him the destruction of the world as an alternative to the conquest of Britain. Still, he did not quite believe in the possibility of that destruction even yet, in spite of what the Tsar had told him and what he had learned from other sources. He still wanted to fight to a finish, and, as Deputy European Providence, he had a very real objection to the interference of apparently irresponsible celestial bodies with his carefully-thought-out plans for the ordering of mundane civilisation on German commercial lines. Whether they liked it or not, it must be the best thing in the end for them: otherwise how could He have come to think it all out?

Meanwhile, to make matters worse from his point of view, John Castellan had refused absolutely to accept any modification of the original terms, and he had replied to an order from headquarters to report himself and the ships still left under his control by loading the said ships with ammunition and motive power and then disappearing from the field of action without leaving a trace as to his present or future whereabouts behind him, and so, as far as matters went, entirely fulfilling the Tsar's almost prophetic fears.

And then, precisely at the hour, minute and second predicted, five hours, thirty minutes and twenty-five seconds, a.m., on the 31st of March, the comet became visible in daylight about two and a half degrees southwestward of the Morning Star. Twenty-four hours later the two wings came into view, and the next evening the Invader looked like some gigantic bird of prey swooping down from its eyrie somewhere in the heights of Space upon the trembling and terrified world. The professional prophets said, with an excellent assumption of absolute conviction, that it was nothing less awful than the Destroying Angel himself in propria persona.

At length, when excitement had developed into frenzy, and frenzy into an almost universal delirium, two

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

cablegrams crossed each other along the bed of the Atlantic Ocean. One was to say that the Pittsburg gun was ready, and the other that the loading of the Bolton Baby—feeding, some callous humorist of the day called it—was to begin the next morning. This meant that there was just a week—an ordinary working week, between the human race and something very like the Day of Judgment.

The next day Lennard set all the existing wires of the world thrilling with the news that the huge projectile, charged with its thirty hundred-weight of explosives, was resting quietly in its place on the top of a potential volcano which, loosened by the touch of a woman's hand, was to hurl it through space and into the heart of the swiftly-advancing Invader from the outmost realms of Space.

Chapter XXXIX — The Last Fight

IT so happened that on the first night the German Emperor saw the comet without the aid of a telescope he was attacked by one of those fits of hysteria which, according to ancient legend, are the hereditary curse of the House of Brandenburg. He had made possible that which had been impossible for over a thousand years—he had invaded England in force, and he had established himself and his Allies in all the greatest fortress-camps of south-eastern England. After all, the story of the comet might be a freak of the scientific imagination; there might be some undetected error in the calculations. One great mistake had been made already, either by the comet or its discoverer—why not another?

“No,” he said to himself, as he stood in front of the headquarters at Aldershot looking up at the comet, “we've heard about you before, my friend. Astronomers and other people have prophesied a dozen times that you or something like you were going to bring about the end of the world, but somehow it never came off; whereas it is pretty certain that the capture of London will come off if it is only properly managed. At any rate, I am inclined to back my chances of taking London against yours of destroying it.”

And so he made his decision. He sent a telegram to Dover ordering an aerogram to be sent to John Castellan, whose address was now, of course, anywhere in the air or sea; the message was to be repeated from all the Continental stations until he was found. It contained the first capitulation that the War Lord of Germany had ever made. He accepted the terms of his Admiral of the Air and asked him to bring his fleet the following day to assist in a general assault on London—London once taken, John Castellan could have the free hand that he had asked for.

In twelve hours a reply came back from the Jotunheim in Norway. Meanwhile, the Kaiser, as Generalissimo of the Allied Forces, telegraphed orders to all the commanders of army corps in England to prepare for a final assault on the positions commanding London within twenty-four hours. At the same time he sent telegraphic orders to all the centres of mobilisation in Europe, ordering the advance of all possible reinforcements with the least delay. It was his will that four million men should march on London that week, and, in spite of the protests of the Emperor of Austria and the Tsar, his will was obeyed.

So the truce was broken and the millions advanced, as it were over the brink of Eternity, towards London. But the reinforcements never came. Every transport that steamed out of Bremen, Hamburg, Kiel, Antwerp, Brest or Calais, vanished into the waters; for now the whole squadron of twelve Ithuriels had been launched and had got to work, and the British fleets from the Mediterranean, the China Seas and the North Atlantic, had once more asserted Britain's supremacy on the seas. In addition to these, ten first-class battleships, twelve first and fifteen second-class cruisers and fifty destroyers had been turned out by the Home yards, and so the British Islands were once more ringed with an unbreakable wall of steel. One invasion had been accomplished, but now no other was possible. The French Government absolutely refused to send any more men. The Italian armies had crossed the Alps at three points, and every soldier left in France was wanted to defend her own fortresses and cities from the attack of the invader.

But, despite all this, the War Lord held to his purpose; and that night the last battle ever fought between civilised nations began, and when the sun rose on the sixteenth of April, its rays lit up what was probably the most awful scene of carnage that human eyes had ever looked upon. The battle-line of the invaders had extended—from Sheerness to Reading in a sort of irregular semicircle, and it was estimated afterwards that not less than a million and a half of killed and wounded men, fifty thousand horses and hundreds of disabled batteries of light and heavy artillery strewed the long line of defeat and conquest.

The British aerial fleet of twenty ships had made victory for the defenders a practical certainty. As Admiral Hingeston had told the Tsar, they could both out-fly and out-shoot the Flying Fishes. This they did and more. The moment that a battery got into position half a dozen searchlights were concentrated on it. Then came a hail of shells, and a series of explosions which smashed the guns to fragments and killed every living thing within a radius of a hundred yards. Infantry and cavalry shared the same fate the moment that any formation

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

was made for an attack on the British positions; the storm of fire was made ten-fold more terrible by the unceasing bombardment from the air; and the brilliant glow of the searchlights thrown down from a height of a thousand feet or so along the lines of the attacking forces made the work of the defenders comparatively easy, for the man in a fight who can see and is not seen is worth several who are seen and yet fight in the dark.

But the assailants were exposed to an even more deadly danger than artillery or rifle fire. The catastrophe which had overwhelmed the British Fleet in Dover Harbour was repeated with ten-fold effect; but this time the tables were turned. The British aerial fleet hunted the Flying Fishes as hawks hunt partridges, and whenever one of them was found over a hostile position a shell from the silent, flameless guns hit her, and down she went to explode like a volcano amongst masses of cavalry, infantry and artillery, and of this utter panic was the only natural result.

Eleven out of the twelve Flying Fishes were thus accounted for. What had become of the twelfth no one knew. It might have been partially crippled and fallen far away from the great battlefield; or it might have turned tail and escaped, and in this case it was a practical certainty, at least in Lennard's mind, that it was John Castellan's own vessel and that he, seeing that the battle was lost, had taken her away to some unknown spot in order to fulfil the threat contained in his letter, and for this reason five of the British airships were at once despatched to mount guard over the great cannon at Bolton.

The defeat of the Allies both by land and sea, though accomplished at the eleventh hour of the world's threatened fate, had been so complete and crushing, and the death-total had reached such a ghastly figure, that Austria, Russia and France flatly refused to continue the Alliance. After all the tremendous sacrifice that had been made in men, money and material they had not even reached London. From their outposts on the Surrey hills they could see the vast city, silent and apparently sleeping under its canopy of hazy clouds, but that was all. It was still as distant from them as the poles; and so the Allies looked upon it and then upon their dead, and admitted, by their silence if not by their words, that Britain the Unconquered was unconquerable still.

The German Emperor's fit had passed. Even he was appalled when upon that memorable morning he received the joint note of his three Allies and learnt the awful cost of that one night's fighting.

Just as he was countersigning the Note of Capitulation in the headquarters at Aldershot, the Auriole swung round from the northward and descended on to the turf flying the flag of truce. He saw it through the window, got up, put his right hand on the butt of the revolver in his hip-pocket, thought hard for one fateful moment, then took it away and went out.

At the gate he met Lord Kitchener; they exchanged salutes and shook hands, and the Kaiser said:

“Well, my lord, what are the terms?”

K. of K. laughed, simply because he couldn't help it. The absolute hard business of the question went straight to the heart of the best business man in the British Army.

“I am not here to make or accept terms, your Majesty,” he said. “I am only the bearer of a message, and here it is.”

Then he handed the Kaiser an envelope bearing the Royal Arms.

“I am instructed to take your reply back as soon as possible,” he continued. Then he saluted again and walked away towards the Auriole.

The Kaiser opened the envelope and read—an invitation to lunch from his uncle, Edward of England, and a request to bring his august colleagues with him to talk matters over. There was no hint of battle, victory or defeat. It was a quite commonplace letter, but all the same it was one of those triumphs of diplomacy which only the first diplomatist in Europe knew how to achieve. Then he too laughed as he folded up the letter and went to Lord Kitchener and said:

“This is only an invitation to lunch, and you have told me you are not here to propose or take terms. That, of course, was official, but personally—”

K. of K. stiffened up, and a harder glint came into his eyes.

“I can say nothing personally, your Majesty, except to ask you to remember my reply to Cronje.”

The Kaiser remembered that reply of three words, “Surrender, or fight,” and he knew that he could not fight, save under a penalty of utter destruction. He went back into his room, brought back the joint note which he had just received, and gave it to Lord Kitchener, just as it was, without even putting it into an envelope, saying:

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“That is our answer. We are beaten, and those who lose must pay.”

Lord Kitchener looked over the note and said, in a somewhat dry tone:

“This, your Majesty, I read as absolute surrender.”

“It is,” said William the Second his hand instinctively going to the hilt of his sword. Lord Kitchener shook his head, and said very quietly and pleasantly:

“No, your Majesty, not that. But,” he said, looking up at the four flags which were still flying above the headquarters, “I should be obliged if you would give orders to haul those down and hoist the Jack instead.”

There was no help for it, and no one knew better than the Kaiser the strength there was behind those quietly-spoken words. The awful lesson of the night before had taught him that this beautiful cruiser of the air which lay within a few yards of him could in a few moments rise into the air and scatter indiscriminate, death and destruction around her, and so the flags came down, the old Jack once more went up, and Aldershot was English ground again.

Wherefore, not to enter into unnecessary details, the Auriole, instead of making the place a wilderness as Lord Kitchener had quite determined to do, became an aerial pleasure yacht. Orderlies were sent to the Russian, Austrian and French headquarters, and an hour later the chiefs of the Allies were sitting in the deck saloon of the airship, flying at about sixty miles an hour towards London.

The lunch at Buckingham Palace was an entirely friendly affair. King Edward had intended it to be a sort of international shake-hands all round. The King of Italy was present, as the Columbia had been despatched early in the morning to bring him from Rome, and had picked up the French President on the way back at Paris. The King gave the first and only toast, and that was:

“Your Majesties and Monsieur le President, in the name of Humanity, I ask you to drink to Peace.”

They drank, and so ended the last war that was ever fought on British soil.

EPILOGUE — “And On Earth, Peace!”

ON the morning of the thirtieth of April, the interest of the whole world was centred generally upon Bolton, and particularly upon the little spot of black earth enclosed by a ring of Bessemer furnaces in the midst of which lay another ring, a ring of metal, the mouth of the great cannon, whose one and only shot was to save or lose the world. At a height of two thousand feet, twenty airships circled at varying distances round the mouth of the gun, watching for the one Flying Fish which had not been accounted for in the final fight.

The good town of Bolton itself was depopulated. For days past the comet had been blazing brighter and brighter, even in the broad daylight, and the reports which came pouring in every day from the observatories of the world made it perfectly clear that Lennard's calculations would be verified at midnight.

Mr Parmenter and his brother capitalists had guaranteed two millions sterling as compensation for such destruction of property as might be brought about by the discharge of the cannon, and, coupled with this guarantee, was a request that everyone living within five miles of what had been the Great Lever pit should leave, and this was authorised by a Royal Proclamation. There was no confusion, because, when faced with great issues, the Lancashire intellect does not become confused. It just gets down to business and does it. So it came about that the people of Bolton, rich and poor, millionaire and artisan, made during that momentous week a general flitting, taking with them just such of their possessions as would be most precious to them if the Fates permitted them to witness the dawn of the first of May.

The weather, strangely enough, had been warm and sunny for the last fortnight, despite the fact that the ever-brightening Invader from Space gradually outshone the sun itself, and so on all the moors round Bolton there sprang up a vast town of tents and ready-made bungalows from Chorley round by Darwen to Bury. Thousands of people had come from all parts of the kingdom to see the fate of the world decided. What was left of the armies of the Allies were also brought up by train, and all the British forces were there as well. They were all friends now for there was no more need for fighting, since the events of the next few hours would decide the fate of the human race.

As the sun set over the western moors a vast concourse of men and women, representing almost every nationality on earth, watched the coming of the Invader, brightening now with every second and over-arching the firmament with its wide-spreading wings. There were no sceptics now. No one could look upon that appalling Shape and not believe, and if absolute confirmation of Lennard's prophecy had been wanted it would have been found in the fact that the temperature began to rise after sunset. That had never happened before within the memory of man.

The crowning height of the moors which make a semicircle to the north-west of Bolton is Winter Hill, which stands about half-way between Bolton and Chorley, and, roughly speaking, would make the centre of a circle including Bolton, Wigan, Chorley and Blackburn. It rises to a height of nearly fifteen hundred feet and dominates the surrounding country for fully fifteen miles, and on the summit of this rugged, heather-clad moor was pitched what might be called without exaggeration the headquarters of the forces which were to do battle for humanity. A huge marquee had been erected in an ancient quarry just below the summit; from the centre pole of this flew the Royal Standard of England, and from the other poles the standards of every civilised nation in the world.

The front of the marquee opened to the south eastward, and by the unearthly light of the comet the mill chimneys of Bolton, dominated by the great stack of Dobson & Barlow's, could be seen pointing like black fingers up to the approaching terror. In the centre of the opening were two plain deal tables. There was an instrument on each of them, and from these separate wires ran on two series of poles and buried themselves at last in the heart of the charge of the great cannon. Beside the instruments were two chronometers synchronised from Greenwich and beating time together to the thousandth part of a second, counting out what might perhaps be the last seconds of human life on earth.

Grouped about the two tables were the five sovereigns of Europe and the President of the French Republic,

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

and with them stood the greatest soldiers, sailors and scientists, statesmen and diplomatists between east and west.

On a long deck chair beside one of the tables lay Lord Westerham with his left arm bound across his breast and looking little better than the ghost of the man he had been a month ago. Beside him stood Lady Margaret and Norah Castellan, and with them were the two men who had done so much to change defeat into victory; the captain and lieutenant of the ever-famous Ithuriel.

Never before had there been such a gathering of all sorts and conditions of men on one spot of earth; but as the hours went on and dwindled into minutes, all differences of rank and position became things of the past. In the presence of that awful Shape which was now flaming across the heavens, all men and women were equal, since by midnight all might be reduced at the same instant to the same dust and ashes. The ghastly orange-green glare shone down alike on the upturned face of monarch and statesman, soldier and peasant, millionaire and pauper, the good and the bad, the noble and the base, and tinged every face with its own ghastly hue.

Five minutes to twelve!

There was a shaking of hands, but no words were spoken. Norah Castellan stooped and kissed her wounded lover's brow, and then stood up and clasped her hands behind her. Lennard went to one of the tables and Auriole to the other.

Lennard had honestly kept the unspoken pact that had been made between them in the observatory at Whernside. Neither word nor look of love had passed his lips or lightened his eyes; and even now, as he stood beside her, looking at her face, beautiful still even in that ghastly light, his glance was as steady as if he had been looking through the eye-piece of his telescope.

Auriole had her right forefinger already resting on a little white button, ready at a touch to send the kindling spark into the mighty mass of explosives which lay buried at the bottom of what had been the Great Lever pit. Lennard also had his right forefinger on another button, but his left hand was in his coat pocket and the other forefinger was on the trigger of a loaded and cocked revolver. There were several other revolvers in men's pockets—men who had sworn that their nearest and dearest should be spared the last tortures of the death-agony of humanity.

The chronometers began to tick off the seconds of the last minute. The wings of the comet spread out vaster and vaster and its now flaming nucleus blazed brighter and brighter. A low, vague wailing sound seemed to be running through the multitudes which thronged the semicircle of moors. It was the first and perhaps the last utterance of the agony of unendurable suspense.

At the thirtieth second Lennard looked up and said in a quiet, passionless tone:

“Ready!”

At the same moment he saw, as millions of others thought they saw, a grey shape skimming through the air from the north-east towards Bolton. It could not be a British airship, for the fleet had already scattered, as the shock of the coming explosion would certainly have caused them to smash up like so many shells. It was John Castellan's Flying Fish come to fulfil the letter of his threat, even at this supreme moment of the world's fate.

Again Lennard spoke.

“Twenty seconds.”

And then he began to count. “Nine—eight—seven—six—five—four—three—two—Now!”

The two fingers went down at the same instant and completed the circuits. The next, the central fires of the earth seemed to have burst loose. A roar such as had never deafened human ears before thundered from earth to heaven, and a vast column of pale flame leapt up with a concussion which seemed to shake the foundations of the world. Then in the midst of the column of flame there came a brighter flash, a momentary blaze of green-blue flame flashing out for a moment and vanishing.

“That was John's ship,” said Norah. “God forgive him!”

“He will,” said Westerham, taking her hand. “He was wrong-headed on that particular subject, but he was a brave man, and a genius. I don't think there's any doubt about that.”

“It's good of you to say so,” said Norah. “Poor John! With all his learning and genius to come to that—”

“We all have to get there some time, Norah, and after all, whether he's right or wrong, a man can't die better than for what he believes to be the truth and the right. We may think him mistaken, he thought he was

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

right, and he has proved it. God rest his soul!”

“Amen!” said Norah, and she leant over again and kissed him on the brow.

Then came ten seconds more of mute and agonised suspense, and men's fingers tightened their grip on the revolvers. Then the upturned straining eyes looked upon such a sight as human eyes will never see again save perchance those which, in the fullness of time, may look upon the awful pageantry of the Last Day.

High up in the air there was a shrill screaming sound which seemed something like an echo of the roar of the great gun. Something like a white flash of light darted upwards straight to the heart of the descending Invader. Then the whole heavens were illumined by a blinding glare. The nucleus of the comet seemed to throw out long rays of many-coloured light. A moment later it had burst into myriads of faintly gleaming atoms.

The watching millions on earth instinctively clasped their hands to their ears, expecting such a sound as would deafen them for ever; but none came, for the explosion had taken place beyond the limits of the earth's atmosphere. The whole sky was now filled from zenith to horizon with a pale, golden, luminous mist, and through this the moon and stars began to shine dimly.

Then a blast of burning air swept shrieking and howling across the earth, for now the planet Terra was rushing at her headlong speed of nearly seventy thousand miles an hour through the ocean of fire-mist into which the shattered comet had been dissolved. Then, this passed. The cool wind of night followed it, and the moon and stars shone down once more undimmed through the pure and cloudless ether.

Until now there had been silence. Men and women looked at each other and clasped hands; and then Tom Bowcock, standing just outside the marquee with his arm round his wife's shoulders, lifted up his mighty baritone voice and sang the lines:

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow!”

Hundreds and then thousands, then millions of voices took up the familiar strain, and so from the tops of the Lancashire moors the chorus rolled on from village to village and town to town, until with one voice, though with many tongues, east and west were giving thanks for the Great Deliverance.

But the man who, under Providence, had wrought it, seemed deaf and blind to all this. He only felt a soft trembling clasp round his right hand, and he only heard Auriole's voice whispering his name.

The next moment a stronger grip pulled his left hand out of his coat pocket, bringing the revolver with it, and Mr Parmenter's voice, shaken by rare emotion, said, loudly enough for all in the marquee to hear:

“We may thank God and you, Gilbert Lennard, that there's still a world with living men and women on it, and there's one woman here who's going to live for you only till death do you part. She told me all about it last night. You've won her fair and square and you're going to have her. I did have other views for her, but I've changed my mind, because I have learnt other things since then. But anyhow, with no offence to this distinguished company, I reckon you're the biggest man on earth just now.”

Soon after daybreak on the first of May, one of the airships that had been guarding Whernside dropped on the top of Winter Hill, and the captain gave Lennard a cablegram which read thus:

“LENNARD, Bolton, England: Good shot. As you left no pieces for us to shoot at we've let our shot go. No use for it here. Hope it will stop next celestial stranger coming this way. America thanks you. Any terms you like for lecturing tour.—HENCHELL.”

Lennard did not see his way to accept the lecturing offer because he had much more important business on hand: but a week later, after a magnificent and, if the word may be used, multiple marriage ceremony had been performed in Westminster Abbey, five airships, each with a bride and bridegroom on board, rose from the gardens of Buckingham Palace and, followed by the cheers of millions, winged their way westward. Thirty-five hours, later there was such a dinner-party at the White House, Washington, as eclipsed all the previous glories even of American hospitality.

Nothing was ever seen of the projectile which “The Pittsburg Prattler” had hurled into space. Not even the great Whernside reflector was able to pick it up. The probability, therefore, is that even now it is still speeding on its lonely way through the Ocean of Immensity, and it is within the bounds of possibility that at some happy moment in the future and somewhere far away beyond the reach of human vision, its huge charge of explosives may do for some other threatened world what the one which the Bolton Baby coughed up into Space just in the nick of time did to save this home of ours from the impending Peril of 1910.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

THE END

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

The Romance Of Golden Star

'To that Son of the Sacred Race who for Honour and Faith and Love shall take the hand of a pure virgin of his own holy blood and with her pass fearless through the Gate of Death into the shadows which lie beyond shall be given the glory of casting out the Oppressor and raising the Rainbow Banner once more above the Golden Throne of the Incas. On that Throne he shall sit and wield power and mete out justice and mercy to the Children of the Sun when the gloom that is falling upon the Land of the Four Regions shall have passed away in the dawn of a brighter age.'

The Prophecy Contained In The Ancient Legend Of Vilcaroya — inca and Golden Star, His Sister—bride.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Prologue

I — His Highness The Mummy

'Ah, what a thing it would be for us if his Inca Highness were really only asleep, as he looks to be! Just think what he could tell us—how easily he could re-create that lost wonderland of his for us, what riddles he could answer, what lies he could contradict. And then think of all the lost treasures that he could show us the way to. Upon my word, if Mephistopheles were to walk into this room just now, I think I should be tempted to make a bargain with him. Do you know, Djama, I believe I would give half the remainder of my own life, whatever that may be, to learn the secrets that were once locked up in that withered, desiccated brain of his.'

The speaker was one of two men who were standing in a large room, half-study, half-museum, in a big, old-fashioned house in Maida Vale. Wherever the science of archæology was studied, Professor Martin Lamson was known as the highest living authority on the subject of the antiquities of South America. He had just returned from a year's relic-hunting in Peru and Bolivia, and was enjoying the luxury of unpacking his treasures with the almost boyish delight which, under such circumstances, comes only to the true enthusiast. His companion was a somewhat slenderly-built man, of medium height, whose clear, olive skin, straight, black hair, and deep blue-black eyes betrayed a not very remote Eastern origin.

Dr Laurens Djama was a physiologist, whose rapidly-acquired fame—he was barely thirty-two—would have been considered sounder by his professional brethren if it had not been, as they thought, impaired by excursions into by-ways of science which were believed to lead him perilously near to the borders of occultism. Five years before he had pulled the professor through a very bad attack of the calentura in Panama, where they met by the merest traveller's chance, and since then they had been fast friends.

They were standing over a long packing-case, some seven feet in length and two and a-half in breadth, in which lay, at full length, wrapped in grave-clothes that had once been gaily coloured, but which were now faded and grey with the grave-dust, the figure of a man with hands crossed over the breast, dead to all appearances, and yet so gruesomely lifelike that it seemed hard to believe that the broad, muscular chest over which the crossed hands lay was not actually heaving and falling with the breath of life.

The face had been uncovered. It was that of a man still in the early prime of life. The dull brown hair was long and thick, the features somewhat aquiline, and stamped even in death with an almost royal dignity. The skin was of a pale bronze, though darkened by the hues of death. Yet every detail of the face was so perfect and so life-like that, as the professor had said, it seemed to be rather the face of a man in a deep sleep than that of an Inca prince who must have been dead and buried for over three hundred years. The closed eyes, though somewhat sunken in their sockets, were the eyes of sleep rather than of death, and the lids seemed to lie so lightly over them that it looked as though one awakening touch would raise them.

'It is beyond all question the most perfect specimen of a mummy that I have seen,' said the doctor, stooping down and drawing his thin, nervous fingers very lightly over the dried skin of the right cheek. 'On my honour, I simply can't believe that His Highness, as you call him, ever really went to the other world by any of the orthodox routes. If you could imagine an absolute suspension of all the vital functions induced by the influence of something—some drug or hypnotic process unknown to modern science, brought into action on a human being in the very prime of his vital strength—then, so far as I can see, the results of that influence would be exactly what you see here.'

'But surely that can't be anything but a dream. How could it be possible to bring all the vital functions to a dead stop like that, and yet keep them in such a state that it might be possible—for that's what I suppose you are driving at—to start them into activity again, just as one might wind up a clock that had been stopped for a few weeks and set it going?'

'My dear fellow, the borderland between life and death is so utterly unknown to the very best of us that there is no telling what frightful possibilities there may be lying hidden under the shadows that hang over it. You know as well as I do that there are perfectly well authenticated instances on record of Hindoo Fakirs who have allowed themselves to be placed in a state of suspended animation and had their tongues turned back into

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

their throats, their mouths and noses covered with clay, and have been buried in graves that have been filled up and had sentries watching day and night over them for as long a period as six weeks, and then have been dug up and restored to perfect health and strength again in a few hours. Now, if life can be suspended for six weeks and then restored to an organism which, from all physiological standpoints, must be regarded as inanimate, why not for six years or six hundred years, for the matter of that? Given once the possibility, which we may assume as proved, of a restoration to life after total suspension of animation, then it only becomes a question of preservation of tissue for more or less indefinite periods. Granted that tissue can be so preserved, then, given the other possibility already proved, andwell, we will talk about the other possibility afterwards. Now, tell me, don't you, as an archaeologist, see anything peculiar about this Inca prince of yours?"

The professor had been looking keenly at his friend during the delivery of this curious physiological lecture. He seemed as though he were trying to read the thoughts that were chasing each other through his brain behind the impenetrable mask of that smooth, broad forehead of his. He looked into his eyes, but saw nothing there save a cold, steady light that he had often seen before when the doctor was discussing subjects that interested him deeply. As for his face, it was utterly impassive—the face of a dispassionate scientist quietly discussing the possible solution of a problem that had been laid before him. Whether his friend was really driving at some unheard-of and unearthly solution of the problem which he himself had raised, or whether he was merely discussing the possible issue of some abstract question in physiology, he was utterly unable to discover, and so he thought it best to confine himself to the matter in hand, without hazarding any risky guesses that might possibly result in his own confusion. So he answered as quietly as he could:

'Yes, I must confess that there are two perhaps very important points of difference between this and any other Peruvian mummy that I have ever seen or heard of.'

'Ah, I thought so,' said Djama, half closing his eyes and allowing just the ghost of a smile to flit across his lips. 'I thought I knew enough about archæology and the science of mummies in general to expect you to say that. Now, just for the gratification of my own vanity, I should like to try and anticipate what you are going to say; and if I'm wrong, well, of course, I shall only be too happy to be contradicted.'

'Very well,' laughed the professor; 'say on!'

'Well, in the first place, I believe I'm right in saying that all Peruvian mummies that have so far been discovered have been found in a sitting posture, with the legs drawn close up to the body by means of bindings and burial-clothes, so that the chin rested between the knees, while the arms were brought round the legs and folded over them. Then, again, these mummies have always been found in an upright position, while you found this one lying down.'

'Quite so, quite so!' said the professor. 'In fact, I may say that no one save myself has ever discovered such a mummy as this among all the thousands that have been taken out of Peruvian burying-places. And now, what is your other point?'

'Simply this,' said Djama, kneeling down beside the case, and laying his hands over the abdomen of the recumbent figure. 'In the case of all mummies, whether Egyptian or Peruvian, it was the invariable practice of the embalmers to take out the intestines and fill the abdominal cavity with preservative herbs and spices. Now, this has not been done in this case. Look here.'

And deftly and swiftly he moved the dusty, half-decayed coverings from the body of the mummy, while the professor looked on half-wondering and half-frightened for the safety of his treasure.

'That has not been done here. You see the man's body is as perfect as it was on the day he died—to use a conventional term. Now, am I not right?'

'Yes, yes; perfectly right,' answered the professor, who felt himself fast losing his grip of the conversation which had taken so strange a turn. 'But what has all this got to do with the most unique mummy that ever was brought from South America? Surely, in the name of all that's sacred, you don't mean—'

'My dear fellow, never mind what I mean for the present,' replied Djama, with another of his half smiles. 'If I mean anything at all, the meaning will keep, and if I don't it doesn't matter. Now, do you mind telling me exactly how and where you came across this extraordinary specimen of—well, for want of a better term—we will say, Inca embalming?'

'Yes, willingly,' said the professor, glad to get back again on to the familiar ground of his own experiences. 'I found it almost by accident in a little valley about four days' ride to the westward of Cuzco. I was on my

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

way to Abancay across the Apurimac. My mule had fallen lame, and so I got belated. Night came on, and somehow we got off the track crossing one of the Punas—those elevated tablelands, you know, up among the mountains—and when the mule could go no farther we camped, and the next morning I found myself in an almost circular valley, completely walled in by enormous mountains, save for the narrow, crooked gorge through which we had stumbled by the purest accident. The bottom of this valley was filled by a little lake, and while I was exploring the shores of this I saw, hidden underneath an overhanging ledge of rock, a couple of courses of that wonderful mortarless masonry which the Incas alone seemed to know how to build. I had no sooner seen it than all desire of getting to Abancay or anywhere else had left me. I made my arriero turn the animals loose for the day, and then I sent him back to a village we had passed through the day before to buy more provisions and bring them to me.

'As soon as he had got out of sight I set to work to get some of the stones out and see what there was behind them. I knew there must be something, for the Incas never wasted labour. It was hard work, for the stones were fitted together as perfectly as the pieces of a Chinese puzzle; but at last I got one out and then the rest was easy. Behind the stones I found a little chamber hollowed out of the rock, perfectly clean and dry, and on the floor of this I found, without any other covering than what you see there, the mummy of His Highness lying on what had once been a bed of soft Vicuna skins, as perfect and as lifelike as though he had only crept in there twelve hours before, and had laid down for a good night's rest.

'You may imagine how delighted I was at such a find. I hardly knew how to contain myself until my man came back. I put the stones back into their places as well as I could, and when Patricio returned the next day I had the animals saddled up, and started off in a hurry to Cuzco. There I had this case made, bought two extra mules, brought them to the valley, packed up my mummy, took it back to Cuzco, and from there to the railway terminus at Sicuani and took it down by train to Arequipa, where I left it in safe keeping until I had finished the rest of my exploration. Then I went back, took it down to Mollendo, got it on board the steamer, and here it is.'

'And you didn't find any traces of other treasure—places, I suppose, in the valley?' said Djama, who had listened with the most perfect attention to the professor's story.

'No, I didn't, though I must confess that one side of the cave in which I found this was walled up with the same kind of masonry as there was in front of it; but, to tell you the truth, the Peruvian Government has such insane ideas about treasure—hunting; and the life of a man who is believed to have discovered anything worth stealing is worth so little in the wilder districts of the interior, that I was afraid of losing the treasure I had got, perhaps for the sake of a few little gold ornaments which I might have dug out of the hill, and so I decided to be content with what I'd found.'

'H'm!' said the doctor. 'Well, you may have been wise under the circumstances; I daresay you were. But we can see about that afterwards. Meanwhile there is something else to be talked about.'

He stopped suddenly, took a quick turn or two up and down the room, with his hands clasped behind him and his eyes fixed on the floor. Then he went to the door, opened it, looked out, shut it and locked it, and then came back again and sat down without a word in his chair, staring steadily at the impassive face of the mummy in the packing—case.

'Why, what's the matter, doctor?' said the professor, a trifle sharply. 'You don't suppose I am afraid of anyone coming to steal my treasure, do you?'

'My dear fellow,' said Djama, looking him straight in the eyes, and speaking very slowly, as though his mind was doing something else besides shaping the thoughts to which he was giving utterance, 'I don't for a moment suppose that there are thieves about, or that, if there were, any burglar with a competent knowledge of his profession would think of stealing your mummy, priceless as it may prove to be. I locked the door because I don't want to be interrupted. I want to talk to you about a very important matter.'

'And that is?'

'Mephistopheles.'

'WHAT?'

'Gently, my friend, gently, don't get excited yet. You will want all your nerves soon, I can assure you. Yes, I am quite serious. You know that in the good old days, when people still believed in His Majesty of Darkness, such a speech as the one you remember making a short time ago was quite enough to call up one of

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

his agents, armed with full powers to make contracts and do all necessary business.'

'Look here, Laurens, if you go on talking like that, I shall begin to think you have gone out of your mind.'

'My dear fellow, to be quite candid with you, I don't care two pins what you think on that subject. I have been called mad too many times for that. Now, suppose, just for argument's sake, that I were Mephistopheles, and staked my diabolic reputation on the statement that in that thing you possess a possible key to those lost treasures of the Incas, which ten generations of men have hunted for in vain, what kind of a bargain would you be inclined to make with me on the strength of it? Half the rest of your life, I think you said, and as that wouldn't be very much good to me, suppose we say the half of any treasures we may discover by the help of our silent friend there? Eh?—will that suit you?'

'Are you really serious, Djama, or are you only dreaming another of these wild scientific dreams of yours?' exclaimed the professor, taking a couple of quick strides towards him. 'What connection can there possibly be between a mummy, about four centuries years old, and the lost treasures of the Incas?'

'This man was an Inca, wasn't he?' said the doctor, abruptly, 'and one of the highest rank, too, from what you have said. He lived just about the time of the Conquest, didn't he—the time when the priests stripped their temples, and the nobles emptied their palaces of their treasures to save them from the Spaniards? Is it not likely that he would know where, at anyrate, a great part of them was buried? Nay, may he not even have known the localities of the lost mines that the Incas got their hundredweights of gold from, and of the emerald mines which no one has ever been able to find? Why, Lamson, if these dead lips could speak, I believe they could make you and me millionaires in an hour. And why shouldn't they speak?'

'Don't talk like that, Djama, for Heaven's sake! It is too serious a thing to joke about,' said the professor, with a half-frightened glance in his set and shining eyes. 'I should have thought you, of all men, knew enough of the facts of life and death not to talk such nonsense as that.'

'Nonsense!' said the physiologist, interrupting him almost angrily; 'may I not know enough of the facts of life and death, as you call them, to know that that is not nonsense? But there, it's no use arguing about things like this. Will you allow this mummy of yours to be made the subject of—well, we will say, an experiment in physiology?'

'What! the finest and most unique huaca that was ever brought to Europe—'

'It would only be made finer still by the experiment, even if it failed. I know what you are going to say, and I will give you my word of honour, and, if you like, I'll pledge you my professional reputation, that not a hair of its head shall be injured. Let me take it to my laboratory, and I promise you solemnly that in a week you shall have it back, not as it is now, but either the body of your Inca, as perfect as it was the day he died, or—'

He stopped, and looked hard at his friend, as if wondering what the effects of his next words would be upon him.

'Or what?' asked the professor, almost in a whisper.

'Your Inca prince, roused from his three-hundred-year sleep, and able to answer your questions and guide us to his lost mines and treasure houses.'

'Are you in earnest, Djama?' the professor whispered, catching him by the arm and looking round at the mummy as though he half thought that the silent witness in the packing-case might be listening to the words which, if it could have heard, would have had such a terrible significance for it. 'Do you really mean to say in sober earnest that there is the remotest chance of your science being able to work such a miracle as that?'

'A chance, yes,' replied Djama, steadily. 'It is not a certainty, of course, but I believe it to be possible. Will you let me try?'

'Yes, you shall try,' answered the professor in a voice nothing like as steady as his. 'If any other man but you had even hinted at such a thing, I would have seen him—well, in a lunatic asylum first. But there, I will trust my Inca to you. It seems a fearful thing even to attempt, and yet, after all, if it fails there will be no harm done, and if it succeeds—ah, yes, if it succeeds—it will mean—'

'Endless fame for you, my friend, as the recreator of a lost society, and for both of us wealth, perhaps beyond counting. But stop a moment—granted success, how shall we talk with our Inca revenant? Have I not heard you say that the Aymaru dialect of the Quichua tongue is lost as completely as the Inca treasures?'

'Not quite, though I believe I am now the only white man on earth who understands it.'

'Good! then let me get to work at once, and in a week—well, in a week we shall see.'

II — A Physiological Experiment

LAURENS DJAMA dined with the professor that night, and the small hours were growing large before they ended the long talk of which their strange bargain, and the still stranger experiment which was to result from it, formed the subject. The next day the packing-case containing the mummy was transferred to Djama's laboratory, and then for a whole week neither the professor nor any of his friends or acquaintances had either sight or speech of him.

Every caller at his house in Brondesbury Park was politely but firmly denied admittance on professional grounds, and three letters and two telegrams which the professor had sent to him, after being himself denied admittance, remained unanswered.

At last, on the Thursday following the Friday on which the mummy had been sent to the laboratory, the professor received a telegram telling him to come at once to the doctor. Three minutes after he had read it he was in a hansom and on his way to Kilburn, wondering what it was that he was to be brought face to face with during the next half hour.

This time there was no denial. The door opened as he went up the steps, and the servant handed him a note. He tore it open and read,—

'Come round to the laboratory and make a new acquaintance who will yet be an old one.'

His heart stood still, and he caught his breath sharply as he read the words which told him that the unearthly experiment for which he had furnished the subject had been successful.

The doctor's laboratory stood apart from the house in the long, narrow garden at the back, and as he approached the door he stopped for a moment, and an almost irresistible impulse to go away and have nothing more to do with the unholy work in hand took possession of him. Then the love of his science and the longing to hear the marvels which could only be heard from the lips that had been silent for centuries overcame his fears, and he went up to the door and knocked softly.

It was opened by a haggard, wild-eyed man, whom he scarcely recognised as his old friend. Djama did not speak; he simply caught hold of the sleeve of his coat with a nervous, trembling grasp, drew him in, shut the door, and led him to a corner of the room where there was a little camp bed, curtained all round with thin, transparent muslin, through which he could see the shape of a man lying under the sheets.

Djama pulled the curtain aside, and said in a hoarse whisper,—

'Look, it has been hard work, and terrible work, too, but I have succeeded. Do you see, he is breathing!'

The professor stared wide-eyed at the white pillow on which lay the head of what, a week before, had been his mummy. Now it was the head of a living man; the pale bronze of the skin was clear and moist with the dew of life; the lips were no longer brown and dry, but faintly red and slightly parted, and the counterpane, which was pulled close up under the chin, was slowly rising and falling with the regular rhythm of a sleeper's breathing. He looked from the face of him who had been dead and was alive again to the face of the man whose daring science and perfect skill had wrought the unholy miracle, and then he shrank back from the bedside, pulling Djama with him, and whispering,—

'Good God, it is even more awful than it is wonderful! How did you do it?'

'That is my secret,' whispered Djama, his dry lips shaping themselves into a ghastly smile, 'and for all the treasures that that man ever saw, I wouldn't tell it to a living soul, or do such hideous work again. I tell you I have seen life and death fighting together for two days and nights in this room—not, mind you, as they fight on a deathbed, but the other way, and I would rather see a thousand men die than one more come back out of death into life. You see, he is sleeping now. He opened his eyes just before daybreak this morning—that's nearly ten hours ago—but if I lived ten thousand years I should never forget that one look he gave me before he shut them again. Since then he has slept, and I stood by that bed testing his pulse and his breathing for eight hours before I wired you. Then I knew he would live, and so I sent for you.'

The professor looked at his friend with an involuntary and unconquerable aversion rising in his heart

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

against him; an aversion that was half fear, half horror, and then he remembered that he himself had a share in the fearful work which had been done—a work that could not now be undone without murder.

With another backward look at the bed, he said, in a whisper that was almost a smothered groan,—

'When will he wake?'

Before Djama could reply, the question was answered by a faint rustle, and a low, long-drawn sigh from the bed. They looked and saw the Inca's face turned towards them, and two fever-bright eyes shining through the curtains.

'He is awake already, two hours sooner than I expected,' said Djama, in a voice that he strove vainly to keep steady. 'Come, now, you are the only man on earth who can talk to him. Let us see if he has come back to reason as well as to life.'

'Yes, I will try,' said the professor, faintly. He took a couple of trembling steps. Then the lights in the room began to dance, the whitewashed walls reeled round him, and he pitched forward and fell unconscious by the side of the bed.

When he came to himself he was lying on the floor of the laboratory, out of sight of the bed, behind a great cupboard, glass-doored and filled with bottles. Djama was kneeling beside him. A strong smell of ammonia dominated the other smells peculiar to a laboratory, and his brow was wet with the spirit that Djama was gently rubbing on it with his hand.

'What have I been doing?' he said, as, with the other's assistance, he got up into a sitting position and looked stupidly about him. 'It isn't true, that is it, I really saw—Good God no, it can't be; it's too horrible. I must have dreamt it.'

'Nonsense, my dear fellow, nonsense! I should have thought you would have had better nerves than that. Come, take a nip of this, and pull yourself together. There is nothing so very horrible about it for you. Now, if you had had the actual work to do—'

'Then it is true! You really have brought him back to life again? That was him I saw lying on the bed?' He looked up at Djama as he spoke with a half-inquiring, half-frightened glance. His voice was weak and unsteady, like the voice of a man who has been stunned by some terrible shock, and is still dazed with the fear and wonder of it.

'Yes, of course it was,' said Djama; 'but I can tell you, I should have hesitated before I introduced you so suddenly, if I hadn't thought that the nerves of an old traveller like you would have been a good deal stronger than they seem to be. It's a very good job that His Highness was only about half conscious himself when you collapsed, or you might have given him a shock that would have killed him again.'

'Again?' said the professor, echoing the last word as he got up slowly to his feet. 'That sounds queer, doesn't it, to talk of killing a man again? I am more sorry than I can say that I was weak enough to let my feelings overcome me in such a ridiculous fashion. However, I am all right now. Give me another drain of that brandy of yours, and then let us talk. Is he still awake?'

'No, he dozed off again almost immediately, and you have been here about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. Do you think you can stand another look at him?'

'Oh, certainly,' said the professor, who, as a matter of fact, felt a trifle ashamed of himself and his weakness, and was anxious to do something that would restore his credit. He followed the doctor out into the laboratory again, and stood with him for some moments without speaking by the Inca's bedside. He was sleeping very quietly, and his breathing seemed to be stronger and deeper than it had been. He had slightly shifted his position, and was lying now half turned on his right side, with his right cheek on the pillow.

'You see he has moved,' whispered Djama. 'That shows that muscular control has been re-established. We shall have him walking about in a day or so. Ah! he is dreaming, and of something pleasant, too. Look at his lips moving into a smile. Poor fellow, just fancy a man dreaming of things that happened three hundred years ago, and waking up to find himself in another world. I'll be bound he is dreaming about his wife or sweetheart, and we shall have to tell him, or rather you will, that she has been a mummy for three centuries. Look now, his lips are moving; I believe he is going to say something. See if you can hear what it is?'

The professor stooped down and held his ear so close that he could feel on his cheek the gentle fanning of the breath that had been still for three centuries. Then the Inca's lips moved again, and a soft sighing sound came from them, and in the midst of it he caught the words,—

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'Cori—Coyllur, Nustallipa, Ñusta mi!'

Then there came a long, gentle sigh. The Inca's lips became still again, shaped into a very sweet and almost womanly smile, as though his vision had passed and left him in a happy, dreamless slumber.

'What did he say?' whispered Djama. 'Were you able to understand it?'

'Yes,' said the professor, 'yes, and you were right about the subject of his dream. Come away, in case we wake him, and I will tell you.'

They went to the other end of the laboratory, and the professor went on, still speaking in a low, half-whisper,—

'Poor fellow, I am afraid we have incurred a terribly heavy debt to him. What he said meant, "Golden Star, my princess, my darling!" So you see you were right, but poor Golden Star has been dead three hundred years and more—that is, at least, if his Golden Star is the same as the heroine of the tradition.'

'What tradition?' asked Djama.

'It's too long a story to tell you now, but if she is the same, then our Inca's name is Vilcaroya, and he is the hero of the strangest story, and, thanks to you, the strangest fate that the wildest romancer could imagine. However, the story must keep, for I wouldn't spoil it by cutting it short. The principal question now is—what are we going to do with him? We can't keep him here, of course?'

No, certainly not,' replied Djama, with knitted brows and faintly smiling lips. 'His Highness must be cared for in accordance with his rank and our expectations. I shall have him taken into the house and properly nursed.'

'But what about your sister? You will frighten her to death if you take in a living patient that has been dead for three hundred years.'

'Not if we manage it properly; there will be no need to tell Ruth the story yet, at anyrate. I'll tell her that I am going to receive a patient who is suffering from a mysterious disease unknown to medical science. I'll say I picked him up in the Oriental Home in Whitechapel, and have brought him here to study him, and you and I must smuggle him into the house and put him to bed some time when she is out of the way. Then I'll instal her as nurse; in fact, she will do that for herself; and as there is no chance of her learning anything from him, we can break the truth to her by degrees, and when His Highness is well enough to travel we'll all be off to Peru and come back millionaires, if you can only persuade him to tell you the secret of his treasure-houses.'

That night the doctor and the professor took turns in watching by the bedside of their strange patient, whose slumber became lighter and lighter until, towards midnight, he got so restless and apparently uneasy that Djama considered that the time had come to wake him and see if he was able to take any nourishment. So he set the professor to work, warming some chicken broth over a spirit lamp, and mixing a little champagne and soda-water in one glass and brandy and water in another. Meanwhile, he filled a hypodermic syringe with colourless fluid out of a little stoppered bottle, and then turned the sheet down and injected the contents of the syringe under the smooth, bronze skin of the Inca's shoulder. He moved slightly at the prick of the needle, then he drew two or three deep breaths, and suddenly sat up in bed and stared about him with wide open eyes, full, as they well might be, of inquiring wonder.

The professor, who had turned at the sound of the hurried breathing, saw him as he raised himself, and heard him say in the clear and somewhat high-pitched tone of a dweller among the mountains,—

"Am I only dreaming that the death-sleep is over?"

'Has the morning dawned again for the Children of the Sun? Am I truly awake, or am I only dreaming that the death-sleep is over? Where is Golden Star, and where am I? Tell me—you who have doubtless brought me back to the life we forsook together—was it last night or how many nights or moons ago?'

The words came slowly at first, like those of a man still on the borderland between sleep and waking; but each one was spoken more clearly and decisively than the one before it, and the last sentence was uttered in the strong, steady tones of a man in full possession of his faculties.

'Come here, Lamson,' said Djama, a trifle nervously; 'bring the soup with you, and some brandy, though I don't think he needs it. Do you understand what he said?'

'Yes,' replied the professor, coming to the bedside with a cup of soup in one hand and a glass of brandy and water in the other. Both hands trembled as he set the cup and the glass down on a little table. He looked at the Inca like a man looking at a re-embodied spirit, and said to him in Quichua,—

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

I am not he who has brought you back to life, but my friend here, who is a great and skilled physician, and master of the arts of life and death. You are in his house, and safe, for we are friends, and have nursed you back to health and waking life after your long sleep.'

'But Golden Star,' said the Inca, interrupting him with a flash of impatience in his eyes. Where is she—my bride who went with me into the shades of death? Have you not brought her, too, back to life?'

The professor stared in silence at the strange speaker of these strange words, which told him so plainly that the old legend of the death—bridal of Vilcaroya—Inca and Golden Star was now no legend at all, but a true story which had come down almost unchanged from generation to generation. Then an infinite pity filled his heart for this lonely wanderer from another age, whose friends and kindred had been dead for centuries, and whose very nation was now only a shadowy name on a half—forgotten page of history.

'What does he say?' said Djama, breaking in upon his reverie. 'I suppose he wants to know where he is, and what has become of that sweetheart of his he was dreaming about?'

'Yes,' replied the professor; 'but you won't understand properly until I have told you the story. Poor fellow! I suppose we shall have to tell him the ghastly truth. Good Heavens! fancy telling a man that his wife has been dead for three hundred years or more! Look here, Djama, this business can't stop here, you know. What a fool I was, after all, not to see if there wasn't another chamber beside the one I found him in! Of course there must be, and I have no doubt she is lying there at this present moment. We shall have to go and find her, and you must restore her as you have done him. Phew! where is it all going to end, I wonder!'

'And suppose we can't find her, or suppose I fail, even if I can bring myself to undertake that horrible work all over again?' said Djama, looking almost fearfully at the Inca, who was still sitting up in the bed glancing mutely from one to the other, as though waiting for an answer to his question. Then, keeping his voice as steady as he could, the professor told him the story of his resuscitation, addressing him by his own name and ending by asking him if he remembered when he and Golden Star had devoted themselves to die together, as the tradition said they had done.

'Yes, I remember!' said Vilcaroya, with brightening eyes and faintly flushing cheeks. 'How could I forget it? It was when the bearded strangers from the north had come and taken the usurper Atahualpa prisoner in the midst of his conquering host at Cajamarca. It was after the Inca Huascar had been slain by stealth with a traitor's knife. It was on the night of the feast of Raymi, when our Father the Sun had left the Sacred Fleece unkindled, and when was fulfilled the prophecy that the night should fall over the land of the Children of the Sun. Now, tell me, you who speak the language of my people, how long have I been sleeping?'

Instead of replying directly, he offered the Inca the cup of broth, and asked him first to take the nourishment that he must need so greatly after his long fast, telling him that it was needful to prevent him losing his new—found strength again. When he had eaten and drunk a little, then he would tell him what he could.

He took the broth and a little bread obediently, and while he was eating and drinking, the professor translated what he had said to the doctor. When he had finished, Djama looked at the Inca, sitting there taking food and drink like any other human being, and with evident relish, too, and said,—

'That happened in 1532—three hundred and sixty—five years ago! It sounds utterly incredible, doesn't it, and yet there he is, eating and drinking and talking with us just like any other man. I can hardly believe the work of my own hands, and I am beginning to half wish I had never begun it. Just imagine the awful loneliness to which we shall have condemned this poor fellow, supposing we can't find his Golden Star and restore her to him! Still perhaps you had better tell him the truth at once. I think he can stand it. He has been a long time coming round, but I don't think there is much the matter with him now.

Then the professor told Vilcaroya the terrible truth, that of all men in the world he was the most lonely, separated as he was from all that he had known and loved by an impassable gulf of nearly four long centuries—that his well—loved Golden Star was but a memory known to few, a name in a vague tradition; that the resting—place, even of her mummy, was unknown, and that all that the darkest prophecy could have foretold had in very truth fallen upon the land of the Incas and the Children of the Sun.

Vilcaroya heard him to the end in silence; then, raising his hands to his forehead, he bowed his head and said,—

'It is the will of our Father, foretold by the lips of his priests, but other things were foretold which shall be

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

fulfilled as well as these. Golden Star is not dead; she only sleeps as I did. If I have awakened, why shall not she? I know where she lies—where Anda–Huillac swore to me they would lay her. Come, let us go! I will take you to the place, and you shall restore her to me, warm and living and loving as she was when I kissed her good–bye in the Sanctuary of the Sun, and I will give you treasures of gold and silver and jewels such as you have never dreamed of in exchange for her.'

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

The Story of Vilcaroya

CHAPTER I — Back Through The Shadows

As the time passes between dreaming and waking, so for me did the long years pass, flowing like a smooth and silent stream seen from afar, out of the darkness that fell so slowly and so sweetly over my eyes that night when I sank into the death-trance beside Golden Star, my beloved, in the bridal chamber that they made for us in the Temple of the Sun, into the light that shone into them when they opened upon a scene so different, and saw a white, haggard face bending over me, and two black, burning eyes looking into them.

Then I closed them again and slept, and when I woke again there were two faces looking at me, both white and full of fear and wonder, and I saw two beings who seemed very strange to me, such as I had never seen among the Children of the Sun, standing by the couch on which I lay, and one of them fell down as though sore stricken, and I tried to think what this could mean, and, thinking, fell asleep again.

Then I dreamt a long, sweet dream of the days that I now know were far past, when I, Vilcaroya, son of the great Huayna-Capac, lived in the Land of the Four Regions, a prince among princes, a warrior and a child of the Sacred Race, whose blood had flowed unmixed through many generations from the divine fountain of life and light, our Father the Sun. I dreamt of Golden Star, and the days when I loved her in timid silence, for she was the fairest of all our race, and so, as it seemed to me, destined to no less a lot than the motherhood of a long line of Incas, in whom should live and grow to ever greater splendour the glories of the race that owned no earthly origin.

I called her in my dream, but she made no answer. I saw her lying by my side in that well-remembered chamber, with the shadowy forms of the priests standing about us as I had seen them long before; but, alas! she lay still with closed eyes and lips which seemed to have forgotten how sweetly they once could smile. I whispered her name, mingled with many a loving word, into her ear, and still she moved not. I put my arms about her and kissed her, and instantly I shrank back shivering with a fear unspeakable, for the form that should have been so warm and soft and yielding, was chilled and pulseless and rigid, as though some foul magic had changed it into stone, and the lips that should have given me back kiss for kiss were still and cold and senseless.

Then I saw, as it seemed with half-closed eyes, that dear shape of hers being borne away from me, while I, longing to snatch her from the hands of those who were robbing me of her, yet lay helpless on the couch, without strength to move or speak, until all grew dim around me, and I felt myself raised by invisible hands, and borne far away through the darkness—and so my dream melted away into the night of sleep.

Then, yet again, I woke and saw the two strange men that I had seen before, and one came and spoke to me kindly in my own tongue, and called me by my own name, and gave me food and drink, and told me in a few, but to me terrible, words that the dreams I had dreamed were dreams indeed—dreams of a time that was long gone by, of things that had passed away, perchance for ever, and men and women whose names were only memories.

Thus did I come from the evening of one age into the morning of another, falling asleep in the prime of my strength and manhood, and waking again even as I had fallen asleep—though those who had closed my eyes had been dead for many generations, and the name of our ancient race was but a bitter memory to the sons and daughters of my own land amidst the mountains.

Then I went forth into the wondrous new world into which I had awakened, the world which you who read this hold so common, and which I found crowded with wonders so many and marvellous that if it had not been for the loving care of her who guided my first footsteps on my new journey, as she might have guided those of a little child, my re-awakening reason must soon have been quenched in the night of madness.

Many and strange as were the things that happened to me during the first days and months of my awakening, there is little need that I should now write of them at any length. Yet something I must say of them in order that the still stranger things of which I shall have to tell may be the better understood.

And first I must tell of her whose gentle hand led me from weakness to strength, and guided my unwonted

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

footsteps through the mazes of that new wonderland in which I had awakened, and from whose lips I learnt the first words that I spoke of the strong and stately English speech in which I am striving so lamely and imperfectly to write down the story of my new life.

This was Ruth, the sister of Djama, whose smile was the first ray of sunshine that shone into my second life, and whose laugh was so sweet and gladsome, that when it first sounded in my ears, like an echo from the dear dead past, I named her forthwith Cusi-Coyllur, which in English means Joyful Star—after that royal maiden of my own race who loved the handsome rebel Ollantay, and, refusing all others, waited for him in the House of the Virgins of the Sun until he came in triumph to claim her. She came with us to the south, rejecting all contrary counsel and braving the labours of the long, toilsome journey, so that she might be the first woman to welcome Golden Star back into the world of life.

Yet what words can I find in this new speech that I have yet but half learnt to tell fitly of her beauty and sweet graciousness, and of all the magic which made her seem in my eyes like an angel that had come down from the Mansions of the Sun to greet me in a world in which I was a stranger? Better that you who may read what I write should learn to know her for yourself through the sweetness and grace of her own words and deeds, as I shall strive, however unworthily, to tell of them. So, then, let it be.

But there is another of whom I must say something before I go on to tell of my return to my own land—now, alas! mine no longer—and that is Francis Hartness, a captain among the warriors of the English, and a friend of him who was called the professor, because of his learning—he who had helped Djama to bring me back into the world of living men.

He was a man of about thirty years, tall of stature and strong of limb, brief of speech and straight of tongue, with eyes as blue as the skies which shine on Yucay, and hair and beard golden and bright as the rays which flow from the smile of our Father the Sun. Him we met by chance one evening in the square of the town which is called Panama, named, they told me, after that older city, whence the conquerors of my people sailed to ravish the realms of Huayna-Capac. There was peace in his own land and all the neighbouring countries, and so he was journeying to the region which is now called South America, where the descendants of the Spaniards are nearly always fighting among themselves over the spoils of my people, to see what work he could find to keep his sword from rusting.

As he was greatly skilled in that strange, new warfare of flame and thunder and far-smiting bolts, which had but begun to be when our Father the Sun hid his face from the eyes of his children, I took counsel with Joyful Star—who was ever my wisest as well as my most faithful guide in all things—and we together told him my story as we went south, and after that I had asked him if he would help me in the task which I was going to essay, which was nothing less than the taking back of the land of my fathers, and the raising of the children of my people to the ancient glories of that state which I alone of living men remembered. To this, after some shrewd questioning, he consented—for it was a desperate venture, such as his brave heart loved—and when he had given me his hand on it, and promised, after the simple fashion of his nation, to be true to me in peace and war, I told him of the means that I could employ to gain my end, and how I would use that lust of gold which had led to the ruin of my people, so that it should conquer the children of their conquerors and give me back the empire that had been my father's.

At Panama we took ship again and travelled swiftly and straightly south, driven by that wondrous power which had come into the world to serve men like a tireless giant since I had fallen asleep; and day after day on the southward voyage I walked alone up and down the deck, or stood gazing, rapt in thought, at the desert foreshore along which the steamer was running, and at the great masses of the dark brown barren mountains, as they towered range beyond range till they overtopped the clouds themselves and stood serene and sharply outlined against the blue background of the upper sky.

Behind those mighty, rock-built ramparts lay the well-loved, well-remembered land over which my fathers had ruled in the days of peace, before the stranger and the oppressor had come. On the other side of them I knew that I was now fated to find only the poor fragments of the great cities and stately pleasure-houses that I had known in all their strength and beauty—only the silent and deserted ruins of the mighty fortresses which had guarded the confines of our lost empire, and were the portals through which the Children of the Sun had marched to unvarying conquest.

I thought, too, of the broad, green, level plain of Cajamarca, surrounded by its guardian ramparts of

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

terraced hills; of the long, verdant valley of Cuzco with its hundred towns and villages nestling amidst the foliage which shaded their streets and squares, and looking out over the level fields of the valley and the countless tiers of terraces that rose green and gold with maize, or glowing with flowers, to the summits of the hills; and of that earthly paradise of Yucay, wherein the Gardens of the Sun, the golden shrines of my ancient faith, and the wondrous pleasure-palaces of many generations of Incas had glowed in almost heavenly beauty, embosomed in green and gold and scarlet in the midst of inaccessible mountains which themselves were overtopped by the mighty peaks of eternal snow that I had so often seen glimmering white and ghostly in the moonlight, like guardian spirits round an enchanted realm, on many a night of delicious revelry now far past and lost in the swift flood of the years that had rolled by since then.

It was to the poor remnants of all these glories that I was returning—returning to find, as they had told me, the homes of my ancestors laid waste and the descendants of my people the slaves of strangers. The desolation which it had taken centuries to accomplish would be to me but the swift, magical change of a day and a night and a morning.

Think, you who read, of the dread and the horror of it! I had seen the last day of the stately empire of my fathers the Incas! I had fallen asleep and I had awakened, and now, on the morrow of my sleep, I was coming back to the silent and ghastly ruins which the slow, pitiless work of the years and centuries had left behind it!

But over the gulf of these same centuries the hand of my Father the Sun was swiftly stretched out to help and uphold me, for no sooner did I again tread that soil which had once been sacred to Him, than my fainting heart grew strong with the memory of that ancient prophecy which I had come to fulfil, and of which this new life of mine was of itself a part fulfilment. If one part, and that not the least, had already been made good, then why not the rest?

Far away behind those towering tiers of mountains lay Golden Star in that resting-place to which she had been borne with me, sleeping soundly in the impassive embrace of their mighty arms; and within the safe-keeping of those arms lay, too, that uncounted treasure, that vast legacy which the long-dead leaders of my people had bequeathed to me for the sacred purpose of restoring those glories which all men, save myself, believed to be but a dream of the distant past, that incomparable inheritance of which I was the sole lawful heir on earth, and which I was coming to share with Golden Star when I had once more raised the Rainbow Banner above the restored throne of the divine Manco.

As I thought of all this, the blood that had lain stagnant through the long years of my magical death-sleep began to pulse like living fire through my veins. My new life with all its marvels became glorified into a waking vision of new conquests and re-won empire. The past was a dream both sweet and bitter in its vivid memories, but still a dream that had been dreamt and was done with. The present and the future were realities, golden and glorious with a hope justified by the miracle that had made them possible. I had learnt enough of the new age in which I had awakened to know that the lust of gold which had brought the conqueror and the oppressor into the land of the children of the Sun burnt every whit as fiercely in the hearts of the men who were living now as it had done in theirs, and that lust, as I had told Hartness and the others, should now work for me and for the redemption of my people so that that which had been their ruin should yet prove their salvation.

Thus, through the long sunny days and cool, starlit nights did I, Vilcaroya, last of the Incas, muse and dream until I once more stood in the Land of the Four Regions, hale and strong, and burning with the ardour of my sacred mission, ready to dare and do all things, and to use without ruth or scruple that dread power which would so soon lie within my hands to fulfil my oath and Golden Star's, and to accomplish the work that I had come through the shadows of death to do.

So I came back to the shores of that well-loved land of mine which, by the reckoning of the new time into which I had come, had been for more than three hundred years the sport and prey of the generations of strangers and oppressors who had followed those first conquerors of the Children of the Sun, whose coming had sounded the hour of doom and ruin through the length and breadth of that glorious land of green plains and verdant valleys, of terraced hills and towering mountains, which had once been our empire and our home.

From the mean coast town of wooden houses where the railway begins we travelled ever upward over great, grey, sloping deserts, and by rugged ravines with steep, broken walls of red earth and ragged rock; through range after range of mountains that were all strange and hateful to me, until we swung round the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

shoulder of a great crag-crowned mountain, and I saw across a vast plain, into which range after range of lesser hills sloped down, the crystal-white peaks of the snow-mountains towering far beyond the clouds into the blue sky above them.

Then I knew that I was coming nearer to the land that had once been mine, and ere many hours had passed we stopped in a great city which still bore its old name of Arequipa, the Place of Rest, which my own ancestors had given to it. It was no longer the place of palaces and pleasure-houses, of flowery gardens and leafy woods that I had seen it, but above it still gleamed the white snow-fields and shining peaks of Charchani and Pichu-Pichu, and between the two great white ranges still towered the vast, black, snow-crowned cone of Misti, the smoke-mountain, rising sheer in its lonely grandeur twelve thousand feet above the sloping plain on which the city lay.

As I looked at it again for the first time after so many years, I asked the professor, as we all called him, if, since I had been asleep, the mountain had been rent asunder again as it had been in the olden times, long before the Spaniards came to seek gold and blood in the Land of the Four Regions. He was very learned in such matters, even as Djama, his friend, was learned in secrets of life and death, and when he told me that the fires within it had slept for more years than men could remember, I was glad. Yet I said nothing of my inward joy, for had I told them all that I knew about the valley of black sand and yellow rock that was hidden behind the far-off wall of snow which shone so whitely against the blue of the midway heaven, it might have been many a long day before we had again set out on our journey towards the place that was the goal at once of my hopes and fears.

We stayed seven days in Arequipa, making our last preparations for the work that lay before us and then we went on again by train to Sicuani, in the valley of the Vilcariota. Then from Sicuani we journeyed on by road, riding on mules through a land that was lovely even in my eyes, though its loveliness was to me only the beauty of ruin and decay, for this was the heart and centre of that vanished empire whose glories no living eyes but mine had ever seen.

I saw wildernesses where there had been gardens, and gaunt, treeless mountains lying bare to the glare of the sun. Lakes that had shone encircled with gardens now spread out dull and stagnant over the neglected fields. A few ragged fragments of grey clay walls still rose from the green plain of Cacha, where I had last seen, in all its glory of gold and rainbow colours, the holy Temple of Viracocha; and the great guardian fortress of Piquillacta, which I had seen stretching its impregnable length and rearing its unscalable height from mountain to mountain across the entrance to the once lovely valley of Cuzco, lay, a huge ragged mass of towering ruins, splendid even in decay.

As we passed through the one half-choked portal that still lay open, I thought, with heavy heart and bowed-down head, of the great fortress as I had seen it in the glory of its pride and strength, of the gallant warriors that had defended it, and the gay processions that I had seen winding in and out of its stately gates, making its hoary walls ring with songs and laughter, and, farther on, as we rode along the valley on that sad and yet eager three days' march of ours, I saw, on the hill-spurs about me, the black and ragged ruins of the fair cities and stately temples and palaces that I had seen crowded with happy throngs, bright with gold and colours, and so fair and strong that no man could have dreamed of the ruin the oppressor had brought upon them.

And so, journeying amidst all these sad memories through a land which, for me, was peopled with the ghosts of my long-dead friends and kindred, we came out at length on the broad, green Plain of the Oracle, and there before me, still nestling under her guardian hills, lay, glimmering white and grey under the slanting sun-rays, all that was left of what had once been Cuzco, the City of the Sun and the home of his children. Then, as I lifted my eyes and gazed upon it through the rising mist of my tears, I bowed my bared head towards it and swore, in the sadness and silence of my desolate heart, that, to the full extent of the power which I believed was soon to be mine, I would take life for life and blood for blood, and I would give sorrow for sorrow and shame for shame, until I had paid to the full the debt which the long years of plunder and cruelty and oppression had heaped up against those who, from generation to generation, had brought this shame and ruin on the once bright home of the Children of the Sun.

CHAPTER II — Brothers Of The Blood

I SHALL not weary you who perchance may some day read this story of mine by dwelling on the sorrow and shame that filled me as I entered the foul, unlovely streets, and saw the filthy refuse in the squares of the city that I remembered so pure and bright and beautiful; nor yet by telling of the feelings that possessed me when I saw the poor remains of our desecrated temples, the places where our vanished palaces had stood, and the dismantled ruins of that mighty fortress of Sacsahuaman, which I had last seen standing palace-crowned and throned in all its grandeur high up above the city.

All this and more you who read must picture for yourselves, for I have greater things to tell of than the poor sorrows of a wanderer who had left his own age and his own kindred far behind him, and who had come back into a strange world to find his country a wilderness, and the children of his people the slaves of strangers.

It had been settled amongst us that, for the purpose for which we had come, it would be necessary to hire a house that should be at once commodious for our work, sufficiently removed from the city for privacy, and capable of defence against intruders if need be. The professor, being already known in Cuzco as a man of science and seeker after antiquities, and possessing, moreover, a special permit from the Government in Lima to travel and dwell in the interior, and make such searches as he thought fit, undertook the business of finding such a house. He made many journeys in quest of what he sought, and on these journeys Djama always accompanied him, since he had to see that the house chosen contained a chamber suitable for that precious work which he had undertaken to do in return for the share of treasure that I was to give to him.

And while these two were absent I at times wandered about the city with Joyful Star and Francis Hartness, who, it was plain to see, already looked with eyes of love and longing on her beauty, as in good truth I myself could have done had I dared, and could I have forgotten that older love of mine who still lay cold in her death-sleep in the cave by the lake yonder, over the mountains to the westward, whither I had already cast so many longing glances. But at other times I left them to go upon my own ways, for I had work on hand which, for the present, did not concern them.

I had by this time met and conversed with many of my people in their own language, which was that of the labouring classes of my own times, and from them I had learned that at a village called San Sebastian, through which we had passed, about two leagues to the south of the city, there still dwelt many families of Ayllos—that is to say, the descendants of those of the old noble Inca lineage, who had been permitted by their conquerors to settle here. So one morning I went to visit an old Indian—as they now called all our people—named Ullullo, with whom I had made acquaintance, and at his house I dressed myself in the native fashion—in an old shirt and short trousers, with sandals on my feet, and a broad-brimmed, fringed hat on my head, and covered myself with a faded poncho, and together we went on foot to San Sebastian, I looking no different from the rest of the Indians who were passing to and fro upon the road.

I had already seen, while riding through the village, that the people were different to those of all other villages that we had come through on the way. They were taller of stature, prouder of carriage, and fairer of face. The blood showed red in their cheeks through the light brown of their skin, and these signs had told me that if any remnant of the pure Inca race was left these must be they; and I was soon to have proof that it was so, although the children of those who had lived in palaces were now dwelling in huts of mud and reeds.

Ullullo led me first to the house of a man named Tupac Rayca, who was chief among the Indians of the town. He was great-grandson of that ill-fated Tupac-Amaru, who, as you know, had revolted many years before against the oppressors of his race, and for this, after being forced to watch the torture and murder of his wife in the square of Cuzco, had himself been torn limb from limb by horses.

We found him alone in a bare room in one of the better houses of the village. As he stood up to salute us it needed but a glance to tell me that in his veins at least the ancient blood of our race flowed well nigh as purely as it did in my own. Had it not been for the meanness of his clothing and the dull, brooding look on his noble

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

features—the stamp of generations of oppression—I could have pictured him with the yellow Llautu* on his brow, the golden image of the Sun on his girdled tunic, and the rainbow banner in his hand, standing amongst the guards of the great Huayna–Capac himself.

* The yellow Llautu, or fringed turban of wool, worn on the brows, was the distinguishing mark of the sacred Inca race. The scarlet was worn only by the reigning Inca—'Son of the Sun.' Its fringe, called the 'borla,' was mingled with threads of gold.

I asked Ullullo to leave us alone for a little while, and when he had gone I stepped forward, and, drawing myself up to my full height, I looked him in the eyes, and said in the tongue that was spoken only by those of the divine Inca race,—

'Tell me, Tupac–Rayca, does a remnant of the Children of the Sun still dwell in the Land of the Four Regions, and are they still faithful to the traditions of their race, and the faith of their ancestors?'

As the words left my lips he staggered back a pace or two with his hands clasped to his forehead, staring at me from under them as though—as in very truth I was—some spirit of the past stood re–embodied before him. Then, coming forward again and scanning me eagerly from head to foot, he whispered in the same tongue—by the Lord of Light how those familiar accents thrilled my ears as I heard them again after so long!

'Who are you—a stranger—that comes in the image of those long dead, to ask me such a question in the tongue that may only be spoken when none save those of the Blood are present?'

'One who is of the Blood himself!' I answered, taking a stride towards him, and stretching out my hand. 'Fear not, Tupac–Rayca, son of him that suffered, I am a friend, and have come from afar to work as a friend with you and others of the Blood that may still be left in the land, with a great and holy purpose of which you shall know ere long.'

He grasped my hand and bowed over it in silence for a while. Then he stepped back and looked at me again, murmuring,—

'Can it be so? Has the divine Manco come back from the Mansions of the Sun to save the remnant of his children, or has Vilcaroya broken the bonds of his death–sleep and come to fulfil the oath he swore with Golden Star before the altar in the Sanctuary? I know all the Children of the Blood that are left in the land, and I have never seen your face before, yet you are of the Blood. Who are you—Lord?'

The last word seemed forced from his lips by some power other than his own will, and it sounded most pleasant to me, for it told me that, without knowing my name, and seeing me only as a stranger, he had recognised the stamp of my divine ancestry, and this promised well for the progress of the work I had in hand. I answered him kindly, and yet as one speaking to another who is scarce his equal, and said,—

My name matters not now or here, Tupac, for we are but two, and I might lie to you, and you would have no proof of my truth or falsehood. But if you will do as I bid you, to–night you shall know and all shall be made plain and with ample proof. Are you willing to give me your aid?'

He picked up a rude hoe that stood in a corner of the room, and laying it across his shoulder after the manner of one who bears a burden, bowed his head and answered,—

'The Son of the Sun has but to speak, and I and all his slaves will obey.'

What he had done was an act of homage, which, in the olden time, was paid only to him who wore the imperial Llautu, and proved to me how faithfully the old traditions had been preserved in secret.

'That is well said, Tupac,' I replied, speaking now as a sovereign might speak to a faithful subject, 'and in the days to come fear not that I shall forget this, your first act of unasked–for homage. Now, hear me. Are there twenty men of the Blood in this village—men who are faithful and can be trusted even to the death?'

'There are five hundred here, Lord, and as many thousands within the valley, whose blood has flowed pure from the olden times, unpolluted by a single stain of Spanish dirt. What would you with them?'

I asked not for hundreds or thousands,' I said, right glad at heart to hear such good tidings. 'For the present I need but a score, so do you choose me twenty of the noblest blood and the best judgment, and an hour before midnight let them be with you on the plain behind the Sacsahuaman. Let them come well provided with torches or candles, and tools, levers, and hammers and spades. Tell them what has passed between us, but nothing of the guesses that you may have made in your own mind while we have been talking, and leave the rest to me. Can you do that?'

It shall be done, Lord,' he answered, still bending before me with the shaft of the hoe across his shoulders,

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'and we will wait and toil in patience till the Son of the Sun shall please to reveal himself to the eyes of his servants.'

Nor shall you have to wait long,' I said. 'Now put that off your back and take my hand again, for we are not Inca and servant yet, only two men of the Blood, and brothers of a fallen race who are joined together to perform a holy work. Now farewell, Tupac, till to-night. Choose your companions well, and fear not but that your services and your faithfulness shall have their due reward.'

He put his hand humbly and tremblingly into mine, bowing low over it, and so I left him, standing there with bent head, not daring to look up until the door closed behind me. Then Ullullo and I went back into the city, and as we crossed the great square on our way to Ullullo's house, I saw my four English friends standing among the market people by the fountain in the centre. We passed close to them, and I heard my name spoken by Joyful Star to her brother, who answered her and said,—

'I daresay we shall find he is making friends again with some of these filthy Indian compatriots of his.'

I hated him from that moment for his bitter words, and swore in my heart that some day he should pay for them, for I loved my people, and pitied them in their misery and degradation. I stopped beside them, and my heart was beating hard as I listened for what Joyful Star would say, and I have remembered her words, even as I have remembered his. She looked at him with the light of anger in her eyes and said,—

'For shame, Laurens! I couldn't have believed that you would have said such a thing. If you belonged to a race that had been enslaved and plundered by these brutes of Spaniards and Peruvians for three centuries and a half, do you think you would be any better than these poor fellows? And, besides, whatever they are, they are Vilcaroya's people, and he is our friend.'

I could have fallen on the stones and kissed her feet for those sweet words of hers, and I moved away quickly for fear I should betray myself, and went with a swelling heart and mingled tears of love and anger in my eyes to old Ullullo's house, where I changed my clothes again, and then, as it was nearly dinner time, which, as you know, is in the evening in Spanish countries, I went back to the house where we were lodging, wondering what they would think if they could have understood the words that had passed between Tupac-Rayca and myself.

When I met them again I saw that they would willingly have learned what had become of me during the day, but I answered their inquiries by telling them nothing more and yet a great deal less than the truth, and saying that I had spent the day revisiting old scenes, and learning what I could of the present condition of my people. This satisfied them outwardly at least, though I saw a look in Djama's eyes which told me that he suspected more of the truth than it suited my purpose to tell him.

Then our conversation turned to the matter of procuring a house, such as I have spoken of, and the professor told me that he had heard of a hacienda, well built and solid, and standing in its own domain, about three leagues across the valley to the westward, on a secluded little plain among the hills, which would serve our purpose excellently; but the owner of it wished to sell it, and 'with the stupidity of these Peruvians,' as he said, would not hire it out to us but would only sell it, and the price was twenty thousand soles, or dollars of Peru, which was two thousand pounds in English money.

It is a great pity,' said the professor, when he had finished telling me about it, 'for it doesn't seem as though there was another house in the neighbourhood of Cuzco that would suit our purpose, and this one would do perfectly.'

'Of course, if the fellow won't let it there's no use thinking any more about the matter, for two thousand pounds is entirely out of the question. It seems to me that the expedition will be quite expensive enough without the luxury of buying houses at fancy prices.'

It was Djama who spoke. No one else at our table could have spoken like that. I heard him in silence, for I could not trust myself to speak for the anger that was rising within me. I saw Joyful Star raise her eyelids and look at him with a swift glance that meant much; but she, too, said nothing; and then, looking at me, he spoke again and said,—

'Of course, if His Highness'—for so he always spoke of me when no strangers were present—'would just unlock one of those treasure-houses of his, the matter would be easy enough, but I suppose that's outside the contract.'

I still kept silence, knowing as I did what the night was to bring forth. But Francis Hartness answered for

me, and said,—

'I don't think you can quite put it that way, Djama, if you'll excuse me saying so. If I am not mistaken, it has been clearly understood that the first treasure-house to be unlocked is the one that holds Vilcaroya's greatest treasure—his wife—and what you say seems to suggest—'

'It is enough!' I said, unconsciously speaking in my growing anger in the same imperious tone that I had used but a few hours before to Tupac. 'Let the house be bought. I will charge myself with the cost, and I will be the debtor of my friends no longer.'

They stared at me as I spoke, for hitherto I had spoken to them as a child rather than as a man; as an inferior, rather than as an equal. I saw a smile that was not pleasant to look upon pass swiftly over Djama's mouth, but he kept silence, and the professor said to me,—

'Are you really in earnest, Vilcaroya? You know, according to our bargain, we have no claim on you until our part of the work is done. None of us have any desire to learn your secrets.'

I am not talking of secrets,' I said, breaking into his speech, 'and one of my race does not speak to make a liar of himself. What I say I can do and will, for I wish the work to begin at once. Do you think I have not waited long enough for my beloved, my sister and my wife?'

'Your what!' cried Joyful Star, rising suddenly from her seat, and staring at me with fixed and wide-opened eyes. 'Your sister! Oh, Vilcaroya, surely this is not true!' and as she said this I saw her cheeks grow pale and her lips tremble.

'Yes,' I answered, 'it is true. Why should I lie to my new sister and friend, Joyful Star? Golden Star was the daughter of my father, the great Huayna-Capac, though our mothers were not the same.'

I had no time to finish my speech, for with a look of unutterable horror in her eyes, which pierced me to the heart and seemed to sever it in twain, she cried,—

'Oh, no, no! that is too horrible! I don't want to hear any more. I will go back to England to-morrow. Laurens, come to my room; I want to speak to you at once.'

So saying, she went to the door and opened it and went out, followed by her brother, who looked at me as he passed me with a look which I never forgot or forgave, for it was like the words that I had heard him say to her in the square.

'What is this?' I said to the professor when the door had closed behind them. 'What have I said or done that Joyful Star should look with horror upon me and say such cruel words?'

I saw him exchange glances full of meaning with the English soldier before he answered me; and then, leaning his arms on the table in front of him, he said, in that quiet, calm voice of his,—

'My dear Vilcaroya, it is a very strange thing, and, as far as Miss Djama is concerned, perhaps, a very great pity that this has never come out before, for without knowing it you have given her a shock that may have very painful consequences. No, don't interrupt me now, for the sooner I can make you understand the meaning of your words to her the better. It is this way: we know, of course, that in your day and among your people sister-marriage was held to be the most sacred of all marriages. We know that from such a marriage only might spring the wearer of the imperial Borla, but to us the idea is so unutterably horrible and revolting that of all the crimes that could be committed by one of our race that would be the most fearful. It cannot even be discussed amongst us, and yet you, in the most perfect innocence, have spoken of it in the presence—Good Heavens, Hartness! what is to be done? Do you think Miss Djama was really in earnest when she talked of going back to England to-morrow? It is impossible—it would ruin everything!'

I kept silence, for my sorrow and wonder were too great for words, but I listened eagerly for what Francis Hartness would say in reply.

'She was in earnest when she spoke,' he said, as quietly as the professor had spoken; 'but, if the doctor has as much sense as I give him credit for, she will have seen the thing in a different light by this time. Of course, she has read Prescott, and she really knows as much about the marriage customs of the ancient Incas as we do. In fact, to tell you the truth'—and as he said this I saw him frown, and an angry light came into his eyes that I had never seen in them before—'I really can hardly understand how, knowing that as she does know it, she can have been as horrified as she certainly was. She knows perfectly well that Vilcaroya has come at a single step, as it were, from his age into ours, and so must have brought all the ideas and beliefs of his time and his people with him. Depend upon it, a little reflection will very soon show her that, horrible and all as the idea

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

must naturally have appeared to her at the first shock of hearing it, from Vilcaroya's point of view there is nothing in it but what is perfectly natural and proper. Now, to my mind, the matter is much more sad and serious for Vilcaroya himself than for anyone else.'

As he said this he turned from the professor to me and went on, addressing me in a tone so frank and kindly that ever afterwards I looked upon him as my friend and my brother,—

'It's not a pleasant thing for me to say, and it must, of course, be a very painful one for you to hear; still, it has got to be said some time or other, and, unless I am wrong in what I think of you, I believe you are man enough to hear it and to agree with me that it had better be said now than later on, when the saying of it might be tenfold more painful both to you and us.'

'Say on,' I said shortly. 'Your tongue is straight and your eyes look into mine as those of a friend should look. I am listening.'

'I would wish for no better friend than you, Vilcaroya, after that, for I know what you mean. Now, what I have to say is this. We know, of course, that you look upon yourself as doubly married to this love of yours, who is dead and, like you, may yet be alive again. You are bound to her, not only by a marriage which, in the time that it took place, was perfectly lawful and natural, but also by the oath that you took together. But you have come back to the world in another age and among another people, and now that form of marriage is looked upon by all civilised humanity, not only as unlawful, but, as the professor has just said, unnatural and horrible beyond conception.

'Therefore, if Golden Star is restored to life, for you to love her, save as a brother, or for you to consummate the union which, as you have told us, began and ended before the altar of the Sun, would be to make not only yourself, but your—your sister, Golden Star, as well, looked upon with horror and loathing by every civilised man and woman who knew your story. I am speaking strongly, because it is necessary.

'You might succeed in all your aims, you might realise every ambition of your life, and yet I tell you it is Heaven's own truth, that if you took Golden Star to sit beside you on the throne of the Incas as your wife and queen, you would place her upon a pinnacle of infamy which men would spit upon and women turn their backs on. The reward of all your labours, the price of all your treasures, no matter how great they might be, would be nothing but a curse that would fall heavily on you, but a thousand times more heavily on the woman whom you have loved best in all the world.'

He stopped, and they both sat and looked at me in silence, awaiting for me to answer him. As for me, I felt my spirit wandering over a bare wilderness where all was dark.

I knew that he had spoken truth, strange as the truth seemed to me, for no man could have heard his voice and seen the steady light in his eyes, without knowing that he was a true man, and so spoke the truth. The moments passed, and I could still find no words to say. Then the silence was broken by the opening of the door, and Djama came in and said,—

'My sister wishes you to excuse her coming back to the table. Of course, I have explained matters to her, and I think she now sees them in a different light, but for some reason or other she seems strangely shaken. You know how extremely sensitive she is, and so, as her doctor, as well as her brother, I have sent her to bed. She wasn't really fit to come back after what has happened, and a night's rest will be the best thing in the world for her. I suppose you two have explained things to His Highness as well, eh?'

'Yes,' I said, rising from my seat. 'It has been explained to me. I do not understand all now, but I must think, and think alone, so I will go.'

Then I went to Francis Hartness and held out my hand to him and said, after the fashion of the English,—

'Good-night, Captain Hartness. You have wounded me sorely with your words, yet you have spoken them as only a friend could speak them. From now till the day of my death or yours, Vilcaroya Inca is your friend, and all his people are your servants.'

Then I took my hand from his, and bowing farewell to the others, walked swiftly out of the room and got my cloak, and went out into the city to think in silence by myself over the strange and terrible things that I had heard, and to calm my spirit before I went to do the work which, in a few hours, would be awaiting me on the hills behind the Sacsahuaman.

CHAPTER III — In The Hall Of Gold

I went first to Ullullo's house and changed my clothing, so that I might the more easily lose myself among the hundreds of Indians about the streets of the city, for something told me that Djama might make an attempt to discover the meaning of what I had said about the house by following me and learning, if possible, the secret of my movements; for he must have known that, being without money as I was, save for the few dollars that the professor had lent me, it would not be possible for me to do as I had said, unless one, at least, of the hiding-places of the old treasures was within easy reach so that I could take sufficient gold out of it by the next day to fulfil my promise.

When I changed my clothes I put a dagger into my belt, and a revolver, which Francis Hartness had already taught me how to use, into a case slung at my hip, and hidden by my jacket and the long folds of my poncho. Then I went back into the great square, and across it up the street in which we had our lodgings. As I passed the house I saw Djama standing in the archway leading into the courtyard, smoking a cigar. I turned and looked him in the face as I went by, slouching and trailing my sandalled feet after the fashion of the natives. He looked at me, but I saw no recognition in his eyes. Then as I walked on there came a thought to me.

I hurried to Ullullo's house once more and brought him back with me, telling him on the way what I wanted him to do for me. When we reached the house again we saw Djama standing in the courtyard, and Ullullo, doing as I had bid him, went in to him, and told him in Spanish, which I could not speak, that if he would give him ten dollars he should learn the secret of my goings and comings, and where I was to find the gold with which to pay for the hacienda. Djama instantly promised him the money, as I thought he would, and Ullullo told him to be at the end of the street which is now called El Triunfo at eleven o'clock that night. He was to come alone, for if anyone came with him he would learn nothing. As you will soon see, I had two objects to serve in doing this.

When Ullullo came back and told me that Djama would be there, I bade him wait for me at the same place and hour, and then I went away alone out of the city and up a path which led towards the mountains to the north. There, alone and in silence, I communed with my own soul, at first in sorrow, yet slowly becoming more and more peaceful in heart, even as one who is told that he is to die on a certain day first rages against his doom and then learns to contemplate with calmness that which there is no hope of escaping. The words of the professor and Francis Hartness had shown me that in the world to which I had returned my sister Golden Star could now never be my wife and queen, and the more I pondered on what they had said, the more plainly it appeared to me that this was the truth, however bitter it might seem.

Yet there was something else in my heart, although at that time I did not dare even to let my inmost thoughts dwell upon it, which in some way dulled the pain of the blow that had fallen upon me, and reconciled me to the parting which in one sense must now be eternal. The longer I pondered the more deeply did that look of horror which I had seen in the eyes of Joyful Star burn into my soul, and the more clearly did the words that she had spoken ring in my ears. She had said that it was horrible and that it was impossible, and she was to me as one of those bright angels who, according to our ancient faith, awaited the heroes and sages of our race in the Mansions of the Sun—a being so far above me that I could look upon her only as a mortal might look from afar upon a daughter of the Celestials.

Thus, musing in silence and solitude on the wild mountain-side, now looking back into my distant past, and now hazarding a glance into the fast-approaching future, the hours slipped by quickly for me, and I heard the bells of the churches—bells which they had told me had been cast out of the copper and gold and silver that our conquerors had taken from our temples and palaces—chiming the half-hour before eleven.

So I turned back to the city, and made haste to the place where Djama and Ullullo would be waiting for me. I found them there talking together, and without discovering myself to Djama, I told Ullullo in Quichua to follow me with the Englishman. Then I went on swiftly along the rivulet of Tullamayo, past the terrace of Rocca Inca, and along the smooth, dark wall of what had once been the Yachahuasi, or College of the Youths,

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

and so out of the city and the gorge of the little river Rodadero. Then, with the two still following me a few yards behind, I climbed the lower terraces of the Colcompata, or the Granaries, where the divine Manco built his first palace, and then on up the hillside to the Tiupunco, or Gate of Sand, which led through the fragments of what had once been the outer wall of the great fortress, and so on to the little level pampa of the Rodadero, which was my meeting-place with Tupac.

Now as I went I began to sing one of our ancient songs, which was the signal that I had agreed upon with Tupac, and presently, one after another, silent, stealthy forms crept out from the angles of the great zig-zag wall and came towards me. One of them, taller than the rest, threw an iron bar that he was carrying across his shoulders, and came and stood before me with bowed-down head, waiting for me to speak. I knew that it was Tupac, and I said to him,—

'Are the Children of the Sun ready to do the bidding of his Son?'

'They are, Lord!' he replied. 'Here are twenty who have sworn by the heart of the divine Manco to do all things lawful and unlawful, even to the death, at the bidding of him who shall prove himself to be the true heir of the royal Llautu.'

'It is good,' I said, 'and the proof shall soon be given. Now, take the stranger yonder; do him no harm, but bind his eyes so that he cannot see, and tie his hands behind him. Then follow me.'

Instantly the stealthy forms closed around Djama. Not a word was spoken save his startled, angry exclamation, which was soon stifled, and then they brought him along after me, I going first and Tupac following close behind me. Like a string of shadows we moved across the plain past the great carved rock which is still called the Inca's Seat, and over the ridge of the Sliding Stones and down into the valley beyond, which is thickly strewn with great rock-masses carved into seats, and altars, and baths, and chambers, of which no man knows the origin, and which were ancient when Manco-Capac and Mama-Occlu first came into the land.

The greatest of these is a high white rock carved all over into steps and seats and altars and basins, which are said to have been made to catch the blood of the living sacrifices that were offered up here by a race of men whose name has been forgotten. It is called in our language the Sayacusca, or Tired Stone, for an old tradition says that ages ago it was brought from the mountains by the toil of ten thousand men, and when it reached its present place it rolled over and killed three hundred of them, and could never be moved again upon its journey.

On the south side of this there is a great cleft from the top to the bottom, and up the sides of this cleft are the two halves of a stairway, which was carved there before some earthquake rent the stone in twain, and under this is a deep dark pool of water. At the entrance to the cleft I stopped and beckoned to the others to come round me. Then I told them that they were about to see that which no man then alive on earth had ever seen, and made all swear by the Glory of the Sun that each and every one of them would slay without pity him who revealed anything seen or heard that night, even though he were his own brother, or his own father, or his own son. As for Djama, they held him there bound and blindfolded amongst them, and when he tried to speak they stopped his mouth at my bidding, for I had told them that I would be answerable for him, since I had brought him here for my own purposes.

Then I made two of the men stretch a cord tightly across the mouth of the cleft close down to the ground, and to the middle of this I tied another cord, and stretched it out straight twelve foot-lengths from the centre, and here I bade them clear away the bushes, and dig. Then axe and hoe and spade went to work. In that clear air, and under that cloudless sky, the stars gave light enough to work by, and soon a space had been cleared, and a round hole about three feet across was being dug down through the loose, rocky soil.

When it was about half the depth of a man the spades struck on the solid rock below, and could go no farther. When Tupac told me of this, I, who had been standing by the cleft, looking—full of strange thoughts—down into the dark pool of water, called the man who had been digging out of the hole, and, taking an iron bar from Tupac, I dropped into it.

I sought about the bottom with my hands for a few moments till I found the outline of a squared stone that had been let into the rock. In the centre of this I found a hole, out of which I picked the dirt with my dagger. Then, putting the end of my iron bar into it, I pulled, and the stone turned over on a hinge, leaving an opening half its size. Down this I thrust my arm, and found a chain of copper which hung down into a deep well

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

below. I pulled this with all my strength until something gave way at the bottom, then I drew the chain up, and cast my iron bar under it across the hole. As I did this, I heard the deep, smothered roar of waters rushing away far below me into the bowels of the earth.

Then I got out of the hole and went back to the cleft. I lit a candle and looked down at the pool. It was no longer stagnant now, but seething and eddying like a whirlpool. I beckoned to Tupac, who was standing a little way behind me, and as he came and looked over my shoulder I pointed down into the dark gulf, out of which the bottom was rapidly falling, and said,—

'See, the waters are opening the way by which the Son of the Sun shall go into his kingdom. Watch now, and listen!'

'Son of the Sun and Lord of the Four Regions, it is true!' he whispered as the waters eddied round faster and faster, and gurgled and rattled down into some unknown abyss. Soon they vanished altogether, leaving only a dark, black, and seemingly fathomless cavern in the place where they had been. I waited until the sound of the last gurgle had died away in the depths, and then I turned to Tupac and said,—

'The way is open. Tell Ullullo to bring the lantern and light it. There must be no other light. You and the rest follow me, and let two strong men bring the stranger.'

He did as I bade him, and when I had lit the lantern I cast its rays about the gulf beneath me till I found the continuation of the broken stairway above, and then picking my way carefully down the dank, slimy steps, I led the way into the heart of the rock, the rest following, guided by the spreading ray of light in front of me.

I counted fifty steps, and then stopped and turned sharply to the right. The fiftieth step ended against a wall of rock, still dripping with the water that was running down from the arched roof of the chamber. I measured ten spans with my hand from the wall where the steps ended, and made a mark with my dagger on the rock. Then from the floor I measured eight spans in a line across the mark. Where the eighth span ended I made another mark, and with the help of my lantern I found a silver socket let into the rock. It was a plate with a hole in the centre large enough to admit the iron bar which I had brought for the purpose. I put it in, and whispering to Tupac to help me, we gripped the bar, and after two or three hard pulls felt it coming towards us.

A great slab of rock, which fitted into the wall with all the perfection that our old Inca masons could give it, turned on a central hinge, leaving a space that two men could have walked through abreast, 'Go in,' I said to Tupac, 'and let all follow you.'

He obeyed, and standing by the opening with a ray of my lantern shooting across it, I watched them file past one by one until all had gone in. Then I followed, and as I crossed the threshold set my shoulder against the edge of the slab and pushed it back into its place.

Now I covered my lantern with my poncho and cried aloud in the darkness,—

'Let the torches be got ready, but let no light be struck till that which is to be revealed may be seen.'

A low murmur answered me, and then, still keeping my lantern hidden, I felt my way along the wall, treading softly as a mountain lion approaching its prey, until I had counted forty paces. The fortieth brought me to a doorway, through which I turned. Five paces more brought me to another turning, ten more to the end of the passage, and then I uncovered my light and found myself in a little square chamber hewn out of the rock and surrounded with stone chests covered with lids of copper.

In the centre of the chamber stood a smaller one, all of metal. I set my lantern down on one of the others so that the light fell across this one; then I raised the lid, and there before me lay, perfect as they had been on the day when Anda-Huillac, last High Priest of the Sun, had laid them there, the imperial robes and insignia that had last been worn by the ill-fated Huascar, son of the great Huayna-Capac.

Quickly throwing off the mean garments that I wore, I dressed myself in them. Then, binding the golden sandals on my feet, and clasping the long mantle emblazoned in gold and jewels with the symbols of the Sun and his sister-wife the Moon across my shoulders, I wound the scarlet Llautu around my head, with the crimson fringe of the Borla interlaced with gold falling upon my brow, and then, closing the chest, I took up my lantern and went back along the passages I had traversed.

In the middle of the last one I put my lantern down with the glass against the wall, and feeling my way into the doorway, which opened on to the chamber in which the others were awaiting me, I cried, in a voice that echoed strangely through the great chamber,—

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'Let the torches be kindled, and let the Children of the Sun look upon their Lord!'

I heard a shuffling of feet and a whispering of many voices. Then lights were struck, and I stepped back quickly into the shadow of the doorway. I saw the glow of light grow into a glare that was flashed back in a thousand manycoloured rays from the walls of the chamber. I heard a deep, low cry of wonder, and then I strode out into the midst and said,—

'I am he who went into the shadows at the bidding of our Father the Sun, and by his will I have returned to bring deliverance to his children!'

For one moment of affrighted amazement they stared wide-eyed at me standing there before them, as though Huayna-Capac himself had returned from the Mansions of the Sun to resume his sceptre and his crown. Then, with one accord, they sank on their knees before me, holding their torches above their bent heads and murmuring,—

'Hail, Son of the Sun and deliverer of his children, who hast come to bring the daylight back to the long-darkened Land of the Four Regions!'

I looked at them and saw Djama standing erect, still bound and blindfold, in the midst of them. I went through the kneeling forms to him, and taking the bandage from his eyes stepped back, and while he was blinking at the light of the torches, said to him in English,—

'Look about you, Laurens Djama, and tell me if you believe now that I, the friend of the filthy Indians whom you despise, can do that which I have said?'

He was still half dazzled by the glare of the torches and the thousand rays of many colours that were flashing about him. Wherever his wondering glance fell it saw great golden plates covering the walls, thick-set with jewels, and in front of him, piled up against the end wall of the chamber, a shining heap of gold bars in the shape of a pyramid reaching to the roof of the chamber, and on either side of this, half way up, was a great image of the Sun, like to that which in the olden times stood above the altar in the sanctuary of the great temple of Cuzco, each with its centre fashioned as a human face, with great flashing diamonds for eyes, with lips of rubies, and long pendants of emeralds hanging from the ears, and all round a hundred curving rays of gold edged and lined with jewels.

He stared about him, open-eyed and open-mouthed with amazement. Then his eyes fell on me, and he started forward and stared me in the face for a moment. Then he gasped,—

'Vilcaroya, is it you, or am I dreaming? Where have you brought me to?'

'To one of the treasure-houses that you so longed to see,' I said, 'so that you might see and believe that I told you no idle tale, and that I can perform my promise if you can perform yours.'

Then I turned my back on him and went to the foot of the pyramid, and, taking my place in front of it, I said to those who still knelt before me in silence,—

'Let those of his children who are faithful to their Father the Sun rise and come without falsehood in their hearts, and say if they now believe that that which was foretold long ago, when the darkness fell over the land, has in very truth come to pass.'

They rose from their knees and came towards me in a half circle, carrying their torches. They stopped about five paces from me, looking at me through a little space with wondering eyes full of worship. Then they bowed their heads again, and Tupac came from the midst of them, and, casting himself prone at my feet, yet not daring even to touch my sandals, said in a broken voice,—

'Son of the Sun, heir of heaven and lord of earth, we have seen thy wisdom and thy majesty. None but one of thy royal line—nay, none but thee, oh, Vilcaroya, son of Huayna-Capac, and brother of Huascar, last of the Incas, could have known the secret that thou hast brought with thee from the past into the present. We are thy children and thy slaves, and all the men of the Blood that are left in the Land of the Four Regions shall hail thee lord as we do, and own no other master save thee, Vilcaroya Inca, from now until the hour when their father, the Lord of Life, shall call them back to the Mansions of the Sun. We are thine, and we will serve thee, ourselves and our wives and our children, as our fathers served thy father in the days when there was yet peace and happiness in the land.'

'And if ye are but faithful,' I said, 'and if the Lord, my father, who rules the day, and his sister, my mother, who rules the night, shall give me strength and wisdom to use the power that is mine, I will give you back peace and happiness, and the stranger and the oppressor shall be driven from the land, and the homes of the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Children of the Sun shall again be full of light. Rise now, Tupac, and let ten of the men give their torches to the others and make ready to do my bidding.'

He rose, and it was done. Then I called Djama to me and said,—

'What you have seen here to-night is a dream. When your eyes open again on the outer world, remember what I have said. Your hand has brought me from the grave to the throne, and you must obey me as these do. Let me but know that you have spoken one word, even to Joyful Star herself, concerning what you have seen here to-night, and I will show you how an Inca deals with one who dares to disobey him. Keep silence and have patience, and perform that which you have promised, and you shall go back to your own land loaded with gold and jewels. Fail, and the fragments of your body shall be sent north and south and east and west throughout the Land of the Four Regions, and your name shall be one of shame in the ears of my people for ever.'

For a moment he looked me in the eyes, and I saw his lips moving as though he was striving to shape some answer to my words. Then his face grew grey, and his knees shook as he stood. Then I called to Tupac, and bade him bind his eyes again and lead him away, and as soon as his sight was taken from him I bade the ten men who had given up their torches take off their ponchos and fill them with as many of the golden bars as each one could carry, and when this was done, I ordered all the torches save one to be extinguished. This one I took, and went with it into the passage where I had left my lantern. Then I dashed it against the wall and vanished into the darkness.

I took my lantern, and hiding the light carefully, went back to the little chamber, where I took off my robes and sandals and the imperial Llautu, and put them back into the chest. Then I put on my mean attire again and went back into the Hall of Gold. Signing to the others to follow me, I turned the stone door on its pivot again, and watched them file past me as before. Then, going out last, I closed the portal after me and lighted them up the steps with my lantern.

When we all once more stood in the open air by the cleft I went to the hole and released the chain. Instantly the roar of waters broke out again, and I bade them fill the hole up and put turf over it, and trample it down and scatter the bushes over it; and that being done, we took our way back again across the plain towards the fortress, still leading Djama blindfold in our midst.

We took him by the gate of Viracocha into the fortress, across its upper part, where the three crosses stood, and down on to the zigzag road which leads into the eastern part of the city, and there we unbound his eyes, and I bade him go to the house and make ready to receive me early in the morning, telling our friends that I should arrive with some packages of Indian merchandise and metals from one of my mines, for, as I should have told you before, I had come to Cuzco in the character of an owner of mines who had lived long in Europe and had returned to supervise the working of my property.

I and Tupac and his companions then went back into the hills, and without entering the city made our way by twos and threes into the village of San Sebastian. We met at Tupac's house, and there I explained to them as much of my plans and purposes as I thought fit for them to know, and showed them that the time was not yet come for them to make use of the treasures that I would share with them. But to each man I gave two pounds' weight of gold to be left in Tupac's care till it could be taken into the cities of the south and there changed for silver coins. Then I had a list made of their names, and promised them, after reminding them of their oaths, that when I once more sat on the throne of the divine Manco, their fidelity should be well remembered.

The next morning we loaded the gold in bales of the coca-leaf, great quantities of which are taken every day into Cuzco, upon four mules, and these I sent to our house while I went back with Ullullo and put on my English clothing. Then I followed, and found that the bags of coca had already arrived. They were carried up to my own room, and there, in the presence of Djama and Joyful Star, the professor and Francis Hartness, I took out the gold ingots and built them up in a pyramid before them.

I could see from their amazement that, whether from fear or faith, Djama had obeyed me, and said nothing of what he had seen during the night. As for me, I said but little. I gave them the gold, and that day the professor and Djama, acting as my agents, sold it to some of the merchants of Cuzco as the product of my mines. The price was more than twice as much as was needed for the hacienda, so with the rest I discharged my debt and made myself once more a free man.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

There is no need for me to dwell upon our dealings with the owner of the hacienda, and therefore it will suffice for me to say, before ten days more had passed the purchase—money had been paid, we had taken up our abode there, and installed Joyful Star as housewife, with faithful servants chosen by myself from among the Children of the Blood. Djama, who had been strangely silent and reserved with all of us since the lesson I had taught him in the Hall of Gold, had taken possession of the chamber which was devoted to his uses, and had put all his apparatus in order for the great work that was to be done there.

So on the fourteenth day, such was the power of my gold and of my longings, all things were ready, and at daybreak on the fifteenth day we rode at the head of our little mule train out of the courtyard of the hacienda on our way to the resting—place of Golden Star.

CHAPTER IV — The Sister Stars

For five long days we travelled slowly and toilfully on our way from the valley of Cuzco to that other where Golden Star lay sleeping beside the lake. Over high plains and pleasant valleys, through deep, dark gorges and ravines, to whose lowest depths the sun but seldom reaches, and then but for an hour or two, along narrow pathways cut into the living rock on the mountain side, with precipices on one hand falling thousands of feet into the dark abysses, where the torrents roared and foamed, and on the other the great rock-walls of the mountain soaring up into the sky yet more thousands of feet above us.

I saw the mighty crests of Saljantai and Umantai rising snow-crowned from earth to heaven, unchanged in their eternal grandeur since the long-distant day on which I had last beheld them. I rode with saddened heart past the ruins of Lima Tambo, remembering how fair and stately a city it had been in the days before the plunderer and the oppressor came. We toiled slowly over the great, sharp-ridged range which parts the waters of the Vilcamayo from those of the Apurimac—the 'Great Speaker'—then, descending again by the gorge of the river which is now called the Rio de la Banca, we came to the long bridge which swings in mid-air from rock to rock across the chasm through which the Great Speaker rolls his swift, roaring flood.

Its cables were loosened and its floorway broken, for, like all things else in the land, the Spaniards had suffered it to fall well nigh to ruin; and, as I led Joyful Star across it by the hand, I thought of what it had been in the olden times, when not a rope or a stick was suffered to be out of place, and when the Son of the Sun had been borne across it in his golden travelling litter, with long processions of his adoring people going before and behind him, strewing his way with flowers, and waking the echoes of these gloomy gorges with the melody of their songs and laughter.

From here we journeyed on, ever facing the setting sun, for two days more, still winding higher and higher up into the mountains, until at length, on the third evening, I, riding alone many yards in front of the others, found the sign that I was looking for—a rock with three seats carved on the top of it—and turned my mule from the track and rode over the rough, stony ground up the side of the mountain until what looked from the road a single rock-built peak opened into two. I beckoned to the others to follow me, and when they, came up I said to the professor,—

'Do you know where you are now? Have you ever been here before?'

He looked about him and shook his head, saying,—

'This may have been the place where we got off the road when my mule gave out, but I don't recognise it. Do you mean that we are near the valley?'

'Yes,' I said. 'Do you not remember seeing yonder two peaks from the shore of the lake near where you found me?'

He looked at them for a moment, and then said,—

'Yes, I remember them; but they don't look the same, and I don't believe I could find my way back into the valley from here to save my life. It's very strange how I can have forgotten it so completely.'

I smiled as he said this, knowing that I had brought them purposely many miles out of the way by which he had found the valley by accident, for I had no desire that the way should be known to any but myself and those I had chosen from among the remnant of the Children of the Blood. Then I bade them follow me again, and once more rode on alone ahead, for, as you may well believe, I was too full of my own thoughts and hopes and fears to be in any mood for conversation, even with Joyful Star herself. They, too, talked but little, and as we rode on in the deepening gloom amid the solemn silence and the gaunt grandeur of the mountains, their words became fewer and fewer, till at length thought took the place of speech, and the silence was broken by no sound save the patter of the mules' feet and the rattle of stones under their iron-shod hoofs.

Hour after hour I led them on, turning from valley to valley on the road that was visible only to my own eyes, and ever rising higher and higher towards the twin peaks that now stood out dark and sharp against the starry sky. At last, when our watches were nearly marking ten o'clock, I stopped before a cliff covered with

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

bushes and creeping grasses, and calling Tupac to me, I bade him seek for an opening under these.

He groped about among the bushes for a while, and then suddenly, with a short cry of surprise, he vanished, as it seemed, through the face of the rock itself. I dismounted and followed him, and found him standing behind the bushes, facing a square doorway cut in the rock and lined with masonry. Behind it, and closing it completely, was a great slab of dressed stone. Down the sides of the doorway were two square pillars of stone, and in the middle of one, to the left hand, three little lines had been cut about a finger's breadth apart, but so faintly that only one who knew they were there could find them.

I stretched a string across from the middle one of these to the right-hand pillar, and where the string ended in the centre of the pillar I felt with my finger-tips and found a little circle about as big round as an English two-shilling piece. Tupac had in his hand the iron rod that I had used on the Rodadero. I took it from him, and, pressing the end against the circle, told him to push with me, and, to his wonder, the rod sank, seemingly, into the solid stone, forcing out a bolt which had been fitted so cunningly into the pillar that the end of it looked no more than a circle traced on the face of it.

When we had pushed the rod in about six inches I bade Tupac help me to pull it round towards the door. The pillar turned on a central hinge as we did so, and the great stone slab swung back by its own weight, which we had thus released, opening the entrance to a tunnel high enough for a man to walk through erect. This tunnel sloped somewhat sharply upwards, and looking up it I could see, shining in the clear sky beyond the upper entrance, the stars that I knew were reflected in the still waters of the little lake by which Golden Star was sleeping the sleep out of which we had come to wake her.

As the passage was not large enough for the mules to go through with their burdens, I bade my men unload them and carry their loads through into the valley. Then we followed, leading our own animals by the bridle, and after us the cargo-mules were driven through. The load of one of them was a long, narrow case of wood like that in which the professor had taken my own dead body to London, but this was thickly and softly padded inside with wool, and lined with white linen, and at one end was a little pillow of the softest down, on which the head of Golden Star would soon be resting.

As soon as we were all standing outside the upper mouth of the tunnel I looked at Joyful Star and said,—

'Is not this a fitting resting-place even for the daughter of kings? Are not the stars bright in the heavens and on the bosom of the lake? Are not the mountains great, and strong, and silent? Do they not guard her couch well, and does not the snowy peak of Umantai yonder point the straight way to the Mansions of the Sun, where the soul of Golden Star is even now waiting for the arts of your brother to call it back to earth as he called mine?'

'Yes,' she said, looking about her, first at the stars and then at the vast shapes of the mountains which loomed huge and dim on every side. 'Yes, Vilcaroya, it is a good place for sleep, but—is not the world beyond a good place to wake in? Have you not found it so?'

I caught the gleam of her eyes in the starlight as she looked towards me saying this, and, by the glory of the Sun, had we stood alone where we were, I might have forgotten all save the knowledge that I was the lawful lord of all this land, and that she was there in the midst of it with me. For the instant I had gone back to my old life, with all its old-world thoughts and customs, and then, before I could answer her, my dreaming soul was called back to the present by the cold, quiet voice of her brother saying,—

'I don't think that very many would find the world an unpleasant place to wake in, either for the first or second time, if they could also wake up lord of illimitable treasures as Vilcaroya here has done. But come, Your Highness, and you, professor, it is getting late. Don't you think it is time to be thinking about camping?'

The matter-of-fact words scattered my dreams in an instant, and I woke from them into the present. I bade Tupac have the animals tethered and fed, and the tents we had brought with us pitched in the most sheltered place he could find; and while they were doing this, and Djama and the others were busy seeing that the work was done to their satisfaction, I went to Ruth and said my words, which I strove so hard to keep steady, trembling with I know not how many mingled passions,—

'Will Joyful Star come with me and see the place where her sister and mine is lying, waiting to come forth and greet her?'

'Your sister, Vilcaroya?' she said, turning her face up to me so that the starlight shone upon its fairness and lost itself in the lustrous depths of her eyes. 'Do you mean your sister only—not—your—'

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'No,' I said, 'not my wife, for I have thought upon your words and pondered them deeply; and though they wounded me sorely at first, yet now I see that they were wise and just, like all the other words that Joyful Star has spoken to me. I have learned that lesson, like many others which you have taught me. That bridal of ours is already to me a dream of the long-lost past, the vision of a time that is dead and a people that is no more. When Golden Star wakes, if she ever does, I will greet her as a sister and a friend, as one of my own people who has come back to me out of my own times, and she shall help me in the work that I swore with her to do—but that is all; and I will find others of the Blood who shall sit upon the restored throne of my ancestors, and be the parents of the generations of Incas that shall come after me.'

'What do you mean, Vilcaroya?' she said, in a voice that was half angry and half fearful. 'Do you mean—no, I cannot say it—for I am sure you do not mean that.'

'How could that be?' I answered, guessing her meaning. 'Is it not you who have taught me the ways and thoughts of the world into which I have come back? No, what I mean is that I am not the only one now alive in whose veins the old blood of the Incas flows. Tupac, yonder, is the son of the son of the son of that Tupac-Amaru who died torn asunder in the square of Cuzco, because he had dared to raise the Rainbow Banner in the Land of the Four Regions, and called the Children of the Sun to revolt against their oppressors. He, more blessed than I who am his lord, has both wife and child, and if the prophecy is to be fulfilled, and I am to reign in the City of the Sun, then I will take his firstborn and instruct him in all the lore of our people and the duties of their ruler, and if he proves worthy he shall wear the Llautu after me.'

She looked up at me again as I ceased speaking, just one swift, bright glance that seemed to pierce to the most secret depths of my soul, and read the unuttered thoughts that were hidden here, thoughts which I did not dare to speak even to myself in the loneliest hour of my musings. Then she looked down again, and side by side we walked in silence round the shore of the lake until I stopped in front of a great black cliff that jutted out from the mountain side and hung impending over the dark, still waters of the lake. I pointed into the black shadows in which its base was hidden, and said,—

'There lies Golden Star, and there I lay beside her through all the long years that were to pass from the night when I pledged my troth with her before the Altar of the Sun until this night when I stand with you, Joyful Star, a new being in a new world, before her resting-place.'

'Is it really true?' she said, stopping as she spoke, and staring straight before her into the darkness. 'Is it really true that you, who are standing alive and strong here beside me, lay there under that great rock for all those years, while ten generations of men and women were born, and lived and died, and the whole world changed again and again? And is the Golden Star lying in there now really the Golden Star you have told me so much of, and I have thought about until she seems to me more like some living friend that I have known and loved, than a dead body that has been in the grave for more than three hundred years? Is it really true, Vilcaroya, or have we all only been dreaming some wild dream, like that Frankenstein story that I was telling you the other day?'

As she spoke she laid her hand for a moment upon my arm, as though to satisfy herself that I was really made of human flesh and blood, and not a phantom standing beside her in the starlit darkness.

Scarce knowing what I did, I laid my own hand, warm and strong and firm, upon hers. For an instant I felt it tremble beneath mine. I would have given all the boundless wealth that I knew was mine for the courage to close upon it a grasp that it could not have escaped if it would. My heart seemed to swell as though it would burst in my breast, my tingling blood ran fire, and wild words rose choking to my lips. Then her hand slipped away from under mine. Once more I saw her eyes shine in the starlight, and then I knew that I had learned the last and greatest lesson that Joyful Star could teach me.

I knew now why to think of Golden Star as my wife and my queen, filled me with the same untold horror which I had heard that night thrill in the tones of her who stood beside me, for now I—the son of a lost race and a long-past age—loved this daughter of the new time. For good or evil, for hope or despair, I was hers until I went again, and for the last time, into the shadows through which I had already passed, and then—yes, there he was, this tall, stalwart, golden-haired son of her own race and her own time, whose eyes I had seen looking love into hers!

He was coming towards us round the lake with his long, easy, swinging strides, this man who was already my friend, and who would one day be the captain of my armies. For one blind moment of madness I thought

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

how completely I had him and the others in my power; of the lonely, unknown valley where we stood; of the men who were already my slaves, and who looked upon me as a god. I thought, too, of the dark, deep waters of the lake, and the secrets that they held for me alone. How well they could hide others for me, too! What if Golden Star never awoke? Would she not be as well lying there in the peace of her endless sleep as coming back into the world, perhaps to love in vain and to suffer as I was doomed to suffer?

The shadowy forms of the mountains began to waver and reel around me; the stars danced up and down in the sky, and a red mist seemed to swim before my eyes. Then, through the hoarse, dull murmur that was sounding in my ears, I heard the sweet, low voice of Joyful Star saying,—

'Ah, Captain Hartness, I suppose you have been wondering what had become of us! I am afraid I have been neglecting my household duties, and you have been attending to them for me, but really I could not resist coming here with Vilcaroya. Look, that is where Golden Star is lying, in a cave under that great rock down there where those dark shadows are. Doesn't it look cold and lonely and eerie?'

'Yes,' he answered, with a laugh that did not sound to me like his own. 'But I don't suppose that matters very much now to Her Highness any more than it did to Vilcaroya. But, to descend to less romantic matters, I have come to tell you that the affairs of our temporary household are already in order, supper is ready, and we are all ravenously hungry, and I suppose you are about the same. This mountain air puts an edge on one's appetite like a razor's.'

'Supper—yes, I had forgotten all about it, thinking of poor Golden Star lying there all alone in the darkness. Of course, I am desperately hungry, now that you remind me of it. Come, Vilcaroya, I am sure you are hungry too. Another night alone won't matter much to poor Golden Star after all these years. You can dream of her to-night, as I suppose we all shall, and to-morrow we shall see her. Oh, how I wonder what she will be really like!'

As Joyful Star said this in a voice that was half sad and half merry, she turned away towards Francis Hartness, and I followed her with some light words on my lips and many heavy thoughts in my heart, and we walked together to the tents, talking of the things that were to be done on the morrow.

The next morning I was afoot before the stars had begun to pale in the coming dawn. I had not slept for two hours together through the night, yet, waking and sleeping, many dreams had come to me. I had been back to the past among my people, living again that strange old life, with all its light and colour and gaiety, which was now every day becoming more and more like a vision that had been told to me by some other dreamer.

I had talked with Golden Star, seeking to teach her the lesson that my dear instructress of the new time had taught me, and had awakened half mad with the perplexities of my divided love—the love of the past that was dead and of the present that was alive. I had seen my sister-bride come forth out of her tomb to greet me, clothed in her bridal robes, with the dust of the grave in her hair and on her face. I had clasped her in my longing arms and kissed the dust from her lips, and while I yet held her in my embrace her form had grown cold and stiff again. Then, in the agony of my sorrow, I had strained her to my breast, and, under the pressure of my arms, she had crumbled in my grasp and fallen, a little heap of grey bones and dusty garments, at my feet.

Once more I had awakened with my gasping cry of horror still sounding in my ears, and then, not daring to seek sleep again, I had risen and gone out to watch for the rest of the night before her grave under the rock. There they found me when they came from the camp at daybreak. I went back with them, and our hasty morning meal was eaten and drunk almost in silence, for we were all too busy with our thoughts to have leisure for conversation, and my friends, knowing how much that day's work must mean to me, respected my unspoken feelings, and left me to the silent company of my own hopes and fears.

Breakfast over, we took our lanterns and tools and went to the rock, followed by Tupac and two of my men carrying the coffin-like case in which Golden Star's body was to be laid. Under the rock was a long heap of loose stones which the professor had wisely piled up in front of the upright courses of masonry through which he had broken into my resting-place. He scanned them eagerly to see if they had been disturbed since his visit, and told us that they had not. Then I bade Tupac and the men clear them away, which they speedily did, laying bare the courses of stone behind them, still standing as the professor had re-built them after taking out my body.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

A few minutes' more work opened a passage large enough for a man to walk in, stooping. As if by a common instinct they all stepped aside and looked at me. I saw what they meant, and, turning the light of my lantern into the entrance, I walked back, a living man, into the grave where I had lain dead while ten generations of men had lived and died. I saw the place where I had lain, for a few mouldering scraps and shreds of cloth and furs still lay where my bed had been. Then I flashed my lantern round the walls of the cavern, and on the side along which my own couch had been spread by Anda-Huillac and his brother priests I found what they had told me to seek while I was preparing to fulfil the oath that I had sworn with Golden Star.

It was a wedge of stone fitted in to a crevice in the wall and left rough and jagged at its outer end, so that one who did not know its true purpose would have taken it to be nothing more than a natural projection in the rough side of the cavern.

With a mallet that I had brought with me I struck the end of the wedge softly above and below until it was loosened in its socket. Then, standing to one side, I struck it harder. It dropped from its place, and the same instant a part of the cavern wall swayed outwards and fell with a rumbling crash across the floor.

For a moment I stood breathless and motionless on the threshold of Golden Star's grave. Then, with trembling hands, I turned the light of my lantern into the inner chamber, and as the dust that the falling stone had raised fell slowly back to the ground I saw through the particles dancing in the lantern rays the dim outline of a human form lying on a couch of skins.

Still, not daring to set a foot within that sacred place, I stood in the doorway and let the light fall full upon the figure. A glance showed me that so far all was well. No profaning hand had disturbed the peace and sanctity of her long slumber. She lay there as perfect in form and feature as she had lain beside me that night in the little chamber in the Sanctuary of the Sun.

Then I thought of Joyful Star. Hers should be the first eyes after mine to look upon that dead loveliness. So I turned and went out to where they were all standing round the outer entrance, and, taking no notice of the others, replying nothing to their half-whispered questions, I went to Ruth and, holding out my hand for her, said,—

'Come, Joyful Star, and see the sister that the Lord of Life made long ago in the image that you now wear.'

She said nothing, but, with a look of wondering question, put her hand into mine and I turned to lead her to the entrance.

Djama, with a sudden exclamation, took a step forward as though he would stop her, but Francis Hartness put his hand on his shoulder, saying,—

'I think you had better let them go alone. There is no fear for your sister with all of us here so near; and if what Vilcaroya says is true, why should she not see her first?'

Djama drew back, though with no very good grace, and I went into the inner chamber, helping Ruth over the fallen stones. Then I flashed my light on Golden Star's face and said,—

'Did I not tell you truly that the Lord of Life made her in the same image as yours?'

I heard her utter a little gasping cry of wonder, and then I saw her slip forward on to her knees beside Golden Star's pillow, and as the light fell upon the two faces—the living and the dead—the likeness between them was so perfect, save for the golden gleam of Joyful Star's hair and the lustrous blackness of the tresses that framed my dead love's face, that they seemed to me as sisters, one watching over the slumbers of the other.

'It is more than wonderful, and it is surely more than chance!' said Joyful Star, in a tone that was almost a whisper, and turning towards me her white face and the eyes into which the loving tears of pity were already springing. 'Why did you not tell me of this before, Vilcaroya?'

'Because,' I said, 'the arts of the priests might not have done for her what they did for me, and I might have found here that which your eyes should never have looked upon. But now—is she not beautiful, even as you are?'

The bright blood came swiftly back into her cheeks as I said this, and, without answering me she stooped, and with gentle hands put back the tresses from Golden Star's forehead, and, bending over her, laid her warm, sweet lips on the cold, smooth brow that I had last seen crowned with the marriage-garland in our bridal chamber in the Sanctuary.

CHAPTER V — How Djama Did His Work

I can tell you but little of what followed the taking of the body of Golden Star back to the hacienda, for neither I nor any of the others, save only Djama himself, witnessed the secret mysteries of his strange and fearful art. I could tell you of their wonder when, after I had bidden Tupac bring the case into the cavern and he and I and Joyful Star had gently and reverently raised her from her couch and laid her in it, we carried her out into the daylight. How they stood around the open case and looked, half in wonder and half in fear, from her dead, cold face to the living likeness that was bending over it. How they praised her beauty and marvelled at the forgotten arts that had preserved so perfect a likeness of life in one who for more than three centuries and a half had neither drawn breath nor known a thrill of feeling.

I could tell you, too, with what loving and anxious care that precious burden was borne over plain and valley and mountain in a litter that we had brought with us for the purpose, and how at last we laid her in all her calm, unconscious loveliness on the great table which stood in the middle of the chamber in which Djama was to do his work. But here my story must cease for the time, for Djama made it an unalterable condition that he should do the work that only he could do in absolute solitude. Only thus, he said, would he, or could he, perform the task upon whose issue the completion of Golden Star's life on earth, if it was ever to be completed, depended.

He told us plainly that a single interruption should be fatal to her and all our hopes. He would not even permit his sister to enter the room until he should call for her. I was bitterly loath to yield—to leave her who had been so dear to me powerless and unconscious in the hands of a man whom I had already learned to hate, although not only did I owe my own new life to him, but on him alone rested all my hopes of seeing Golden Star once more restored to life and health, and the beauty that had been peerless ages before Joyful Star had reached the perfection of her young womanhood.

How did I know what unholy arts he might use to rekindle the long-quenched life-flame in that fair shape of hers? How could I do more than guess vaguely and fearfully at the awful mysteries that might be enacted in the silence and solitude of that fast-closed chamber in which, day and night, he would remain alone with her, the living with the dead, like the potter with his clay, until it should please him to use the dreadful power that was his, and call her back from death to life, perhaps—and oh! how horrible the thought was to me!—to be the slave of the man who, by his unearthly art, had made himself the master of her new life.

Yet, think of it, brood over it as I would, there was no help for it. He, and he alone, could exert the power that would loose the bonds of death in which she lay enchained. Unless he had his will she would remain as she was, perhaps until the Last Day came, and the Lord of Life called all his children, living and dead, back to the Mansions of the Sun; and so we yielded, since there was nothing else to be done.

On the evening of the day that we returned to the hacienda, he busied himself making the last preparations for his work. Then he came out of the room and locked the door, and, after eating his dinner almost in silence, went to bed, taking the key with him, and telling us that on no account must he be awakened. All that night and the next day and the next night we neither saw nor heard anything of him; but on the morning of the second day, the door of his bedroom was open and his bed was empty, but the door of the room in which Golden Star lay was still fast shut and locked.

How the time passed I cannot tell you. Joyful Star, seemingly more self-possessed than any of us, took up her household duties, and went about them with a quick, quiet industry that surprised and shamed us. But we three men wandered about aimlessly, now alone and now together, communing with our own thoughts or talking with each other always of the same thing—of what was going on in that chamber, where, as we knew from the faint sounds that every now and then came through the closed door, the master of the arts of life and death was performing his awful task.

The first day and night came and went, then the second, and still the door remained closed, and Djama gave no sign. But the professor sought to comfort me and soothe our impatience by telling me how long the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

same work had lasted before I was recalled to life. I had sought also to distract my thoughts by talking with him and Francis Hartness of all that was to be done for the deliverance of my people, and the realisation of my dreams of empire when Djama's task should be over.

But it was useless, for fear and suspense kept my mind bound as though with invisible chains, and, do what I would, my thoughts went back and back again to dwell upon the unknown secrets of that closed and silent room. Then I tried to draw Joyful Star into conversation about the thoughts which I knew were filling both our hearts; but though she listened to me she would say nothing herself, and I soon saw that with her the subject was forbidden, and the work not to be talked of till, in success or failure, it was ended.

For the first two nights no sleep came to my eyes, but the third night my weariness was too much for me, and scarcely had my aching head fallen on the pillow than slumber, filled with broken dreams and visions of things unutterably horrible, came upon me. In the midst of one of them—I know not what it was, save that no human words could paint the horror of it—I woke up with a cold, damp hand upon my shoulder, and heard Djama's voice, hoarse and trembling, saying to me,—

'Get up and dress, Vilcaroya; I have something for you to see and to hear. Make haste, for there is not much time to be lost.'

I looked up, and saw him standing by my bed with a light in his hand, ghastly pale, and staring at me with black, burning eyes, which seemed, as they looked into mine, to take my will a prisoner, and draw my very soul towards him.

'What is it?' I said, in the broken words of one just roused from sleep. 'Is it over—have you succeeded? Is she alive? Have you come to take me to her?'

'The work is not done yet,' he said. 'I have come for you to see it finished. Make haste, I tell you, if you want to see what you have been waiting so long for.'

I needed no second bidding. I sprang out of bed, and dressed myself with swift, though trembling, hands. Then I thrust my feet into a pair of soft slippers, such as Djama himself wore, and then I followed him from the room out on to the balcony that was built round the house over the inner courtyard. We went down into the court and into the dining-room, and through that down a long, narrow passage out of which opened the room that had held all our hope and fear and wonder for so long.

He unlocked the door, and motioned to me to go in. He followed me, and locked the door behind us. I looked about the room, which was dimly lit by two shaded lamps. The table on which we had laid Golden Star was empty. Many strangely-shaped things, that I knew not the use of were scattered about. The air was hot and moist, and filled with a faint, sweet odour. At the opposite end from the door, which was covered by a screen, I saw in one corner a bath—from which white, steamy fumes were rising—and in the other stood a little, narrow, curtained bed, such as I had first awakened in.

Djama caught me by the arm, and half led, half dragged me to the bedside. Then with his other hand he parted the curtains and pointed to the pillow. I felt his burning eyes fixed upon me as I looked and saw the sweet fair face of Golden Star lying in the midst of her dusky tresses, which lay spread out on the pillow, cleansed from the dust of the grave, and soft and shimmering as silk.

I started forward, and, with my face close to hers, scanned every feature, and listened, but in vain, for the soft sound of her breathing. Her skin was clear and moist; I could see the thin, blue veins in her eyelids, and the moisture on her lips. I laid my hand gently on her cheek. It was soft and smooth, but still cold as death.

Then a fierce, unreasoning anger came into my heart. I sprang back and seized Djama by the shoulders, and, looking with fierce, hot eyes into his, I whispered hoarsely,—

'Have you brought me here to mock me? She is not alive—she is but a fair image of death. Tell me that you have failed and I will strangle you, liar and cheat that you are!'

He looked back steadily into my eyes and smiled, and said, in a voice that had not the slightest tremor of fear,—

'If I fail you may strangle me, and welcome; but I have not failed yet, Vilcaroya. It is for you to say now whether Golden Star is to awake or not.'

'What do you mean?' I said, letting go my grip on his shoulders, and recoiling a pace from him.

'You shall hear what I mean,' he said. 'But you must hear patiently and quietly, and think well on what I say, for in your answer to what I ask you will also answer the question whether Golden Star is to awake to life

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

and health, or to be put back in that case yonder and buried, to rot away into corruption like any other corpse.'

'Say on, I am listening,' I said. My lips were dry, and the grip of a deadly fear seemed to be clutching at my heart and draining the last drop of blood from it.

'Listen well, then,' he said. He paused for a moment as though to collect his thoughts, and make words ready to express them. Then he went on. 'You see, I have undone the work that your priests did three hundred and sixty years ago. Your Golden Star is now neither dead nor alive. She is lying on the narrow borderland that divides life from death, and for an hour from the time I left this room she will remain there—if I choose. At the end of that time she will pass beyond the border, and no earthly power, not even mine, could call her back. But at any time before the hour has expired I can complete the work that I have begun. I can bring the breath back to her body; I can set the blood flowing through her veins. You shall see her eyes open and her lips smile, and you shall hear her speak to you as though she had only awakened out of sleep. This I can do, and I will, if you will do what I am going to ask you.'

'What is it?' I whispered. 'Tell me quickly that I may know. You are master here. I can only listen and obey.'

He smiled as I said this, a smile that it was not good for an honest man to look upon, and went on, speaking now rapidly and earnestly,—

'When I did this work for you, I did it as a student and a man of science, who was making the greatest experiment of his life. I believed that I had solved one, at least, of the secrets of life and death. I watched and noted every change that came over you. I marked every symptom and measured every step of your return from death into life, but I did all this as a student inquiring into the mysteries of Nature, as an observer watching the working out of a great problem, and with no more feeling than if I had been dissecting a corpse. But this time it has been different. I began this work with the cold and passionless deliberation of one who toils only to learn and to succeed. But afterwards—come here and look at her, and you will understand me better. She is a woman, and she is beautiful, and here, for two days and two nights, she has lain under my hands and my eyes. I have given her beauty back to her, and if that beauty is to live it must be mine. Do you understand me, Vilcaroya?'

What could I say, what could I do to answer this man whom I hated, and yet who held the power of life and death for Golden Star in his hands? The vague fear that had smitten me when he began to speak had taken its worst shape now. I looked at him with hate and horror staring out of my eyes. Again and again I tried to speak, but my lips only moved and trembled without making any word. But he read my thoughts, and smiled that evil smile of his again and said, in a low voice which seemed to have the echo of a laugh in it,—

'I see you hate me, as I have often thought you did, and that is why I have brought you here to tell you this. That is why I would not complete my work till you had sworn, as you yet shall do if you would see Golden Star alive again, that what I have brought back out of the grave shall be mine and mine only.'

These last words of his let loose my anger and unchained my tongue. I gripped him by the arm, and in a whisper that had a strange hissing sound, I said,—

'But that is not all! What do you think your life would be worth if you left her to die? Have you forgotten what I said to you in the cave beneath the Rodadero? Do you not know that this very night I could have you carried, gagged and bound, over the mountains and back to the grave that we took Golden Star out of? Do you not know that I could lay you there with food and drink beside you that you could not touch, and a lamp whose light would show them to you, and then wall up the entrance again, and leave you there to think of your fate till you went mad and died of hunger and thirst? Do you not know that I could chain you to a rock and light a fire about you, and watch you burn limb by limb till you shrieked your life out in lingering agony? Would this be better than going back to your own land loaded with treasure that would make you richer than you have ever dreamed of being? Now, I have spoken, and it is for you to answer me.'

Before I had done speaking he had taken a chair and seated himself astride it, with his arms resting on the back and his chin on his arms, and was looking at me with white, set face, and steady, dark, shining eyes. When I had finished there was a little silence between us, and then he spoke, and the first time I ever felt fear in either of my lives was when I heard those cold, cruel, carefully—measured words of his,—

'That is well said, Vilcaroya. I am glad you have spoken plainly, for now we understand each other; but I don't think you quite realise the difference between your power and mine. You have, or think you have, the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

brute force, the strength of numbers, and the slavish devotion of your people on your side, and you threaten to use that power to put me to a lingering and torturing death unless I withdraw my demands and do as you wish me. In that, however, you are quite wrong. I am as much the master of my own life as I was once of yours, and still am of Golden Star's. Without moving hand or foot I could kill myself as I sit here before you, so your threats of torture are nothing more than empty words. It is only a matter of simple life or death. If I live, Golden Star will live. If I die, she will never draw the breath of life—but what I have said, I have said. She shall only live as my promised wife, bound to me by the most sacred oath that you can swear. You cannot consummate your own marriage with her, because in the modern world that is impossible.

'You are refusing simply because, for some reason or other, you dislike me personally, but I don't propose that that shall stand in my way. As for your treasures, their value has utterly changed for me. A week ago, I frankly confess that I would have sold my soul, if I thought I had one, for them. Now, without her, they would only make the world a golden mockery to me, for I tell you, Vilcaroya, that I, who have never loved living woman yet, love that beautiful shape of inanimate flesh as that old sculptor we have told you of loved his statue. Every hour that I have been alone in this room with her this strange love of mine has grown. First it was only scientific curiosity, then physical admiration, then something else. I don't know what it is, for it is beyond the reach of my analysis, but I know enough of it to call it love, and I tell you it is such love as only a man of my nature and pursuits is capable of. Unsatisfied, it would consume me and kill me, and I would rather die quickly than slowly. Now—once more—shall Golden Star and I live or die?'

How was I to answer such a speech as this? I heard him in silence to the end, my eyes held fast by his, and my spirit sinking as though beaten down by the pitiless force of those cold words of his. And in the meantime a great truth had been dawning in my mind. Force had ceased to rule in this new world, and intellect had taken its throne. I was the inferior of this man, whose trained mind was the heir of the generations that had toiled and fought while I had slept. I was little better than a savage before him, and I knew it, and he knew it, and, bitter as the thought was to me, yet it was only the truth. I was conquered, and a new gleam in his eyes told me that he had read my thoughts before I had spoken them.

Then, while I stood hesitating before him, his white, hard-set face softened, and his lips melted into a smile that was almost as sweet as a woman's. It was that that saved me, for it reminded me of Ruth, and the recollection of her told me that I loved even as Djama did. The very thought of her put new blood into my heart. The words of yielding and submission died unuttered on my lips. I raised my head, which I had bowed down in dejection, and looked at him steadily again. Then I said slowly, and in the voice of a man who does not speak twice,—

'I have thought, and I will speak for the last time. I will swear by the sacred glory of the Lord of Light that Golden Star shall be yours, upon two conditions.'

'Conditions!' said he, bringing his dark brows down till they made a straight black line over his eyes. 'What are they?'

'These,' I said. 'You love and I love. First, then, you must win the love of Golden Star, and, secondly, you must give me your sister, Joyful Star, if I can win her love.'

'My sister Ruth to you! Is that your earnest, Vilcaroya, or are you only trying my patience?'

The bitter, coldly-spoken words cut into my soul as the lash of a whip cuts into the flesh. I could have slain him as he sat there sneering at me, but it was a time for words, not deeds; and so, mastering my anger as best I could, I took two swift strides to Golden Star's bedside, and, snatching my dagger out of the sheath of the belt which I had put on when I had dressed, I turned and faced him, and said,—

'I am not jesting. As you love I love, and by the glory and majesty of my Father the Sun I tell you if you do not say yes I will do with this dagger what all your art will never repair, and then, if I must do that, I will kill you too; and before to-morrow night has passed Joyful Star shall be with me where none can find her. Now, what is your answer—yes, or no?'

He looked at me and then at the dagger hanging in my hand, point downwards, over the breast of Golden Star. Then his eyes fell upon the still loveliness of her face. He knew that if he moved the dagger would fall. His face, flushed a moment before, grew grey and pale again at the sound of my words, and then I saw that he had not lied to me when he said that his life would be worthless without her. Twice, thrice, his lips moved without shaping a word. Then the words came. They were dry and broken and trembling, for in the strength of

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

my own love I had now conquered my conqueror, and he said,—

'Yes, since it must be so. My sister for your sister. Well, I suppose it's a fair exchange. We hate each other, you and I, but that's an accident of fate. Take away your dagger. I know when I am beaten, and I am beaten now. Will you swear that oath of yours again?'

'Yes,' I said, 'and you?'

I still kept the dagger within a span of Golden Star's heart, for I still had but little trust in his faith. He rose from his chair, throwing it over as he did so, and stood up and faced me, saying,—

'There is no need for oaths either from you or me. We have both too much to lose to break faith. Put up your dagger and come away, and in ten minutes from now you shall hear Golden Star draw the first breath of her new life, and see her eyes open and look at you. That would be worth more than any oath I could swear, wouldn't it?'

'Yes,' I said, 'but that is not all or enough. If you broke faith with me after that, I should have to shed blood—my sister's and yours. Now I need only make her life impossible. I will stop here. Go you and wake your sister and bring her here. Then we will say more.'

'Bring Ruth here!' he cried, staring at me as though he wished, as no doubt he did, that the fierce light in his eyes could blast and wither me where I stood. 'Bring her here to see what no human eyes but mine have ever seen. Bring her here to listen to what you have said—and if her, why not Lamson and Hartness as well?'

'You may bring all, if you please,' I said, 'but Joyful Star must come, no matter what she hears or sees. I have spoken—now go, or Golden Star shall never wake again.'

The dagger—point dropped till it was within an inch of Golden Star's breast.

He took a half pace towards me, with clenched hands and set teeth, crouching like a mountain lion about to spring on its prey. The dagger point dropped till it was only an inch from Golden Star's breast. If he had made another step I would have driven it home. He read in my eyes that I would do so, and he stopped. Then he hissed a curse at me through his clenched teeth, and turned and walked away towards the door. As he reached it he looked back, and saw me still standing there with the dagger ready to do the work that could never be undone. I saw his lips move, but heard no sound.

Then he unlocked the door, went out, and locked it after him, leaving me there alone with my dead sister—love, whose new life, with all its possibilities of love and happiness, or hate and misery, I had thrown into the balance of Fate in the game that I was playing against him to win that other love which had now become tenfold more dear to me.

When he had gone I took his chair and put it by the side of the bed and sat down, still holding my bare dagger in my hand and looking on Golden Star's dead loveliness, wondering what it would be like when the sunshine of her new life should shine upon it, and on whom her first glance would fall, or whose name be the first that her lips would speak, and as I sat and watched and waited it seemed to me as though the ghosts of those long dead were taking shape and ranging themselves about the bed of her re—awakening as they had done about the bed of her falling asleep and mine.

I saw Anda—Huillac and his brother priests of the Sun standing about me, gazing at me and at her with sad and dreamy eyes, like phantoms of the past looking upon the realities of the present. Then the shape of Anda—Huillac seemed to glide towards me. His ghostly eyes looked into mine, and a smile of pity and reproach moved his pale lips. I felt a cold, soft hand laid upon mine, my grasp relaxed and the dagger fell ringing to the floor.

The sound awoke me, and my vision vanished. How long it had lasted, or whether it was a vision of sleep or waking, I know not, but I was awake now for I heard the door creak on its hinges. I picked the dagger up again and started to my feet, and, still guarding Golden Star's bed, I turned and faced Djama as he came in, followed by the professor and Francis Hartness, with Joyful Star between them.

CHAPTER VI — The Waking Of Golden Star

'There is your royal, would-be lover, Ruth! Come, if you don't believe me, you can hear from his own lips that upon you, and you alone, depends Golden Star's return to life: Is not that so, Your Highness?'

It was Djama who said this, and as he said it, he caught Joyful Star by the hand and half led, half dragged her towards me from between the other two. But before he had come half the length of the room, Francis Hartness had overtaken him in a few swift strides. I saw his hand fall heavily on his shoulder, and with his other hand he took Ruth's out of his. His blue eyes were nearly black with anger, and his bronzed face was grey and set and pale with the passion that his strong will was holding back, and his voice was low and clear, and vibrating like the sound of a distant bell when he spoke and said,—

'I can't stand that, Djama. Are you forgetting that your sister is a woman, and that you have brought her into the presence of the dead?'

'You must be mad, Laurens!' said Joyful Star, before her brother could reply. 'Surely this dreadful work of yours has turned your brain. Vilcaroya, what does all this mean? Is Golden Star dead or alive? Ah, how beautiful she is now! No, surely she cannot be dead!'

She had broken away from both her brother and Francis Hartness, and as she said the last words she was leaning over Golden Star's pillow, softly stroking her hair; and then she stooped lower and kissed her forehead. Then the others came up to the bedside, Francis Hartness and Djama in front, and the professor standing silent and wondering behind them.

'If Djama won't speak, will you, Vilcaroya?' said Hartness, looking at me with eyes that were still angry. 'What is that dagger in your hand for, and what is the meaning of this story that he has been telling me?'

'The meaning is of life or death,' I said. 'Laurens Djama will not give Golden Star's life back to her if I will not swear to give her to him when she lives again, and I have sworn that he shall not restore her to life unless he swears to give Joyful Star to me, for I love her, and will have neither life nor empire without her.'

As I listened to my own voice saying these bold words, it seemed to me as though another were speaking, for, even in that hot moment of passion and desperate resolve, I could scarce believe them mine. For the instant, I thought Hartness would have struck me down where I stood, nor could I have used my dagger against him, for he was a man and I loved him, though I saw now that we both loved the same woman. But before either of us could move, Ruth had risen erect and come between us, her cheeks burning with shame and her eyes aglow with anger.

'What!' she said, 'Laurens give me to you, Vilcaroya! Don't you know yet that no one can give an English girl away except herself, and that she only gives herself to the man she chooses of her own free will? Do you think I am a slave or a human chattel to be bartered away like that? Nonsense! And you, Captain Hartness, don't look so fiercely at Vilcaroya. Remember that he is your friend and mine, or has been, and has not the same ideas as we have. If he had—'

'He has,' I said, breaking in upon her speech, 'since Joyful Star has spoken. He is not her lover but her slave, and she has shamed him. I will eat the words that should never have been spoken. Let Golden Star live! I will keep my oath and ask nothing in return.'

So the savage within me was tamed, and I, who but a few minutes before had been ready to take two lives at the prompting of a single word, dropped my dagger and stood with bowed head, humble as a chidden child before her whose lightest word was then my most sacred law. I raised my eyes and looked at her to see if my words had pleased her. As our eyes met she gave me a glance that I would have died to win from her, and then, pushing me and Francis Hartness gently aside, yet with a force that neither of us could have resisted, she took her brother by the arm and, leading him to the bedside with one hand, she laid the other on Golden Star's brow, and said,—

'Laurens, can you really bring her back to life?'

'Yes,' he answered, and I could see that he did not dare to raise his eyes to hers, 'but—'

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'But you will only do it for a price, you think. For shame! Is that the way you would use this terrible power that you possess? Is my brother so mean a creature as that? You love her, you say, even as she lies there, neither dead nor alive? Well, when she lives, she will be worthy of any man's love, but only of a man's, Laurens, and you would not be a man, with all your learning and power, if you insisted on so mean an advantage as your skill gives you. Do you mean to tell me that you can look on such a beauty as that, knowing that you can restore it to life, and yet ask a price before you will do it? Come, Laurens, that is not like your old self. Use your power with the same generosity that it has been given to you, and then win Golden Star like a man if you can.'

Where my strength had been vanquished, her sweet wisdom conquered. The man who had laughed at my threats, and told me without a quiver in his voice how he could, and would, slay himself rather than I should do what he knew I could do, stood humbled and abashed before the righteous and yet gently-spoken reproach of her who was pleading for the life of a sister woman.

I saw Djama's hands meet behind his back, and his fingers begin to twine about each other. I saw him look from Ruth to Golden Star, from the living woman who was his sister to her lifeless counterpart. Then came over him one of those swift changes of mood which we had so often seen before. All the cold cruelty of his long-chained-up passion vanished. His face, from being stone, became flesh again. The fierce glitter, as of a sword's point, died out of his eyes, and they grew warm and soft again, and his voice was almost as sweet and gentle as Ruth's, and strangely like it, too, as he answered her and said,—

'You are right, Ruth. I was not myself. I was a brute, unworthy either of love or power. Let her die! Good God, I would die myself a thousand times rather than do that! I must have been out of my senses even to think of such a crime for a moment, but if you were a man and had lived through what I have lived through for the last two days and nights, you would understand me, and perhaps forgive me. Yes, she shall live. How could I ever have thought of letting her die!'

Then he rose from his half-stooping posture over the bed, and came to where I stood at the foot, and, with his hand outstretched and a smile on his lips, said,—

'You have heard what I have just said, Vilcaroya. You have withdrawn your conditions; now I will take back mine. It is no use for you and me to be enemies. We have had our fight, and I confess myself beaten. Now let us try to be friends for Ruth's sake and Golden Star's, and I promise you that to-morrow morning you shall be telling her the story of your resurrection and her own.'

For a moment I stared at him in, speechless wonder, striving to understand how it could be that those eyes, which had, but a short time before, been glaring hate at me, could now be looking so kindly and frankly into mine; and how those lips, which had just been sneering so coldly and cruelly alike at my love and my hate, could shape such friendly and honest-sounding words. Then I looked at Ruth, asking her with my eyes what she would have me do, and in instant obedience to what I saw took Djama's hand in mine and said,—

'So be it! The evil in our hearts has spoken, now let the good that is there speak, and let us be friends; and, when Golden Star awakes, with my lips she shall bless you and her who has made peace between us where there was strife.'

'Miss Ruth, you really must allow me to congratulate you on your success as a peacemaker,' said the professor, speaking now for the first time since he had come into the room, and coming forward to where Joyful Star still stood by the bedside. 'It would have been ten thousand pities if this—ah—this little affair had ended any other way, for all of the exquisitely perfect subjects—'

'Subjects, professor?' said Ruth, interrupting him with a laugh. 'Do you venture to call Golden Star a subject, just as you do those awful things in your dissecting-rooms? Look at her—a subject indeed! Don't call her that again in my hearing, please!'

'Oh, ah, of course, I beg your pardon a thousand times, and Her Highness's too. Really, I spoke quite thoughtlessly and most improperly.' he answered, laughing at her mock displeasure, 'And now, Djama, since we have had two declarations of love and a peacemaking, don't you think it would be cruel to keep Her Highness waiting any longer on the threshold of her new life? Come, Hartness, you and I have no more business here at present. Don't you think we had better go and wait somewhere else for the working of the miracle?'

'Just what I was going to say,' replied Hartness, who had gone away a little distance from the bed while we

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

were talking, and had been standing by the table, seeming to examine the strange instruments that were scattered about it. 'Of course the doctor will wish to finish his work alone.'

'May not Vilcaroya and I stay, Laurens?' asked Joyful Star, looking at him with appealing eyes. 'You know it will be much better for her to see another woman by her when she awakes, and then she will recognise Vilcaroya, and that will tell her that she is among friends.'

But Djama shook his head and said,—

'No, Ruth, not yet. There is something else to be done before that—something, well, something that only a medical man ought to see or do, and you really must leave me to do it alone. You forget, it is not merely a matter of waking. She is not alive yet; but if you will leave me alone for about half-an-hour, I promise you that I will call you and Vilcaroya back before she actually wakes.'

'Very well,' she said, moving away from the bedside. 'I don't want to pry into your mysteries.' Then she turned to me, and said, with a faint smile on her lips, 'Vilcaroya, come into the dining-room, I have something to say to you.'

She went down the room after the professor and Francis Hartness, and I followed her with beating heart and anxious thoughts, wondering what new lesson it was she was about to teach me.

Djama closed and locked the door after us. She led the way to the dining-room, where there was a light burning. It was empty, for the others, hearing what she had said to me, had gone out into the courtyard. Then she turned and faced me with her back to the light; but in spite of that I could see that her eyes were bright, and her fair face flushed as she said to me in a low voice that trembled a little,—

'Vilcaroya, I am going to forget everything that was said in the room yonder, and—and you must forget it too. It was no time or place for such things to be said, and you and Laurens were not yourselves when you said them. If you do not forget them, we cannot be friends any more. You understand me, don't you?'

Gentle and sweetly spoken as the words were, they fell upon my heart like snow upon a fainting flame; yet I felt that, like all her words, they were true and just. I crossed my hands on my breast with one of my old-world gestures, and, standing so before her with bowed head, I said,—

'The will of Joyful Star is my law. Let what I spoke in my madness be forgotten as you have said. Who am I that I should say such things?—a poor savage that has wandered from his own world into hers, where he is a stranger!'

'No, not a savage, Vilcaroya. You must never say that word again. How could Golden Star's brother be a savage? How could I—but there, we have said enough for the present. We have other things to think of now.'

With that she turned away and sat down in a long, low chair, resting her cheek upon her hand, and looking out of one of the windows at the stars, while I went and stood before another to look at the same stars that she was looking at, and so we waited in silence until the door opened, and we heard Djama's voice telling us that the long—expected moment of Golden Star's awakening had come at last.

As Joyful Star went to the door I stood aside and waited for her to pass me and go out first. As she went by our eyes met for a moment, and I saw that hers were bright with tears. My heart leapt at the sight, and then fell still again and well nigh fainting. What had she said to me but a few minutes before? How dare I dream that those sweet tears could be for me?

I followed her and Djama into the room, but half-way between the door and the bed I stopped, not daring to go on, held back by some impulse I could not name. I saw her lean over the pillow for a moment in silence that for me was breathless. Then came a soft, sweet sound, and then a little cry. Was it her's or Golden Star's?

Djama beckoned to me. I went with swift, silent steps to the foot of the little bed, and saw Golden Star's eyes wide open and looking wonderingly up into Ruth's face, and her red lips smiling at her. The miracle had been completed. She had awakened her with a kiss.

'Come and give her your welcome back to life, Vilcaroya,' she whispered, rising and turning her fair face with its wet cheeks and smiling lips towards me. I went and stood over the pillow, and laid my trembling lips on Golden Star's brow, and then I said, in the words that had been the first of my own new life,—

'Cori—Coyllur Ñustallipa, Ñusta mi!'

She looked at me, but there was no more recognition in her gaze than in that of a newborn child, nor was there any answering smile upon her lips. Unheeding this for the moment, I went on and said, still speaking very gently and softly in our own tongue,—

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'Thou art thrice welcome back from the shades of night into the bright presence of our Father the Sun, oh, Golden Star! Dost thou not remember me, Vilcaroya, thy brother, who went into the darkness with thee long ago, and has been permitted to return before thee that he might greet thee and bid thee welcome?'

Her eyes wandered from my face to Joyful Star's, and then she smiled again, but no answering words came from her parted lips. Now, as we looked from one another to her, a great fear came into all our hearts, and Rath gave it voice.

'Laurens,' she whispered, laying her hands upon his arm, 'what is the matter? Vilcaroya spoke at once, didn't he? Why doesn't she speak? Oh, surely it can't be that she is—that she has come back to life without memory or—or her reason? What is it?'

I waited for Djama's answer as a man might wait for words that were to tell him whether he was to live or die. He put us both gently away from the bed, and then, laying his hand on Golden Star's brow, he looked long and steadfastly into her eyes. It seemed to me as though Ruth and I could hear each other's hearts beating and counting off the seconds until he raised his head again and said in the slow, even tones of the man of science who, for the time, had overcome and banished the lover,—

'Memory, perhaps, even probably; but reason, no. These are not the eyes of an imbecile or an idiot, but they are the eyes of a child. It is possible that when she fully recovers we may find her mind a perfect blank—a virgin page on which the story of her new life will have to be written.'

'Thank God for that!' she murmured, and I, too, echoed her words in my heart, though I did not know then how much she meant by them.

Then once more she turned and went to Golden Star's pillow, laying her hand upon her brow again, and looking fondly for a moment on the silent and yet eloquent face that was looking up at her. Then she said to her brother,—

'But is she well now? I mean, is her physical life certain? Will she live and grow well and strong again?'

'Yes,' he answered. 'I have done everything that it is in my power to do. I have fulfilled my promise to His Highness. The rest is, as it was with him, merely a matter of care and nourishment and nursing.'

'Then,' she said, with a swift, subtle change coming over her manner, 'the care and the nursing must be mine, and you two must say good-bye to her for the present, until I have nursed her back to health. Of course you may see her when necessary, as her doctor, but only as her doctor, mind. And you, Vilcaroya, must possess yourself with what patience you can until my part of the work is done as well. Now, go away, both of you. I am mistress here for the present. Laurens, you go and get ready the nourishment that you think she should take, and come back in half-an-hour, and tell me how it is to be taken.'

It was easy for us to see the deep yet kindly meaning of her lightly-spoken words, for in them she had told us that Golden Star was now once more a living woman. No longer a mummy, or a corpse, or a 'subject,' as the professor had called her—no longer an inanimate thing that had neither sex nor claim to human rights—but a sister woman of her own kind whose wants could only be supplied by her. So we obeyed her, and went away, leaving her there to perform the most sacred task save one that a loving woman could perform.

Djama went to prepare the food that Golden Star would soon need, and I went in search of the professor and Francis Hartness, and told them all that had happened, and then, when the professor had gone to bed to finish his broken night's rest, I and he who was my rival in love, and who was to be my brother-in-arms, went out from the courtyard into the patio which lay in front of the house, sloping down towards the entrance of the little valley in which the hacienda lay, and there, walking to and fro side by side, we talked long and earnestly of many things upon the doing of which my heart was set, and which might now be freely entered upon, seeing that the first object of our journey was already achieved.

Our talk, as you may well believe, was of war and not of love, though it would be hard to say which of the two at that hour most filled our secret thoughts; but, as I have told you, this English soldier was a true man, and I trusted him, knowing well that though, when the imperial Llautu once more encircled my brows, I might find courage to seek openly the love of her into whose eyes I had already seen him look with love, yet no falsehood or hatred could ever come between us. So I told him freely of the treasures that I had only to take from their hiding-places to make them mine, and spoke once more of the use that I would make of them, and took his advice as to the best method of that use.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

This he was well able to give me, for I soon found that since he had resolved to throw in his lot with us, he had applied himself diligently to the task of studying the work that was to be ours, and seeking the best and readiest means of doing it. In Lima and Arequipa he had bought books and papers from which he had learned, as far as could be learned, the resources and power of the government of Peru, the number of its soldiers and their stations, the names and characters of the men who made the government, and of those who were opposed to them, seeking, as he told me was now ever the case in the countries of South America, to overturn the government and to take for themselves the honours and the profits of rule.

He told me—which events soon proved to be the truth—that not many months would pass by before civil war once more broke out. The President and the ministers, who were the tools of his tyranny, had oppressed the people with grievous burdens till they could endure them no longer, and already people in the towns of the interior were refusing to pay taxes, and were arming themselves in secret and meeting in bands among the mountains to practise themselves with their weapons, and make ready for the war which was so soon to come.

All this, as he soon showed me, was happening as though the Fates which rule the world had especially prepared it for my coming. The people had no leader save a man who had been himself a tyrant before, and none trusted him, but looked to him only to serve their own ends. Those who had the power were hated, and those who sought to seize it were distrusted.

But better than all was the utter, and, as far as all men, save ourselves, could see, the hopeless poverty of the country. Long years of plundering had emptied the treasury. Commerce was leaving the shores, and industries were languishing throughout the land. No man trusted his neighbour, for nearly all were in debt, and none could get paid, and my own people, the slaves of the children of the Spaniards, and the sport of their blind and brutal jesting, had borne their heavy burdens till their backs were sore, sore as their patient hearts were, and they would bear them no longer.

From the country which is called Ecuador, and which in my other life had been Quito, the kingdom of Atahuallpa, to the southern confines of Bolivia, which had once been part of the Land of the Four Regions, the dominions of my own father, all were ready to throw down their long-borne burdens and turn and rend their oppressors and those whose fathers had robbed them of the land that had once been theirs.

I well remember the very words in which Francis Hartness told me all this at much greater length than I have set it down here; and this is what he said when, as the stars were paling in the sky above us and the eastern mountains were beginning to stand out sharply against the growing light of the coming dawn, our long talk drew to its close,—

'In short, Vilcaroya, if I were given to that sort of thing, I could believe that the very Fates themselves had conspired to prepare the way for you. You have come back to the world and to your own country at the very moment that these miserable wretches are getting ready to tear each other to pieces. The government is as hopeless as it is impossible, and the popular party, as they call themselves, have neither a leader that they can trust, nor money to buy weapons and pay their soldiers with. The treasury is empty, for, so to speak, almost the last dollar had been stolen. The native troops have had no regular pay for months, and I believe they would desert to a regiment if they once believed that you are what you are, and that you possess, as you do, the means of paying them well and honestly for their help.

'And, after all, I don't know that even I, as a soldier, could call it desertion under such circumstances. You are of their own blood, the son of one of their ancient kings. These people, these Peruvians, are only mongrel descendants of those who have plundered and oppressed them for centuries. They owe them no allegiance that is worth the name; but you they would hail, not only as their lawful king, but almost as a god—as, indeed, they could well be pardoned for doing, seeing what a marvellous fate yours has been.

'The only thing to do at present, and the only thing in which I see any difficulty, is to get into communication with them in such a way that they shall come to know you without the authorities knowing anything about you or your treasures. If that could be done, I think all the rest would be easy, and then I believe that the moment you raised the flag of the old Incas, they would flock to it in thousands, and after that it would only be a matter of military management and leadership.'

'And if I will charge myself with that, my friend,' I said, as he paused for a moment; 'if I will promise you that before six more suns have risen and set, the news of my coming shall be spread far and wide through the land, and yet in such a manner that none but the faithful, the Children of the Blood themselves, shall know

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

anything that could work us harm, will you give me the help of your skill and your knowledge of the arts of this new warfare which is so strange to me? Will you lead my armies to battle against the oppressors of my people? Will you help me to free this land of my fathers from the yoke of its tyrants, and be the war-chieftain of my people, and stand by my throne in the days when the Rainbow Banner shall once more float over the battlements of the Sacsahuaman and the City of the Sun? If you will, you shall have riches and power and all that the heart of man can desire.'

'Not all, I am afraid, Vilcaroya!' he said, interrupting me with a laugh that had but little mirth in it. 'Not all; but that would not be in your hands to give. Never mind, it is the fortune of war, or perhaps I should rather say of love. But for the rest, yes. I believe your cause is a just and righteous one, and what I can do to help it I will. Henceforth we are brothers-in-arms, even though we may perhaps be rivals in love. There, you have my hand upon it, and with it the word of an Englishman who never broke his word yet to man or woman.'

How shall I tell you of the great joy with which those brave, honest-spoken words of his filled me? He, the man whom I had feared most, even as I had learned to love him most, was the first to bid me hope—and hope I did now, in spite of all things. So, saying nothing, for my heart was too full for speech, I put my hand in his, and there, as the dawn brightened over the mountains, we clasped hands in silence and sealed our compact, and when the sun rose swiftly over the now glittering peaks, I let go his hand and bowed myself before it, greeting it as the bringer of a new day which was to end the long night that had fallen over my land and my people when the light of my last life was quenched in the darkness of my death-sleep.

CHAPTER VII — In The Throne-Room Of Yupanqui

We saw nothing of Golden Star the next day, nor yet for many days afterwards, for, in spite of our impatience, Ruth would not permit us to do so. What her brother had said had speedily proved itself to be true. She had come back to life a child-woman. Her body was that of a girl of seventeen years—which was her age when she and I had drunk the draught of the death-sleep together—and the kindly Powers that had presided over her birth had shaped her in a mould of almost perfect womanly beauty, yet, as Djama had said, her mind was a virgin page, from which the story of her past life had been utterly erased, and on whose blank whiteness the story of her new life had yet to be written.

Now, on the writing of the first words of this story, as Joyful Star told us in her sweetly-serious way the night that she had sunk into her first natural slumber, everything might depend.

'It is a task,' she had said that night, 'which I fear terribly to enter upon, and yet I know that I am the only one here who ought to undertake it. She will need weeks and months of most careful watching, and the sympathy that only another woman, and one who loves her as I have already learned to do, could give her. No woman ever had such a task before, and very few have had so good a work to do. There is something, too'—and here I remember how subtle a change came into her voice as she said this 'there is something in this wonderful resemblance between us which tells me that this is my duty, and I am going to devote myself absolutely to it during every hour of her waking life until she is able to do without my care. I must watch her and care for her as a mother does for her child, and you must let me do it alone as long as I wish to, just as we had to let Laurens do his work alone. Don't you think I am right, professor?'

'Yes,' he answered, 'perfectly right, Miss Ruth. I am sure everybody will agree with me that Her Highness could not be in better hands than yours. Indeed, as you say, yours are the only hands in which she could possibly be trusted with safety to her newly-awakening reason at such an extraordinary juncture in her life.'

To this we all agreed willingly enough, and so Joyful Star had the big room cleared out and installed herself there with all the comforts and luxuries that the inexhaustible wealth which was now at my command could provide her with, so that Golden Star should find her new world as beautiful as might be. Meanwhile the professor, with a trusty guide that I had provided him with from among my own people, plunged afresh into his beloved studies with such ardour that he seemed to have almost forgotten all else that had brought us to Peru.

Francis Hartness had gone with Tupac—who, in the sight of the Spaniards, was only his Indian servant and guide—on a mission of importance to the South, where the first rumblings of the coming war-storm were already making themselves heard. As for Djama, who, as you know, had no more interest in the work that now lay before Francis Hartness and myself than the professor had, he went about for some days gloomy and silent, and seemingly ill at ease, like a man who for a time has lost his interest in life; and at last—it was on the twentieth day after Golden Star had awakened—he came to me when I was alone in my room and said abruptly,—

'Vilcaroya, do you think I have fairly earned my reward for what I have done?'

'Yes,' I said, looking into his eyes and reading, though he knew it not, the thoughts that were moving in his mind. 'You have done all that you promised to do, but we have yet said nothing of the price. How much do you ask for?'

'As much as I can get!' he said, with a laugh that pleased me but little. 'But, of course, I know the work that you yourself have come here to do, and I see that it will be expensive, so you will find me reasonable.'

'And you, I hope, will not find me ungenerous. Do you remember what you saw in the Hall of Gold?' As I said this, his self-command left him for an instant. I saw his hands close, and his lips tremble, and the fierce fire of the gold-lust spring into his eyes as he replied,—

'Yes; how could I forget it?'

'And do you remember, too,' I said, 'the words that you heard me speak when I stood before the pyramid?'

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'Yes,' he replied, with a faint flush coming into his pale cheeks. 'It is not likely that I should forget them either. Why do you ask?'

'Because,' I said, speaking slowly as a man who weighs his words well, 'saving only the sacred emblems of the Sun, which it is not lawful for me to give away, all that you saw there shall belong to you and to him who made it possible for you to do what you have done. You will share it as you please—that is no care of mine—but I have conditions to make for my own sake and that of my people.'

'What are they?' and as he spoke the flush died out of his cheeks again.

'That you shall both swear solemnly to me that, come what may, no man shall ever know from you where the gold came from, and that, moreover, you shall never utter any word of my story or Golden Star's where mortal ears can hear it, nor give any sign or word to any man or woman that shall lead him or her to guess that I am what I am, or that my work here is what it is. Swear that oath to me and you shall take your gold and go in peace. Break it, and the fate that I told you of shall be yours. Are you content?'

'Yes,' he said, 'and more than content; and I swear to you most solemnly, on my own honour and by all that I hold sacred, that I will keep your secrets absolutely.'

'No, not here,' I said, breaking into his speech; 'and more, it is not only your oath that I want. There must be witnesses, for this is too great a thing to do lightly. To-morrow night we will go back to the Hall of Gold, and there you shall swear your oaths and they shall be witnessed.'

'Very well,' he said. 'Whenever and wherever you like. But now, Vilcaroya, I have something else to say to you. Personally, you know, I have no further interests in Peru, saving one only. Your next few years will be stormy ones, and though I believe that, with the power you have behind you, you will win in the end, yet you know as well as I do that you will have to run all the risks of a war that may be a very savage one before you succeed. You may restore the throne of the Incas, and reign upon it, or you may be killed in the first battle. You will pardon me speaking so plainly, won't you?'

I bowed my head in silence and he went on.

'In view of this, then, I am going to propose that when we leave Peru—I mean my sister and the professor and myself—you will allow Ruth to take Golden Star to England with her, say, for three years or so, in order that her education may be carried on to the best advantage. I will promise you solemnly that during that time I will not speak a word of love to her, or attempt to be anything else to her than I am to Ruth, and then if you succeed in your aims, as I hope you will, we will come back and be Your Majesty's guests for a time, and after that we shall see what more the kindly Fates may have in store for you and me.'

No man ever heard more fairly spoken or reasonable-sounding words than these were, and yet all the while I listened to them I knew that they were but used to hide the real thoughts of him who was speaking them. Yet what could I answer him? Did they not seem to point out the best of all courses that could be followed for the welfare of Golden Star and the comfort of her whose gentle hand was leading her nearer every day to the fulfilment of the promise of her new life? So, for want of anything better in my mind, I answered,—

'Your words are unwelcome to me, for so long a parting would be a great sorrow to me; yet they are wise, and that which is most pleasant is not always the best to be done.'

'Very well,' he said, 'I quite understand you, so we won't say anything more about it until then. I suppose I may tell the professor about what we are to do to-morrow night?'

'Yes,' I said; 'there will be no harm in that, since a share of the gold belongs to him as well.'

'And Hartness?'

'He knows already, for I have told him not only of the treasures in the Hall of Gold, but of many others that will be used in the work that he has sworn to do with me.'

Later on that day when the mid-day heat had cooled a little, I was walking alone in the garden of the hacienda, thinking deeply of what Djama had said and striving to find some plan of my own that would be as good and yet not make the parting that I dreaded needful. I turned, paying but little heed to my way, into a winding pathway shaded with trees and bordered with grass and flowers. I was looking down upon the ground, as was my wont, when I heard footsteps near me and looked up. I had turned the bend in the path, and there, but a few paces from me, stood Golden Star and Ruth. I started and made a motion as though I would turn back, but Ruth immediately beckoned to me smilingly, and said,—

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'Come and let me introduce you to your sister, Vilcaroya. I think it's time you began to be friends again. Don't you think she is looking wonderfully well and strong, and—and beautiful?'

You may think, but I cannot tell you, of all the feelings that rose up within me as I obeyed her invitation. It was the first time that I had seen Golden Star since the night she had awakened. Nay, was it not the first time I had seen her as a truly living woman since the night of our bridal in the Sanctuary?

She was dressed in garments made after the fashion of Ruth's own, of light grey soft stuff, and on the glorious wealth of her hair was a broad-brimmed straw hat such as Ruth wore. Indeed, to look at them both, standing there side by side, they could but have been taken for two twin sisters—daughters of the Day and Night—as my loving fancy called them afterwards—rather than the daughters of different peoples, and children of far-parted generations, whose hands, as they clasped, bridged the gulf between one age of the world and another.

As I approached, Golden Star's eyes looked at me with the simple wonder that shines out of the eyes of a little child, and like a little child she smiled at me, and then she looked at Ruth, and made a soft low sound that was almost like the cooing of a child.

'She is pleased to see you, Vilcaroya,' said Ruth, taking hold of my hand and hers, 'but of course she can't say so yet. Now, let me teach her to shake hands with you.'

Then she put into mine the soft, warm little hand that I had last clasped when we went hand in hand to the couch of our long sleep. I pressed it gently, looking at her through the tears that rose into my eyes, then I raised it to my lips and kissed it, and she smiled, and made the little soft sound again, and then Ruth put her arm around her waist and said,—

'Come, now, you are acquainted, and she likes you. This will be a most valuable lesson for her. Now, let us have a walk, and you tell me the news, if there is any.'

'Most willingly,' I said, 'for I have much news to tell.'

So we turned back along the path into the quietest part of the garden, I walking by Ruth's side. And I told her of all that had passed between her brother and me in the morning, and of what was to be done on the following night. She was looking very serious when I had finished, and I could see that many unspoken thoughts were working in her mind, and when I had done she looked up at me and said,—

'Laurens's plan seems a very good one at first sight, but of course we cannot decide upon anything until we have thought a good deal more about it, and talked it well over amongst ourselves. But, at anyrate, it would be several weeks yet before I would even think of going away with Golden Star, so there is plenty of time for that. But to-morrow night—Listen, Vilcaroya, may I ask a very great favour of you?'

'Joyful Star can ask no favour of me,' I said. 'She can speak, and I can hear and obey.'

'Nonsense, Vilcaroya! I wish you wouldn't talk like that,' she answered with pretty petulance. 'Now, suppose I was to ask you to let me see this wonderful treasure—house of yours and promise faithfully not to tell anyone about it—would you let me?'

'It is not the best that I can show you,' I answered gladly, 'but if you desire to see it, it is yours and all that it contains. I can give your brother and the professor other gold, and I will show you a greater treasure—house than this under the Fortress itself.'

'Well,' she laughed, 'I won't say now that I won't have it, because the sight of all that gold might be too much for me, but I should dearly love to come and see it, and I think I might venture to bring Golden Star too. She's quite well and strong now, and if we are careful of her, it can't do her any harm, and it may do her good. Shall I bring her?'

'Yes,' I said, 'why not?'

At this moment we saw Djama come walking down the path towards us, and at the sight of him there came to me, like the stab of a dagger of ice, the sudden memory that, at the moment I was speaking of my treasure—house under the Sacsahuaman, I had heard a gentle rustle behind some bushes close by the path, and a sound like that of a stealthy tread.

As Djama came near to us I saw the love—light flash into his eyes, and a swift flush rise into his sallow cheeks. He held out his hand and quickened his pace, smiling as sweetly as a woman the while. I was facing him a little in advance, and I heard behind me a sharp, low, shuddering cry of terror that shook my heart as I turned to learn its cause. Golden Star had thrown her arms round Ruth's neck, and was clinging to her,

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

trembling with fear, and looking sideways at Djama with eyes fixed and wide open with terror.

You have seen how little children will go smiling and fearless into the arms of one stranger and shrink in hate and terror from another. Their sight is keener than it is in after years, when the dust of the world's conflict has dulled it, and they can see plainly the good and the evil that is hidden behind the mask of the face. So it was with that child-soul of Golden Star's. Though I was now to her as strange as Djama, yet she had seen in me only the friend and brother who loved her and wished her well, and whose heart was clean in her sight; but in Djama she had seen at a single glance the evil that had only been revealed to me after many weeks of watching.

Though I hated him for the fear that he had caused her, yet I was glad also, for now I saw that the answer to his proposal would be easier than I had thought for. As for him, his face darkened and his black brows came together, and the love-light in his eyes changed to a glare of anger; but this was only for an instant. It passed more quickly than the thunder-clouds melt round the crest of Illampu. He stopped, and stood with his head slightly bent and his hands spread, palms outward, in the posture of one who asks pardon, and said, in a voice that had no trace of anger,—

'Forgive me, Ruth! I am afraid I have startled our patient—or perhaps I should rather say yours now. It was something more than stupid of me to come upon you suddenly like this, without any warning. Of all people in the world, I ought to have known better than that. But I suppose seeing Vilcaroya already here made me forget myself. Did she start like that when he came?'

'No,' replied Ruth, still standing with her arm where she had thrown it around Golden Star's shoulders, and stroking her hair with the other. 'She—she saw him farther off than you, and I took her towards him, so I suppose the shock was not so great. But please go away, both of you, now. You see she is terribly frightened, and she is trembling as though someone had struck her. I must take her into the house and get her quiet again, or the consequences may be serious.'

Djama turned away without a word, his face darkening again as he did so, and with one backward glance at Golden Star, who had now raised her head from Ruth's breast, and was staring after us with fixed, wide-open eyes, I turned and walked away beside him, neither of us speaking a word, for we were both too busy with our own thoughts.

That night Francis Hartness and Tupac returned from their journey to the South, and as the professor was also in the house I told them of what I wished done on the following night, and bade Tupac make all preparation. The next day we all started in the cool of the morning to go to the Rodadero as though for a picnic, as the people of Cuzco often do, so that there might be no suspicion of our true object. We all rode upon horses, saving Golden Star, who was carried in a hammock litter, that I had had made for her, and Tupac, and six of our people who came with us as bearers and servants.

We spent the day wandering about among the huge ruins of the Sacsahuaman, and exploring the wonders of the carved rocks and underground passages and altar-places, which have been the marvel of every traveller to the hills about Cuzco, and all that I knew of the upper works I told my companions, and showed them as well as I could what the mighty fastness had been in the days of its pride and unbroken strength.

Then, when the brief twilight came, I bade one of our men take the beasts into a chamber among the rocks that I had shown him, and where plenty of fodder had been stored a few days before. After this we waited a little longer till night fell, and then I bade Tupac do what I had bidden him the day before. His voice rose shrill and plaintive in the silence, chanting a song that you may have heard the Indians singing in Peru when returning from their labours, and presently, from among the rocks on the plain, and from the shadowy lines of the Fortress, many silent figures stole out and went towards the valley in which the Sayacusca stands.

Then I told my companions that all, save those of the Blood, must have their eyes bandaged, as Djama's had been before, and when they had submitted willingly to this, knowing that no harm would come to them, we led them to the Sayacusca, I leading Ruth by the hand, and following the bearers of Golden Star's litter, and there the way to the Hall of Gold was opened as before, and we entered it, followed by a long line of the Children of the Blood.

But I made no halt here, nor did I let my companions even see the treasure that was to be divided between Djama and the professor according to my promise, for I had greater marvels in store for them. So, lantern in hand, I led the way through a winding gallery behind the pyramid of gold of which I told you before. At the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

end of this was a door, formed by a revolving stone similar to that at the entrance to the hall. This Tupac and another opened under my directions, and we entered a long, straight passage behind it. At the end was a broad flight of stone steps, and at the top were two low bronze doors bolted into pillars on either side. The doors had no hinges, but they turned with the pillars, and no one who did not know this, or how the pillars turned, could open them. But this secret was one of many others that I had brought with me from the past, and in a few moments the doors were standing open before us.

We passed in, and I closed them behind us. Two of my men had come laden with great candles and torches, and these I had lighted and placed in golden sconces which stood out from the walls in the great hall into which we had passed through the bronze doors. When this had been done, I beckoned to Tupac, and went silently with him to the other end of the hall, where, on a throne of gold under a canopy of silver, sat a silent figure clad in the imperial robes, and with a mask of beaten gold over its face, according to the ancient custom. It was the effigy of the great Yupanqui, father of Huayna-Capac, which had been seated here since his death, as an emblem of the unbroken sovereignty of his race, giving place in turn to his son and grandson on the days that they were crowned, and being replaced when the ceremony was over.

Now, with Tupac's help I carried the effigy into a little chamber behind the throne, and there quickly removed my upper clothing and dressed myself as I had done before in the Hall of Gold, and took my place on the throne. Then I bade Tupac lead Joyful Star, with her eyes still bandaged, to me. When he had placed her before me, I made a sign to him, and the bandage fell from her eyes. She turned white as death, and staggered back a pace, with her hands clasped to her temples, and there she stood, staring wide-eyed at me and all the splendours about her.

Wherever her gaze wandered it saw nothing but gold and silver and gems and rich-dyed hangings of silk and wool, whose brilliant hues no time could dim. The roof and the upper halves of the walls were covered with plates of burnished silver. Around the walls, half-way between the floor and the ceiling, ran a great cornice or ledge of gold, on which stood the golden chairs in which were seated the mummies of the twenty Incas which I had last seen in the Sanctuary of the Sun, looking down through the eye-holes in their golden masks.

From the cornice to the floor hung the bright-hued hangings, and against these were ranged along the floor on either side threescore seats of silver, and the floor was paved with diamond-shaped blocks of gold and silver set alternately. Behind the throne on which I sat rose from the floor to roof a sloping wall of golden ingots, and on either hand stood a great golden vase, heaped high with unset gems, emeralds and diamonds, pearls and sapphires and rubies, precious almost beyond price; and on the roof above my throne a great, golden image of the Sun, encircled by spreading rays of gems, glowed and sparkled in the light of the candles and torches.

At last Ruth's wandering gaze became steady and rested upon my face, and I looked back into her eyes, making no sign until she should speak, and sitting motionless as the effigy whose place I had taken.

'Where am I?' she said at last in a low, faint voice, like one awakening from a dream. 'And who are you? Surely you cannot be—and yet, yes, you are Vilcaroya! What has happened?'

'Nothing more than the granting of Joyful Star's request, save that through the treasure-house which she asked to see I have brought her to a better one. Does it please her?'

'Is it real, Vilcaroya?' she whispered. 'Is all this really gold and silver, and are these real diamonds and rubies and emeralds, or am I only dreaming? Does it please me? What a question! I have never even dreamed of anything like it. Where are we, Vilcaroya?'

'In the throne-room of the Incas, beneath what was once their palace and fortress on the hill of Sacsahuaman,' I answered, 'and this is the throne of the great Yupanqui, the greatest earthly king and conqueror of my race. I sat here and crowned myself Inca in the presence of Anda-Huillac and the priests and nobles of the Land of the Four Regions on the day before the night when I drank the death-draught with Golden Star.'

'Ah, yes, where is she?' she cried, looking round only to see that all the rest had vanished, and that she and I were alone in the great hall. 'What have they done with her, and where are Laurens and the others?' she cried, looking fearfully and almost mistrustfully at me. 'What have you done with them, Vilcaroya?'

'They are safe,' I said. 'Tupac and his men have care of them, and they will come back when I bid him

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

bring them. But I have need of your presence here alone before I do that,' I went on, rising from my seat as I spoke. 'Has Joyful Star ever sat on a throne?'

'No,' she stammered, staring at me with wonder in her eyes. 'You know I haven't. Why should you ask?'

'Then sit on mine,' I said, I for I have something to say to you which I can best say and you can best hear if we change places. Nay, I will take no denial,' I said, drawing her by the hand up the steps in front of the throne, 'for it is not only your—your friend who is asking, but a crowned king in his own palace, who is lord of life and death over all who enter it.'

Half frightened and half wondering, she submitted to my will and allowed me to seat her in the chair which no woman had ever sat in before. Then I took her hand, and, dropping on one knee on the upper step, I said,—

'Joyful Star has taken one queen from me, and she alone can give me another to fill her place. She is sitting where the great Yupanqui sat when he ruled all the land from north to south, and from the eastern mountains to the sea, and ere long I too shall reign, sole and undisputed lord, over a realm wider even than that. Many things have been done that Joyful Star knows not of since I came back to my country and my people. Through all the Land of the Four Regions the word has gone forth, with the swiftness of thought, that the Son of the Sun has returned, and that the heir of the divine Manco has come to deliver his children from bondage.*

* The Inca Indians of the Sierra region possess the same extraordinary faculty of transmitting intelligence without apparent material means that the Hindoos and the Arabs have. Thus, during the last revolution in Peru, the fall of Lima was known to the Indians of Bolivia on the southern shore of Lake Titicaca three days after it happened, though the telegraph wires were cut and all ordinary communications suspended. Without the telegraph this would be quite impossible by any means known to Europeans.

'Everywhere the tidings have been received with joy, and the people are longing to return to the allegiance of their fathers, and tread their oppressors under foot. Before many days civil war will be raging throughout the lands of the south, and I have but to set flowing that golden stream, one of whose many sources is here, and say, "Here is gold and silver in plenty for all who will fight under the Rainbow Banner," and I shall have armies and fleets to do what I will with, and the sway of my sceptre shall reach from north to south and sea to sea.

'This I shall do because of my oath; but I have brought Joyful Star here to tell her, in the most sacred place that is left in the Land of the Four Regions, that I shall also do it so that she, if she will, may be queen where I am king, and sit beside me on my throne, and make my empire a paradise by the brightness and the sweetness of her presence. I cannot forget, as she bade me do—for the words that I said in the heat of my passion are true—for I love you, Joyful Star, and all that I have or shall ever have on earth will be worthless to me unless you take it as a gift from my hands. Nay, do not speak, for now I seek no answer, whether good or evil. I have brought you here that I, as a king, might kneel at the feet of her whom I would win for my queen, and from now until I sit in the sight of all the world on the throne of the Four Regions no other words of love shall pass my lips. So you shall have many days to ponder what I have said, and to ask your own heart whether it will say "yes" or "no" to me when I stretch out my hand from my throne and ask you to come and sit beside me and rule my people with me.'

Before she could answer, I stood up and clapped my hands, and Tupac with six others, dressed now in the forbidden costume of their ancestors, entered the hall from the ante-chamber, into which they had taken the others, and came towards me, bearing wands across their shoulders in token of homage, and with heads downbent, not daring to look upon my majesty till I bade them. I drew Joyful Star from the throne by the hand, and seating myself in it, said in the ancient tongue,—

'Let the Children of the Blood enter into the presence of their father and their lord, and let the strangers be brought in, and the other maiden, all with eyes bandaged, and let seats of silver be placed to the right and left of the throne, one for each of the virgins of the Sun to sit upon. Are all things else ready, Tupac-Rayca?'

'Yes, lord,' he answered, stepping out in front of the others and falling on his knees, 'and the Children of the Blood are waiting to see the glory of thy presence and hear the words of wisdom and hope from thy lips.'

CHAPTER VIII — How The Soul Of Golden Star Came Back

When the two chairs had been brought in and placed according to my orders, I rose from my throne and led Joyful Star to the one on my left hand and placed her in it, still silent with the wonder and perplexity of what she had seen and heard since her eyes were opened. Then, seating myself again, I bade Tupac summon the Children of the Blood to take their places, and presently he ushered them in from the chambers that opened out of the great hall on either hand at the other end.

There were threescore of them, the heads of the families of Ayllos, whose blood was the purest and whose descent was most direct from the old nobility of my own days. Each of them, too, under the outward husk of his forlorn and degraded state, had preserved unsullied the ancient faith and traditions of the sacred race, and, against all appearances, had steadfastly hoped for the fulfilment of the promises that had been given in the olden times. More than this, too—each had treasured, as a miser hoards his gold, the ever-growing legacy of hate which the oppression and contempt of the Spaniards and their meaner descendants had heaped up from generation to generation against the long-awaited day of vengeance which, as but two or three in that strange company alone knew, was now so near at hand.

Ever since I had revealed myself to them in the Hall of Gold they had been working for the end in view with the swift, subtle arts known only to those of their race, and already, from Quito in the north to Santiago in the south, tidings had gone forth that the day of deliverance was approaching, and that ere long the Rainbow Banner would be raised by the hands of him for whom the Children of the Sun had waited.

Each of the fathers of the people was dressed, as Tupac was, in the long-forbidden garb of the ancient nobility, and each as he entered stopped in the centre of the hall and paid his homage before he went to his seat. Then, when all were seated, I ordered that the strangers should be brought in, and they were led into the midst of the silent assembly, with their eyes still bandaged. Over Golden Star's head a veil had been thrown, hiding her face, for it was my purpose that it should not be seen for the present, and how strangely this purpose worked you shall soon see.

As she came up the middle of the hall, following Tupac, who was leading her as obedient as a little child, I descended from the throne and went to meet her, and led her to the seat on my right hand and placed her in it. Francis Hartness, the professor and Djama I left standing in the middle of the hall, each with one of Tupac's chosen guards beside him. When Golden Star was seated, I stood up in front of the throne and said to those assembled, speaking in the ancient tongue,—

'Sons of the Blood and fathers of the Oppressed, you know already how the promise that was made by our Father the Sun, through the lips of his high priest, in the days when first the oppressors came, has been in part most faithfully and marvellously fulfilled. I, Vilcaroya—son of Huayna—Capac, son of the great Yupanqui Inca, before whose throne-seat I am now standing alive in your presence—am he of whom it was said that one who should pass from life to life through the shadows of death should grasp the sceptre of the divine Manco, and restore the ancient glory of the Children of the Sun. And with me, as you know, there was another, at whose call and for love of whom I dared the ordeal of the death-sleep and swore the oath which I have returned to the world of living men to fulfil. I have already given you some proof that I am what I say I am, for I have revealed to you secrets which were buried in the grave with me and in those faithful hearts which have been pulseless now for many generations.

'But now, that all things may be made plain to you, and that no doubts may remain in your hearts to hinder the working of our sacred purpose, I have brought here before you witnesses of the wonders that have been worked—even those who wrought them themselves, that their own lips may tell you the story; and with them I have brought yet another witness who, though she cannot speak to you in our ancient tongue, of which our Father, for his own wise purposes, has deprived her during her long sleep, will yet in her own person and even with silent lips be witness enough that I have not lied to you. Now let the eyes of the strangers be uncovered and their mouths opened that they may see and speak.'

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Even as the words left my lips they were obeyed, and at the same time I stretched out my right hand and raised the veil from the head of Golden Star, and unloosed the bandage from her eyes.

A deep murmur of wonder ran round the hall; a sharp cry of amazement broke from Djama's lips, and the two others stared blankly about them. Then I raised my left hand to command silence, and, still speaking the ancient speech and pointing with my right hand to Golden Star, said,—

'This, O Fathers of the People, is she who drank the death—draught with me. This is Cory—Coyllur, daughter of Huayna—Capac, and sister of the long—ago murdered Huascar, and my sister, too, since her great father was mine also. With her, as the tradition was told to you, I plighted the marriage—troth before the altar in the Sanctuary of the Sun, and of that troth I would speak to you now. Such marriage is no longer lawful in the world to which we have returned, and in token of this our Father the Sun has sent this other likeness of Golden Star, who sits upon my left hand, to tell me that it may not be; and to make the message surer, it has pleased him also to put into my heart, a love for her differing from, though not greater than that which I have borne for Golden Star, and if my Father who has given me this love shall also look with kindness upon my longing, then Joyful Star, as I have named her, shall be my Coya* and my queen, and Golden Star shall be her sister and mine, and I doubt not that in his own good time our Father will send her a fitting mate, that her heart may not be empty nor her life lonely.'

*The queen—consort of the Inca, as distinguished from the many others whom the ancient laws allowed him to marry.

As I said these last words I saw the eyes of all who were sitting in the chairs turn, as if moved by one impulse, and rest on Francis Hartness, standing strong and stately in the midst of the little group in the middle of the hall, overtopping the others by nearly a span, and crowned with his curling golden hair; and as I, too, looked at him, a new thought came into my mind, and I spoke aloud again and said,—

'Yes, Brothers of the Blood, I read your thought. The stranger from the land which is the greatest of all lands in the world of today, is a true Son of the Sun, though not of our blood, for his heart is clean and his tongue is straight and his arm strong, and perchance it may please our Father to bring about that which he has put into our hearts.'

At this another murmur ran round the hall, and every head was bowed in assent.

Now all this time the three Englishmen had been standing patiently in the midst of the hall, looking about them at its splendours, and waiting till I should speak to them, for the professor knew enough of the Quichua tongue to follow what I had been saying, and had told the others that I was speaking of them. Now I spoke to them in English, and told them what I had brought them to the throne—room for, and then I had chairs placed for them at top of the hall, to my left hand.

When they had taken their places, I asked the professor to speak in Spanish to those assembled, and tell them whether or not the story of my return to life was true, and whether or not Golden Star had been found where Anda—Huillac and the priests had placed her, and had been, like me, restored to life by the arts of Djama his friend. This he did in few, straight words, and after him Djama rose at my bidding and told them also what he had done. When he had finished I took the Llautu from my head and raised it above me with outstretched arms and said in a loud voice,—

'If you, O Children of the Blood and Sons of the Ancient Race, believe now that I am in truth Vilcaroya, son of Huayna—Capac, and lawful heir of the divine Manco, from whom all the Incas of our race draw their royal blood, then take me for your lord as my father was the lord of your fathers; or if any shall have yet doubt in his heart, let him speak now or for ever be silent.'

Then with one accord they rose from their seats and came before me and prostrated themselves on the shining pavement of the throne—room, and began to chant, in a low, soft tone, the Song of Homage with which of old the new—crowned Incas had been hailed, generation after generation, Sons of the Sun and lords of life and death throughout the Land of the Four Regions.

And now a wondrous thing happened. As I stood there facing the prostrate throng, lowering the Llautu on to my head, I heard a low, sharp cry beside me on my right hand. I turned half round, and there I saw Golden Star staring at me with eyes burning with the light that shone through them from her new—awakened soul.

Her hands were clasped to her temples, pushing back her thick, bright hair from her forehead. Her face was flushed, and her half—open lips were working as though they were striving to shape some long—forgotten

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

words. At the instant that the Llautu touched my brows, she rose to her feet. Then a cry burst from her lips and went ringing down the hall, and the next moment she had thrown herself forward and I had caught her in my arms.

As I did so our eyes met, and our hearts looked at each other through them. In that one burning glance the mists of the long years were melted, all things else were forgotten, and for the moment we stood alone—the children of a long—dead generation—in the solitude that our strange fate had made about us. Then her lips moved, not dumbly this time, and in a voice that woke, who shall say how many memories in my heart, she said,—

'Have they awakened us, my lord? Tell me how long we have slept, my Vilcaroya. It seems long to me, and I have had strange, dim dreams, and thought I was not one, but two, and that one of myself was your sister and the other was your Coya and queen. It was strange, was it not, to dream like that?'

'Not so strange but that it may be true, O my sister, Golden Star,' I said, my wonder for the moment overcome by a new hope that uprose within me at her words. 'Stranger things than that have happened since we fell asleep together in the distant days that are no more. See, Ñusta mi, here is your other self, the living shape of that sister—soul of yours, who has watched over you and cared for you and loved you since you drew the first breath of your new life. She cannot speak our tongue, for she is the daughter of another age than ours, but she has taught me hers and I will speak for you.'

As I said this I took her hands from where they rested on my shoulders, and led her to the seat of Joyful Star, who was standing in front of it, with one hand on the arm of her chair and the other one clasped to her heart, her face white with fear and her eyes wide with wonder.

'What has happened, Vilcaroya?' she said, in a voice so low that it was almost a whisper. 'Has her memory come back, and does she believe herself to be you—your wife?'

As she forced the last word from her hesitating lips I saw the hot blood flow into her cheeks, and a new light that shot like a dart of fire into my heart leapt into her eyes.

'No,' I said, with a smile that was quickly answered by one that came unawares to her lips. 'She calls herself my sister and me her lord, and says that she has dreamed that she is not one but two, and that her other sister—self is Vilcaroya's wife and queen. Now, if that dream may be the truth, tell her so!'

And with that I took her hand gently from where it rested on the chair and laid Golden Star's in it.

'But—I cannot speak your language, and she wouldn't understand me,' she said softly, with one swift glance at me and another longer look at Golden Star's smiling face, so wondrous like her own.

'There is another speech than that of the tongue,' I answered, 'which all men understand.'

'Yes!' she said, and then she drew Golden Star gently to her and kissed her.

All this while the Ayllos had remained silent and prostrate before the throne, none daring to raise their heads till I bade them, and the three Englishmen sat still, hearing what I had said to Joyful Star and her answer to it, and yet neither speaking nor rising from their seats, each full of his own thoughts and not willing to betray his feelings by any rash word that he might speak in the wonder of the moment. But now I turned with my heart full of joy and new hope, and said in a voice in which my gladness seemed to sing like a bird in the morning sky,—

'Rise up, Brothers of the Blood, and look upon your lord and rejoice with him, for our Father the Sun has looked kindly upon him and filled all his life with light. He has given back memory and speech to Golden Star, his daughter, and put it into the heart of Joyful Star, her other sister—self, to love her and to make plain that which might else have been dark.'

Then they all rose to their feet and saluted me and paid their homage to Golden Star and Joyful Star as well, and then I waved them to their seats, and when they had gone I led Golden Star back to her chair, and then I called Djama to me, and when he came and stood before me I said,—

'You have seen what has happened, and you have heard the words that have been said. You see now that there is no need for Golden Star to go to England. Therefore it remains but for you and for your friend to take the treasure that is yours, and for us to say farewell.'

'And Ruth?' he asked. 'You know, of course, that that will mean farewell to her also.'

I could see that he was ill at ease, and that his words were not the words that his true thoughts would have spoken. As I looked at him I saw that his eyes shifted and wandered from my gaze, and I said coldly,—

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'Much has happened since we last spoke of this. It will be for Joyful Star herself to say whether she will bid me farewell or not. Is she not free to go or stay where she pleases? Say, now, when I shall command the treasure to be taken out of the Hall of Gold for you, and where you wish it to be placed.'

'I must ask you to give me time to think about that and talk it over with the professor,' he said, 'for we have no means of taking such an immense amount of gold to the coast and getting it on board ship without suspicion.'

'Go, then,' I said, 'and speak with him, but remember that it must be done quickly, for ere many days are past there will be war in the land, and neither your lives nor your gold will be safe.'

'I will take good care of that,' he said in a tone whose strangeness told me more than his words, and with that he turned away and sat down beside the professor, with the thoughts that were within his heart still unspoken. As soon as he had gone back to his seat I called Francis Hartness to me and set him beside me on the right hand of the throne, and then I told who he was and showed that he was well skilled in those new arts of warfare which had taken the place of our ancient methods, and how he had promised to use his knowledge for me and lead my armies into battle, hazarding his own life on the chance of our success; and when I had said this I named him leader of all those who should range themselves under the Rainbow Banner when the day of battle came, and bade all present obey his orders and enforce obedience to them, even as though his commands were my own.

Then I bade Francis Hartness himself speak all that was in his mind freely and without fear of betrayal concerning the war that was soon to be waged between the rival factions of our oppressors and the means that were to be used to turn their strife to our own account, and this he did, speaking in fluent Spanish and in short, clear sentences, as a man of action and a soldier should speak.

He told how he had made himself acquainted with the forces on both sides, and how, with the help of Tupac, he had sounded the feelings of those by whom the fighting would have to be done, and had found them willing to leave the service of the schemers who sought to make themselves tyrants over the land, and fight for those whose purpose it was to restore the ancient rule and give liberty to all to use their lives as they thought best and to win for themselves as many of the gifts of the All-Father as they were able to do. He told, too, how he had sent many messages over the lightning-wires to his own country, bidding friends like himself in war to come out as quickly as might be to find the fortune that awaited them, yet saying nothing of war but only of gold that was to be had for the taking.

When he had finished, I bade Tupac summon all who were present to the foot of the throne, and then I spoke to them of the plans that I had made with Francis Hartness in all their details, and showed them how each, according to his opportunities, could give his help in carrying them out, and then, as by this time the night was far spent and there was yet work of another sort to do, I sent them back to their seats, and calling Ruth and Golden Star to me, I bade them follow me, and led the way down the hall and through one of the passages at the end until I brought them to a chamber which Tupac and his comrades had already prepared for them by my orders, and here I left them to take their rest together, promising to return in the morning.

When I got back into the throne-room Djama asked me whither I had taken his sister, and I told him what I had done, saying that the hour was now too late for us to return to our home on the other side of the valley, and that, moreover, it was needful for us to go back to the Hall of Gold to make a proper count of the treasure and to let him and the professor swear their oaths of secrecy in the presence of the fathers of my people.

Then I left him, looking much more ill at ease than such tidings should have made him feel, and told Tupac in the ancient tongue to take three of his companions and go and do that which it was now time to do. So he went and chose his men and departed through the bronze doors by which we had entered the hall. After that I named a guard to remain all night in the hall, and bade the rest go and put on their everyday clothing, and I, too, went back into the chamber behind the throne and changed my imperial garments for the others that I had put off.

Then I ordered the torches and candles to be extinguished, all saving a few that were left for the guards, and then the eyes of Djama and the professor were bandaged afresh, though those of Francis Hartness—he being now one of us and devoted to our cause—were left open; and when this was done the lanterns were lit and I led the way into the ante-chamber of the throne-room, where the bronze doors still stood open as Tupac had left them.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

I stood by them till the last man had passed out, then I went through and closed them. Then I followed the rest and again placed myself at their head. But when we reached the end of the straight passage, instead of turning the revolving pillar which closed the entrance of the winding passage leading to the Hall of Gold, I sought about with my lantern on the floor until I found three marks in the shape of a triangle in one corner of a great square slab of stone, and, taking a long staff which one of the men carried, I placed the end on the triangle and calling two others to help me, we bore downwards with all our weight, and when we had thrust awhile on the staff the corner of the slab sank into the floor and it turned on a diagonal axis until it stood upright, leaving a three-cornered space large enough for a man's body to pass through easily, Then I made a sign to one of the Ayllos and said,—

'Anahuac, take your lantern down there and light the way down the steps.'

'Truly there are no secrets in the land hidden from the eyes of our Lord!' he said, glancing round in wonder at the rest, and then he lowered himself with his lantern into the hole and disappeared.

Then I bade the rest follow him one by one, and so all went down, I going last with Francis Hartness, who helped me to put the stone back into its place.

Our way now led along a rough-hewn gallery that sloped gently upwards for some twelve hundred paces, and at the end of it there was a little chamber measuring some twenty feet each way and having no apparent outlet, but in the middle of one of the walls there was another of the cunningly-constructed revolving stones which our ancient masons ever used to bar their secret ways, and this three of our men, working as I told them, turned on its hinge, and through the opening that was thus made we passed out in single file to a little rock-walled valley over which the stars were shining.

The door was closed behind us, and dust and dirt were rubbed over the thin lines which marked where it fitted into the rock, and then we extinguished our lanterns and passed out of the valley on to the pampa.

The place where we had come out was about a thousand paces from the walls of the Sacsahuaman. We halted on the plain and I gave my last orders to the Ayllos. Then we set out in the direction of the Fortress, and as we went one by one my followers disappeared silently into the half darkness about us till at last only four of them were left, two leading Djama and two the professor.

I had been talking of many things with Francis Hartness on the way, and showing him how in the olden times we had made use of the secret passages such as those he had already seen, and when we saw that we had come out by a way different to that which we had entered, he asked me the reason of it, and I answered him in a low voice and said,—

'Because the other way is closed. Have patience a little while and you shall see why.'

Then we went on our way in silence until we came to the edge of the valley in which the Sayacusca stands. Here I halted and whispered a few words to the men who were leading Djama and the professor. They slipped off their ponchos and threw them over the heads of their prisoners, for such the two were now to be for the present. I heard a muffled cry from Djama, and I went to him and put my hand on his shoulder and said in a whisper,—

'Keep quiet and lie down. These men have knives and will use them at my bidding.'

Then they pulled him and the professor down, and they lay quiet, knowing that their lives were in my hands, and I lay down on the edge of the valley, signing to Francis Hartness to come and lie beside me. Then I pointed into the valley and bade him watch. Presently, in the dim light, we made out figures moving about the rock, and caught every now and then the glint of the star-rays along thin lines of polished metal.

'Rifle barrels!' he whispered. 'What are they doing here? I didn't know that your men had any weapons yet.'

'No,' I said, 'those, are in the hands of soldiers from Cuzco. The time has come sooner than I thought for, and yet not too soon. You will see the first blow struck for the freedom of my people before to-morrow's sun rises.'

CHAPTER IX — The Treachery Of Djama

'Wait now for a little while with patience,' I said, laying my hand on his shoulder, 'and you shall see a strange thing, a thing that shall show you how strong the old traditions are still in the land of the Incas. Lie here and do not let yourself be seen till I send a messenger for you. It will not be very long.'

He nodded and I rose quietly to my feet and went round the hollow until I got the great stone between me and the place where the soldiers were standing, and then I went down on my hands and knees and crept quietly towards it and climbed up a flight of steps carved in it. This took me to the top of the cleft in which is the broken stairway. I climbed down this and dropped softly into the hole at the bottom. It was dry now, for Tupac had done that which I had bidden him in the throne-room. I felt my way down the steps till I came to the wall at the bottom. Then I whispered his name, and he answered out of the darkness in the old language,—

'I am here, Lord, and all that has been ordered is done.'

I crept towards him along the wall, measuring my way along it with my outstretched arms till I knew that I had come to the revolving stone which closed the way into the hall. He was standing against it, and one of the others was with him. I felt over the door till I found the silver socket, and then we opened the door as before with the bar which Tupac had brought. Then I went down through the hall and lighted a lantern and went into the little chamber where, as before, I changed my clothing for the imperial robes, and set the Llautu on my head; but I kept on my belt under my cloak, and put two revolvers in it in case I should need them, and when I went back into the hall Tupac and the others were lighting candles and putting them in the holders round the walls as I had bidden them. When this was done I said to him,—

'Go now and bring the others down, first the soldiers with their officer, by whose side you must keep closely, and see that your knife is ready. Then let AINU bring the Men of the Blood, and the strangers quickly after them, and bid Anahauc and AINU close the door when the last man has entered.'

He bowed his head, and the two went out and left me sitting there on a seat built up of blocks of gold before the pyramid, waiting to play my part in the scene that was to follow, and strike the first blow in the battle that I had come to fight. Presently I heard the rattle of arms and the sound of footsteps coming along the passage. I took one of the revolvers out of my belt and held it ready under my cloak, and sat still and rigid as the effigy of Yupanqui, looking straight before me at the entrance at the other end.

Tupac came in first, and close behind him was a Spanish officer with a drawn sword in his hand. After him came the soldiers, two and two, with their rifles and bayonets. The officer stopped and stared about him, blinking with eyes half dazzled by the sudden light and the glitter of the gold and jewels which he saw wherever he looked. The same instant I saw the gleam of steel in Tupac's hand close to his yellow throat. Then he said to him in Spanish,—

'Put up your sword, *senor*, and come with me and beg your life from the Son of the Sun who sits yonder on his throne.'

The Spaniard uttered a loud cry of amazement as his eyes fell upon me, for so far he had not seen me, having been too much taken up by the splendours of the hall. Then he turned and called to his soldiers, but while the cry was still in his throat, Tupac's arm went round his neck and the knife-point touched his skin. Then he bade two of the soldiers take the sword out of his hand and hold him fast, which they did, greatly to his wonder, for he did not know that the betrayer was already betrayed. As soon as he was safe, Tupac told the other soldiers to take their places along the walls, and they did so in silence, yet wondering greatly at all they saw. There were four-and-twenty of them, not counting the two who held the officer, all men of Indian blood whom the Spaniards* had made rather slaves than soldiers to fight their petty quarrels for them for little pay and scanty food.

*The Inca naturally does not distinguish between the modern Peruvians and their Spanish ancestors.

After them came Anahauc and AINU and the rest of the Men of the Blood, bringing with them Djama and the professor blindfolded, and Francis Hartness with his eyes unbound. All this time I had neither moved nor

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

made a sound, and the soldiers were looking at me almost in terror, wondering whether I was truly a man or one of the dead Incas with living eyes in his head. As for the Spanish officer, being a coward, as many of his sort are, he was already white with fear, and his knees were shaking as he stood between the two soldiers who held him. When all had entered, Anahauc came and prostrated himself before me and said,—

'The commands of the Son of the Sun are obeyed. All are here, and the door is shut.'

Before I answered him, I called Francis Hartness to me and said,—

'Come here and stand by me, my friend, for I shall need your counsel.'

He came and stood by me on my right hand, saying as he looked still wonderingly at me,—

'This means treachery, I suppose, and after that, tragedy. Is that why you left Ruth and Golden Star in the Fortress? I am afraid you had only too much reason to, but I hope, for Ruth's sake, you will do justice with as much mercy as you can.'

'You shall see,' I answered. But if it were not for her you would see justice without mercy.'

Then I bade Anahauc rise, and told him and Tupac to unbind the eyes of Djama and the professor and bring them before me.

As Djama's eyes opened to the light, he stared about him in silence for a moment. His face was very pale, and his lips were twitching and trembling. The professor, too, looked about him, also wondering greatly at what he saw; but neither of them spoke till they had been led forward and stood before me. Then, while Djama still kept silence, the professor, looking from me to Hartness, said in a voice that had much wonder, but no fear or sign of guilt, in it,—

'What is this? What does all this mean? What are all these soldiers here for, Vilcaroya? I thought it was so important that all this should be kept secret? Surely no one has betrayed you already? But no, that can't be. Hartness, what does it all mean?'

'It means—first,' I said, speaking very slowly, and not in a loud voice, 'that you have been brought here with Laurens Djama to take the oath which you agreed to take—never to reveal the secrets of the things that you have learned. I ask your pardon for the rude way in which my people have brought you, but it was necessary.'

Then I turned to Djama, who was standing silent and motionless, with clenched teeth and set face, like one who knows that he stands near his doom and has no hope of mercy, and said,—

'Now, Laurens Djama, are you ready to do as you promised to do when I told you that I would give you the half of this gold for what you have done for me and Golden Star? Are you ready to swear the oath here, in the presence of these witnesses, that you swore to me then?'

He drew himself up and looked at me boldly—for he was a brave man although his heart was black—and said to me with a hard, harsh laugh in his voice,—

'You have been too clever for me, and so I suppose you have the right to mock me. There is no need to go on with this farce. The sight of your treasures gave me the gold-fever, I suppose, and it drove me mad, as it has driven many others mad, and I betrayed you. There is no use saying any more. I see that I have been betrayed too, and that my life is in your hands, so I need only say that I keep the right of taking it myself in my own way.'

'There is no need for that yet,' I said, 'and others are concerned in this besides you.'

Then I turned from him to Francis Hartness and said,—

I cannot speak the Spanish speech, and I would not if I could. Do you therefore speak to the Spaniard yonder, and bid him say how he came to be here with his soldiers. Tell him, too, that if he lies, or refuses to speak, he shall be buried in the gold he came to steal until the weight of it crushes his life out. But say to him that if he speaks the truth and holds nothing back and does as I shall bid him, he shall have his life, and afterwards as much gold as three men can carry.'

So then Francis Hartness turned to the trembling Spaniard and questioned him, and he confessed freely as soon as he knew he was not to be killed, and told how Djama had gone to the Governor of Cuzco and told him of my coming and of a great treasure that he would show him, and of others that I knew the secret of and might be made to reveal, and how he had bargained that half of all that was found should be his and the other half the Governor's, if he would help him to carry it to the coast in safety and put it on a steamer. The Spaniard told also how the Governor, who was his own father, had only half believed this story, and had

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

bidden him bring a company of soldiers to the appointed place and see if there was any truth in Djama's story, and, if he found there was, to take Djama and all of us prisoners and carry us back to Cuzco, and put us into the prison until he could question us the next day.

When he had finished, Djama laughed again and said,—

'There's the honour of a Peruvian! Serve me right for being such a fool as to trust to it!'

But I bade him sternly to hold his peace till he should be told to speak, and then, when Francis Hartness had told me in English what the Spaniard had said, I bade Tupac and Anahuac stand forward and tell of their share in what had been done, so that all might understand. They told their story in Quichua, and when I translated it into English to Francis Hartness I made few words of it, of which the meaning was this,—

Ever since Tupac and his comrades had recognised me as their lord, and sworn their faith to me, they, and others whom they trusted, had industriously spread abroad the news of my coming—though telling nothing that would make a traitor able to betray us—and, in proof of their story, little wedges of gold, stamped with the ancient symbol of the Sun, had been passed from hand to hand as earnest of my promise that I would use the hidden treasures of the Incas for the benefit of my people, and make money of gold where now there was only silver and copper.

By this time, not only had the golden wedges gone far and wide through the land, but nearly all the soldiers of the pure Indian blood had been won over to my cause, for, as I have said, and as everyone in the country knows, these soldiers are treated with great hardness by their Spanish masters, who often pay them nothing for many weeks or months together, and give them scanty food and hard usage, and cast them into prison or flog them and shoot them if they think to do anything to get justice. Moreover, there are always factions of men they call politicians scheming for power and setting the soldiers fighting against one another and against their countrymen for no benefit to themselves. So what Francis Hartness had told me on the night that Golden Star had come back to life had already begun to come true. More than half the garrison of Cuzco had already been won over, and only waited for the signal which should bid the whole Indian population of the valley to rise and seize the arms and ammunition in the city, and make the officers and the Governor and all the officials prisoners.

Anahuac's daughter was a servant in the Governor's house, and this girl understood Spanish, though she pretended only to know Quichua and the dialect of the people, and she had been set to watch,* and Tupac's eldest son had also been secretly watching all the comings and goings of Djama since we came to Cuzco. In this way his visit to the Governor had been made known to me, and then one of the soldiers in the company that had been ordered to go with the Governor's son to the Rodadero had told Tupac of the order, and I had arranged with him how the surprise was to be carried out, and this, as you have seen, had been done with complete success.

*This is quite a common thing in Peru, and the Indian women make exceedingly clever spies.

When I had finished telling this to Hartness I turned to the professor and said to him kindly,—

'There has been nothing said that brings any share of the guilt of this treason to you, so now, if you will promise me on your faith and honour as an Englishman to keep my secrets and obey such commands as I shall put upon you for your own safety and that of all of us, you shall go free, and you shall have the choice of going back to England or to any other country until the war is over, or of staying here under my protection until you can go away safely with the treasure which shall be yours. But if you go now you cannot take it with you, for in a few days from now there will be war throughout the whole land, and it would be impossible to take so much treasure to the coast. Now, what do you say?'

He thought for a moment and then said,—

I am not a man of war, as you know Vilcaroya, but I hope I am a man of honour. I have never breathed a syllable that could have given anyone an inkling of your secret, and I promise you solemnly that I never will. What Djama has done distresses me even more than it amazes me. I would have staked my life on his honesty, and if you will release him and let him come with me—'

'No, no, my friend!' I said, quickly and sternly. 'What you would ask is impossible. His aims were deeper and his sin was blacker than it has been shown to be here. He did not betray us for gold alone, for he knew that I would keep my promise and give him more than he could want. He would have given me to my enemies to be killed—it might have been by tortures, to make me say where my treasures were hidden—so that he

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

might have had Golden Star at his mercy.'

'It was your own fault, curse you! Why did you not give her to me?' Djama cried suddenly, breaking loose from the two who held his arms and putting his hand to his pistol pocket. The next instant my own revolver was out from under my cloak and levelled at his heart.

'Another motion and I will kill you,' I said, 'though so quick a death would be too good for you. Tie his hands behind his back and hold him faster this time. Give me his pistol.'

Before I had done speaking they had seized him again in spite of his struggles, and paying no heed to his cries and imprecations—for by this time his long-pent-up passion had broken loose and made him almost mad, and when they had given me his pistol I said to him,—

'I told you that Golden Star should be yours if you could win her as an honest man. But you sought to steal her as you would have stolen my gold. That is enough; keep silence now, or you shall be gagged.'

Then I held out my hand to the professor and said,—

I will accept your promise, for you are an honest man. There is my hand. Now we will be friends as before, and I will answer for your safety. Will you go or stay with us?'

'I will stay,' he said, 'for my studies are not completed yet, and besides, I am anxious to see what the Inca empire will be like when it is restored.'

'I am glad that you say so,' I replied, 'for you are welcome, and you shall make your home here always if you will.'

Then I bade them stand the Spanish officer in the professor's place beside Djama, and, turning to Francis Hartness, said,—

'These men are worthy of death, for they would have delivered us to death, but I cannot kill Djama since Joyful Star might hate me for it, and if I do not kill him it would not be justice to kill the Spaniard. What shall I do?'

'I see nothing for it,' he said, after thinking awhile, 'but shutting them up safely until we have got this business over, and then sending them out of the country and forbidding them to come back under pain of death. There are plenty of places that they would be perfectly safe in.'

'That is well thought of, my friend,' I said, and it shall be done. They came for gold and they shall have it. They shall live in it, and see gold, and nothing but gold, till the sight of it is hateful to them. They shall have a prison of gold, and eat and drink from gold, and sleep and walk and sit on gold. Yes, truly, they shall have enough of gold before they see the light of day again. Now tell the Spaniard what I have said.'

He did so, and at first the wretch's eyes glittered and then grew dim when the true meaning of his doom came upon him, for it meant he knew not how long an imprisonment with a man who had betrayed his friends, and whom, as he had confessed, he would himself have betrayed; and he thought, too, that I had only promised him his life and the gold to make him speak, and that now I would keep him prisoner and perhaps kill him in the end. So he fell on his knees, like the craven that he was, and begged for mercy, and told Hartness of my promise, and with Hartness's lips I told him only that he must have patience and wait until it was my pleasure to do what I had said.

After this I called Tupac and Anahuac and told them what I wished done, and they took a score of their men and forthwith began to build, in a corner of the hall beside the throne, a chamber measuring some ten feet each way, of the oblong blocks of gold which were piled up in the pyramid, and while they were doing this I called the soldiers before me and told them, speaking in their own dialect, that if they were faithful to me until the end of the war, each man should have one ounce weight of gold paid to him every month, and one ounce more for each of his comrades that he could persuade to join us, and for this night's work I would give them each a wedge of gold of the weight of two ounces, which was more money than all that they had earned in their lives before; and when I had promised this they went on their knees and swore faith to me and destruction to their hated Spanish masters.

Then I told them how Francis Hartness would lead them to battle and to victory as he had led the soldiers of his own nation, and after that he spoke to them in Spanish, and told them what to tell their comrades and what was to be done with the arms and ammunition when the signal for the rising was given.

All this while Djama and the Spaniard were kept standing watching the building of their golden prison-cell. The men worked swiftly, and the many hands made the toil light, and they built the walls up very

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

thick and strong, fitting the golden bricks closely into each other, and making the walls smooth and without hand or foot—hold, so that neither could any of the bricks be got out, nor the walls be climbed. The cell was divided into two by another wall, and when the walls were finished they were about ten feet high, and there was an opening into each cell in front, large enough for a man to crawl in on his hands and knees.

When all was ready I said to Djama,—

'There is your house of gold. Go and dwell in it till it shall be safe for me to release you. Every day, as I have said, you shall eat and drink from plates and cups of gold, and you shall dream of gold until this gold—fever of yours is cured.'

'Until I have gone gold—mad, you mean!' he cried, snarling at me like an angry dog. 'It is just such a vengeance as a half—civilised savage would have thought of. You know as well as I do that I shall go mad in there unless I kill myself first.'

'You have your choice!' I said. 'I will make your punishment no lighter. If you think to pull the walls down they will fall on you and crush you, and you will be buried in gold, and if I am told that you have tried to break out, I will put chains of gold on you, so heavy that you shall not be able to drag them across your cell; but if you are peaceful and patient, all your wants shall be attended to by those that I shall appoint, and you shall have everything but liberty and the light of day. Now, go in.'

'I won't!' he cried with a curse that ended in a scream. 'I shall go mad in there, I tell you, and that is a thousand times worse than death to me. I won't! Damn you, I won't!'

'Then you shall be thrust in,' I said.

They thrust him in with his arms still bound.

I made a sign to those who held him, and they, seeing what I meant, took him by the body and the legs, and carried him, feet foremost, kicking and struggling, towards the hole. Then they thrust him in with his arms still bound. But when he was half—way through, I bade one of them loose the cords a little, so that he could free himself afterwards. The Spaniard made no resistance, and when he was bidden crept, trembling like a hound that has been flogged, into his cell, and when they were both in I ordered the openings to be built up.

Francis Hartness and the professor had gone away to the other end of the hall, not liking to see this, and yet knowing that it would be useless to seek to persuade me to more mercy.

'Our work here is done now,' I said, going to them, 'and it would be well for us to go back to the fortress and sleep, for the morning is near and there will be much work to do before long.'

'I don't think I shall sleep much after what I have seen to—night,' said Hartness, 'and if I did sleep I think I should dream of that golden prison and those two poor wretches hungering and thirsting for daylight and liberty, with the means of buying any luxury the world could give them within reach of their hands.'

'Yes,' said the professor, 'it is a curious situation, isn't it?—quite apart from the personal interest it has for us. Now, in England or America, a room built with walls and floor of solid gold would be a luxury that only a millionaire could afford, and he would probably be thought a fool for building it, and yet here it is only a prison in which a man might well starve to death. Come, let us get away from here. I really don't want to hear any more of Djama's ravings than I can help. Good heavens! who ever would have thought that a man of his culture and learning and strength of mind could possibly have made such a blackguard of himself!'

'Well,' said Hartness, with a dry sort of laugh, 'you see he was the victim of the two passions that have done most to drive men mad or make scoundrels of them since the world began—the love of woman and the lust for gold. I don't pretend to understand it myself, because he had gold enough promised to him, and there is no telling but that he might have won the woman; but there, you never can tell how far any man is mad or sane until he's tried.'

'But there was something else, my friend,' I said. 'There was, as you say, lust of gold and love of woman; but there was also hate. Why, I know not; but though I owe my new life to that man, I have hated him and he has hated me since we learnt to know each other as living men. You know, too, how, as I told you, Golden Star shrank from him as though he had been a poisonous reptile, and yet why should I hate him and yet love her who is of the same flesh and blood as he is?'

'I would rather discuss the problem in the open air or at the hacienda than here,' said the professor, 'and even then I don't suppose we should get much nearer to a solution, for these things are mysteries and mostly past finding out. Yet it may be that you and he, the sons of different centuries, may actually have embodied in

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

you the differences and the antipathies of the two ages and the two races to which you belong. There is no telling. But come, let us get out of here, please. I really can't stand this any longer.'

'Nor I,' said Hartness. 'For goodness' sake let us go! This is a good deal more trying to the nerves than a cavalry charge or a smart skirmish.'

'Very well,' I said, 'we will go.'

Then I called to Tupac and bade him tell the soldiers and the rest that the night's work was over and it was time to go. We gave each of the soldiers his wedge of gold, as I had promised them; and once more I made them swear that each would kill any of the others who thought to betray us. Then Tupac and Anahuac went and opened the stone door, and we returned from the Hall of Gold to the upper earth, leaving Djama and his fellow traitor still raving and crying within the walls of their golden prison.

CHAPTER X — On The Rodadero

Francis Hartness and I came last out of the passage, and I asked him to lead the soldiers out of the hollow and across the plain to the wall of the Sacsahuaman, where I would join them, and as soon as they had gone out of the hollow and were lost to sight I went to the hole among the bushes where the hidden stone was and released the chain and let the water flow back into its old place, till the entrance to the Hall of Gold was only the same dark, stagnant pool that any wanderer might find at the bottom of the cloven stairway.

Then I strewed the earth over the hole, and piled the stones and brushwood round and over it as before, and went away to join the others. I found them standing in a group in one of the angles of the great fortress, and there I spoke to the soldiers again, and told them how much depended, both for themselves and for the country, on their fidelity, promising them peace and prosperity and freedom if they were faithful, and a speedy death if they betrayed me.

After this I told them what story they should tell when they went back to the city—how their Indian guide had led them into the entrance to a cavern in the mountain, their officer going first and he following, and how, when these two were going on with a single light, some two or three yards ahead of them a great slab of stone had suddenly fallen down between them, closing the passage, and how water had risen up and filled the passage at its lower end, forcing them to run back out of it for fear of being drowned; and I further gave them permission to bring any who disbelieved them to the mouth of the cleft under the Sayacusca and show them the water that they would find at the bottom of it, but to take good care to send me warning of anyone going there.

This they promised to do, and still full of wonder, and yet pleased with the gold they had got and the promises I had made to them, they made a loyal farewell, and marched down through the Gate of Sand, and went back to the city to tell their story and do the work that I had bidden them do.

When they had gone I sent some of my men to see that none of them turned back, and dismissed the rest to their homes, saving only Tupac, Anahuac, and Ainu and three others who could be trusted in all things; and with these we went back into the underground chambers of the fortress by the way that we had left them.

When we got back to the throne-room I sent all but Tupac away to remove the beasts from the stables and take them to the hacienda, so that the next night, under cover of the darkness, they could return and bring us food and drink and clothing and other things that we needed, for now that matters had gone so far it would not be safe for us to live at the hacienda or be seen in any place known to the Spaniards until the time was ripe for the striking of the first blow.

When they were gone we ate and drank a little of what we had brought with us in the morning, and then lay down, either to sleep or to think of the strange things that had happened and of what was now quickly coming to pass.

As for me, no sleep came to my eyes, for I knew that when Joyful Star awoke I should have to tell her at least something of what her brother had done and of what had happened to him, and a grievous task it was, you may be sure, when I came to the doing of it, as I did not many hours afterwards.

The first thing she asked me when she found that Djama was not with us was what had become of him, and then, knowing that sooner or later the bitter truth had to be told, I told her as gently as I was able, and hiding from her all that I could without lying to her. My words struck her dumb with horror and amazement, and if it had not been that Francis Hartness and the professor were there, and told her that they had seen and heard with their own eyes and ears the truth of all that I said, I do not think she would have believed me. But when at last she could no longer doubt the story of her brother's crime and treachery, she came to me and laid her hand upon my arm, and looked up at me with tearful eyes and said,—

'But you will not kill him, Vilcaroya, for my sake, will you? He is my brother, you know, after all, though he has made me almost ashamed to say so. You must protect yourself, of course, and your people from treachery, but you will not kill him, will you?'

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'He is alive now,' I said, 'because he is Joyful Star's brother, not because I think he is worthy to live, for he would have betrayed one life that he gave back, and stained the other with infamy. But I have given my word, and he shall live, and when he can do no more harm I will pardon him, and he shall go back to his own country in safety. More than that I cannot promise even to you.'

'It is all that I can ask for,' she said, 'and more than he could expect after what he has done. But, oh! why should he have brought such a shame as this upon us?'

'Upon himself only,' I said. 'It would not be possible for such a thing as shame to touch you.'

She looked up at me again and smiled through her tears, as if my words had pleased her well, and that smile of hers was more to me than even her tears. Then she went back to the little chamber where she had slept, and presently returned leading Golden Star by the hand, and then we all sat down in the silver seats and talked of the wonderful things that had happened, and I told Golden Star all the story of my own return to life, and hers, and what I knew of the changes that had happened in the world since she and I had said our last words to each other in the Sanctuary of the Sun; and then I set her talking with the others, translating for her and for them as well as I could, and she, knowing nothing of what had happened in the night, and being glad that Evil Eyes, as she called Djama in our own speech, had gone away for a long time, was as happy as a child amongst us, and soon even Ruth became more cheerful and began to try and make her say words of English and repeat her name and the professor's and Francis Hartness's after her, for she already loved her dearly, and, even in the midst of her own sorrow, she was rejoiced that the soul which had slept had been so happily re-awakened in her.

After this, Francis Hartness and I began to talk our plans over again, and to discuss the chances of the revolt in Cuzco, and I showed him how, with the help of my people, I would the next day cut off all communication between the valley and the rest of the country until our work was finished there, for I was determined that the first part of the empire of my fathers' that I would re-take should be the City of the Sun itself and the region that it commanded, since I knew that my people still looked upon it as the most sacred spot on earth, and would fight better to take it than any other place. And in this plan Francis Hartness, looking at the matter as a soldier, also agreed with me.

We thought it best that none of us should show ourselves in the open that day, for we knew not what the effect of the soldiers' story and their return without their officer might be in Cuzco, for if it had become widely known, it would certainly bring many people up to the Rodadero to behold the scene of so strange an occurrence. So we spent the day in conversation, and, which was more interesting to my companions, in exploring the maze of chambers and passages and winding galleries which the labour of many thousands of men had wrought out of the solid rock in the days of my ancestors, for you must know that in those days the fortress of the Sacsahuaman was crowned with a great palace, which was the strongest place in all the Land of the Four Regions, and so here were stored very great treasures, not only of gold and silver and precious stones, but also weapons and armour and most finely-woven cloths of the purest wool of the Vicufla, which is softer than silk, brilliantly dyed and embroidered with gems and threads of gold, and the imperial robes that had been worn by twenty generations of Incas, many sets of each, since nothing that had belonged to one Inca might ever be used by another after his death.

Among these were found many sets of the royal robes of the Coyas or queen-wives of the Incas, and I took Golden Star aside and told her to take two of these and to clothe herself in one and Joyful Star in the other, so that we might see our two Inca princesses side by side as they might have looked in the days of the past, and she fell in with my humour, laughing and clapping her hands like a delighted child.

So she took the robes and led Joyful Star away with her to their own chamber, talking to her in her soft, musical speech, though she knew she could not understand her, and yet making so many pretty signs and eloquent gestures that Ruth, forgetting her sorrow for the time, comprehended her, and entered into the spirit of the play, and soon they came back to us into the throneroom, clad exactly alike, and so perfectly resembling each other, save for the contrast of the blue eyes and the brown, and the bright hair and the dark, that they could have been taken for nothing save twin daughters of the Sun and the fairest of his children; and Tupac and the two men that I had kept in the fortress to attend to our wants fell on their knees before them as they passed, as though they would have worshipped them.

It was at this time, and while we were passing the hours in this fashion, that Golden Star did something that

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

gave me great joy and a bright hope for the future. I had been telling her of the wonderful country that I had returned to life in, and of the marvellous things that I had seen there, and this, she knew already, was the country of Francis Hartness. So, as he came from such a wonderful land, she thought, in the innocence of her old-world simplicity, that he was one of a new race of beings that came on to the earth since our days, and when I told her he was but human like ourselves, though very strong and learned and skilled in many things that we knew nothing of, she said to me, just as a sister might say to a brother from whom she had no secrets,—

'He is rather, in my eyes, like a son of our Father who has come to earth from the Mansions of the Sun; yet I am very glad that he is not, and that he is a man such as you are, my brother, and when Joyful Star has taught me the speech of her people I will talk with him, and then I think life will be better for me, for even now, though I cannot understand his words, his voice sounds like music to me, and when he looks at me he makes me try to remember something that was in my other life, and I have forgotten. What is it, I wonder?'

I looked down into her eyes and saw the untroubled serenity of her soul reflected in them. There was no flush on her cheeks, and her lips were smiling as they could not have smiled had she known how I could have answered that question for her. I stooped and kissed her brow and said,—

'I might guess what it is, Golden Star, but I could not tell you. Yet I pray that our Father the Sun may put it into the heart of my friend to teach you what I see now you can only learn from him.'

More than this I would not tell her, though she questioned me sharply. But the next time that Francis Hartness spoke to her through my lips she looked up at him, and a little flush came to her cheeks, and a smile to her lips, and I saw his eyes brighten, and the colour deepen ever so little under the bronze of his skin.

Then I looked at Joyful Star and saw something shining in her eyes too, and as she caught my glance she smiled ever so little and said, when I had finished speaking for him,—

'Vilcaroya is an excellent interpreter, I've no doubt; but don't you think, Captain Hartness, it would be very much more interesting if you could talk directly with Her Highness? You know I'm teaching Golden Star English, and Vilcaroya is teaching you Quichua—now, I wonder which of you will be able to talk to the other first?'

He pulled his moustache and laughed, looking at Golden Star the while, and said,—

'Well, Her Highness has the advantage of the easier language and the freshest, and I daresay the brightest intellect, but probably for all that we shall begin with some delightful jargon of both languages, and leave them to sort themselves out as we go on. Still, as you say, it will be more interesting than talking through an interpreter.'

'And I hope,' she said, with more meaning in her voice than in her words, 'that you will both of you find it as pleasant as it will be interesting.'

'Who knows!' he said, catching her meaning and laughing again. 'She is most wonderfully like you, Miss Ruth, isn't she?'

'Yes, but—but I am not without hope that you may some day compare us a little, just a little, to my disadvantage.'

What Francis Hartness would have said to this I cannot say, though I do not think he was displeased by Joyful Star's words, and yet his face grew very serious as she spoke. But just then Tupac came and told me that Anahuac and AINU had returned with the beasts, and were now waiting outside the bronze doors. From this we learnt that it was already night, though, truth to tell, the time had passed so quickly for us that I for one thought that it was little more than late afternoon.

Now, as I have said, I was the only one who knew the secret of the bronze doors, and so I went back with Tupac and opened them, and, when the men had entered, closed them again.

There were twelve of them beside AINU and Anahuac, and all were laden with food and drink and clothing, and our arms and ammunition, two repeating rifles and two revolvers for each of us. When the men had laid their burdens down, I called Anahuac to me, and asked him if he had any news. He bowed himself before me, and then, standing in front of me as I sat in one of the seats, he said,—

'Yes, Lord. If the ears of the Son of the Sun are open, his servant will fill them with tidings of some moment.'

'Say on,' I said, 'and meanwhile let a meal be prepared for us, for we are hungry.'

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

This I said to Tupac, and Golden Star, hearing it, smiled, and took Ruth's hand and led her to the boxes, making signs that they should perform the housewife's duties together. Then Anahuac began, and said,—

'The ears of the Children of the Blood have not been closed, nor have their eyes slept throughout the Holy City and the Valley of the Sun, and they have seen and heard much, and the courage of their hearts has risen high, and they are longing for the word of their Lord to break the yoke that is upon their necks.

'When the soldiers returned last night and told the story that my Lord had put into their mouths, there was great wonder among all the other soldiers, and many saw in it a sign that the Son of the Sun is mighty, and can do that which he promises. But among the masters who are set over the soldiers there was great anger, and they sought, but without avail, to keep the news from being made public in the city; but the Men of the Blood took care that this should not be so, and to-day all Cuzco has been talking of the strange fate of the Coronel Prada, the son of Don Antonio Prada, the governor. But Don Antonio himself had gone the day before to a hacienda near Oropesa, and messengers have been sent to him to tell him the story, and this evening he rode back with all haste to the city.

'He has ordered that to-night sentries shall be posted at all the approaches to the Rodadero and round the Sayacusca, so that none may come or go without his knowledge, and tomorrow he will come himself with many officers and two hundred soldiers, and the thing they call dynamite, that he may rend the Sayacusca in pieces, and find, as he thinks, the place where his son has been hidden.'

'And the soldiers—what of them?' I asked. 'Will they be for us or against us?'

'There will be many in the service of my Lord, and if it shall be possible there shall be more of these than of the others, for those who were in the Hall of Gold last night have been busy in the hope of my Lord's further bounty, and many have been tempted with the promise of gold and freedom; but still there will be many that may not be trusted, and all the officers of the Governor will be Spaniards.'

'And therefore enemies,' I said, when he had finished his story, and stood waiting for me to speak.

I told Francis Hartness at once what Anahuac had said, and we debated for a short time on what we should do. Then I called Tupac, and he came and stood beside Anahuac, and I said to them,—

'These things have happened well for us, and now we must act quickly, so that we may take the best advantage of them. When you go hence, take with you twenty strips of the scarlet fringe in token of my authority, and give these to twenty of the best of the Men of the Blood, and let them go with all speed and silence through the towns and villages of the valley, and say that the Son of the Sun has come, and is about to stretch forth his hand and take that which was his again. Further, let every entrance to the valley be closed. Let the bridge over the Great Speaker be cut with all speed that may be. Let none pass in or out of the gateway of Piquillacta, and let all the mountain paths be broken down or blocked, so that none may know what is happening in the valley, nor any news be carried hence into the country.

'Let every hacienda, whose master is a Spaniard, be given to the flames, but let no one else be injured. Let none of the strangers be hurt, and let their goods be sacred. Let all of the sentries who will not serve us be disarmed or slain silently by the others, and this before midnight, and let those who are for us—who shall come with the Governor to-morrow—make ready to do quickly that which shall be commanded them. The password for those who are with us will be "Vilcaroya." The rest I will do with my own hands and the help of my friend. I have spoken—let me be obeyed quickly!'

Then they bent low before me and went to make ready to do what I had bidden them.

It was then about eight o'clock at night, and after we had had our evening meal we waited until it was nearly eleven, making perfect our plans, and then, when Ruth and Golden Star had gone to rest without knowing of the work which we had in hand—for we had kept it from them lest they should be anxious for us—Francis Hartness and I armed ourselves, after I had disguised him as well as I could to make him look like an Indian, and we said good-night to the professor and left the fortress by the same way that we had left it the night before.

As soon as we got out into the open air we made our way stealthily back towards the Rodadero, until I caught sight of a sentry standing near one of the carved stones.

'I will go and see whether this is a friend or a foe,' I whispered. 'Wait here and cover him with your rifle, but do not fire unless you hear me whistle.'

'Very well,' he said; 'but take care of yourself, for those Mannlicher bullets make a very ugly wound.'

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

I waved my hand to him in reply, and went away towards the sentry, keeping a good lookout for others who might be about. I had in my belt a long, heavy-bladed knife, and this I loosened in the sheath as I came near to him. I got within earshot of him unseen, and then, rising to my feet behind him, I said in a low voice, but loud enough for him to hear,—

'Vilcaroya—friend or foe?'

'Halta! quien va?'

The words in the hated Spanish speech told me that he was a foe. As he faced about, bringing his rifle to the ready, I drew my knife and, before he could take aim, sent it whistling through the air with such force and so true an aim that it took him in the windpipe and half buried its blade in his neck. That was one of the tricks of our old warfare which, with many others, I had taken good care not to forget.

He dropped his rifle and clasped his hands to his throat and fell without a sound. I crept swiftly forward, pulled the knife out of his throat and drove it into his heart. Then I quickly took off his cartridge-belt and long coat and cap, and put them on. After that I took his rifle and stood in his place for a little while, so that the others might see me, and then walked back to where I had left Hartness. When he saw me coming, his rifle-barrel moved till it covered me, and he said in English,—

'Is that you, Vilcaroya?'

'Yes,' I said. 'The sentry was an enemy, and I have killed him. Now I am going to take you prisoner, as though I were the sentry, and so we can go together and find the officer who commands the sentries, and take him prisoner or kill him.'

'All right,' he said with a laugh. 'I surrender. This isn't quite what we call civilised warfare, but I suppose it can't be helped.'

We went back together to the place where the sentry that I had killed had stood, and then we saw two or three others coming in towards the place, no doubt to see why the other sentry should have left his post. I took Hartness's rifle out of his hand, and, catching him by the arm, led him to meet the nearest of them, as though I had taken a prisoner. Within ten paces of them I halted, and said,—

'Is it Vilcaroya or Prada?'

'Vilcaroya to a friend, Prada to an enemy,' he answered, in the dialect in which I had addressed him.

'Then we are friends,' I said, taking off the peaked cap that had belonged to the other sentry, and showing him the long, straight, brown hair that betokened my race. 'I am he who has come back from the days that are dead—Vilcaroya, the son of Huayna-Capac.'

'And I am thy servant, Lord,' he said, bringing his rifle-butt down between his feet, and bending his head over the muzzle. 'I am one of those who saw the glory of my Lord in the Hall of Gold last night.'

'Then thou art one of the faithful,' I said, 'for none have betrayed the secret or earned the swift death that would have been theirs had they done so. Now tell me, how many of those who are on guard here to-night may be trusted?'

'There are twenty of us here, Lord, not counting the officer in command.'

'Nay,' I said, interrupting him, 'there are but nineteen, for he who wore this coat and carried this rifle was an enemy, and I have killed him, as I would have killed thee hadst thou been an enemy. Now, of these nineteen, how many may I trust?'

'There are but five who may not be trusted, not counting the officer, and he is a Spaniard, and must be killed.'

'That is good,' I said, for the tone in which he had said these last words had pleased me well. 'Now this man with me is my faithful friend, and one who will fight well for me and my people. Go on the other side of him, and we will take him as a prisoner to the officer. Then thou shalt see how Vilcaroya deals with his enemies.'

He bent his head in assent, and took his place beside Hartness, and as we marched away Hartness said to me,—

'I don't think I shall have much to teach you in strategy, Vilcaroya, but I must say that I would rather have a stand-up fight than this kind of thing.'

'It is not like what you have told me of the warfare of the English,' I said, 'yet if it has to be it must be. Let us get it over.'

So we marched him between us across the plain, and when we got between the wall of the fortress and the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

carved stone that they called the Inca's Seat, we saw the officer who was in command of the sentries walking, with two soldiers beside him, from post to post, seeing that the sentries were awake and keeping proper watch. We went to meet him, and halted ten paces from him at his command. I had told the sentry to reply for me, and he answered the officer's hail and said,—

'Vilcaroya!—a prisoner.'

It had smitten him to the heart.

As the first words left his lips the two soldiers repeated the password and made with their rifles the movement that is called the salute. My knife was already in my hand, and as the officer gave a command in Spanish, it flashed once in the starlight and the next instant was buried to the hilt in his breast. He fell, as the sentry had done, without a cry, for it had smitten him to the heart, dead as though he had been struck by a lightning bolt. The others stared at his fallen body, dumb with amazement, and I heard Hartness utter a sound that might have been one either of horror or of wonder; but I had no time to take heed of this, so I instantly ordered the two soldiers to take the officer's uniform off his body, and then I said to Hartness,—

'Now, you can speak Spanish and I cannot. Take this Spaniard's uniform and his weapons, and make yourself the officer of the guard, and then you shall help me to set a trap that the Governor shall find it a hard matter to escape from.'

CHAPTER XI — How We Took The City Of The Sun

Although Hartness was a much taller and broader man than the Spaniard, his long, loose overcoat fitted him well enough for the occasion, and when he had put on his shako, and wrapped his scarf about his neck so as to hide his fair beard, he was disguised enough to pass in the darkness for one of the enemy. We now took the two soldiers who had been with the officer and visited all the posts. We found four of the sentries who could not return the password and were therefore enemies. These we disarmed and bound instead of killing them, for I could see that what I had done had pleased my friend but little, though he saw that in such a desperate venture as ours it was necessary to use desperate measures.

When we had gone the rounds and made sure of all, we buried the two dead men, and took our prisoners into one of the caves under the carved stones. Then I posted my men so as to guard all the approaches from the city to the Rodadero, and after that I went with Hartness to the hidden hole by the Sayacusca, and showed him how the way to the Hall of Gold was opened. I did this so that the secret might be in good and safe hands if I should fall in battle, and so that he should be able to properly protect the welfare of Ruth and Golden Star, and fulfil my promises to himself and the professor.

When I had turned the stone and showed him the chain, I pulled it up and supported it as I had done before, only this time I used the carbine which had belonged to the sentry I had killed, and to the stock of this I fastened a long rope which Tupac had hidden there by my orders. This rope I stretched out along the ground, hiding it as well as I could, in a straight line away from the Sayacusca. The end I led into the entrance of one of the many passages or tunnels which ran under the carved stones. By the time I had done this the water had all flowed away, and Hartness said to me,—

'Are you going to leave the entrance to your treasure-house open like that for His Excellency to walk into to-morrow?'

'Yes,' I said, 'but it is only half open. Unless the door below is open too there is no way out or in save this and the channel through which the waters flow, so that His Excellency will not find much down there.'

'I see,' he said, 'a trap, and not one that I should care to see a friend of mine walk into. But you don't mean to drown them all like rats in a hole, do you?'

'I cannot tell that yet,' I said. 'If we can take them alive we may do so, but unless they yield to us they shall yield to the water. Now, everything is ready, and we have only to wait. Come and sleep for a little and I will keep watch, and then I will sleep and you shall watch. It will not be daylight for six hours yet, and we can do nothing more till then.'

We went to the cavern in which I had hidden the end of the rope, and he lay down on the soft, clean sand, and, soldier-like, was fast asleep almost as soon as he had lain down. I left him there, and made the round of the guards and spoke with the men, telling them as much as it was necessary for them to know of my plans for the next day, and allowed half of them to take two or three hours' rest, with their arms ready at hand, while the others watched, and then I went back to Hartness and told him to wake me in three hours, and soon was fast asleep in his place. He came and woke me at daylight and told me that everything was still quiet and that the sentries were all in their places.

Then, when we had breakfasted on the food that we had brought with us from the fortress, we called in all the sentries save the two by the Gate of Sand, and hid them among the stones and bushes, all within an easy rifle-shot of the entrance to the water-cavern. I bade the two I had left by the gate tell the Governor that all was well, and, when he had ridden by, to mix with the soldiers and tell those who were for me to separate from the others as soon as they heard my signal-cry, and then to wait for the English captain.

For nearly an hour we sat and watched for the coming of the enemy, and then at last we saw a troop of horse come up out of the valley round the end of the fortress. After them came some officers on horseback, with the Governor riding at their head, and then another troop of horse, in all about three hundred men. The first troop, led by the Governor and his officers, came on towards the Sayacusca, and the others halted and

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

spread themselves out along the ridge that runs round it. When they saw the empty hole and the steps leading down into the darkness, they all crowded round, peering down into it. Then two lanterns were lighted and some of them went down.

They had all dismounted from their horses and were indulging their curiosity without suspicion. I waited till they were nearly all in my trap, and then came the moment to close it. My long, wailing cry rang out loud and shrill through the hollow, and was taken up by my men in hiding, and in an instant all was confusion. I heard my name shouted from one to the other, and saw more than half of the troopers in the hollow leave their ranks and gallop away towards the plain. Then I took aim at a trooper who was watching the officer's horses, and fired. The bullet struck his horse, and it reared up and threw him, and then fell and lay kicking on the ground. At this all the others took fright and broke loose and galloped away in all directions. At the same instant the rifles of my men began cracking all round, and saddle after saddle was emptied as the bullets found their marks.

'I'm going to catch one of those horses,' said Hartness suddenly to me, 'then I'll ride out and bring those other fellows up and show them what to do. That'll be more in my line than this sort of work. Good-bye; you will see or hear of me again before long.'

The next moment he was gone, and I had not fired many more shots before I saw him, mounted on one of the officers' horses, galloping through the hollow towards the ridge. All this time none of my men had shown themselves, and the constant stream of shots coming from all sides of them had thrown the Governor's troops into utter confusion. The officers were shouting orders which no one listened to, the horses were galloping wildly about, rearing and plunging with the pain of their wounds, and many of the soldiers had already taken to flight, believing, in their panic, that the hollow was full of hidden enemies.

We kept up the fire from our hiding-places until we heard shouts and cheers coming from the ridge, and I looked and saw Hartness with a drawn sword in his hand, leading a body of some hundred and fifty troopers down into the hollow.

Now I saw that we should be able to end the battle quickly, so I sent up my signal-cry again and called for my own men to come out. Then I pulled the rope and released the chain, and ran out towards my men, shouting to them to close round the entrance to the water-cavern and shoot all who tried to get out. Some three or four sought to escape and were shot, and then the rest, seeing my men running at them with the bayonet, and the other troopers coming up, led by a stranger, lost heart, and crowded back into the cleft, firing their revolvers wildly as they went.

The next moment we heard cries of terror coming up out of the darkness, mingled with the rushing of water, and the Governor, followed by about six of his officers, came leaping up the steps to find a line of bayonets drawn up across the mouth. With the waters surging up behind them, and the bayonets in front of them, there was nothing for them but surrender or death.

Hartness, who had now dismounted, ordered the men to fall back a pace, and, as they did so, he went through the line with his sword in one hand and a revolver in the other, and said to the Governor,—

'Senor, will you yield or go back down yonder?'

'We must yield,' said the Governor, 'since there is no choice. But who are you, and what are you, an Englishman, doing here in arms against the Government?'

'Who I am matters nothing just now,' he replied, 'and as for your Government, it no longer exists. That must be enough for you. Now, senores, give up your swords and revolvers quietly and no harm shall come to you. You, Senor Prada, give your sword to this caballero here, who is the Inca Vilcaroya and lawful ruler of this country.'

The Governor turned and stared at me, dumb with amazement at these strange words, and all the others stared too, for, like him, they had no doubt heard the legend of my strange fate. He drew his sword, and as he did so I covered him with my revolver, and extended my hand to take it. He held the hilt out to me with a trembling hand. I took it in silence, and then I turned from him and said to my men,—

'Bring these Spaniards out and bind them safely, then follow me to the Seat of the Incas.'

When they saw that the victory was with us, and that the Governor himself was our prisoner, together with many of the chief of his officers, those of the soldiers who had not been for me when they came were glad enough now to secure themselves by shouting my name and obeying my orders, and when I moved away

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

towards the seat, they followed me, laughing and cheering, well pleased to see their hated masters prisoners in their midst.

The great carved rock which is called the Inca's Seat is, as I have already said, a great rounded mass of stone rising up from the plain of the Rodadero, and carved into many seats. On the top there are three broad seats, the middle one higher than all the rest, and it was here that my forefathers had sat to watch the building of the great fortress, and sometimes to give audience to their people.

Now I sat on it, and the soldiers drew themselves up round the rock, with the prisoners in the midst of them, and I spoke to them, and told them freely of the strange things that had happened to me, and how I had come back to the Land of the Four Regions to drive out their oppressors and restore the just and gentle rule of my ancestors. Then I had the Governor brought up and stood before me, and bade Francis Hartness come and sit on my right hand and speak to him for me, and by his lips I told him that unless the city was surrendered to me before evening he and all his officers should die, and all the houses of the Spaniards in the city should be given to the flames and no pity shown to any man, woman or child of them, for as they had treated my people so I had sworn to treat them unless they yielded.

You may think how troubled he was at hearing such words as these, since he knew from what he had seen that there was conspiracy and treachery among his own men, and he had no knowledge of how far this had gone, or which of his men he could trust, and so this man, who but a few hours before had been master of the whole valley, and had looked upon the Indios, as he called them, as little better than slaves, now answered me humbly enough and prayed me not to murder him when he was helpless in my power. And to this I answered him that the blood of my people had been crying out for many generations against his people, and that this was the day not of mercy but of vengeance, and that I would do as I had said unless the city were delivered to me.

Then I descended from the seat and mounted the Governor's horse, and after I had sent a company of twelve men to ride quickly down to the city and go through all the streets, shouting my name as a signal to tell my people that all was well, and that the moment for them to rise against their oppressors had come, I took my place beside Hartness at the head of our little army, and with our prisoners well guarded close behind us we set out on our way back to Cuzco.

As we approached the city we heard the sound of the church-bells being rung wildly, and looking down, we could see the streets and squares full of people, and as we got nearer still we heard the cracking of rifles and the shouts and cries of men in conflict.

'There is either a fight or a riot going on down there,' said Hartness to me, 'and if many of the soldiers remain faithful to the Government there'll be some bloodshed before to-night. Have you any idea how many there are?'

'There were more than two thousand soldiers in the city yesterday,' I said, 'and out of these more than half have already taken my gold and sworn faith to me. Of the rest many are wavering, and when they see we have taken the Governor prisoner I think they will come over.'

'Very likely,' he said; 'but how about those machine-guns in the barracks? There are three Gatlings and two Maxims, and if they keep those and work them properly they'll just sweep the streets and squares clear, you know.'

'I have promised fifty pounds' weight of gold for each of them,' I said; 'and, more than that, there should be no ammunition for them by this time if what the sentries told us is true.'

'Yes,' he said, 'if we can get hold of that, or even the best part of it, I don't think there will be much danger. However, as everything depends on that, I think we had better go straight to the Cuartel first. If we have that we have Cuzco.'

We entered the city by the street of El Triunfo, and made our way straight to the great Plaza. As we rode along three abreast we were greeted by joyful cries from the crowds of Indians who parted to leave a way for us through the midst of them. Tupac and his comrades had done their work well, and all night the people had been thronging into the city from the surrounding country. All the shops and houses of the Spaniards were already shut up, and although none knew the truth of what was happening, all thought that the revolution had already broken out in Cuzco and so had made themselves as safe as they could.

A little way from the entrance to the great square we came upon Tupac at the head of some two hundred of

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

the men of San Sebastian, armed with knives and guns and pistols of all sorts which they had taken during the night from the towns and villages around, where they had been doing the work I had bidden them do. He told me that there were more than a thousand soldiers in the city waiting only for me to show myself to kill their officers and come over to us, and that the others would fight without heart, if they fought at all, now that the Governor was taken—for half of the people of Cuzco were for the Government and half for the Revolution, and so the city would be divided against itself and all would be confusion as soon as the fighting began.

He also told me that the official who is called the Sub-Prefect had brought out two of the machine-guns and had planted them at each end of the terrace in front of the cathedral, and made a proclamation that unless everyone left the streets within an hour he would have them cleared with bullets.

When I told this to Hartness he said,—

'Then we must have those two guns first. Tell Tupac to break his men up into little bands of about half-a-dozen each and send them round into all the streets leading to the square, and tell everyone that isn't armed to keep out of the way if they don't want to get hurt. Then you ride on with the prisoners and a guard of fifty men, and let them be ready to shoot sharply. Tell them to aim at the knees and not to empty their magazines too fast. I'll look after the guns. They won't fire on you for fear of killing the Governor and the rest. Now, forward!'

I did as he said. Tupac's men broke up and disappeared as though by magic. I took the reins of the horse on which the Governor was bound and bade half-a-dozen of my men to do the same with the others. Then two and two we trotted into the square, Tupac running along by my horse's head. It was covered with groups of people all talking and looking and pointing about them, and on the terrace before the cathedral there were two companies of soldiers, one at each end, drawn up behind a machine-gun.

As soon as the people saw me ride in with the Governor bound beside me a great shout went up and many came running towards me, but I waved them back and shouted to them to leave the square and guard all the streets leading into it. I did this so that those who understood me, and were therefore friends, might escape out of harm's way before the guns began to fire.

Then I drew my revolver and put it to the Governor's head and bade Tupac tell him to order the men away from the guns, and that if a shot was fired he should be the first to die.

So, as there was no help for it, he did so, and called to the officers to come down and speak with him, but instead of obeying they shouted some orders to their men and I saw them making ready to fire the guns, for, as we found out afterwards, they were men who would have joined the revolution when it broke out.

But before the guns could be trained on us Hartness's troop swung round into the square. The twenty foot soldiers sent a volley along the terrace, firing low as he had told them, and killing and wounding nearly half of the men at the guns. Then there came a rattling volley from the cavalry and another from my own men, and then, with a great shout and a clattering of hoofs, Hartness leapt his horse up the steps at the end of the terrace, where the street slopes up nearly level with it at the back by the cathedral, and charged down on the rear of the enemy just as the gun was swung round.

As he did this I led my men round to the other end of the terrace, where I saw that the men had begun fighting among themselves, and thus I knew that some of them were our friends and were seeking to prevent the others from training the gun on us. I halted, and ordered thirty of my men to dismount and take the gun, which they did with very little trouble, for the others, seeing how they were outnumbered, either threw down their arms and ran away, or surrendered. Two of the officers were killed and another one taken prisoner.

Meanwhile Hartness had cleared the other end of the terrace, and taken the other gun after killing nearly every man who had defended it. But scarcely had this been done than we heard the rattle of drums and the sound of bugles, and saw two columns of men marching at the double out of the Plaza Del Cabildo, where the barracks are, and the other past the Church of the Jesuits, which is at the other end of the square.

'Are those friends or enemies, or both?' Hartness asked me, when he had ordered the two guns to be trained, one on each of the columns, and sat down behind one of them himself.

'If there are friends among them,' I said, 'they know what to do, and when they have done it you can fire.'

Even as I spoke the two columns seemed to break up. Scores of men broke out of the ranks, shouting my name and cheering, and these all ran together towards the fountain in the middle of the square. The rest stopped in wonder and confusion, their officers shouting furiously at them, and ordering them to fire on the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

deserters. Some obeyed, others, when they saw the guns trained on them, ran away and hid themselves in doorways, and then Hartness gave the order to fire.

Instantly every sound was drowned by the terrible voices of the machine-guns. Hartness glanced once along the barrel of his, and then sent a torrent of bullets full into the middle of the broken column that had come down from the Plaza Del Cabildo. Then he moved it a little from side to side, and then stopped. When the smoke had drifted away I saw that there was not a living being in that corner of the square, only huddled heaps of corpses and bodies of animals. Then he turned the gun on the other corner into which the other gun was firing, and soon not a man or an animal was left alive there also.

When the firing ceased there were none left in the square but those who had declared for us. Hartness immediately formed these into two columns. He led one of them, with one gun at the head, into the street past the Church of the Jesuits, and I led the other with the second gun into the other street leading to the Cuartel, and up these two streets we fought our way into the Plaza Del Cabildo, in which we could hear more fighting already going on.

When we at last gained the square we found a furious fight going on in front of the Cuartel between one body of men who were defending the building and another that was attacking it, but which of these were friends or foes we did not know until Tupac, heedless of the flying bullets, ran out shouting in Quichua that Vilcaroya had come. Shouts and cheers from the Cuartel soon told us that our friends had got possession of it, and after the city was won I learned that when the two columns had started, leaving a third drawn up in the square before the Cuartel, those who were for us, remembering what I had said about the gold that I would give for the machine-guns and the ammunition, had broken their ranks and made a rush for the doors to secure the three guns which were in the courtyard, and so the fight had begun, they seeking to hold the Cuartel against the others until help came.

As soon as I knew which were our enemies, by their bullets coming singing about our ears, I had the gun trained on them, and gave the word to fire. But no sooner had it begun to rain its tempest of death than we heard the other one speak from the other end of the square, and such a storm of bullets swept across the Plaza that before many moments had passed there was not a man or beast left alive in it.

Then, when the firing ceased again, those who had held the Cuartel, and had taken shelter in it as soon as the machine-guns began to play, threw open the doors to us and came out to welcome us, and Francis Hartness and I clasped hands as victors, and for the time being, at least, masters of the ancient City of the Sun, for with the Cuartel we had taken all the arms and ammunition stored up in Cuzco, including the three Gatling guns and the two Maxims; and more than this, the whole of the native population of the valley was in our favour.

The fighting was now over, save for conflicts that were going on in different parts of the city between the Spaniards and the Indians, and I at once had the Governor brought before me in the Cuartel and told him by the lips of Hartness to write a proclamation surrendering the city to us and ordering all the officials to come in and make their submission before sundown, threatening fire and sack to every Spanish house if it was not done. This he did, knowing well what would befall him if he refused. At the same time Hartness made a proclamation in my name in English and Spanish promising perfect freedom and security to all foreign merchants in the region that was under our command.

It was then about mid-day, and when I had given Francis Hartness full authority to act in my name as Governor of the city, which, speaking fluent Spanish as he did, he could do better than I, I took a guard of fifty men and went with Tupac back to the Rodadero, and took ten of the men into the Hall of Gold and bade them carry out as much as they could, so that I might keep my promise to the soldiers who had been faithful to me, and while they were doing this I went with Tupac to Djama's cell and found him wailing and crying like a little child, and beating his hands on the golden wall of his prison and praying most piteously for a sight of the daylight and a breath of the fresh air of heaven.

The Spaniard, when he heard us coming, began to shriek and scream, and I bade Tupac tell him that I would gag him for a day and a night if he did not cease his cries. But to Djama I told what had happened, and how Cuzco was already mine, and promised I would let him out for a little while the next day if he would keep silence for half-an-hour, and hearing this, he ceased his cries, and I went on to the throne-room to take the news of our victory to Ruth and Golden Star.

CHAPTER XII — Queen And Crown

I found them in the midst of an English lesson which Golden Star was taking, sitting, still clad in her Inca costume, between the professor and Joyful Star, who also was dressed in the same fashion. They all three rose to meet me as I entered the throne-room, and Ruth coming forward with both hands outstretched, as she had never done before, said,—

'What have you been doing all this time, Vilcaroya, and why are you looking so worn and haggard? Have—have you been fighting? And why have you come back here alone?'

'Yes,' I answered, taken her hands into mine, and feeling all my blood urn to flame as their gentle pressure thrilled along my nerves. 'Yes, we have been fighting, and the Lord of Light has fought upon our side, for we have gained the victory, and the city is ours.'

'Thank God for that!' she said; 'and that no harm has come to you—or to Captain Hartness.'

'What! do you mean to say you have taken Cuzco already?' cried the professor. 'How on earth did you manage that so quickly?'

'Because,' I replied, 'as I told you, my father the Sun fought on my side and turned the hearts of his children towards me, and so Francis Hartness led them to speedy victory, and the hearts of our enemies fainted within them, and they have yielded. Now I have come to tell you how it happened, and to take Joyful Star back to the city, where she shall be hailed as queen.'

Then I sat down with them and told them all, from the taking of the Governor and his officers prisoners by the Sayacusca to the capture of the Cuartel and the making of Francis Hartness Governor of Cuzco. After that I went and put on the imperial robes, which I had now a double right to wear, and led them through the gates of bronze into the Hall of Gold.

Now, in the joy of my triumph, and the greeting that Ruth had given me, I had forgotten to bid her keep silence while going through the hall, and when she saw the two cells in the corner built up with blocks of gold she stopped and said,—

'Those were not here the other night. What have you had them built up like that for?'

And before I could answer, Djama's voice, shrill and trembling, rose out of the cell, crying,—

'Ruth, Ruth, I am here! This is my prison. It is a grave of gold. Curse the gold! Save me, save me, Ruth, for I am going mad—and I am your brother!'

She stopped and took hold of my arm with both her hands, and looked up at me. Her face was very pale and her lips were trembling. Yet though her voice was low, it was firm as she said to me,—

'I have no brother who is a liar and a traitor to his friends; but, Vilcaroya, I had a brother once who was very good and kind to me, and for the sake of his goodness and kindness I ask you to treat this—this prisoner of yours more gently.'

'Joyful Star can ask nothing to-day that I could refuse,' I said. 'He shall be taken out forthwith and lodged with all comfort, though I must keep him safely.'

'No, no, not till I am gone!' she whispered, taking Golden Star by the arm and leading her towards the passage. But, softly as she had spoken, Djama heard her, and in his rage and despair at her words he cried,—

'You—you won't see me! But you will go with your lover, your Indian master, who owes his life to me! You will sell yourself for his gold and be his wife. Oh, my God!—my sister!'

And then he raved in the madness that came upon him, and his voice rang horridly out of his cell and echoed shrilly through the hall and the passages about it. I could feel no anger against a man who was helpless and my prisoner, so I followed Ruth without speaking; and when we stood once more in the sunlight she turned to me with a bright flush on her cheeks and great tears in her eyes, and said very softly and sweetly,—

'He is mad, poor Laurens! he must be. That terrible gold has turned his brain, or he could never speak to me like that. You will not treat him more harshly for it, Vilcaroya, will you, for you know, after all, he is—I mean he was my brother, and I loved him very much—once?'

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'Yes, he is mad,' I said; 'and yet the lips of madness may speak truth, for what am I but what he said?'

'Have you forgotten what you asked me, or what I answered when I kissed Golden Star in the throne-room, that you can speak like that?' she said, with one swift glance that told me I had not asked in vain.

What more she might have said I know not but she had said enough to set my heart dancing and my blood thrilling with a joy greater than I had found in the speedy conquest of the city of my fathers, and just then Tupac came to me and said that a sufficient quantity of gold had been taken out, and that all was ready to return to the city. Then I told him what he was to do with Djama and his fellow-prisoner, and ordered Golden Star's litter and the horse for Ruth which we had brought with us to be made ready, and also a mule for the professor, and when Tupac had returned we set out along the road that leads to the Gate of Sand, I riding in the midst of the troop, and Ruth on my left hand and Golden Star in her litter on the right.

As we approached the streets, great crowds of my delivered people thronged out to welcome us, and when they saw me riding on my black horse, dressed in the imperial robes and with the Llautu on my brow, they set up a shout of joy and welcome that went ringing along the streets and through the squares and all over the city, and so I rode on through the bareheaded throngs, who bowed themselves almost to the earth before me.

As we were crossing the great Plaza, Ruth looked about her with bright cheeks and shining eyes and said to me,—

'Is it not all like a dream, Vilcaroya? Only a few weeks ago you came here poor and unknown, and now you are a king come back to your own again. Is it not wonderful?'

'Yes,' I said, looking into her eyes with more courage than before; 'but something more wonderful even than that has befallen me. Is it not so, my queen?'

'Your queen is not crowned yet, your Majesty!' she said, looking down, and yet not frowning, as I half feared she would.

'No,' I answered, 'nor shall she be till my work is done, and the whole land that was my fathers' is mine to give her, and then all that power and gold and love can give her shall be hers.'

'Give me the last and I shall ask no more,' she said softly, chasing with that first sweet confession from my heart the last lingering doubt of the great blessing that my Father the Sun had bestowed upon me.

Thus we came to the front of the Cuartel, where all the troops were already drawn up to do us honour, and Hartness came out to greet us. He stopped for an instant, and his cheeks paled a little as he saw Ruth riding at my side, already dressed as she would be when she was my queen. But then the goodness of his honest heart spoke from his lips, and he said, as he held out his hand to me,—

'Welcome, your Majesty! Majesties, I might almost say, I suppose! The city is ours and everything is quiet. Some of the officials have come in and submitted; others I have had to put under arrest, and runners are coming in every minute from the other towns in the valley to say that our plans have been carried out perfectly. The rest of our work won't be as easy as this has been, but we've made a very good beginning, and, at anyrate, I think I can congratulate your Majesty on having made your two most important captures.

He looked at Ruth as he said this, and though her fair face flushed brightly and her eyes fell, yet she spoke steadily enough when she answered him, saying,—

'You can hardly call me one of the spoils of war, I think, Captain Hartness, though I confess that I have surrendered at discretion. Now give me your hand and help me down, and don't look so disconsolate, for you are not nearly as unfortunate as you think. There is an Inca princess for you also, a real one, too. I have been teaching Golden Star to say your name, and, do you know, she makes it sound just like music with that sweet voice of hers. See, here she is, and you shall hear her say it.'

I had dismounted meanwhile, and taken Golden Star from her litter, and when the people saw her, her name ran swiftly from lip to lip, and a great shout of delight rose up from thousands of throats to welcome her back to life and the home of her long-dead fathers. Then I took her hand and Hartness's, and put hers in his, and said to him,—

'My friend, what I have taken I can in some measure give back to you. Here is Joyful Star's sister-soul and living likeness. I have seen her newly-awakened soul look out of her eyes with love upon you, as in good truth it well might, for you are a true son of the Sun, though not of our blood. In the days to come you may learn to love her too, and then all will be well.'

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'Yes,' said Ruth, coming to his side, 'and better than it could have been in any other way. The very Fates themselves seemed to have arranged all this, so it is not for mortals to rebel, Captain Hartness.'

He looked at her almost sadly for a moment, and then he laughed a little and said,—

'I should be more or less than mortal if I did, Miss Ruth. But mind, if I am faithless, remember it is you who have done the most to make me so.'

As he said this he took Golden Star's little hand in his own and kissed it. As she felt the touch of his lips a new light sprang into her eyes and shone and danced there, and she said to me,—

'Why does the Son of the Great People do that, and what have you said to him about me, my brother?'

'He has kissed your hand in loving greeting,' I answered, 'and what I have said he will no doubt tell you better some day when you can speak together.'

The bright blood in her cheeks told me that she had understood me, and she turned her head away, but she did not take her hand from Hartness's, and so I gave my hand to Ruth and led her into the Cuartel, and Hartness and Golden Star followed us hand in hand amidst the cheers of the soldiers and the joyful shouts of the people.

That night there were such rejoicings in Cuzco as the City of the Sun had not seen since the Spaniards came into the land. I distributed the gold among the soldiers as I had promised, giving to each man a piece of about two ounces in weight, and they, who had never possessed, even if they had ever seen, gold before, kissed it and fondled it in their delight, and swore that they would fight for me as long as one of them was left alive; and then I spoke to them and told them that they had but to be faithful and brave, and their English leader would lead them to victory after victory, until the whole land should be ours.

Later on I sent Tupac with many men up to the fortress, and they brought down the Golden Throne and the symbols of the Sun and great quantities of gold and jewels, and they set the throne in the midst of the terrace in front of the cathedral, with silver seats on either side of it, on the spot where in the olden time stood the Palace of Viracocha; and on the front of the cathedral, over the great doors, they fixed the symbols of the Sun, and high above all, between the two bell-towers, they placed a great flagstaff.

Before daybreak the next morning the square was thronged with people, save for an open space which the soldiers kept before my throne. I took my place amidst an utter silence. Ruth and Golden Star sat on my right and on my left, and Francis Hartness, with a drawn sword in his hand, stood by my throne to the right, and on the terrace behind me, and on either side, stood the Men of the Blood, dressed in their ancient and long-forbidden costumes, with which I had furnished them out of the stores in the secret chambers of the fortress.

No word was spoken and no sound was heard over the whole city, and all eyes were turned to the swiftly brightening eastern sky.

The blue changed to silver and the silver to crimson and gold. Then the sun, the glorious image of the Lord of Life, arose in all his sudden splendour, and as his rays fell on the great golden jewel-rayed circle on the cathedral front, the Rainbow Banner ran swiftly up to the head of the flagstaff, and I, rising from my throne, bared my head and, turning my face to the rising sun, bowed myself before it, and at the same instant every head in the vast assembly was uncovered, and all, save the soldiers, fell on their knees and stretched out their hands to heaven in silent joy and thankfulness.

Then I lifted up my voice and spoke the ancient Invocation to the Sun which generation after generation of my fathers had spoken from the same spot at the beginning of the feast of Raymi, and when I had ended this the Children of the Blood lifted up their voices after me and sang the long-silenced and yet never-forgotten hymn to the Sun, and then, standing before the kneeling multitude, I replaced the Llautu on my brow and proclaimed myself Inca and supreme Lord of the Land of the Four Regions in the name of my long-dead fathers, whose divine right to lordship had been preserved in me.

And so I, Vilcaroya, son of Huayna-Capac, first fulfilled the prophecy that had been spoken in the Days of Darkness, and so did I come, as had been said, from one life into another through the shadow of death and the silence of the grave, with her whose love, now changed, though no less dear, had nerved me to face the ordeal of the strangest fate that had ever befallen one born in mortal shape.

CHAPTER XIII — How Djama Paid His Debt

It is one of the mysteries of this lower life of ours that men, meaning to do good in all honesty of heart, may yet do evil in the doing of it, and it was thus with me in the hour of my first triumph and rejoicing.

I had pondered long and deeply over the strange treachery of Djama, and I had talked of it with Francis Hartness and the professor until I had come to see that he was in truth sorely afflicted with that madness which is born of the lust of gold, which, as they told me, is a disease of the soul that makes timid men rash and mild ones fierce and cunning, and may even turn the gentleness of woman into the pitiless rage of beasts of prey.

It was through thinking of this that I came to see that I was by no means blameless myself for his madness and the treachery that had come from it.

In my own days and among my own people gold was held precious only for its beauty and its usefulness. We had not learned the art of making it into money and buying men's souls and bodies with it, but I had already lived enough of my new life to see that now, save for the few, gold was all and honour nothing; and knowing this, I should also have known what I was doing when I showed Djama the treasures in the Hall of Gold. The sight of them had made him mad, and, as my hand had shown them to him, the blame of what he had done in his madness was in part mine.

All this I remembered in the hour when my soul was filled with joy and my heart warm with love, and I thought how great a pleasure I should give to her who had given me the better part of my own joy if I looked upon Djama with pity and forgiveness and did an act of mercy as the first deed of my new reign.

So, when the ceremonial of my crowning was over, I bade Tupac take some of my body-guard and bring him before me from the place where he had been lodged after his release from his golden cell, and at the same time I quieted the fears of Joyful Star by telling her what was in my heart concerning him.

They brought him unbound, but well guarded by soldiers with bayonets on their rifles, up the broad avenue which the parted throng had made across the square in front of my throne.

I saw him stare wildly about him as he came near, gazing at the splendid sun-lit pageant like a man in a dream, or one just awakened into another world, as I had been after my long death-sleep. But when he came near, and saw me sitting in my royal state with Joyful Star on my right and Golden Star on my left, both robed as princesses of the Ancient Blood, his face grew dark with passion, and his eyes, losing their wonder, gazed in fixed and furious hate at me—the man who was going to give him his life, and much more that he had coveted besides.

They placed him between two soldiers before me at the foot of the terrace steps above which my throne had been set, and I was about to speak and greet him kindly, when his anger already got the better of him, and, with a mocking smile on his lips, he said in a loud, rough voice that was most unlike his own quiet, even tones,—

'Well, your Majesty, as I suppose you think yourself for the present, I expected something like this—to be brought out into the midst of your fellow-savages and sentenced like a felon before my own sister and the woman who, like yourself, owes her life to me!'

Then he laughed one of his strange, joyless laughs, and went on before I could reply,—

'Well, I suppose I mustn't grumble. You have won, and to the victor go the spoils. Now that you have apparently bought the girl who was once my sister with your gold, and I have given you your own sister-wife back, you will be able to try an interesting experiment in your old form of matrimony—'

I saw Joyful Star shrink back in her seat and turn her head away from him with a little cry as he said these evil words, and they angered me so, that—forgetting they were spoken by a man who stood helpless before me—I cried,—

'Silence, liar and speaker of evil! or your next words shall be the last that human ears shall hear you speak. Are you still mad, or have you forgotten that you were once a man?'

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

He smiled such a smile as you may have seen on the lips of one who has died in agony, and said with a swift change in his voice,—

'I beg your Majesty's pardon, and—and the ladies' too. It was a most ungentlemanly thing to say, and one should not forget one's manners on the threshold of the next world—if there is one. But come, your Majesty, you are wasting your valuable time, and keeping all these interesting savages of yours waiting. You'll find I shall take it quietly enough. What do you propose that it shall be—something with boiling oil or red-hot pincers in it?'

I knew that a man who could speak thus, believing that he was about to die, must be in a pitiful plight, and so I answered him sternly, and yet without anger,—

'Laurens Djama, I have not brought you here to jest with you, nor yet, as you think, to condemn you to die, though your life is justly forfeit to me and my people, whom you would have betrayed again to their oppressors. Now, listen! You brought me back from death to life, and for my life I will give you yours, and for Golden Star's I will pay you the price agreed on and something more. It was by my foolish act that the madness of the gold-hunger came upon you, and for that I will give you your freedom; but not now, for that would not be safe for me or my people, since you have betrayed us once, and, knowing what you do, might do so again. You shall be taken hence to a pleasant and fertile valley, where you shall have all freedom, save permission to leave it until this war is over and I am undisputed lord of the land of my fathers. Then you shall take the wealth that shall be yours and go to your own country, or wherever you please, so long as you do not remain in mine, for here there is no place for you, since my people do not forgive as easily as I do. Now I have spoken; if there is anything more that you can ask, and I can give with safety, ask it.'

Most men who had sinned as he had done would have very willingly taken such forgiveness, and Laurens Djama might have taken it but for a seemingly small thing. While I was speaking to him his eyes had wandered from mine and were looking into Golden Star's. As I ceased I felt her hands clasping my arm, and heard her voice say tremblingly in our own tongue,—

'Save me, my lord and brother, save me! Evil Eyes is looking into my heart and turning it cold!'

This Djama saw, though he did not understand her words, and the sight brought the madness into his blood again. He shouted with a voice like the cry of a wild beast in pain,—

'Curse you! I will have neither life nor liberty from you, but I'll have your life for mine, and that will pay me better!'

As the last word left his lips he made a movement so quick that my eyes could not follow it. The next instant he had wrenched the rifle from the hands of the soldier on his right hand and levelled it at me. Even as he did so Joyful Star flung herself with a scream upon my breast and Hartness sprang forward from behind my throne-seat.

The rifle flashed. I heard a hissing sound close to my ear and a deep groan and the fall of a body behind me. In the same moment Djama was seized and flung to the ground, where he lay quite still and silent. I rose to my feet, clasping Joyful Star for the first time in my arms, and looked round. Hartness stood beside me unharmed, but old Ullulo, the first friend that I had made in my new life among my own people, lay dead behind my throne with a bullet through his forehead.

I had not forgotten that old training which taught an Inca warrior to look on near-approaching death with unmoved eyes and unshaken heart, and this was only such a hazard as I had taken a score of times before. I bade Hartness lead Ruth and Golden Star into the temple behind us, so that they should not see what was about to be done. Then I took my place on the throne again and ordered Djama to be raised and stood on his feet.

He rose of himself, very pale but calm and strong in his own evil strength, fearing nothing, as became a man for whom death had no terrors and, it might be, few secrets. We looked each other in the eyes in silence, and in the midst of an utter stillness that had fallen on the vast throng, until Hartness came back. Then I said,—

'That is enough, Laurens Djama. Choose now what death you will die, but, for your own sake and Joyful Star's, choose a quick one.'

Although my voice was as the voice of doom to him, yet he did not quail even then, for if his heart was black it was very strong, and fear had never entered into it. He drew himself up to the full height of his stature

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

and, looking me full in the eyes, he said as quietly as I had ever heard him speak,—

'That choice is always mine, whether you give it to me or not. You have threatened me with death before and I have told you that you could not kill me. Now watch and see if I spoke the truth.'

Then, with a soldier holding each of his arms and two others grasping his shoulders, he drew a quick, deep, gasping breath. The blood rushed into his face till its pallor became purple. The next instant it became deathly white again. His jaw dropped, his eyes grew fixed and blindly staring, and then his shape seemed to shrink together like an empty bag, and he sank down between those who were holding him.

They pulled him upright again, and his head dropped forward on his breast. He was dead—dead as though the Llapa itself had struck him—and so Laurens Djama, master of the arts of life and death, passed out of the world of living men by the act of his own will, though not of his own hand.

CHAPTER XIV — The Re-Kindling Of The Sacred Fire

Now this story of mine is nearly done, for there are but few things left for me to tell. It is not for me to write of all the battles that we fought after the City of the Sun and the region about it fell into our hands, for to do that is a task better fitted to the hands of him who led my ever-growing hosts to victory after victory until the whole land that had been my fathers' was mine from north to south and from the great rivers of the east to the Sea of the Setting Sun, which you now call the Pacific Ocean.

It is enough for me to say that I used my gold without stint, and that it did all and more than the work I had been told it would do. As we marched southward and westward to the sea, army after army left those who were fighting between themselves for the ruins of the land and, having no real quarrel of their own, ranged themselves under the Rainbow Banner and fought with me for freedom and the ancient faith of their long-dead fathers, and how city after city welcomed me as I came to give it peace and wealth instead of strife and misery.

My unforgotten story and the marvel of my coming back from the days of our old-time glories had sped like the leaps of the lightning from mountain to mountain and valley to valley, and every man in whose veins flowed even the smallest drop of the Sacred Blood threw aside the broken fragments of the oppressor's yoke and came to give me his service.

From other countries, too, and from far over the sea, there came men to fight for me, men whom Hartness had called from afar by speaking to them over the lightning-wires, and they brought ships with them, armed with flame and thunder, which the promise of my gold had purchased, and these took all the seaports for me, while my ever-growing armies were taking the cities of the inland valleys—all of which those who would learn may read in the great book which Francis Hartness and the professor, who with Joyful Star have helped out these lame words of mine, are writing together to tell how the ancient empire of the Incas rose at my call and the bidding of my gold—which I doubt not was far stronger than I—out of the degradation into which the oppressors had cast it, and has even now begun to prosper again with more than its former glory.

But, as I have said, these things are not for me to tell, since I have neither the skill nor the knowledge to do so. What I have set down here is only the story of my own awakening out of the death-sleep into which the arts of the priests of the Sun had cast me with Golden Star, and of her return to join me in my new life. I have told of that and of all that befell us afterwards, and now there remains only the telling of that which fulfilled our strange fates and completed our happiness in the new world into which those fates had brought us.

Many weeks passed and grew into months before the oppressors were finally subdued and I found myself undisputed lord of all the land, and, as I had promised Joyful Star, all this had to come to pass before I would ask her to put her hand into mine and take her place beside me as my Coya and queen on the throne of Huayna-Capac.

But at length there was peace in the land and we returned from Lima, the capital of the Spaniards, where I had been proclaimed and acknowledged Inca and Emperor of my ancient domains, to the City of the Sun, which many loving and willing hands had cleansed of the abominations of its new idolatries and made in some measure fit to receive us, to crown our new lives with such happiness as, with the help and blessing of the Unnameable, we might be able to bestow upon each other.

The treasures of gold and silver and ornaments of jewels, the rich hangings and the sacred and precious emblems had been brought from the Hall of Gold and the throne-room beneath the Sacsahuaman and set up in the chief temple of the Spaniards, which stands in the place where the holy Temple of the Sun once stood and is in great part built of the self-same stones.*

*This is not quite correct, although a natural mistake on the part of the Inca. It is not the Cathedral of Cuzco, but the Church of Santo Domingo, which stands on the site of the ancient Temple of the Sun. It is by far the finest church in Cuzco. The Cathedral faces the great square.

It was the eve of the Feast of Raymi, or the Coming of the Sun, which in the olden time we counted as the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

beginning of the year, and I had determined that this day should witness the restoration of the old order and the beginning of my own true happiness—so that night Golden Star and I, as became the son and daughter of the Royal Race and Sacred Blood, watched and prayed according to the ancient rites—she in a chamber of what had once been the House of the Virgins of Sun, and I in the purified temple—from the setting of the sun until the first waning of the stars in the coming dawn.

Very early in the morning she was brought to me in the temple by Tupac-Rayca—whom I had in virtue of his pure blood and noble decent, consecrated Villac-Umu or High Priest of the Sun, and who had in turn invested such others of the Blood as he thought worthy with the subordinate dignities of the holy office. He and his attendants were arrayed in the ancient priestly robes and adorned with the sacred emblems of their rank, and Golden Star was attired as a royal Virgin of the Sun, in garments of white edged with scarlet and decked with ornaments of pure gold.

Then we prayed together before the newly-set-up altar, which stood over against the eastern window of the Sanctuary, and when that duty was ended, and while the growing light was yet dim, there came to us Joyful Star, also arrayed as a princess of the Blood, and Francis Hartness, whom my thankful people had already named Viracocha, after one of our golden-haired hero-gods of the olden time.

After them came all those of the Sacred Race that were left in the land—men and matrons, youths and maidens—all dressed in the long-forbidden garb of their forefathers, and ranged themselves in two silent, orderly ranks down the sides of the Sanctuary, waiting with patient eagerness for that which they had been bidden here to see.

Above the altar hung the great golden Emblem of the Sun, upon which the radiant glance of the Lord of Light would first fall through the circular window in the eastern wall, and on it was a pyramid of wood anointed with scented oils; for here was soon to be re-kindled—if our Lord the Sun should smile on the new fortunes of his long-suffering children—without the aid of human hands, that sacred fire first lit by Manco Capac and Mama Occlu, son and daughter of the Sun, and which had burnt unquenched through all the ages that had passed from the founding to the fall of our ancient empire. Beside it lay a cone-shaped vessel of burnished gold, in the depths of which the Sacred Fleece awaited the touch that was to change it into flame.

When all were assembled, Tupac-Rayca mounted the steps of the altar, and, facing the silent throng, began to speak in the ancient and unforgotten tongue and said,—

'Children of the Sun, sons and daughters of those whose ancestors in the unremembered days received the divine command to create the empire over which they ruled with ever-growing glory until, by the inscrutable decrees of the Unnameable, the destroyer and oppressor were permitted to come into the land, listen with open ears and thankful hearts to the words which our Father shall put into my mouth to say to you!'

All bowed their heads and crossed their hands over their breasts as he spoke, and after a little silence he went on,—

'The last of the Villac-Umus who stood where I am standing told your fathers and mine of the near-approaching night of gloom and desolation that was about to fall upon the Land of the Four Regions. For what sins of his children our Father permitted that night to eclipse the bright day of their empire we know not, nor is it lawful for us to inquire. Let it be enough for us to believe that, grievous as the doom was, it could not have been anything save the inflexible justice of the Unnameable.'

Again they bowed their heads, and there was silence for a little space until he went on, speaking this time in a gladder voice,—

'But, stern as that justice was, it was yet not untempered with mercy, for with the words of doom there came from our Father, by the lips of his minister, the holy Anda-Huillac, those words of hope and promise which from that day to this have been handed down in secret, yet unforgotten, from father to son and from mother to daughter, and which now for the first time since then may be spoken openly in the land:—

“To that Son of the Sacred Race who, for honour and faith and love, shall take the hand of a pure virgin of his own holy blood and with her pass fearless through the gate of death into the shadows which lie beyond, shall be given the glory of casting down the oppressor and raising the Rainbow Banner once more above the Golden Throne of the Incas. On that throne he shall sit, and wield power and mete out justice and mercy to the Children of the Sun when the gloom that is now falling upon the Land of the Four Regions shall have passed away in the dawn of a brighter age.”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

'Sons and daughters of the long-dead, turn your eyes and see how the eastern skies are swiftly brightening with first rays of that long-looked-for dawn. This is the morning of our deliverance, for our deliverers stand here before us, and with your own eyes you may look upon those who, in the strength of their love and faith, dared the doom to win the promise, for here in the living flesh stands that Vilcaroya, son of the great Huayna-Capac, and there beside him is Golden Star, that virgin of the Royal Race who of her own will joined hands with him in the wedlock of death, and whose pure soul has dwelt with his in the Mansions of the Sun while ten generations of men have lived and died awaiting their return to the land.

'To us, more blessed, it has been given to see that which our fathers waited for in vain. To us our Lord Vilcaroya and our Lady Golden Star have come back from the shadows of death into the light of life and glory of victory. Already you have seen the oppressor pay the price of life for life, and blood for blood, and shame for shame. You have seen our Lord seated on the golden throne of the Divine Manco with the Rainbow Banner waving high above him, and now the moment has come for you to see the fulfilling of what yet remains of the promise unfulfilled. Behold the visible presence of our Father comes near to smile once more on his children long left in darkness!'

While he was speaking these last words the light in the eastern sky had brightened fast until a sunray leapt over the lower rim of the window and shone on the painted ceiling of the Sanctuary. At a sign from Tupac-Rayca, Golden Star took up the vessel in which lay the Sacred Fleece, and, standing in the middle of the altar on the highest step, held it poised in her hands above her head, with her pale, fair face and shining eyes upturned towards the window.

Foot by foot the light crept along the roof, broadening and brightening as it went, till it touched the western wall. Then, ever followed by the anxious eyes of the silent throng, it descended until the great Symbol of the Sun flashed and flamed in its radiance. Still lower it sank and the burnished vessel that Golden Star held to receive them caught the gathering rays and glowed as though filled with liquid fire.

Now the moment for the giving of the Sign had come.

Now the moment for the giving of the Sign had come. A faint wreath of pale blue smoke curled upwards from the Sacred Fleece. It grew darker and denser, and then a little tongue of flame leapt out from the midst of it. At the same instant Tupac seized the vessel and held it upturned over the pyramid of wood upon the altar. The burning fleece fell down upon the anointed wood, a long shaft of fire shot upward, and, as the descending sunrays fell over the face and bosom of Golden Star, the voice of Tupac rang out in an exultant chant through the silence, saying,—

'Rejoice, Children of the Sun, rejoice! for your Father has once more looked in kindness and blessing upon you, and with the radiant glance of his eyes he has re-kindled the long-quenched fire which henceforth shall burn upon his altar as long as his visible presence shall make bright the heavens and beautiful the earth!'

As he ceased, Golden Star's voice rose up clear and sweet, singing the first words of the Hymn to the Sun—as I alone of all that throng had heard her sing them in the days that were no more. Then the Children of the Blood raised their voices too, and out of the fulness of their thankful hearts poured forth their first tribute of praise and thanksgiving to Him who had broken the yoke of the oppressor and given back light and joy and peace to the long-darkened Land of the Four Regions.

When the Hymn to the Sun was ended and the Children of the Blood had received the blessing of Tupac, there was yet one more ceremony to be performed before the rejoicings of the Feast of Raymi began. There is little need for me to tell you what it was. In love as in war I had striven and conquered, and now the dearest of my rewards, dearer far than wealth or empire, was to be made mine by the free gift of her who was herself that which she gave.

Two of the priests brought forth the marriage-font and placed it in front of the altar, and Joyful Star stood on the one side of it and I on the other and we joined hands across it.

It was a double vessel of gold, formed of two twin cups, and between them there was a hole stopped by a golden plug, to which a little chain was fastened. The cup on my side was filled with blood-red wine and that towards Joyful Star with pure water, crystal clear.

Tupac took our hands in his and parted them, saying as he did so,—

'To meet and to part is the lot of man and woman upon earth, yet when two true souls meet and two faithful hearts are joined even death can part them but in seeming, for in the bright halls of the Mansions of the Sun

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

they shall dwell for ever in the blessed presence of our Father!

So saying, he joined our hands again, and drawing out the golden plug, he pointed to the mingling fluids and went on, speaking now to each of us in turn,—

'Here, Vilcaroya Inca, and you, Joyful Star, daughter of a conquering race and well-beloved of our Lord, see the emblem of the union between you! As the strong red wine colours and strengthens the pure water, so, Joyful Star, shall the stronger nature of thy chosen husband colour and strengthen thine, and, as the pure water tempers and purifies the wine, so, Vilcaroya Inca, shall the gentler and purer nature of her who is henceforth thy wife and queen by the rites of our ancient law, soften and purify thine according to the will and purpose of the Unnameable, who to this end sent man and woman upon earth that together they might possess and enjoy it, each helping the other, man making the world fruitful and beautiful by his labour, and woman sweetening his toil by the reward of her love and her constancy.'

Then he raised his hands above our heads as we bowed them together over the emblem of our mingling lives, and said again,—

'Son and daughter, man and wife, who have met from afar, and who in this solemn act have sworn in the all-pervading presence of the Unnameable to lead each other from this your meeting-place to the dim border of the shadow-land which lies between this world and the threshold of the Mansions of the Sun, may the blessing of our Father clothe your brows with honour and fill your hearts with everlasting love and trust, and may He guide your feet to walk in pleasant places from now even to the end!'

As he ceased our hands parted, only to meet again a moment later after we had stepped aside to yield up our places at the marriage-font to Francis Hartness and Golden Star.

THE END

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

The Raid Of Le Vengeur

I.—The Dream Of Captain Flaubert

It was the third morning after the naval manoeuvres at Cherbourg, and since their conclusion Captain Leon Flaubert, of the Marine Experimental Department of the French Navy, had not had three consecutive hours' sleep.

He was an enthusiast on the subject of submarine navigation. He firmly believed that the nation which could put to sea the first really effective fleet of submarine vessels would hold the fleets of rival nations at its mercy and acquire the whole ocean and its coasts as an exclusive territory. To anyone but an enthusiast it would have seemed a wild dream and yet only a few difficulties had still to be overcome, a few more discoveries made, and the realisation of the dream would be merely a matter of money and skilled labour.

Now the Cherbourg evolutions had proved three things. The submarines could sink and remain below the surface of the water. They could be steered vertically and laterally, but once ten feet or so below the water, they were as blind as bats in bright sunshine.

Moreover, when their electric head-lights were turned on, a luminous haze through which it was impossible to see more than a few metres, spread out in front of them and this was reflected on the surface of the water in the form of a semi-phosphorescent patch which infallibly betrayed the whereabouts of the submarine to scouting destroyers and prowling gun-boats. The sinking of a couple of pounds of dynamite with a time-fuse into this patch would have consequences unspeakable for the crew of the submarine since no human power could save them from a horrible death.

It was the fear of this discovery that had caused the rigid exclusion of all non-official spectators from the area of the experiments. Other trials conducted in daylight had further proved that the dim, hazy twilight of the lower waters was even worse than darkness. In short, the only chance of successful attack lay in coming to the surface, taking observations, probably under fire, and then sinking and discharging a torpedo at a venture. This, again, was an operation which could only be conducted with any chance of success in a smooth sea. In even moderately rough weather it would be absolutely impossible.

It was these difficulties which joined to a thousand exasperatingly stubborn technical details had kept Captain Flaubert awake for three nights. For him everything depended upon the solution of them. He was admittedly the best submarine engineer in France. The submarines had been proved to be practically non-effective. France looked to him to make them effective.

The troubles in the far East and, nearer home, in Morocco, had brought the Dual Alliance and the British Empire to the verge of war. At any moment something might happen which would shake a few sparks into the European powder magazine. Then the naval might of Britain would be let loose instantly. In a few hours her overwhelming fleets would be striking their swift and terrible blows at the nearest enemy—France—and yet, if he could only give the submarines eyes which could see through the water, France could send out an invisible squadron which would cripple the British fleets before they left port, destroy her mightiest battleships and her swiftest cruisers before they could fire a single shot, and so in a few days clear the Narrow Seas and make way for the invasion of England by the irresistible military might of France. Then the long spell would be broken, and the proudly boasted Isle Inviolable would be inviolable no longer.

It was a splendid dream—but, until the submarines could be made to see as well as steer, it was as far away as aerial navigation itself.

Day was just breaking on the third morning when a luminous ray of inspiration pierced the mists which hang over the border land of sleep and waking, of mingled dream and reality, amidst which Flaubert's soul was just then wandering.

He sat bolt upright in his little camp bed, clasped his hands across his close-cropped head, and, hardly knowing whether he was asleep or awake, heard himself say:

“Nom de Dieu, it is that! What foolishness not to have thought of that before. If we cannot see we must feel. Electric threads, balanced so as to be the same weight as water—ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred metres

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

long, all round the boat, ahead and astern, to port and to starboard! Steel ships are magnetic, that is why they must swing to adjust their compasses.”

“The end of each thread shall be a tiny electro-magnet. In-board they will connect with indicators, delicately swung magnetic needles, four of them, ahead, astern, and on each side; and, as *Le Vengeur*—yes, I will call her that, for we have no more forgotten Trafalgar than we have Fashoda—as she approaches the ships of the enemy, deep hidden under the waters, these threads, like the tentacles of the octopus, shall spread towards her prey!”

As she gets nearer and nearer they swing round and converge upon the ship that is nearest and biggest. As we dive under her they will point upwards. When they are perpendicular the overhead torpedo will be released. Its magnets will fasten it to the bottom of the doomed ship. *Le Vengeur* will sink deeper, obeying always the warning of the sounding indicator, and seek either a new victim or a safe place to rise in. In ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, as I please, the torpedo will explode, the battleship or the cruiser will break in two and go down, not knowing whose hand has struck her.

“Ah, Albion, my enemy, you are already conquered! You are only mistress of the seas until *Le Vengeur* begins her work. When that is done there will be no more English navy. The soldiers of France will avenge Waterloo on the soil of England, and Leon Flaubert will be the greatest name in the world. Dieu Merci, it is done! I have thought the thought which conquers a world—and now let me sleep.”

His clasped hands fell away from his head; his eyelids drooped over his aching, staring eyes; his body swayed a little from side to side, and then fell backwards. As his head rested on the pillow a long deep sigh left his half-parted lips, and in a few moments a contented snore was reverberating through the little, plainly-furnished bedroom.

II.—A Dinner At Albert Gate

Curiously enough, while Captain Leon Flaubert had been worrying himself to the verge of distraction over the problem of seeing under water, and had apparently solved it by substituting electric nerves of feeling for the sight-rays which had proved a failure, Mr. Wilfred Wallace Tyrrell had brought to a successful conclusion a long series of experiments bearing upon the self-same subject.

Mr. Tyrrell was the son of Sir Wilfred Tyrrell, one of the Junior Lords of the Admiralty. He was a year under thirty. He had taken a respectable degree at Cambridge, then he had gone to Heidelberg and taken a better one, after which he had come home entered at London, and made his bow to the world as the youngest D.Sc. that Burlington Gardens had ever turned out.

His Continental training had emancipated him from all the limitations under which his father, otherwise a man of very considerable intelligence, suffered. Like Captain Flaubert he was a firm believer in the possibility of submarine navigation, but, like his unknown French rival, he, too, had been confronted with that fatal problem of submarine blindness, and he had attacked it from a point of view so different to that of Captain Flaubert that the difference of method practically amounted to the difference between the genius of the two nations to which they belonged. Captain Flaubert had evaded the question and substituted electric feeling for sight. Wilfred Tyrrell had gone for sight and nothing less, and now he had every reason to believe that he had succeeded.

The night before Captain Flaubert had fallen asleep in his quarters at Cherbourg there was a little dinner-party at Sir Wilfred Tyrrell's house in Albert Gate. The most important of the guests from Wilfred's point of view was Lady Ethel Rivers, the only daughter of the Earl of Kirlew. She was a most temptingly pretty brunette with hopelessly dazzling financial prospects. He had been admiring her from a despairing distance for the last five years, in fact ever since she had crossed the line between girlhood and young womanhood.

Although it was quite within the bounds of possibility that she knew of his devotion, he had never yet ventured upon even the remotest approach to direct courtship. In every sense she seemed too far beyond him. Some day she would be a countess in her own right. Some day, too, she would inherit about half a million in London ground-rents, with much more to follow as the leases fell in, wherefore, as Wilfred Tyrrell reasoned, she would in due course marry a duke, or at least a European Prince.

Lady Ethel's opinions on the subject could only be gathered from the fact that she had already declined one Duke, two Viscounts, and a German Serene Highness, during her first season, and that she never seemed tired of listening when Wilfred Tyrrell was talking—which of itself was significant if his modesty had only permitted him to see it.

But while he was sitting beside her at dinner on this momentous night he felt that the distance between them had suddenly decreased. So far his career had been brilliant but unprofitable. Many other men had done as much as he had and ended in mediocrity. But now he had done something; he had made a discovery with which the whole world might be ringing in a few weeks' time. He had solved the problem of submarine navigation, and, as a preliminary method of defence, he had discovered a means of instantly detecting the presence of a submarine destroyer.

He was one of those secretive persons who possess that gift of silence, when critical matters are pending, which has served many generations of diplomats on occasions when the fates of empires were hanging in the balance.

Thus, having learnt to keep his love a secret for so many years, he knew how to mask that still greater secret, by the telling of which he could have astonished several of the distinguished guests round his father's dinner table into a paralysis of official incredulity. But he, being the son of an official, knew that such a premature disclosure might result, not only in blank scepticism, for which he did not care, but in semi-official revelations to the Press, for which he did care a great deal. So when the farewells were being said, he

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

whispered to his mother:

“I want you and father and Lady Ethel and Lord Kirlew to come up to the laboratory after everyone has gone. I've got something to show you. You can manage that, can't you, mother?”

Lady Tyrrell nodded and managed it.

Wilfred Tyrrell's laboratory was away up at the top of the house in a long low attic, which had evidently been chosen for its seclusion.

As they were going up the stairs Wilfred, sure of his triumph, took a liberty which, under other circumstances, would have been almost unthinkable to him. He and Lady Ethel happened to be the last on the stairs, and he was a step or two behind her. He quickened his pace a little, and then laying his hand lightly on her arm he whispered:

“Lady Ethel.”

“Oh, nonsense!” she whispered in reply, with a little tremble of her arm under his hand. “Lady Ethel, indeed! As if we hadn't known each other long enough. Well, never mind what you want to say. What are you going to show us?”

“Something that no human eyes except mine have ever seen before; something which I have even ventured to hope will make me worthy to ask you a question which a good many better men than I have asked——”

“I know what you mean,” she replied in a whisper even lower than his own, and turning a pair of laughing eyes up to his. “You silly, couldn't you see before? I didn't want those Dukes and Serene Highnesses. Do something—so far I know you have only studied and dreamt,—and, much and all as I like you—Well, now?”

“Now,” he answered, pulling her arm a little nearer to him, “I have done something. I quite see what you mean, and I believe it is something worthy even of winning your good opinion. Here we are; in a few minutes you will see for yourself.”

III.—The Water-Ray

The laboratory was littered with the usual disorderly-order of similar apartments. In the middle of it on a big, bare, acid-stained deal table there stood a glass tank full of water, something like an aquarium tank, but the glass walls were made of the best white plate. The water with which it was filled had a faint greenish hue and looked like seawater. At one end of it there was a curious looking apparatus. A couple of boxes, like electric storage batteries, stood on either side of a combination of glass tubes mounted on a wooden stand so that they all converged into the opening of a much larger tube of pale blue glass. Fitted to the other end of this was a thick double concave lens also of pale blue glass. This was placed so that its axis pointed down towards the surface of the water in the tank at an angle of about thirty degrees.

“Well, Wallace,” said Sir Wilfred as his son locked the door behind them, “what's this? Another of your wonderful inventions? Something else you want me to put before my lords of the Admiralty?”

“That's just it, father, and this time I really think that even the people at Whitehall will see that there's something in it. At any rate I'm perfectly satisfied that if I had a French or Russian Admiral in this room, and he saw what you're going to see, I could get a million sterling down for what there is on that table.”

“But, of course you wouldn't think of doing that,” said Lady Ethel, who was standing at the end of the table opposite the arrangement of glass tubes.

“That, I think, goes without saying, Ethel,” said Lord Kirlew. “I am sure Mr. Tyrrell would be quite incapable of selling anything of service to his country to her possible enemies. At any rate, Tyrrell,” he went on, turning to Sir Wilfred, “if I see anything in it, and your people won't take it up, I will. So now let us see what it is.”

Tyrrell had meanwhile turned up a couple of gas-jets, one on either side of the room, and they saw that slender, twisted wires ran from the batteries to each of the tubes through the after end, which was sealed with glass. He came back to the table, and with a quick glance at Lady Ethel, he coughed slightly, after the fashion of a lecturer beginning to address an audience. Then he looked round at the inquiring faces, and said with a mock professional air:

“This, my Lord, ladies, and gentlemen, is an apparatus which I have every reason to believe removes the last and only difficulty in the way of the complete solution of the problem of submarine navigation.”

“Dear me,” said Lord Kirlew, adjusting his pince-nez and leaning over the arrangement of tubes, “I think I see now what you mean. You have found, if you will allow me to anticipate you, some sort of Roentgen Ray or other, which will enable you to see through water. Is that so?”

“That is just what it is,” said Tyrrell. “Of course, you know that the great difficulty, in fact, the so far insuperable obstacle in the way of submarine navigation has been the fact that a submerged vessel is blind. She cannot see where she is going beyond a distance of a few yards at most.”

“Now this apparatus will make it possible, not only for her to see where she is going up to a distance which is limited only by the power of her batteries, but it also makes it possible for those on a vessel on the surface of the water to sweep the bottom of the sea just as a search-light sweeps the surface, and therefore to find out anything underneath from a sunken mine to a submarine destroyer. I am going to show you, too, that it can be used either in daylight or in the dark, I'll try first with the gas up.”

He turned a couple of switches on the boxes as he said this. The batteries began to hum gently. The tubes began to glow with a strange intense light which had two very curious properties. It was just as distinctly visible in the gaslight as if the room had been dark, and it was absolutely confined to the tubes. Not a glimmer of it extended beyond their outer surfaces.

Then the big blue tube began to glow, turning pale green the while. The next instant a blaze of greenish light shot in a direct ray from the lens down into the water. A moment later the astonished eyes of the spectators saw the water in the tank pierced by a spreading ray of intense and absolutely white light. Some stones and sand and gravel that had been spread along the bottom of the tank stood out with magical

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

distinctness wherever the ray touched them. The rest, lit up only by the gas, were dim and indistinct in comparison with them.

“You see that what I call the water-ray is quite distinct from gaslight,” said Tyrrell in a tone which showed that the matter was now to him a commonplace. “It is just as distinct from daylight. Now we will try it in the dark. Lord Kirlaw, would you mind turning out that light near you? Father, turn out the one on your side, will you?”

The lights were turned out in silence. People of good intelligence are as a rule silent in the presence of a new revelation. Every eye looked through the darkness at the tank. The tubes glowed with their strange light, but they stood out against the darkness of the room just like so many pencils of light, and that was all. The room was just as dark as though they had not been there. The intense ray from the lens was now only visible as a fan of light. Tank and water had vanished in the darkness. Nothing could be seen but the ray and the stones and sand which it fell on.

“You see,” said Tyrrell, “that the ray does not diffuse itself. It is absolutely direct, and that is one of its most valuable qualities. The electric lights which they use on the French submarines throw a glow on the top of the water at night, and so it is pretty easy to locate them. The surface of the water there, you see, is perfectly dark. In fact the water has vanished altogether. Another advantage is that this ray is absolutely invisible in air. Look!”

As he said this he tilted the arrangement of tubes backwards so that the ray left the water, and that moment the room was in utter darkness. He turned it down towards the tank and again the brilliant fan of light became visible in the water.

“Now,” he continued, “that’s all. You can light the gas again, if you don’t mind.”

“Well, Wallace,” said Lord Kirlaw when they had got back to the library, “I think we can congratulate you upon having solved one of the greatest problems of the age, and if the Admiralty don’t take your invention up, as I don’t suppose they will, eh, Tyrrell?—you know them better than I do—I’ll tell you what I’ll do; I’ll buy or build you a thirty-five knot destroyer which shall be fitted up to your orders, and until we get into a naval war with someone you can take a scientific cruise and use your water-ray to find out uncharted reefs and that sort of thing, and perhaps you might come across an old sunken treasure-ship. I believe there are still some millions at the bottom of Vigo Bay.”

Before Lady Ethel left, Tyrrell found time and opportunity to ask her a very serious question, and her answer to it was:

“You clever goose! You might have asked that long ago. Yes, I’ll marry you the day after you’ve blown up the first French submarine ship.”

IV.—In The Solent

For once at least the British—Admiralty had shown an open mind. Sir Wilfred Tyrrell's official position, and Lord Kirlaw's immense influence, may have had something to do with the stimulating of the official intellect, but, at any rate, within a month after the demonstration in the laboratory, a committee of experts had examined and wonderingly approved of the water—ray apparatus, and H.M. destroyer Scorcher had been placed at Tyrrell's disposal for a series of practical experiments.

Everything was, of course, kept absolutely secret, and the crew of the Scorcher were individually sworn to silence as to anything which they might see or hear during the experimental cruise. Moreover they were all picked men of proved devotion and integrity. Every one of them would have laid down his life at a moment's notice for the honour of the Navy, and so there was little fear of the momentous secret leaking out.

Meanwhile international events had been following each other with ominous rapidity, and those who were behind the scenes on both sides of the Channel knew that war was now merely a matter of weeks, perhaps only of days.

The Scorcher was lying in the South Dock, at Chatham, guarded by dock police who allowed no one to go within fifty yards of her without a permit direct from headquarters. She was fitted with four water—ray instalments, one ahead, one astern, and one amidships to port and starboard, and, in addition to her usual armament of torpedo—tubes and twelve and three—pounder quick—firers, she carried four torpedoes of the Brennan type which could be dropped into the water without making the slightest splash and steered along the path of the water—ray, towards any object which the ray had discovered.

The day before she made her trial trip Captain Flaubert had an important interview with the Minister of Marine. He had perfected his system of magnetic feelers, and *Le Vengeur* was lying in Cherbourg ready to go forth on her mission of destruction. Twenty other similar craft were being fitted with all speed at Cherbourg, Brest, and Toulon. *Le Vengeur* had answered every test demanded of her, and, at the French Marine, the days of the British Navy were already regarded as numbered.

"In a week you may do it, *mon Capitaine*," said the Minister, rising from his seat and holding out both his hands. "It must be war by then, or at least a few days later. Prove that you can do as you say, and France will know how to thank and reward you. Victory to—day will be to those who strike first, and it shall be yours to deliver the first blow at the common enemy."

At midnight a week after this conversation a terrible occurrence took place in the Solent. Her Majesty's first—class cruiser *Phyllis* was lying at anchor about two miles off Cowes Harbour, and the Scorcher was lying with steam up some quarter of a mile inside her. She was, in fact, ready to begin her first experimental voyage at 1 a.m. She had her full equipment on board just as though she were going to fight a fleet of submarines, for it had been decided to test, not only the working of the water—ray, but also the possibility of steering the diving torpedoes by directing them on to a sunken wreck which was lying in twenty fathoms off Portland Bill. The Fates, however, had decided that they were to be tried on much more interesting game than the barnacle—covered hull of a tramp steamer.

At fifteen minutes past twelve precisely, when Tyrrell and Lieutenant—Commander Farquar were taking a very limited promenade on the narrow, rubber—covered decks of the Scorcher, they felt the boat heave jerkily under their feet. The water was perfectly calm at the time.

"Good Heavens, what's that?" exclaimed Tyrrell, as they both stopped and stared out over the water. As it happened they were both facing towards the *Phyllis*, and they were just in time to see her rise on the top of a mountain of foaming water, break in two, and disappear.

"A mine or a submarine!" said Commander Farquar between his teeth; "anyhow—war. Get your apparatus ready, Mr. Tyrrell. That's one of the French submarines we've been hearing so much about. If you can find him we mustn't let him out of here."

Inside twenty seconds the Scorcher had slipped her cable, her searchlight had flashed a quick succession of

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

signals to Portsmouth and Southampton, her boilers were palpitating under a full head of steam, and her wonderful little engines were ready at a minute's notice to develop their ten thousand horse power and send her flying over the water at thirty-five knots an hour.

Meanwhile, too, four fan-shaped rays of intense white light pierced the dark waters of the Solent as a lightning flash pierces the blackness of night, and four torpedoes were swinging from the davits a foot above the water.

There was a tinkle in the engine-room, and she swung round towards the eddying area of water in which the Phyllis went down. Other craft, mostly torpedo boats and steam pinnaces from warships, were also hurrying towards the fatal spot. The head-ray from the Scorcher shot down to the bottom of the Solent, wavered hither and thither for a few moments, and then remained fixed. Those who looked down it saw a sight which no human words could describe.

The splendid warship which a couple of minutes before had been riding at anchor, perfectly equipped, ready to go anywhere and do anything, was lying on the weed-covered sand and rock, broken up into two huge fragments of twisted scrap-iron. Even some of her guns had been hurled out of their positions and flung yards away from her. Other light wreckage was strewn in all directions, and the mangled remains of what had so lately been British officers and sailors were floating about in the mid-depths of the still eddying waters.

"We can't do any good here, Mr. Tyrrell," said Commander Farquar. "That's the work of a submarine, and we've got to find him. He must have come in by Spithead. He'd never have dared the other way, and he'll probably go out as he came in. Keep your rays going and let's see if we can find him."

There was another tinkle in the engine-room. The Scorcher swung round to the eastward and began working in a zigzag course at quarter speed towards Spithead.

Captain Flaubert, however, had decided to do the unexpected and, thirty minutes after the destruction of the Phyllis, *Le Vengeur* was feeling her way back into the Channel past the Needles. She was steering, of course, by chart and compass, about twenty feet below the water. Her maximum speed was eight knots, but Captain Flaubert, in view of possible collisions with rocks or inequalities on the sea-floor, was content to creep along at two.

He had done his work. He had proved the possibility of stealing unseen and unsuspected into the most jealously guarded strip of water in the world, destroying a warship at anchor, and then, as he thought, going away unseen. After doing all that it would be a pity to meet with any accident. War would not be formally declared for three days at least, and he wanted to get back to Cherbourg and tell the Minister of Marine all about it.

The Scorcher zigzagged her way in and out between the forts, her four rays lighting up the water for a couple of hundred yards in every direction, for nearly an hour, but nothing was discovered.

"I believe he's tried the other way after all," said Commander Farquar after they had taken a wide, comprehensive sweep between Foreland and Southsea. "There's one thing quite certain, if he has got out this way into the Channel we might just as well look for a needle in a haystack. I think we'd better go back and look for him the other way."

The man at the wheel put the helm hard over, the bell tinkled full speed ahead in the engine-room. The throbbing screws flung columns of foam out from under the stern, and the little black craft swept round in a splendid curve, and went flying down the Solent towards Hurst Point at the speed of an express train. Off Ryde she slowed down to quarter speed, and the four rays began searching the sea bottom again in every direction.

Le Vengeur was just creeping out towards the Needles, feeling her way cautiously with the sounding indicator thirty feet below the surface, when Captain Flaubert, who was standing with his Navigating Lieutenant in the glass domed conning-tower, lit by one little electric bulb, experienced the most extraordinary sensation of his life. A shaft of light shot down through the water. It was as clean cut as a knife and bright as burnished silver. It wavered about hither and thither for a few moments, darting through the water like a lightning flash through thunderclouds, and then suddenly it dropped on to the conning-lower of *Le Vengeur* and illuminated it with an almost intolerable radiance. The Captain looked at his Lieutenant's face. It was almost snow white in the unearthly light. Instinctively he knew that his own was the same.

"*Tonnere de Dieu!*" he whispered, with lips that trembled in spite of all his self-control, "what is this,

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

Lieutenant? Is it possible that these accursed English have learnt to see under water? Or, worse still, suppose they have a submarine which can see?"

"In that case," replied the Lieutenant, also in a whisper, "though *Le Vengeur* has done her work, I fear she will not finish her trial trip. Look," he went on, pointing out towards the port side, "what is that?"

A dimly-shining, silvery body about five feet long, pointed at both ends, and driven by a rapidly whirling screw had plunged down the broad pathway of light and stopped about ten feet from *Le Vengeur*. Like a living thing it slowly headed this way and that, ever drawing nearer and nearer, inch by inch, and then began the most ghastly experience for the Captain and his Lieutenant that two human beings had ever endured.

They were both brave men well worthy the traditions of their country and their profession; but they were imprisoned in a fabric of steel thirty feet below the surface of the midnight sea, and this horrible thing was coming nearer and nearer. To rise to the surface meant not only capture but ignominious death to every man on board, for war was not declared yet, and the captain and crew of *Le Vengeur* were pirates and outlaws beyond the pale of civilisation. To remain where they were meant a death of unspeakable terror, a fate from which there was no possible escape.

"It is a torpedo," said the Lieutenant, muttering the words with white trembling lips, "a Brennan, too, for you see they can steer it. It has only to touch us and—"

A shrug of the shoulders more expressive than words said the rest.

"Yes," replied Captain Flaubert, "that is so, but how did we not know of it? These English must have learnt some wisdom lately. We will rise a little and see if we can get away from it."

He touched a couple of buttons on a signal board as he said this. *Le Vengeur* rose fifteen feet, her engines quickened, and she headed for the open sea at her best speed. She passed out of the field of the ray for a moment or two. Then three converging rays found her and flooded her with light. Another silvery shape descended, this time to the starboard side. Her engines were put to their utmost capacity. The other shape on the port side rose into view, and ran alongside the conning-tower at exactly equal speed.

Then *Le Vengeur* sank another thirty feet, doubled on her course, and headed back towards Spithead. The ray followed her, found her again, and presently there were the two ghostly attendants, one on each side, as before. She turned in zigzags and curves, wheeled round in circles, and made straight runs hither and thither, but it was no use. The four rays encircled her wherever she went, and the two torpedoes were ever alongside.

Presently another feature of this extraordinary chase began to develop itself. The torpedoes, with a horrible likeness to living things, began to shepherd *Le Vengeur* into a certain course. If she turned to starboard then the silvery shape on that side made a rush at her. If she did the same to port the other one ran up to within a yard or so of her and stopped as though it would say: "Another yard, and I'll blow you into scrap-iron."

The Lieutenant was a brave man, but he fainted after ten minutes of this. Captain Flaubert was a stronger spirit, and he stood to his work with one hand on the steering wheel and the fingers of the other on the signal-board. He knew that he was caught, and that he could expect nothing but hanging as a common criminal. He had failed the moment after success, and failure meant death. The Minister of Marine had given him very clearly to understand that France would not be responsible for the failure of *Le Vengeur*.

The line of his fate lay clear before him. The lives of his Lieutenant and five picked men who had dared everything for him might be saved. He had already grasped the meaning of the evolutions of the two torpedoes. He was being, as it were, steered into a harbour, probably into Portsmouth, where in time he would be compelled to rise to the surface and surrender. The alternative was being blown into eternity in little pieces, and, like the brave man that he was, he decided to accept the former alternative, and save his comrades by taking the blame on himself.

He touched two more of the buttons on the signal-board. The engines of *Le Vengeur* stopped, and presently Tyrrell and Commander Farquar saw from the deck of the *Scorcher* a long, shining, hale-backed object rise above the surface of the water.

At the forward end of it there was a little conning-tower covered by a dome of glass. The moment that it came in sight the *Scorcher* stopped, and then moved gently towards *Le Vengeur*. As she did so the glass dome slid back, and the head and shoulders of a man in the French naval uniform came into sight. His face looked like the face of a corpse as the rays of the searchlight flashed upon it. His hair, which an hour ago had been black, was iron-grey now, and his black eyes stared straight at the searchlight as though they were looking

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

into eternity.

Then across the water there came the sound of a shrill, high-pitched voice which said in perfectly correct English:

“Gentlemen, I have succeeded and I have failed. I destroyed your cruiser yonder, I would have destroyed the whole British Navy if I could have done so, because I hate you and everything English. *Le Vengeur* surrenders to superior force for the sake of those on board her, but remember that I alone have planned and done this thing. The others have only done what I paid them to do, and France knows nothing of it. You will spare them, for they are innocent. For me it is finished.”

As the *Scorcher's* men looked down the rays of the searchlight they saw something glitter in his hand close to his head—a yellow flash shone in the midst of the white, there was a short flat bang, and the body of Captain Leon Flaubert dropped out of sight beside the still unconscious lieutenant.

Le Vengeur was taken into Portsmouth. Her crew were tried for piracy and murder, and sentenced to death. The facts of the chase and capture of *Le Vengeur* were laid before the French Government, which saw the advisability of paying an indemnity of ten million dollars as soon as *Le Vengeur*, fitted with Wilfred Tyrrell's water-ray apparatus, made her trial trip down Channel and blew up half-a-dozen sunken wrecks with perfect ease and safety to herself.

A few weeks later, in recognition of his immense services, the Admiralty placed the third-class cruiser *Venus* at the disposal of Mr. Wilfred and Lady Ethel Tyrrell for their honeymoon trip down the Mediterranean.

The declaration of war of which the Minister had spoken to Captain Flaubert, remained a diplomatic secret, and the unfortunate incident which had resulted in the blowing up of a British cruiser in time of peace, was publicly admitted by the French Government to be an act of unauthorised piracy, the perpetrators of which had already paid the penalty of their crime. The reason for this was not very far to seek. As soon as Wilfred Tyrrell came back from his wedding trip *Le Vengeur* was dry-docked and taken literally to pieces and examined in every detail. Thus everything that the French engineers knew about submarine navigation was revealed.

A committee of the best engineers in the United Kingdom made a thorough inspection with a view to possible improvements, and the result was the building of a British submarine flotilla of thirty enlarged *Vengeurs*. And as a couple of these would be quite sufficient for the effective blockade of a port, the long-planned invasion of England was once more consigned to the limbo of things which may only be dreamt of.

THE END

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

From Pole To Pole

An Account of a Journey Through the Axis of the Earth; Collated From the Diaries of the Late Professor Haffkin and His Niece, Mrs. Arthur Princeps.

I.

“Well, Professor, what is it? Something pretty important, I suppose, from the wording of your note. What is the latest achievement? Have you solved the problem of aerial navigation, or got a glimpse into the realms of the fourth dimension, or what?”

“No, not any of those as yet, my friend, but something that may be quite as wonderful of its sort,” replied Professor Haffkin, putting his elbows down on the table and looking keenly across it under his shaggy, iron-grey eyebrows at the young man who was sitting on the opposite side pulling meditatively at a good cigar and sipping a whisky-and-soda.

“Well, if it is something really extraordinary and at the same time practicable—as you know, my ideas of the practicable are fairly wide—I'm there as far as the financial part goes. As regards the scientific end of the business, if you say 'Yes,' it is 'Yes.’”

Mr. Arthur Princeps had very good reasons for thus “going blind” on a project of which he knew nothing save that it probably meant a sort of scientific gamble to the tune of several thousands of pounds. He had had the good fortune to sit under the Professor when he was a student at, the Royal School of Mines, and being possessed of that rarest of all gifts, an intuitive imagination, he had seen vast possibilities through the meshes of the verbal network of the Professor's lectures.

Further, the kindly Fates had blessed him with a twofold dowry. He had a keen and insatiable thirst for that kind of knowledge which is satisfied only by the demonstration of hard facts. He was a student of physical science simply because he couldn't help it; and his grandfather had left him groundrents in London, Birmingham, and Manchester, and coal and iron mines in half-a-dozen counties, which produced an almost preposterous income.

At the same time, he had inherited from his mother and his grandmother that kind of intellect which enabled him to look upon all this wealth as merely a means to an end.

Later on, Professor Haffkin had been his examiner in Applied Mathematics at London University, and he had done such an astonishing paper that he had come to him after he had taken his D.Sc. degree and asked him in brief but pregnant words for the favour of his personal acquaintance. This had led to an intellectual intimacy which not only proved satisfactory from the social and scientific points of view, but also materialised on many profitable patents.

The Professor was a man rich in ideas, but comparatively poor in money. Arthur Princeps had both ideas and money, and as a result of this conjunction of personalities the man of science had made thousands out of his inventions, while the scientific man of business had made tens of thousands by exploiting them; and that is how matters stood between them on this particular evening when they were dining tete-a-tete in the Professor's house in Russell Square.

When dinner was over, the Professor got up and said—

“Bring your cigar up into the study, Mr. Princeps. I want a pipe, and I can talk more comfortably there than here. Besides, I've something to show you.”

“All right, Professor; but if you're going to have a pipe, I'll do the same. One can think better with a pipe than a cigar. It takes too much attention.”

He tossed the half of his Muria into the grate and followed the Professor up to his sanctum, which was half study, half laboratory, and withal a very comfortable apartment. There was a bright wood-and-coal fire burning in the old-fashioned grate, and on either side of the hearth there was a nice, deep, cosy armchair.

“Now, Mr. Princeps,” said the Professor, when they were seated, “I am going to ask you to believe something which I dare say you will think impossible.”

“My dear sir, if you think it possible, that is quite enough for me,” replied Princeps. “What is it?”

The Professor took a long pull at his pipe, and then, turning his head so that his eyes met his guest's, he replied—

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

"It's a journey through the centre of the earth."

Arthur Princeps bit the amber of his pipe clean through, sat bolt upright, caught the pipe in his hand, spat the pieces of amber into the fireplace, and said—

"I beg your pardon, Professor—through the centre of the earth? That's rather a large order, isn't it? I've just been reading an article in one of the scientific papers which goes to show that the centre of the earth—the kernel of the terrestrial nut, as it were—is a rigid, solid body harder and denser than anything we know on the surface."

"Quite so, quite so," replied the Professor. "I have read the article myself, and I admit that the reasoning is sound as far as it goes but I don't think it goes quite far enough—I mean far enough back. However, I think I can show you what I mean in a much shorter time than I can tell you."

As he said this, he got up from his chair and went to a little cupboard in a big bureau which stood in a recess beside the fireplace. He took out a glass vessel about six inches in diameter and twelve in height, and placed it gently on a little table which stood between the easy-chairs.

Princeps glanced at it and saw that it was filled with a fluid which looked like water. Exactly half-way between the surface of the fluid and the bottom of the glass there was a spherical globule of a brownish-yellow colour, and about an inch in diameter. As the Professor set the glass on the table, the globule oscillated a little and then came to a rest. Princeps looked at it with a little lift of his eyelids, but said nothing. His host went back to the cupboard and took out a long, thin, steel needle with a little disc of thin white metal fixed about three inches from the end. He lowered it into the fluid in the glass and passed it through the middle of the globule, which broke as the disc passed into it, and then reshaped itself again in perfectly spherical form about it.

The Professor looked up and said, just as though he were repeating a portion of one of his lectures—

"This is a globule of coloured oil. It floats in a mixture of alcohol and water which is of exactly the same specific gravity as its own. It thus represents as nearly as possible the earth in its former molten condition, floating in space. The earth had then, as now, a rotary action on its own axis. This needle represents that axis. I give it a rotary motion, and you will see here what happened millions of years ago to the infant planet Terra."

As he said this, he began to twirl the needle swiftly but very steadily between the forefingers of his right and left hand. The globule flattened and spread out laterally until it became a ring, with the needle and the disc in the centre of it. Then the twirling slowed down. The ring became a globule again, but it was flattened at either pole, and there was a clearly defined circular hole through it from pole to pole. The Professor deftly withdrew the needle and disc through the opening, and the globule continued to revolve round the hole through its centre.

"That is what I mean," he said. "Of course, I needn't go into detail with you. There is the earth as I believe it to be today, with certain exceptions which you will readily see.

"The exterior crust has cooled. Inside that there is probably a semi-fluid sphere, and inside that again, possibly, the rigid body, the core of the earth. But I don't believe that that hole has been filled, simply because it must have been there to begin with. Granted also that the pull of gravitation is towards the centre, still, if there is a void from Pole to Pole, as I hold there must be, as a natural consequence of the centrifugal force generated by the earth's revolution, the mass of the earth would pull equally in all directions away from that void."

"I think I see," said Princeps, upon whom the astounding possibilities of this simple demonstration had been slowly breaking. "I see. Granted a passage like that from Pole to Pole—call it a tunnel—a body falling into it at one end would be drawn towards the centre. It would pass it at a tremendous velocity and be carried towards the other end; but as the attraction of the mass of the earth would be equal on all sides of it, it would take a perfectly direct course—I mean, it wouldn't smash itself to bits against the sides of the tunnel.

"The only difficulty that I see is that, suppose that the body were dropped into the tunnel at the North Pole, it wouldn't quite reach the South Pole. It would stop and turn back, and so it would oscillate like a pendulum with an ever-decreasing swing—until it finally came to rest in the middle of the tunnel—or, in other words, the centre of the earth."

"Exactly," said the Professor. "But would it not be possible for means to be taken to propel the projectile

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

beyond the attraction from the centre if those means were employed at the moment when the momentum of the body was being counteracted by the return pull towards the centre?"

"Perfectly feasible," said Princeps, "provided always that there were reasonable beings in the said projectile. Well, Professor, I think I understand you now. You believe that there is this tunnel, as we may call it, running through the earth from Pole to Pole, and you want to get to one of the Poles and make a journey through it.

"It's a gorgeous idea, I must confess. You've only got to tell me that you really think it possible, and I'm with you. If you like to undertake the details, you can draw on me up to a hundred thousand; and when you're ready, I'll go with you. Which Pole do you propose to start from?"

"The North Pole," said the Professor, quietly, as though he were uttering the merest commonplace, "although still undiscovered, is getting a little bit hackneyed. I propose that we shall start from the South Pole. It is very good of you to be so generous in the way of finances. Of course, you understand that you cannot hope for any monetary return, and it is also quite possible that we may both lose our lives."

"People who stick at small things never do great ones," replied Princeps. "As for the money, it doesn't matter. I have too much—more than anyone ought to have. Besides, we might find oceans of half-molten gold inside—who knows? Anyhow, when you're ready to start, I am."

II.

Nearly two months after this conversation had taken place, something else happened. The Professor's niece, the only blood-relation he had in the world, came back from Heidelberg with her degree of Doctor of Philosophy. She was "a daughter of the Gods, divinely tall and most divinely fair," as became one in whose veins ran both the Norse and the Anglo-Saxon blood. Certain former experiences had led Princeps to the opinion that she liked him exceedingly for himself, and disliked him almost as much for his money—a fact which somehow made the possession of millions seem very unprofitable in his eyes.

Brenda Haffkin happened to get back to London the day after everything had been arranged for the most amazing and seemingly impossible expedition that two human beings had ever decided to attempt.

The British Government and the Royal Geographical Society of London were sending out a couple of vessels—one a superannuated whaler, and the other a hopelessly obsolete cruiser, which had narrowly escaped experimental bombardment—to the frozen land of Antarctic. A splendid donation to the funds of the expedition had procured a passage in the cruiser for the adventurers and about ten tons of baggage, the ultimate use of which was little dreamt of by any other member of the expedition.

The great secret was broken to Brenda about a week before the starting of the expedition. Her uncle explained the theory of the project to her, and Arthur Princeps added the footnotes, as it were. Whatever she thought of it, she betrayed no sign either of belief or disbelief; but when the Professor had finished, she turned to Princeps and said very quietly, but with a most eloquent glow in those big, grey eyes into which he had often looked so longingly—

"And you are really going on this expedition, Mr. Princeps? You are going to run the risk of probable starvation and more than probable destruction; and, in addition to that, you must be spending a great deal of money to do it—you who have money enough to buy everything that the world can sell you?"

"What the world can sell, Miss Haffkin—or, in other words, what money can buy—has very little value beyond the necessaries of life. It is what money cannot buy, what the world has not got to sell, that is really precious. I suppose you know what I mean," he said, putting his hands into his pockets and turning to stare in an unmeaning way out of the window. "But I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to get back on to that old subject, I can assure you."

"And you really are going on this expedition?" she said, with a deliciously direct inconsequence which, in a beautiful Doctor of Philosophy, was quite irresistible.

"Of course I will. Why not? If we find that there really is a tunnel through the earth, and jump in at the South Pole and come out at the North, and take a series of electro-cinematograph photographs of the crust and core of the earth, we shall have done something that no one else has ever thought about. There ought to be some millions in it, too, besides the glory."

"And suppose you don't? Suppose this wonderful vessel of uncle's gets launched into this bottomless pit, and doesn't come out properly at the other end? Suppose your explosive just misses fire at the wrong moment, and when you've nearly reached the North Pole you go back again past the centre, and so on, and so on, until, perhaps, two or three centuries hence, your vessel comes to rest at the centre with a couple of skeletons inside it—what then?"

"We should take a medicine-chest with us, and I don't suppose we should wait for starvation."

"And so you seriously propose to stake your life and all your splendid prospects in the world on the bare chance of accomplishing, an almost impossibly fantastic achievement?"

"That's about what it comes to, I suppose. I don't really see how a man in my position could spend his money and risk his life much better."

There was a little silence after this, and then Brenda said, in a somewhat altered voice—

"If you really are going, I should like to come, too."

"You could only do that, Miss Haffkin, on one condition."

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“And that is—?”

“That you say 'Yes' now to a question you said 'No' to nine months ago. You can call it bribery or corruption, or whatever you like; but there it is. On the other hand, as I have quite made up my mind about this expedition, I might as well tell you that if I don't get back, you will hear of something to your advantage by calling on my lawyers.”

“I would rather go and work in a shop than do that!” she said. “Still, if you'll let me come with you, I will.”

“Then the 'No' is 'Yes'?” he said, taking a half turn towards her and catching hold of her hand.

“Yes,” she said, looking him frankly in the eyes. “You see, I didn't think you were in earnest about these things before; but now I see you are, and that makes you very different, you know, although you have such a horrible lot of money. Of course, it was my fault all the time, but still—”

She was in his arms by this time, and the discussion speedily reached a perfectly satisfactory, if partially inarticulate, conclusion.

III.

THE quiet wedding by special licence at St. Martin's, Gower Street, and the voyage from Southampton to Victoria Land, were very much like other weddings and other voyages; but when the whaler Australia and His Majesty's cruiser Beltona dropped their anchors under the smoke-shadow of Mount Terror, the mysterious cases were opened, and the officers and crew began to have grave suspicions as to the sanity of their passengers.

The cases were brought up on deck with the aid of the derricks, and then they got unpacked. The ships were lying about a hundred yards off a frozen, sandy beach. Back of this rose a sheer wall of ice about eighteen hundred feet high. On this side lay all that was known of Antarctica. On the other was the Unknown.

The greater part of the luggage was very heavy. Many and wild were the guesses as to what the contents of these cases could possibly be used for at the uttermost ends of the earth.

The Handy Men only saw insanity—or, at least, a hopelessly impracticable kind of method—in the unloading of those strange-looking stores. There were little cylinders of a curiously light metal, with screw-taps on either end of them—about two thousand of them. There were also queer “fitments” which, when they were landed, somehow erected themselves into sledges with cog-wheels alongside them. There were also little balloons, filled out of the taps of the cylinders, which went up attached to big kites of the quadrangular or box form. When the wind was sufficiently strong, and blowing in the right direction towards the Southern Pole, a combination of these kites took up Professor Haffkin and Mr. Arthur Princeps, and then, after a good many protestations, Mrs. Princeps. She, happening to get to the highest elevation, came down and reported that she had seen what no other Northernborn human being had ever seen.

She had looked over the great Ice Wall of the South, and from the summit of it she had seen nothing but an illimitable plain of snow prairies, here and there broken up by a few masses of icemountains, but, so far as she could see, intersected by snow valleys, smooth and hard frozen, stretching away beyond the limit of vision to the South.

“Nothing,” she said, “could have been better arranged, even if we had done it ourselves; and there is one thing quite certain—granted that that hole through the earth really exists, there oughtn't to be any difficulty in getting to the edge of it. The wind seems always blowing in the same direction, and with the sledges and the auxiliary balloons we ought to simply race along. It's only a little over twelve —iles, isn't it?”

“About that,” said the Professor, opening his eyes a little wider than usual. “And now that we have got our stores all landed, and, as far as we can provide, everything that can stand between us and destruction, we may as well say 'Good-bye' to our friends and world. If we ever get back again, it will be via the North Pole, after we have accomplished what the sceptics call the impossible.

“But, Brenda, dear, don't you think you had better go back?” said her husband, laying his hands on her shoulders. “Why should you risk your life and all its possibilities in such an adventure as this?”

“If you risk it,” she said, “I will. If you don't, I won't. You don't seem to have grasped the fact even yet that you and I are to all intents and purposes the same person. If you go, I go—through danger to death, or to glory such as human beings never won before. You asked me to choose, and that is what I have chosen. I will vanish with you into the Unknown, or I will come out with you at the North Pole in a blaze of glory that will make the Aurora Borealis itself look shabby. But whatever happens to you must happen to me as well, and the money in England must just take care of itself until we get back. That is all I have to say at present.”

“And I wouldn't like you to hear you say one syllable more. You've said just what I wanted you to say, just what I thought you would say, and that's about good enough for me. We go from South to North through the core of the earth, or stop and be smashed up somewhere midway or elsewhere, but we'll do it together. If the inevitable happens, I will kill you first and then myself. If we get through, you will be, in the eyes of all men, just what I think you are now, and—well, that's about enough said, isn't it?”

“Almost,” she said, “except—”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

And then, reading what was plainly written in her eyes, he caught her closer to him.

Their lips met and finished the sentence more meaningfully than any words could have done.

“I thought you'd say that,” he said afterwards.

“I don't think you'd have asked me to marry you if you hadn't thought it,” she said.

“No,” he said. “I wouldn't. It seems a bit brutal to say so, but really I wouldn't.”

“And if you hadn't asked like that,” she said, once more looking him straight in the eyes, “I should have said 'No,' just as I did before.”

She looked very tempting as she said this. He pulled her towards him; and as she turned her face up to his, he said—

“Has it ever struck you that there is infinitely more delight to a man in kissing lips which have once said 'No' to him, and then 'Yes,' than those which have only said 'Yes'?”

“What a very mean advantage to take of an unprotected female.”

A kiss ended the uncompleted sentence.

Then she began again—

“And when shall we start?”

“Seven to-morrow morning—that is to say, by our watches, not by the sun. Everything is on shore now, and we shouldn't make it later. I'm going to the Professor to help him up with the fixings, and I suppose you want to go into the tent and see after your domestic business. Good night for the present.”

“Good night, dear, for the present.”

And so was said the most momentous “Good night” that man and woman had ever said to each other since Adam kissed “Good night” to Eve in Eden.

IV.

The next day—that is to say, a period of twelve hours later, measured according to the chronometers of the expedition (for the pale sun was only describing a little arc across the northern horizon, not to sink below it for another three months or so)—the members of the Pole to Pole Expedition said “Good-bye” to the companions with whom they had journeyed across the world.

There was a strong, steady breeze blowing directly from the northward. The great box-kites were sent up, six of them in all, and along the fine piano-wire cables which held them, the lighter portions of the stores were sent on carriers driven by smaller kites.

Princepts and Brenda had gone up first in the carrier-slings. The Professor remained on the beach with the bluejackets from the cruiser, who, with huge delight and no little mystification, were giving a helping hand in the strangest job that even British sailors had ever helped to put through. Their remarks to each other formed a commentary on the expedition as original as it was terse and to the point. It had, however, the disadvantage of being mostly unprintable.

It was twelve hours later when the Professor, having shaken hands all round, a process which came to between three and four hundred handshakes, took his seat in the sling of the last kite and went soaring up over the summit of the ice wall. A hearty cheer from five hundred throats, and a rolling fire of blank cartridge from the cruiser, reverberated round the walls of everlasting ice which guarded the hitherto unpenetrated solitudes of Antarotica as the sling crossed the top of the wall, and a pull on the tilting-line bought the great kite slowly to the ground.

As the cable slackened, it was released from its moorings on the beach. A little engine, driven by liquid air, hauled it up on a drum. Three tiny figures appeared on the edge of the ice-cliff and waved their last adieus to the ships and the little crowd on the beach. Then they disappeared, and the last link between them and the rest of the world was cut, possibly—and, as every man of the Antarctic Expedition firmly believed, for ever.

The three members of the Pole to Pole Expedition bivouacked that night under a snow knoll, and after a good twelve hours' sleep they set to work on the preparations for the last stage but one of their marvellous voyage. There were four sledges. One of these formed what might be called the baggage-wagon. It carried the gas-cylinders, the greater part of the provisions, and the vehicle which was to convey the three adventurers from the South Pole to the North through the centre of the earth, provided always that the Professor's theory as to the existence of the transterrestrial tunnel proved to be correct. It was packed in sections, to be put together when the edge of the great hole was reached.

The sledge could be driven by two means. As long as the north-to-south wind held good, it was dragged over the smooth, snow-covered ice and land, which stretched away in an illimitable plain as far as the eye could reach from the top of the ice wall towards the horizon behind which lay the South Pole and, perhaps, the tunnel. It was also furnished with a liquid-air engine, which actuated four big, spiked wheels, two in front and two behind. These, when the wind failed, would grip the frozen snow or ice and drive the sledge runners over it at a maximum speed of twenty miles an hour. The engine could, of course, be used in conjunction with the kites when the wind was light.

The other three sledges were smaller, but similar in construction and means of propulsion. Each had its drawing-kites and liquid-air engine. One carried a reserve of provisions, balloons, and basket-cars, with a dozen gas cylinders. Another was loaded with the tents and cooking apparatus, and the third carried the three passengers, with their immediate personal belongings, which, among other oddments, included a spiritheater and a pair of curling tongs and hairwavers.

All the sledges were yoked together, the big one going first. Then came the passenger-car, and then the other two side by side. In case of accidents, there were contrivances which made it possible to cast any of the sledges loose at a moment's notice. The kites, if the wind got too high, could be emptied and brought down by means of tilting-lines.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

There was a fine twenty-mile breeze blowing when the kites were sent up after breakfast. The yoked sledges were held by lines attached by pegs driven deeply into the frozen snow. The kites reached an altitude of about a thousand feet, and the sledges began to lift and strain at the mooring-lines as though they were living things. The Professor and Princeps cut all the lines but one before they took their places in the sledge beside Brenda. Then Princeps gave her a knife and said:

“Now start us.”

She drew the keen edge backwards and forwards over the tautly stretched line. It parted with a springing jerk, and the next moment the wonderful caravan started forward with a jump which tilted them back into their seats.

The little snow hills began to slip away behind them. The tracks left by the spring-runners tailed swiftly away into the distance, converging as railway lines seem to do when you look down a long stretch of them. The keen, cold air bit hard on their flesh and soon forced them to protect their faces with the sealskin masks which let down from their helmets; but just before Brenda let hers down, she took a long breath of the icy air and said—

“Ah! That's just like drinking iced champagne. Isn't this glorious?” Then she gasped, dropped her mask over her face, put one arm through her husband's and one through her uncle's, pulled them close to her, and from that moment she became all eyes, looking through the crystal plate in her mask at the strange, swiftly moving landscape and the great box-kites, high up in the air, dull white against the dim blue sky, which were dragging them so swiftly and so easily towards the Unknown and, perhaps, towards the impossible.

V.

The expedition had been travelling for little more than six days, and so far the — had been quite uneventful. The pale sun had swung six times round its oblique course without any intervention of darkness to break the seemingly endless polar day. At first they had travelled seventeen hours without halting. None of them could think of sleep amidst such novel surroundings, but the next day they were content with twelve, and this was agreed on as a day's —.

They soon found that either their good fortune had given them a marvellously easy route, or else that the Antarctic continent was strangely different from the Arctic. Hour after hour their sledges, resting on rubber springs, spun swiftly over the undulating fields of snow-covered ice with scarcely a jog or a jar—in fact, as Brenda said at the end of the —, it was more like a twelve-hundred-mile switchback ride than a polar expedition.

So they travelled and slept and ate. Eight hours for sleep two hours evening and morning for pitching and striking tents, supper and breakfast, and the stretching of limbs, and twelve hours' travel.

Lunch was eaten en route, because the lowering of the kites and the mooring of the sledges were a matter of considerable labour, and they naturally wanted to make the most of the wind while it lasted.

Every day, as the sun reached the highest point of its curved course along the horizon, the Professor took his latitude. Longitude, of course, there was practically none to take, since every day's travel took them so many hundred miles along the converging meridians, and east and west, with every mile they made, came nearer and nearer together.

On the seventh morning the kites were all lowered, taken to pieces, and packed up, with the exception of one which drew the big sledge.

They had calculated that they were now within about a hundred miles of the Pole—that is to say, the actual end of the earth's axis—and, according to the Professor's calculations (granted that the Pole to Pole tunnel existed) it would be about a hundred miles in diameter. At the same time, it might be a good deal more, and, therefore, it was not considered advisable to approach what would literally be the end of the earth at a speed of twenty miles an hour, driven by the strong, steady breeze which had remained with them from the top of the ice wall. So the liquidair engines were set to work, the spiked wheels bit into the hard-frozen snow, and the sledges, following the big one, and helped to a certain extent by its kite, began to move forward at about eight miles an hour.

The landscape did not alter materially as they approached the polar confines. On all sides was a vast plain of ice crossed in a generally southerly direction by long, broad snow lanes. Here and there were low hills, mostly rounded domes of snow; but these were few and far between, and presented no obstacles to their progress.

A little before lunch time the ground began to slope suddenly away to the southward to such an extent that the kite was hauled in, and the spiked wheels had to be used to check the increasing speed of the sledges. On either hand the slope extended in a perfectly uniform fashion, and after a descent of about an hour, they could see a vast curved ridge of snow stretching to right and to left behind them which shut out the almost level rays of the pale sun so that the semi-twilight in which they had been travelling was rapidly deepening into dusk.

What was it? Were they descending into a vast polar depression, to the shores of such an open sea as had often been imagined by geographers and explorers, or were they in truth descending towards the edge of the Arctic tunnel itself?

“I wonder which it is?” said Brenda, sipping her midday coffee. “Don't you think we'd better stop soon and do a little snowshoeing? I, for one, should object to beginning the — by falling over the edge. Ugh! Fancy a fall of seven thousand miles into nowhere! And then falling back again another seven thousand miles, and so for ever and ever, until your flesh crumbled off your bones and at last your skeleton came to a standstill exactly at the centre of the earth!”

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Not at all a pleasant prospect, I admit, my dear Brenda,” said the Professor; “but, after all, I don’t think you would be hurt much. You see, you would be dead in a very few seconds, and then think of the glory of having the whole world for your tomb.”

“I don’t like the idea,” she replied. “A commonplace crematorium and a crystal urn afterwards will satisfy me completely. But don’t you think we’d better stop and explore?”

“I certainly think Brenda’s right,” said Princeps. “If the tunnel is there, and the big sledge dragged us over into it—well, we needn’t talk about that. I think we’d better do a little exploring, as she says.”

The sledges were stopped, and the tilting—line of the great kite pulled so as to empty it of wind. It came gently to the earth, and then, rather to their surprise, disappeared completely.

“By Jove!” said Princeps. “I shouldn’t be surprised if the tunnel is there, and the kite has fallen in. Brenda, I think it’s just as well you spoke when you did. Fancy tobogganing into a hole like that at ten or fifteen miles an hour!”

“If that is the case,” said the Professor, quietly ignoring the hideous suggestion, “the Axial Tunnel must be rather larger than I expected. I did not expect to arrive at the edge till late this afternoon.”

When the sledges were stopped, they put on their snowshoes and followed the line of the kite—cable for about a mile and a half until they came to the edge of what appeared to be an ice—cliff. The cable hung over this, hanging down into a dusk which quickly deepened into utter darkness. They hauled upon it and found that there were only a few yards over the cliff, and presently they landed the great kite.

“I wonder if it really is the tunnel?” said Brenda, taking a step forward.

“Whatever it is, it’s too deep for you to fall into with any comfort,” said her husband, dragging her back almost roughly.

Almost at the same moment a mass of ice and snow on which they had been standing a few minutes before, hauling up the cable of the kite, broke away and disappeared into the void. They listened with all their ears, but no sound came back. The huge block had vanished in silence into nothingness, into a void which apparently had no bottom; for even if it had fallen a thousand feet, an echo would have come back to them up the wall.

“It is the tunnel,” said Brenda, after a few moments’ silence, during which they looked at each other with something like awe in their eyes. “Thank you, Arthur, I don’t think I should have liked to have gone down, too. But, Uncle,” she went on, “if this is the tunnel, and that thing has gone on before us, won’t it stop and come back when it gets near the North Pole? Suppose we were to meet it after we have passed the the centre. A collision just there wouldn’t be very pleasant, would it?”

“My dear Brenda,” he replied, “there is really no fear of anything of that sort. You see, there is atmosphere in the tunnel, and long before it reached the centre, friction will have melted the ice and dissipated the water into vapour.”

“Of course. How silly of me not to have thought of that before! I suppose a piece of iron thrown over there would be melted to vapour, just as the meteorites are. Well now, if we’ve found the tunnel, hadn’t we better go back and get ready to go through it?”

“We shall have to wait for the moon, I suppose,” said Princeps, as they turned away towards the sledges.

“Yes,” said the Professor. “We shall have plenty of moonlight to work by in about fifty—six hours. Meanwhile we can take a rest and do as Brenda says.”

It was just fifty hours later when the moon, almost at the full, rose over the eastern edge of the snow wall, casting a flood of white light over the dim, ghostly land of the World’s End. As it rose higher and higher, they saw that the sloping plain ended in a vast semicircle of cliff, beyond which there was nothing. They went down towards it and looked beyond and across, but the curving ice walls reached away on either hand until they were lost in the distance. They were standing literally on the end of the earth. No sound of water or of volcanic action came up out of the void. They brought down a couple of rockets and fired them from the edge at a downward angle of sixty degrees. The trail of sparks spread out with inconceivable rapidity, and then, when the rockets burst, two tiny blue stars shone out, apparently as far below them as the stars of heaven were above them.

“I don’t think there’s very much doubt about that,” said the Professor. “We have found the Axial Tunnel: but, after all, if it is only a very deep depression, our balloons can take us out of it after we have touched the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

bottom. Still, personally, I believe it to be the tunnel.”

“Oh, it must be!” said Brenda decisively. And so, in fact, it proved to be.

As the moon grew rounder and brighter, the work of preparation for the last stage of their amazing enterprise grew apace. Everything had, of course, been thought out to the minutest detail, and the transformation which came over their impedimenta was little short of magical.

The sledges dissolved into their component parts, and these came together again in the form of a big, conical, drum-like structure, with walls of thick papier mache. It had four long plate-glass windows in the sides and a large round one top and bottom. It was ten feet in diameter and fifteen in height. The interior was plainly but snugly fitted up as a sitting-room by day and, by means of a movable partition, a couple of sleeping berths by night.

The food and water were stowed away in cupboards and tanks underneath the seats, and the gas-cylinders, rockets, etc., were packed under the flooring, which had a round trap-door in the centre over the window.

The liquid-air engines and the driving apparatus of the sledges were strongly secured to the lower end with chains which, in case of emergency, could be easily released by means of slip-hooks operated from inside. There were also two hundred pounds of shotballast underneath the flooring.

Attached to the upper part of the structure were four balloons, capable at their full capacity of easily lifting it with its whole load on board. These were connected by tubes with the interior, and thus, by means of pumps worked by a small liquid-air engine, the gas from the cylinders could either be driven up into them or drawn down and re-stored. In the centre of the roof was another cable, longer than those which held the balloons, and to this was attached a large parachute which could be opened or shut at will from inside.

VI.

When the moment chosen for departure came, there remained no possible doubt as to the correctness of the Professor's hypothesis. The sun was dipping below the horizon and the long polar night was beginning. The full moon shone down from the zenith through a cloudless, mistless atmosphere. The sloping snowfield and the curved edge of the Axial Tunnel were brilliantly illuminated. They could see for miles along the ice-cliffs, far enough to make certain that they were part of a circle so vast that anything like an exact calculation of its circumference was impossible.

The breeze was still straight to the southward, to the centre of the tunnel. The balloons were inflated until the Brenda—as the strange vehicle had been named by a majority of two to one—began to pull at the ropes which held her down. Then, with a last look round at the inhospitable land they were leaving—perchance never to see land of any sort again—they went in through the curved sliding door to windward. Princeps started the engine, the balloons began to fill out, and three of the four mooring-ropes were cast off as the Brenda began to rock and swing like the car of a captive balloon.

“Once more,” said Princeps, giving his wife the knife with which she had cut the sledges loose.

“And this time for good—or the North Pole—or—well, at any rate, this is the stroke of Fate.”

She gave her left hand to her husband, knelt down on the threshold of the door, and made a sideward slash at the slender rope which was fastened just under it. The strands ripped and parted, the Brenda rocked twice or thrice and became motionless. The ice-cliffs slipped away from under them, the vast, unfathomed, and fathomless gulf spread out beneath them, and the voyage, either from Pole to Pole or from Time to Eternity, had begun.

The Professor, who was naturally in command, allowed the Brenda to drift for two and a half hours at a carefully calculated wind-speed of twenty miles all hour. The he said to Princeps—

“You can deflate the balloons now, I think. We must be near the centre. I will see to the parachute.”

They had been thinking and talking of this —, with all its apparent impossibilities and terrific risks, until they had become almost commonplace to them. But for all that, they looked at each other as they had never done before, as the Professor gave the fateful order. Even his lips tightened and his brows came together a little as he turned to cast loose the fine wire cables which held the ribs of the parachute.

The powerful little engine got to work, and the gas from the balloons hissed back into the cylinders. Then the envelopes were hauled in and stowed away. Through the side windows, Brenda saw a dim, far-away horizon rise up all round, and through the top window and the circular hole in the parachute, she saw the full disc of the moon growing smaller and smaller, and so she knew that they had begun their fall of 41,708,711 feet.

Taking this at 7,000 miles, in round numbers, the Professor, reckoning on an average speed of fifty to sixty miles an hour, expected to make the passage from Pole to Pole in about six days, granted always that the tunnel was clear all through. If it wasn't, their fates were on the knees of the Gods, and there was nothing more to say. As events proved, they made it in a good deal less.

For the first thirty-six hours everything went with perfect smoothness. The wind-gauges at each side showed a speed of fifty-one miles an hour, and the Brenda continued her fall with perfect steadiness.

Suddenly, just as they were about to say “Good night” for the second time, they heard a sharp snapping and rending sound break through the smooth swish of the air past the outer wall of their vehicle. The next instant it rocked violently from side to side, and the indicators of the gauges began to fly round into invisibility.

“Heavens, Uncle! what has happened?” gasped Brenda, clinging to the seat into which she had been slung.

“It can only be one thing,” replied the Professor, steadying himself against the opposite wall. “Some of the stays have given way, and the parachute has split or broken up. God forgive me! Why did I not think of that before?”

“Of what?” said Princeps, dropping into the seat beside Brenda and putting his arm round her.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“The increasing pull of gravitation as we get nearer to the earth's centre. I calculated for a uniform pull only. They must have been bearing a tremendous strain before they parted.”

While he was speaking, the vehicle had become steady again. The wind-gauges whirled till the spindles screeched and smoked in their sockets. The rush of the wind past the outside wall deepened to a roar and then rose to a shrill, whistling scream.

Long, uncounted minutes of sheer speechless, thoughtless terror passed. The inside air grew hot and stifling. Even the unflammable walls began to crinkle and crack under the fearful heat developed by the friction of the rushing air.

Brenda gasped two or three times for breath, and then, slipping out of her husband's arms, fell fainting in a heap on the floor. Mechanically both he and the Professor stooped to lift her up. To their amazement, the effort they made to do so threw her unconscious form nearly to the top of the conical roof. She floated in mid-air for a moment and then sank gently back into their arms.

“The centre of the earth!” gasped the Professor. “The point of equal attraction! If we can breathe for the next hour, we have a chance. Quick, Arthur, give us more air! The evaporation will reduce the temperature.”

Even in such an awful moment as this, Professor Haffkin could not quite forget his scientific phraseology.

He laid Brenda, still weighing only a few pounds, on one of the seats and went to the liqueur-case for some brandy. Princeps meanwhile turned the tap of a spare cylinder lying beside the air-engine which drove the little electric-light installation. The sudden conversion of the liquid atmosphere into the gaseous form brought the temperature down with a rush, and—as they thought afterwards, with a shudder—probably prevented all the cylinders from exploding.

The brandy and the sudden coolness immediately revived Brenda, and after the two men had taken a stiff glass to steady their shaken-up nerves, they sat down and began to consider their position as calmly as might be.

They had passed the centre of the earth at an enormous but unknown velocity, and they were, therefore, endowed with a momentum which would certainly carry them far towards the northern end of the Axial Tunnel; but how far, it was impossible to say, since they did not know their speed.

But, however great the speed, it was diminishing every second, and a time must come when it would be nil—and then the backward fall would begin. If they could not prevent this, they might as well put an end to everything at once.

Hours passed; uncounted, but in hard thinking, mingled with dumb apprehension.

The rush of the wind outside began to slacken at last, and when Princeps at length managed to fit another wind-gauge in place of the one that had been smashed to atoms, it registered a little over two hundred miles an hour.

“Our only chance, as far as I can see,” said the Professor at length, looking up from a writing-pad on which he had been making pages of calculations, “is this. We must watch that indicator; and when the speed drops, say, to ten miles an hour, we must inflate our balloons to the utmost, cut loose the engines and other gear, and trust to the gas to pull us out.”

There was literally nothing else to be done, and so for the present they sat and watched the indicator, and, by the way of killing the weary hours, counted the possibilities and probabilities of their return to the civilised world should the Brenda's balloons succeed in lifting her out of the northern end of the Axial Tunnel.

Hour by hour the speed dropped. The fatal pull, which, unless the balloons were able to counteract it, would drag them back with a hand resistless as that of Fate itself, had got them in its grip. Somewhere, an unknown number of miles above them, were the solitudes of the Northern Pole, from which they might not get away even if they reached them. Below was the awful gulf through which they had already passed, and to fall back into that meant a fate so terrible that Brenda had already made her husband promise to shoot her, should the balloons fail to do their work.

The Professor passed most of his time in elaborate calculations, the object of which was the ascertaining, as nearly as possible, their distance from the centre of the earth, and, therefore, the number of miles which they would have to rise to reach the outer air again. There were other calculations which had relation to the lifting power of the balloons, the weight of the car and its occupants, and the amount of gas at their disposal, not only for the ascent to the Pole, but also for their flight southward, if happily they found favourable winds

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

to carry them back to the confines of civilisation. These he kept to himself. He had the best of reasons for doing so.

The hours went by, and the speed shown by the indicator dropped steadily. A hundred miles an hour had become fifty fifty became forty, then thirty, twenty, ten.

"I think you can get your balloons out now, Arthur," said the Professor. "It's a very good thing we housed them in time, or they would have been torn to ribbons by this. If you'll cast them loose, I'll see to the gas apparatus. Meanwhile, Brenda, you may as well get dinner ready."

Within an hour the four balloons were cast loose through their portholes in the roof of the car and attached to their cables and supply pipes. Meanwhile the upward speed of the Brenda had dropped from ten to seven miles. The gas-cylinders were connected with the transmitters and apparatus which allowed the gas to return to a normal temperature before passing into the envelopes, and then the balloons began to fill.

For a few moments the indicator stopped and trembled as the cables tightened, then it went forward again. They saw that it was registering six and a half miles an hour. This rose to seven, eight, and nine. Presently it passed ten.

"We shall do it, after all," said Princeps. "You see, we're going faster every minute. I wonder what the reason of that check was?"

"Probably the increased atmospheric friction on the surface of the balloons," replied the Professor quietly, with his eyes fixed on the dial.

The indicator stopped again at ten, and then the little blue, steel hand, which to them was veritably the Hand of Fate, began to creep slowly backwards.

None of them spoke. They all knew what it meant. The upward pull of the balloons was not counteracting the downward pull exerted from the centre of the earth. In a few hours more they would come to a standstill, and then, when the two forces balanced, they would hang motionless in that awful gulf of everlasting night until the gas gave out, and then the backward plunge to perdition would begin.

"I don't like the look of that," said Princeps, keeping his voice as steady as he could. "Hadn't we better let the engines go?"

"I think we ought to throw away everything that we can do without," said Brenda, staring at the fateful dial with fixed, wide-open eyes. "What's the use of anything if we never get to the top of this horrible hole?"

"That's rather a disrespectful way in which to speak of the Axial Tunnel of the earth, Brenda," said the Professor, with the flicker of a smile. "But we won't get rid of the impedimenta just yet." He went on, "You see, as the mathematicians say, velocity is momentum multiplied into mass. Therefore, if we decrease our mass, we shall decrease our momentum. The engines and the other things are really helping us along now, though it doesn't seem so. When the indicator has nearly stopped, it will be time to cut the weight loose."

Then they had dinner, eaten with a mere pretence of appetite, assisted by a bottle of "Pol Roger '89." The speed continued to drop steadily during the night, though Princeps satisfied himself that the balloons were filled to the utmost limit consistent with safety, and at last, towards the middle of the conventional night, it hovered between one and zero.

"I think you may let the engines go now, Arthur," said the Professor, "It's quite evident that we're overweighted. Slip the hooks, and then go up and see if your balloons will stand any more."

He said this in a whisper, because Brenda, utterly worn out, had gone to lie down behind the partition.

The hooks were slipped, and the hand on the dial began to move again as the Brenda, released from about six hundred pounds' weight, began to ascend again. But the speed only rose to fifteen miles an hour, and that was eight miles short of the result the Professor had arrived at. The attractive force was evidently being exerted from the sides of the tunnel as well as from the centre of the earth. He looked at the dial and said to Princeps—

"I think you'd better go and lie down now. It's my watch on deck. We're doing nicely now. I want to run through my figures again."

"All right," said Princeps, yawning and shaking hands. "You'll call me in four hours, as usual, won't you?"

Professor Haffkin nodded and said: "Good night. I hope we shall be through our difficulties by the morning. Good night, Arthur."

He got out his papers again and once more went minutely through the maze of figures and formulae with

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

which the sheets were covered. Then, when the sound of slow, deep breathing told him that Princeps was asleep, he opened the trap-door in the floor and counted the unexhausted cylinders of gas. When he had finished, he said to himself in a whisper—

“Barely enough to get them home, even with the best of luck; but still enough to prove that it is possible to make a journey through the centre of the earth from Pole to Pole. At least, that will be done and proved—and Karl Haffkin will live for ever.”

There was the light of martyrdom in his eyes as he looked for the last time at the dial. Then he unscrewed the circular window from the bottom of the car, lowered himself through it, hung for a moment to the edge with his hands, and let go.

When Princeps and Brenda woke after several hours' sleep, they were astonished to find the windows of the car glowing with a strange, brilliant light—the light of the Northern Aurora. Princeps got out, saying: “Hurrah, Professor! we've got there! Daylight at last!”

But there was no Professor, and only the open trap-door and the window hanging on its hinges below told how an almost priceless life had been heroically sacrificed to make the way of life longer for two who had only just begun to tread it together through the golden gates of the Garden of Love.

But Karl Haffkin's martyrdom meant even more than this. Without it, the great experiment must have failed, and three lives would have been lost instead of one; and so he chose to die the lesser death so that his comrades on that marvellous voyage might live out their own lives to Nature's limit, and that he himself might live for ever on the roll of honour which is emblazoned with the names of the noblest of all martyrs—those who have given their lives to prove that Truth is true.

THE END

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

A Corner In Lightning

I.

They had been dining for once in a way tête-à-tête, and she—that is to say, Mrs. Sidney Calvert, a bride of eighteen months' standing—was half lying, half sitting in the depths of a big, cosy, saddle-bag armchair on one side of a bright fire of mixed wood and coal that was burning in one of the most improved imitations of the mediaeval fireplace. Her feet—very pretty little feet they were, too, and very daintily shod—were crossed, and poised on the heel of the right one at the corner of the black marble curb.

Dinner was over. The coffee service and the liqueur case were on the table, and Mr. Sidney Calvert, a well set-up young fellow of about thirty, with a handsome, good-humoured face which a close observer would have found curiously marred by a chilly glitter in the eyes and a hardness that was something more than firmness about the mouth, was walking up and down on the opposite side of the table smoking a cigarette.

Mrs. Calvert had just emptied her coffee cup, and as she put it down on a little three-legged console table by her side, she looked round at her husband and said:

“Really, Sid, I must say that I can't see why you should do it. Of course it's a very splendid scheme and all that sort of thing, but, surely you, one of the richest men in London, are rich enough to do without it. I'm sure it's wrong, too. What should we think if somebody managed to bottle up the atmosphere and made us pay for every breath we drew? Besides, there must surely be a good deal of risk in deliberately disturbing the economy of Nature in such a way. How are you going to get to the Pole, too, to put up your works?”

“Well,” he said, stopping for a moment in his walk and looking thoughtfully at the lighted end of his cigarette, “in the first place, as to the geography, I must remind you that the Magnetic Pole is not the North Pole. It is in Boothia Land, British North America, some 1500 miles south of the North Pole. Then, as to the risk, of course one can't do big things like this without taking a certain amount of it; but still, I think it will be mostly other people that will have to take it in this case.

“Their risk, you see, will come in when they find that cables and telephones and telegraphs won't work, and that no amount of steam-engine grinding can get up a respectable amount of electric light—when in short, all the electric plant of the world loses its value, and can't be set going without buying supplies from the Magnetic Polar Storage Company, or, in other words, from your humble servant and the few friends that he will be graciously pleased to let in on the ground floor. But that is a risk that they can easily overcome by just paying for it. Besides, there's no reason why we shouldn't improve the quality of the commodity. 'Our Extra Special Refined Lightning!' 'Our Triple Concentrated Essence of Electric Fluid' and 'Competent Thunder-Storms delivered at the Shortest Notice' would look very nice in advertisements, wouldn't they?”

“Don't you think that's rather a frivolous way of talking about a scheme which might end in ruining one of the most important industries in the world?” she said, laughing in spite of herself at the idea of delivering thunder-storms like pounds of butter or skeins of Berlin wool.

“Well, I'm afraid I can't argue that point with you because, you see, you will keep looking at me while you talk, and that isn't fair. Anyhow I'm equally sure that it would be quite impossible to run any business and make money out of it on the lines of the Sermon on the Mount. But, come, here's a convenient digression for both of us. That's the Professor, I expect.”

“Shall I go?” she said, taking her feet off the fender.

“Certainly not, unless you wish to,” he said; “or unless you think the scientific details are going to bore you.”

“Oh, no, they won't do that,” she said. “The Professor has such a perfectly charming way of putting them; and, besides, I want to know all that I can about it.”

“Professor Kenyon, sir.”

“Ah, good evening, Professor! So sorry you could not come to dinner.” They both said this almost simultaneously as the man of science walked in.

“My wife and I were just discussing the ethics of this storage scheme when you came in,” he went on.

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Have you anything fresh to tell us about the practical aspects of it? I'm afraid she doesn't altogether approve of it, but as she is very anxious to hear all about it, I thought you wouldn't mind her making one of the audience.”

“On the contrary, I shall be delighted,” replied the Professor; “the more so as it will give me a sympathiser.”

“I'm very glad to hear it,” said Mrs. Calvert approvingly. “I think it will be a very wicked scheme if it succeeds, and a very foolish and expensive one if it fails.”

“After which there is of course nothing more to be said,” laughed her husband, “except for the Professor to give his dispassionate opinion.”

“Oh, it shall be dispassionate, I can assure you,” he replied, noticing a little emphasis on the word. “The ethics of the matter are no business of mine, nor have I anything to do with its commercial bearings. You have asked me merely to look at technical possibilities and scientific probabilities, and of course I don't propose to go beyond these.”

He took another sip at a cup of coffee that Mrs. Calvert had handed him, and went on:

“I've had a long talk with Markovitch this afternoon, and I must confess that I never met a more ingenious man or one who knew as much about magnetism and electricity as he does. His theory that they are the celestial and terrestrial manifestations of the same force, and that what is popularly called electric fluid is developed only at the stage where they become one, is itself quite a stroke of genius, or, at least, it will be if the theory stands the test of experience. His idea of locating the storage works over the Magnetic Pole of the earth is another, and I am bound to confess that, after a very careful examination of his plans and designs, I am distinctly of opinion that, subject to one or two reservations, he will be able to do what he contemplates.”

“And the reservations what are they?” asked Culvert a trifle eagerly.

“The first is one that it is absolutely necessary to make with regard to all untried schemes, and especially to such a gigantic one as this. Nature, you know, has a way of playing most unexpected pranks with people who take liberties with her. Just at the last moment, when you are on the verge of success, something that you confidently expect to happen doesn't happen, and there you are left in the lurch. It is utterly impossible to foresee anything of this kind, but you must clearly understand that if such a thing did happen it would ruin the enterprise just when you have spent the greatest part of the money on it—that is to say, at the end and not at the beginning.”

“All right,” said Calvert, “we'll take that risk. Now, what's the other reservation?”

“I was going to say something about the immense cost, but that I presume you are prepared for.”

Calvert nodded, and he went on:

“Well, that point being disposed of, it remains to be said that it may be very dangerous—I mean to those who live on the spot, and will be actually engaged in the work.”

“Then, I hope you won't think of going near the place, Sid!” interrupted Mrs. Calvert, with a very pretty assumption of wifely authority.

“We'll see about that later, little woman. It's early days yet to get frightened about possibilities. Well, Professor, what was it you were going to say? Any more warnings?”

The Professor's manner stiffened a little as he replied:

“Yes, it is a warning, Mr. Calvert. The fact is I feel bound to tell you that you propose to interfere very seriously with the distribution of one of the subtlest and least-known forces of Nature, and that the consequences of such an interference might be most disastrous, not only for those engaged in the work, but even the whole hemisphere, and possibly the whole planet.

“On the other hand, I think it is only fair to say that nothing more than a temporary disturbance may take place. You may, for instance, give us a series of very violent thunderstorms, with very heavy rains; or you may abolish thunderstorms and rain altogether until you get to work. Both prospects are within the bounds of possibility, and, at the same time, neither may come to anything.”

“Well, I think that quite good enough to gamble on, Professor,” said Calvert, who was thoroughly fascinated by the grandeur and magnitude, to say nothing of the dazzling financial aspects of the scheme. “I am very much obliged to you for putting it so clearly and nicely. Unless something very unexpected happens, we shall get to work on it at once. Just fancy what a glorious thing it will be to play Jove to the nations of the

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

earth, and dole out lightning to them at so much a flash!”

“Well, I don't want to be ill-natured,” said Mrs. Calvert, “but I must say that I hope the unexpected will happen. I think the whole thing is very wrong to begin with, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if you blew us all up, or struck us all dead with lightning, or even brought on the Day of judgment before its time. I think I shall go to Australia while you're doing it.”

II.

A little more than a year had passed since this after-dinner conversation in the diningroom of Mr. Sidney Calvert's London house. During that time the preparations for the great experiment had been swiftly but secretly carried out. Ship after ship loaded with machinery, fuel, and provisions, and carrying labourers and artificers to the number of some hundreds, had sailed away into the Atlantic, and had come back in ballast and with bare working crews on board of them. Mr. Calvert himself had disappeared and reappeared two or three times, and on his return he had neither admitted nor denied any of the various rumours which gradually got into circulation in the City and in the Press.

Some said that it was an expedition to the Pole, and that the machinery consisted partly of improved ice-breakers and newly-invented steam sledges, which were to attack the ice-hummocks after the fashion of battering rams, and so gradually smooth a road to the Pole. To these little details others added flying machines and navigable balloons. Others again declared that the object was to plough out the North-West passage and keep a waterway clear from Hudson's Bay to the Pacific all the year round, and yet others, somewhat less imaginative, pinned their faith to the founding of a great astronomical and meteorological observatory at the nearest possible point to the Pole, one of the objects of which was to be the determination of the true nature of the Aurora Borealis and the Zodiacal Light.

It was this last hypothesis that Mr. Calvert favoured as far as he could be said to favour any. There was a vagueness, and, at the same time, a distinction about a great scientific expedition which made it possible for him to give a sort of qualified countenance to the rumours without committing himself to anything, but so well had all his precautions been taken that not even a suspicion of the true object of the expedition to Boothia Land had got outside the little circle of those who were in his confidence.

So far everything had gone as Orloff Markovitch, the Russian Pole to whose extraordinary genius the inception and working out of the gigantic project were due, had expected and predicted. He himself was in supreme control of the unique and costly works which had grown up under his constant supervision on that lonely and desolate spot in the far North where the magnetic needle points straight down to the centre of the planet.

Professor Kenyon had paid a couple of visits with Calvert, once at the beginning of the work and once when it was nearing completion. So far not the slightest hitch or accident had occurred, and nothing abnormal had been noticed in connection with the earth's electrical phenomena save unusually frequent appearances of the Aurora Borealis, and a singular decrease in the deviation of the mariner's compass. Nevertheless, the Professor had firmly but politely refused to remain until the gigantic apparatus was set to work, and Calvert, too, had, with extreme reluctance, yielded to his wife's intreaties, and had come back to England about a month before the initial experiment was to be begun.

The twentieth of March, which was the day fixed for the commencement of operations, came and went, to Mrs. Calvert's intense relief, without anything out of the common happening. Though she knew that over a hundred thousand pounds of her husband's money had been sunk, she found it impossible not to feel a thrill of satisfaction in the hope that Markovitch had made his experiment and failed.

She knew that the great Calvert Company, which was practically himself, could very well afford it, and she would not have regretted the loss of three times the sum in exchange for the knowledge that Nature was to be allowed to dispose of her electrical forces as seemed good to her. As for her husband, he went about his business as usual, only displaying slight signs of suppressed excitement and anticipation now and then, as the weeks went by and nothing happened.

She had not carried out her threat of going to Australia. She had, however, escaped from the rigours of the English spring to a villa near Nice, where she was awaiting the arrival of her second baby, an event which she had found very useful in persuading her husband to stop away from the Magnetic Pole. Calvert himself was so busy with what might be called the home details of the scheme that he had to spend the greater part of his time

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

in London, and could only run over to Nice now and then.

It so happened that Miss Calvert put in an appearance a few days before she was expected, and therefore while her father was still in London. Her mother very naturally sent her maid with a telegram to inform him of the fact and ask him to come over at once. In about half-an-hour the maid came back with the form in her hand bringing a message from the telegraph office that, in consequence of some extraordinary accident, the wires had almost ceased to work properly and that no messages could be got through distinctly.

In the rapture of her new motherhood Kate Calvert had forgotten all about the great Storage Scheme, so she sent the maid back again with the request that the message should be sent off as soon as possible. Two hours later she sent again to ask if it had gone, and the reply came back that the wires had ceased working altogether and that no electrical communication by telegraph or telephone was for the present possible.

Then a terrible fear came to her. The experiment had been a success after all, and Markovitch's mysterious engines had been all this time imperceptibly draining the earth of its electric fluid and storing it up in the vast accumulators which would only yield it back again at the bidding of the Trust which was controlled by her husband! Still she was a sensible little woman, and after the first shock she managed, for her baby's sake, to put the fear out of her mind, at any rate until her husband came. He would be with her in a day or two, and, perhaps, after all, it was only some strange but perfectly natural occurrence which Nature herself would set right in a few hours.

When it got dusk that night, and the electric lights were turned on, it was noticed that they gave an unusually dim and wavering light. The engines were worked to their highest power, and the lines were carefully examined. Nothing could be found wrong with them, but the lights refused to behave as usual, and the most extraordinary feature of the phenomenon was that exactly the same thing was happening in all the electrically lighted cities and towns in the northern hemisphere. By midnight, too, telegraphic and telephonic communication north of the Equator had practically ceased, and the electricians of Europe and America were at their wits' ends to discover any reason for this unheard of disaster, for such in sober truth it would be unless the apparently suspended force quickly resumed action on its own account. The next morning it was found that, so far as all the marvels of electrical science were concerned, the world had gone back a hundred years.

Then people began to awake to the magnitude of the catastrophe that had befallen the world. Civilised mankind had been suddenly deprived of the services of an obedient slave which it had come to look upon as indispensable.

But there was something even more serious than this to come. Observers in various parts of the hemisphere remembered that there hadn't been a thunder-storm anywhere for some weeks. Even the regions most frequently visited by them had had none. A most remarkable drought had also set in almost universally. A strange sickness, beginning with physical lassitude and depression of spirits which confounded the best medical science of the world was manifesting itself far and wide, and rapidly assuming the proportions of a gigantic epidemic.

In the physical world, too, metals were found to be afflicted with the same incomprehensible disease. Machinery of all sorts got "sick," to use a technical expression, and absolutely refused to act, and forges and foundries everywhere came to a standstill for the simple reason that metals seemed to have lost their best properties, and could no longer be utilised as they had been. Railway accidents and breakdowns on steamers, too, became matters of every day occurrence, for metals and driving wheels, piston rods and propeller shafts, had acquired an incomprehensible brittleness which only began to be understood when it was discovered that the electrical properties which iron and steel had formerly possessed had almost entirely disappeared.

So far Calvert had not wavered in his determination to make, as he thought, a colossal amount of money by his usurpation of one of the functions of Nature. To him the calamities which, it must be confessed, he had deliberately brought upon the world were only so many arguments for the ultimate success of the stupendous scheme. They were proof positive to the world, or at least they very soon would be, that the Calvert Storage Trust really did control the electricity of the Northern Hemisphere. From the Southern nothing had yet been heard beyond the news that the cables had ceased working.

Hence, as soon as he had demonstrated his power to restore matters to their normal condition, it was obvious that the world would have to pay his price under penalty of having the supply cut off again.

It was now getting towards the end of May. On the 1st of June, according to arrangement, Markovitch

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

would stop his engines and permit the vast accumulation of electric fluid in his storage batteries to flow back into its accustomed channels. Then the Trust would issue its prospectus, setting forth the terms upon which it was prepared to permit the nations to enjoy that gift of Nature whose pricelessness the Trust had proved by demonstrating its own ability to corner it.

On the evening of May 25th Culvert was sitting in his sumptuous office in Victoria Street, writing by the light of a dozen wax candles in silver candelabra. He had just finished a letter to his wife, telling her to keep up her spirits and fear nothing; that in a few days the experiment would be over and everything restored to its former condition, shortly after which she would be the wife of a man who would soon be able to buy up all the other millionaires in the world.

As he put the letter into the envelope there was a knock at the door, and Professor Kenyon was announced. Culvert greeted him stiffly and coldly, for he more than half guessed the errand he had come on. There had been two or three heated discussions between them of late, and Culvert knew before the Professor opened his lips that he had come to tell him that he was about to fulfil a threat that he had made a few days before. And this the Professor did tell him in a few dry, quiet words.

"It's no use, Professor," he replied, "you know yourself that I am powerless, as powerless as you are. I have no means of communicating with Markovitch, and the work cannot be stopped until the appointed time."

"But you were warned, sir!" the Professor interrupted warmly. "You were warned, and when you saw the effects coining you might have stopped. I wish to goodness that I had had nothing to do with the infernal business, for infernal it really is. Who are you that you should usurp one of the functions of the Almighty, for it is nothing less than that? I have kept your criminal secret too long, and I will keep it no longer. You have made yourself the enemy of Society, and Society still has the power to deal with you—"

"My dear Professor, that's all nonsense, and you know it!" said Calvert, interrupting him with a contemptuous gesture: "If Society were to lock me up, it should do without electricity till I were free. If it hung one it would get none, except on Markovitch's terms, which would be higher than mine. So you can tell your story whenever you please. Meanwhile you'll excuse me if I remind you that I am rather busy."

Just as the Professor was about to take his leave the door opened and a boy brought in an envelope deeply edged with black. Calvert turned white to the lips and his hand trembled as he took it and opened it. It was in his wife's handwriting, and was dated five days before, as most of the journey had to be made on horseback. He read it through with fixed, staring eyes, then he crushed it into his pocket and strode towards the telephone. He rang the bell furiously, and then he started back with an oath on his lips, remembering that he had made it useless. The sound of the bell brought a clerk into the room immediately.

"Get me a hansom at once!" he almost shouted, and the clerk vanished.

"What is the matter? Where are you going?" asked the Professor.

"Matter? Read that!" he said, thrusting the crumpled letter into his hand. "My little girl is dead—dead of that accursed sickness which, as you justly say, I have brought on the world, and my wife is down with it, too, and may be dead by this time. That letter's five days old. My God, what have I done? What can I do? I'd give fifty thousand pounds to get a telegram to Markovitch. Curse him and his infernal scheme! If she dies I'll go to Boothia Land and kill him! Hulloo! What's that? Lightning—by all that's holy—and thunder!"

As he spoke such a flash of lightning as had never split the skies of London before flared in a huge ragged stream of flame across the zenith, and a roar of thunder such as London's ears had never heard shook every house in the vast city to its foundation. Another and another followed in rapid succession, and all through the night and well into the next day there raged, as it was afterwards found, almost all over the whole Northern hemisphere, such a thunderstorm as had never been known in the world before and never would be again.

With it, too, came hurricanes and cyclones and deluges of rain; and when, after raging for nearly twenty-four hours, it at length ceased convulsing the atmosphere and growled itself away into silence, the first fact that came out of the chaos and desolation that it had left behind it was that the normal electrical conditions of the world had been restored—after which mankind set itself to repair the damage done by the cataclysm and went about its business in the usual way.

The epidemic vanished instantly and Mrs. Calvert did not die. Nearly six months later a white-haired wreck of a man crawled into her husband's office and said feebly:

"Don't you know me, Mr. Calvert? I'm Markovitch, or what there is left of him."

The Adventures of Rollo Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie

“Good heavens, so you are!” said Calvert. “What has happened to you? Sit down and tell me all about it.”

The whole works suddenly burst into white flame. “It is not a long story,” said Markovitch, sitting down and beginning to speak in a thin, trembling voice. “It is not long, but it is very bad. Everything went well at first. All succeeded as I said it would and then, I think it was just four days before we should have stopped, it happened.”

“What happened?”

“I don't know. We must have gone too far, or by some means an accidental discharge must have taken place. The whole works suddenly burst into white flame. Everything made of metal melted like tallow. Every man in the works died instantly, burnt, you know, to a cinder. I was four or five miles away, with some others, seal shooting. We were all struck down insensible. When I came to myself I found I was the only one alive. Yes, Mr. Culvert, I am the only man that has returned from Boothia alive. The works are gone. There are only some heaps of melted metal lying about on the ice. After that I don't know what happened. I must have gone mad. It was enough to make a man mad, you know. But some Indians and Eskimos, who used to trade with us, found me wandering about, so they told me, starving and out of my mind, and they took me to the coast. There I got better and then was picked up by a whaler and so I got home. That is all. It was very awful, wasn't it?”

Then he reeled backward. Then his face fell forward into his trembling hands, and Culvert saw the tears trickling between his fingers. Then he reeled backward, and suddenly his body slipped gently out of the chair and on to the floor. When Culvert tried to pick him up he was dead. And so the secret of the Great Experiment, so far as the world at large was concerned, never got beyond the walls of Mr. Sidney Culvert's cosy dining-room after all.

THE END