Adrift in the Unknown

OR,

Queer Adventures in a Queer Realm

By WILLIAM WALLACE COOK

Author of "The Paymaster's Special," "A Deep-sea Game," "In the Web," "His Friend the Enemy," etc.



STREET & SMITH CORPORATION

PUBLISHERS

79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

A CARNIVAL OF ACTION

ADVENTURE LIBRARY

Spendid, Interesting, Big Stories

For the present the Adventure Library will be devoted to the publication of stories by William Wallace Cook.

The fact that one man wrote all of these stories in no way detracts from their interest, as they are all very different in plot and locality.

For example, the action in one story takes place in "The Land of Little Rain;" another deals with adventure on the high seas; another is a good railroad story; others are splendid Western stories; and some are mystery stories. All of them, however, are stories of vigorous adventure drawn true to life, which gives them the thrill that all really good fiction should have.

Copyright, 1904-1905

By Frank A. Munsey Co.

Adrift in the Unknown

(Printed in the United States of America)

P S
3505
Co646
A7
1975

ADRIFT IN THE UNKNOWN.

CHAPTER I.

LOST, STRAYED, OR STOLEN?

There could be no more fitting introduction to this most amazing narrative from the pen of James Peter Munn than that article in the *Morning Mercury*.

Munn, it is no breach of confidence to inform the reader, was a reformed burglar; although the author of two books which achieved large sales and were most favorably received by the reviewers—"Forty Ways of Cracking Safes" and "The Sandbagger's Manual"—Mr. Munn developed small skill with the pen, so that the breathless interest aroused by his revelations hangs more upon the matter than the style. The *Mercury* article should do its mite toward preparing the reader for what is to come.

3230

In the first place, the story was what newspaper men call a "scoop."

The article in the first edition ran as follows:

QUINN'S CASTLE VANISHES.

AND SO DOES QUINN! WITH HOUSE AND BELONGINGS, THE HARLEM SAGE DISAPPEARS IN A SINGLE HOUR, LEAVING NOT A TRACE BEHIND.

What happened to Professor Quinn last night? And what happened to the strange steel structure known locally among Harlem residents as Quinn's Castle?

For Quinn and his castle were snuffed out like a candle-gleam some time between the hours of eleven o'clock and midnight. Patrolman Casey, who travels a beat in that part of Harlem, avers that he passed the castle at eleven o'clock, and that it was there; he passed its site again at twelve, and it was not there.

Considerably exercised, Patrolman Casey made search for the castle, and although he beat up the country for a dozen blocks in all directions, he failed to find it. And what is more, Patrolman Casey declares that he took the pledge when he went on the force and has been a total abstainer ever since.

Corroboration of the officer's report is not lacking. Certain residents of the vicinity state that they saw the professor's weird dwelling yesterday evening; its windows were aglow and it appeared evident that the professor was entertaining friends. The first gray dawn this morning showed a bare lot with the steel house missing.

Is it another case of Aladdin's palace dissolving into thin air at the "presto!" of some wonder worker? Or is it a plain case of larceny undertaken on a gigantic

scale? A golden opportunity offers itself to a sleuth of the Sherlock Holmes school; and for such a person the *Mercury* presents the following facts:

First, the so-called castle was projectile-shaped, of boiler-plate construction, and measured some twenty feet in diameter, tapering to a point thirty feet above ground. It was covered with a sort of paint that gave it the appearance of frosted silver.

Second, there is much low shrubbery surrounding the site of the castle, and if the castle had been blown down and rolled from the ridge it stood on into the river there would have been left evidences in plenty of such disaster.

(Note: The castle certainly weighed five tons, possibly five times that. Nothing short of a cyclone could have budged it, and there was hardly a breath of air stirring the whole night long.)

Third, Professor Quinn, ever since he erected his steel house and moved into it, has been regarded as mildly insane. Like Abou-ben-Adhem, he desired to be entered on the angelic scroll as one who loved his fellow-men.

Last summer he read before the Astronomical Society a paper entitled "The Mutability of Newtonian Law," and was laughed out of that honorable body for his inconsistencies. Although adverted to as "The Harlem Sage," Professor Quinn is no Merlin, nor does he possess the ring of Gyges that rendered its wearer invisible.

Yet where is he? And where is his castle? Until some Vidocq appears and solves the mystery, echo can only answer "Where?"

So much for the article in the first printing of the paper. The bright young man who stood

sponsor for the "scoop" had meanwhile been very busy with fresh details, and the second edition contained the following addenda:

It has just been learned that Mr. Emmet Gilhooly, the multimillionaire and president of the railroad combine, was a guest of Professor Quinn last night, and must have been in the castle at the very moment it faded into oblivion.

Mr. Gilhooly did not return to his home and has not since been heard from. His relatives are distracted and leading railroad men of the country are in a panic.

His absence from affairs at the present moment jeopardizes the traction interests of the entire country, and may prove a deathblow to the success of the gigantic pool he was forming.

This was startling news indeed, and sped hither and yon throughout the city, the country, and the civilized world. Appalling as the information was, nevertheless it proved merely a fractional part of the truth.

The bright reporter on the *Mercury* made further discoveries, which were printed in the third edition rushed from the presses of his paper.

Not only was Mr. Emmet Gilhooly a guest of Professor Quinn in the steel castle last night, but so also were Hon. Augustus Popham, the coal baron; J. Archibald

Meigs, of Wall Street, late manipulator of the corner in wheat and now engineering a corner in cotton, and Hannibal Markham, well known as the instigator of a plot to control the food supply of the United States.

What has become of these four millionaires and Napoleons of finance? They have gone with Quinn and his castle, disappearing as utterly as though the earth had opened and swallowed them.

Fabulous rewards were offered by the relatives of the missing millionaires for any information relative to the fate that had overtaken them. Foul play was suspected, and the financial world stood aghast and dumbly wondered what was to happen to the business of the country if it really developed, beyond all peradventure, that Gilhooly, Popham, Meigs, and Markham had been eliminated from commercial affairs.

The influence of these four was vast and far-reaching, and they were scheming to make their grip on the republic's resources even more secure and relentless. If their plans carried, no man could eat, or clothe himself, or warm his body and drive his manufacturing engines, or travel from place to place and ship the product of his mills without paying tribute to Gilhooly, Popham, Meigs, and Markham. Should those schemes,

titanic in conception, be worked out to their manifest conclusion, four men would hold the destiny of industrial America in the hollow of their hands. Prosperity would wait upon their pleasure, or at a mere nod would be paralyzed and leave the country stranded on the reefs of disaster.

It seemed an odd fatality that, at the very time these commanders-in-chief of industry were plotting to make their power complete, they should have vanished as utterly as though they had been engulfed by a tidal wave and swept into the broad regions of the Atlantic. A few facts were brought to light through the probing of skilled detective minds, but these facts were in nowise clues to the fate that had overtaken the millionaires.

Popham's confidential aide reluctantly admitted that his chief had accepted an invitation from Quinn, and had gone to his "castle" for an interview. Quinn professed to have made some discovery or other which, he declared, would make coal a useless commodity so far as human needs were concerned. Popham, while laughing at Quinn's pretensions, was nevertheless secretly

worried. Anything that threatened the success of the *coup* which was being engineered by himself and his three confreres was to be dealt with decisively and without loss of time.

In the case of Meigs, Markham, and Gilhooly there was no confidential aide to offer testimony, for these bright, particular stars of high finance had placed a limit on the confidence reposed in their secretaries. Nevertheless, the probing minds at work on the case developed the extraordinary fact that these men, no less than Popham, had visited Quinn at the latter's request. A spirit of scoffing investigation animated them, but they were prepared to see with their own eyes and hear with their own ears whatever Quinn had to show and to say. If anything that militated against their projected *coup* was brought before them, they would proceed to lay the spectre forthwith.

Strangely enough, the shrewdest of the detectives failed to connect the disappearance of the millionaires with the comprehensive plans they were forming, and which could not be carried out except by the plotters in person.

Other rich men of the country, who were wont

to trim their sails in accordance with whatever wind blew from the offices of The Four, in Wall Street, were already shifting affairs to lay a course that would give them the best headway against the projected new order. This sudden disappearance of the powers to which the lesser rich looked for guidance left them becalmed in an uncharted sea.

The middle class, long accustomed to being mulcted right and left, accepted the astonishing situation with equanimity. So far as they were concerned, Gilhooly, Popham, Meigs, and Markham were abstract generalities—merely names to conjure with. For years the middle class had paid for the conjuring, and had been taught to look calmly into the eyes of what they had come to believe was the ineyitable. If their annual outing to the seashore or the mountains cost too much, they could stay at home; if the butcher, the baker, and the grocer ran prices too high, some of the luxuries could be cut out; if anthracite went to $20 a ton, they would heat fewer rooms; and if clothing became too expensive, there would be fewer suits and gowns to wear.

By a little self-denial, the middle class also could trim their sails to any gale that blew. They were used to it.

With the poor it was different. They were already down to bed-rock in the way of self-denial. No sooner had it drifted through their brains that the influence of Gilhooly, Popham, Meigs, and Markham had been blotted out than they lifted their voices in praise of the blessed event. Their situation had been bad enough, and any change among the vaguely understood causes presiding over their affairs could hardly be for the worse.

The detectives, feeling that they were at work on a particularly complex case, hampered themselves by looking for complex causes. At first, they believed it was a matter of sequestration and that presently a ransom in seven or eight figures would be called for. However, a delving into Quinn's past failed to reveal any lawless actions that would point to a ransom in his present line of endeavor. The detectives, growing more complex as the ambiguities closed them in, overlooked entirely the simplicity of Quinn's character.

Anyhow, one analytical mind would demand of another, what had Quinn's intentions to do with the disappearance? That was a positive reality. And, although it was surmised, it was not definitely known that Quinn himself had had anything to do with it.

Such was the situation confronting the country and with which the police department of New York City was called upon to deal. But the keenest reasoning, inductive or deductive. was powerless to find even a clue.

The tremendous mystery might have remained a mystery until this day, had it not been for the narrative of James Peter Munn, now for the first time given to the world.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNINVITED GUEST.

I used to be one of those who claimed that the world owed him a living, and I went out with a drill and a "jimmy" to collect it.

Where was the difference, I argued, between the man who cracks your strong box and removes a few paltry bills or coins, and the nabob who skulks behind a "trust" and takes his tax on the necessities of life?

This was pure sophistry, of course, but I became wedded to it in early life, and that I escaped a suit of stripes and measurement on the Bertillon system, is due entirely to my experiences with Professor Quinn.

'Twas a blessed night that sent me to his castle with the view of mulcting it of treasures I felt to be there. Quinn was a queer one. I do not mean to say that he was unhinged, as some thought, but he was queer in his outlook upon life, and in resources which fall under the head of "ways and means."

His castle claimed my professional attention. For why should a man build a big steel vault and live in it unless he had portable property worth a burglar's while? I reconnoitered the place for a week before I considered myself possessed of sufficient knowledge for my undertaking. In view of what transpired at the time of my visit, a brief description of the castle, taken from my memorandum book, will prove of interest.

The structure was cigar-shaped, twenty-nine feet from base to apex and twenty feet in diameter through its largest part. It was divided into two stories by means of a steel floor, leaving head-room of ten feet in the lower story.

Four windows pierced the circular walls of the nether room, and two gave light to the room above; these six openings being guarded on the outer sides with latticework of steel.

The door was an oblong piece of boiler plate —the entire building was a shell composed of plates riveted together—hinged heavily and provided with a strong lock. As I had yet to find a lock which I could not pick, if given time enough, my designs naturally centred about the door.

I had hit upon the somewhat early hour of ten in the evening for my call at the professor's. Unless business kept him abroad I knew that he was usually in bed long before that time. If he chanced to be out, so much the better for the success of my foray.

After the patrolman had passed, I crept through the bushes and was soon busy with the lock on the steel door. It yielded with much less resistance than I had anticipated, and I was quickly within, flashing my bull's-eye lantern about me.

A circular seat upholstered in leather ran around the wall, and a table bearing an unlighted oil lamp stood in the centre of the floor. I had barely completed a hasty survey when a crunch of footsteps on the graveled walk without smote on my ears.

Without loss of a moment I snapped the lantern shut and darted up the iron stairway to the room above. It is needless to say that I was very much put out because of the interruption. I was a hard man in those days, and such an occurrence was apt to anger me and make me say things.

Lying flat on the floor with my face to the stair opening, I had a fairly good view of the circular chamber below. The professor had been abroad and not in bed, for he appeared now, ushering in callers.

Four gentlemen, all of distinguished mien and important bearing, followed the owner of the castle, and began glancing about with ill-concealed amusement.

"Gad, but this is an odd place!" exclaimed one.

This gentleman wore a frock coat and silk hat, but what caught my eye was a four-carat spark in his scarf, a massive seal on his fob, and a scintillating gem on the third finger of his left hand.

"Odd, perhaps," returned the professor, "but most suitable to my purposes, Mr. Gilhooly, as I hope to show you before many minutes have passed. Be seated, sir. And the rest of you gentlemen; you will find the divan most comfortable."

Gilhooly? I went hot and cold at that name. Nearly everybody in New York was just then talking about the man who was scheming to make railroad travel too expensive for ordinary mor-

tals. He was a millionaire several times over, and in the breast of his frock coat I knew there must be a bulky wallet.

At once, and while I watched and listened to those in the room below, my mind busied itself with details of a more comprehensive operation than I had at first contemplated.

The professor's four guests had seated themselves on the circular divan. After my eyes had finished with Gilhooly they turned on the other three, and my first impressions were more than confirmed.

Each of the quartet was a Crœsus, and dressed and strutted the part. Fine birds, indeed, and I hugged myself to think how opportunity had come knocking at my door.

Six-shooter in hand, I could descend upon this covey, compel a readjustment of values between them and myself, then back through the steel door, lock it behind me, and make off.

The professor, intent on other things no doubt, had turned his key in the lock and had failed to discover that the bolt was already thrown; therefore my presence in the castle was entirely unsuspected—manifestly an advantage.

"You have asked us to come here, Professor Quinn," spoke up one as the professor turned higher the wick of the lamp he had just lighted, "and here we are. You say you have discovered something whose value to science and the industrial world is beyond compute, and that you wish to interest capital. Well"—and the speaker surveyed his three companions with a large smile—"here is the capital."

"I shall come at my discovery in due course, Mr. Popham," said the professor, who was a wiry little man with a bald head and bead-like black eyes. "I thank you for coming here. Emmet Gilhooly, Augustus Popham, J. Archibald Meigs, and Hannibal Markham are stars of the first magnitude in the skies of speculation, and I esteem myself fortunate in arousing their interest."

A faintness seized me as these names, each an "open sesame" to the world of finance, fell glibly from the professor's tongue. I was all but cheek by jowl with representatives of billions.

Augustus Popham turned his head to give Emmet Gilhooly a plebeian wink. Gilhooly smiled behind his smooth white hand. J. Archibald

Meigs leaned over to whisper something to Hannibal Markham, who was affixing a pair of gold eyeglasses to his Roman nose, whereupon both gentlemen suppressed a titter.

A doubt of the sincerity of all four broke over me. They were there to have sport with this bald little man with the beady eyes and the bee in his bonnet. I chuckled grimly as I thought of how the tables would presently be turned. I do not know whether the professor was as keen as I to detect these evidences of insincerity. If he was, he gave no sign.

"I am sixty-five," said he, "and my life work has been the discovery which I am about to bring to your august attention. Perhaps some of you gentlemen have read my paper on 'The Mutability of Newtonian Law'?"

The gentlemen acknowledged that they had not. Professor Quinn seemed disappointed.

"If you had read that," he continued, "you would have prepared yourselves for an understanding of my theory and the demonstration of it which I am about to give. Let me ask you this: When an apple leaves its parent branch, why is it that it falls downward instead of upward?"

The Napoleons of finance stared at one another. J. Archibald Meigs went so far as to tap a suggestive finger against his forehead.

"Gravity," said the professor. "It is that which draws every atom on the surface of the earth directly toward the earth's centre; it is that which chains our feet to this planet and keeps us from falling through interstellar space; it is even that which keeps our little world from flying apart and dissipating itself in dust throughout the great void. It is a simple proposition simply stated, and I trust you follow me?"

They did follow him, and so signified.

"In the paper I read before the Astronomical Society," pursued the professor, "I made bold to declare that it was possible to insulate a body against the force of gravitation. In other words, to make it so immune from Newtonian law that it would spurn the earth and fall from it at a speed even greater than the drawing power of gravity.

"Can you not comprehend what this means?" cried Quinn, waxing eloquent. "It means a new force in the industrial world—a power that feeds

on nothing save a law that transcends that of gravitation. In point of fact, it falls little short of perpetual motion.

"Without the expenditure of even a pound of coal, this new force can turn the wheels of every railroad train on the globe! With its own inherent energy it can give life to the machinery of flour mills, cotton mills, iron foundries; it can——"

Augustus Popham got up hurriedly and put on his hat.

"A rattle-brained idea, sir!" he exclaimed. "I have no mind to remain here and listen to such talk."

Popham's coal mines ravaged the earth's crust in a thousand and one places. The idea that human industry could get along without his coal was too much for him.

Before he could reach the door, Professor Quinn was in front of him, barring his way.

"Remember, Mr. Popham," said the professor, "if I were to take away your mines I should yet give you something in their place worth incalculably more. Hear me out, sir, I beg of you."

"Theories are cheap things," muttered Pop-

ham, as he again seated himself. "An ounce of proof is worth a pound of theory."

"Exactly," cried Quinn, "and the ounce of proof shall be forthcoming."

With that he pulled the table from the centre of the room, revealing an iron chain some three feet in length, attached at its lower end to a staple in the floor by means of a clevis and pin.

The chain was not lying loosely, but was rigidly upright, its upper end wound about a white block—a six-inch cube, as I judged.

Climbing to the table top, the professor stepped thence to the cube, poising himself for a moment on one foot. Then he sprang to the floor again.

"This cube," he explained, laying one hand on the block with an affectionate gesture, "is of steel, and has been treated with my insulating compound. To all appearance it is falling *upward* with a force sufficient to draw the chain rigidly to its full extent and to support my weight."

"Poppycock!" muttered the coal baron.

"A trick!" exclaimed Meigs.

The other two remained silent. They were bewildered, perhaps impressed.

"Let us see whether it is a trick or no," went on Quinn. "Pray come forward, gentlemen, and lay hold of the chain. There is no danger in the little experiment with which I am going to amuse you, and I think it will dispel your doubts."

The gentlemen hesitated, but finally came forward, got down with some difficulty, and grasped the chain as directed.

"Hold tight!" exclaimed the professor, and drew the pin from the clevis.

Thus released the cube rose to the ceiling, lifting the four gentlemen with it. They hung in mid-air until Quinn drew the table under them, and they dropped to its top, each in turn, and so reached the floor.

Bewilderment was written large in the faces of the quartet, their credulity struggling against the evidence of their senses.

"You are a good magician, sir," averred Popham, brushing the damp from his forehead with a handkerchief.

"You could make your fortune as an entertainer," declared Gilhooly.

J. Archibald Meigs chewed briskly on an unlighted cigar, while Hannibal Markham kept his

eyes on the cube and dangling chain like one fascinated.

"It is the fate of a man who makes startling discoveries to be classed among disciples in black art," observed Quinn calmly. "What is the hour, Mr. Gilhooly?" he asked.

The head of the railway pool consulted his repeater.

"Eleven-fourteen," he replied.

"And high time I was going," added Popham.

"Just a few moments more," said the professor.

Turning to the wall behind him, he caught a small lever and turned it over as far as it would go. The castle vibrated slightly, communicating a perceptible swaying motion to the pendent chain.

"What's this?" cried Markham, jumping up.

"Do not be alarmed, my friends," cried Quinn, whirling around.

His face was pallid as death, and his beady eyes gleamed like coals. Then, wonder of wonders, the white cube settled to the floor.

"Ha!" shouted Popham. "Your anti-gravity compound is not very long lived, it seems to me."

"You will find differently, to your cost!" returned the professor through his teeth. "Augustus Popham, I, Kenward Quinn, arraign you, and Emmet Gilhooly, and J. Archibald Meigs, and Hannibal Markham as foes of the human race! You are leeches who would suck the life-blood from the veins of the poor——"

With steady forefinger, Quinn had transfixed each of the plutocrats as he called his name. Markham was already on his feet, and the other three were not slow in following him.

"What's this, what's this?" gasped Gilhooly.

"An insult!" muttered Popham.

"The old addle-pate is not accountable for what he says or does," remarked J. Archibald Meigs.

"We had best leave this steel trap of his while there is yet time," counseled Markham.

"While there is yet time!" repeated Quinn, with a wild laugh. "A pretty set of conspirators you are, on my soul! Markham, there, would raise the price of food until the poor would go hungry; you, Meigs, would so manipulate the cost of clothing that they would not have the

wherewithal to cover their nakedness; Popham would make fuel a luxury of the rich; and Gilhooly would so boost passenger and freight rates as to quadruple to the consumer the tremendous cost of the necessities of life. Deny me if you can, if you dare!"

Quinn looked like a Nemesis as he confronted the four men and lashed them with his scorpion whip of words.

"Fiddledededee!" exclaimed Popham.

"We deserve it," said Meigs, "for it was the height of folly for us to come here, in the first place."

"Is this why you brought us here?" asked Markham, "to air your own particular ideas on sociology and to make us the victims of your abuse?"

The professor threw back his head and straightened his shoulders. It was the real thing in dignity that he showed those plutocrats, and my nerves tingled with admiration. I was sorry I had come to the castle with designs on Quinn's portable property, and doubly glad that I could force tribute from these four who were badgering him.

"I am not unjust," averred the professor, "and such a thing as abuse is farthest from my mind; but I love the plain people, the bone and sinew of this glorious republic, and it arouses my indignation when the right to live and let live is trampled upon by any one man, or set of men."

"Platitudes!" sneered Popham.

"To call a truth a platitude is witless argument," answered Quinn serenely.

"Be that as it may," said Meigs, "we were not invited here for a debate but to witness a demonstration of what you were pleased to term a revolutionizing discovery."

"You have seen me overcome the force of gravity," went on the professor, "and to astute minds like yours further explanation seems uncalled for. In destroying gravity I produce a power equalled by no other force in the world. The 'pull' of an insulated block the size of that one"—and here he waved his hand toward the cube—"is equal to the strength of a hundred horses. Develop that 'pull' horizontally instead of vertically, and we have a locomotive that runs continuously without the consumption of a pound of coal. That," cried the professor, his voice

ringing with triumph, "is the apotheosis of power!"

Gilhooly, judging from his manner, was the victim of uncomfortable thoughts; Meigs wore a startled look, and Markham seemed half convinced. Popham, alone, was brusque and uncompromising.

"I think we had better get out of here," again suggested Markham. His half convictions appeared to arouse some small amount of apprehension.

"I'm of the same opinion," spoke up Meigs.

"Wait a little," suggested Popham, and I saw a gleam in his eyes that meant a stroke of some kind. Once more he faced Quinn. "I have no patience with your harebrained theories," he went on, "and I have seen charlatans work greater wonders than what you are pleased to call your 'demonstration.' But it is a business principle of mine to buy up these promising theories if they happen to run counter to any pet scheme I am trying to put through. Sir, rather than be annoyed further with this chimerical idea of yours, I will pay five thousand dollars, spot

cash, just to have you give over your notions and quit experimenting."

Professor Quinn laughed.

"Five thousand dollars!" he exclaimed; then added, as though to himself, "He would have me sell the welfare and happiness of the people for five thousand dollars!"

"I will add another five thousand to Popham's offer," put in Gilhooly, "not because I am afraid your discoveries will upset the transportation interests of the country, but simply to clear the commercial atmosphere and keep your visionary ideas from affecting the price of stocks."

"Let me add another five thousand," said Meigs. "I don't see how your invention, even if it is all you claim for it, could affect me or my interests one way or the other, but I will add my contribution simply because Popham has taken the initiative."

"Count me in for the same amount," supplemented Markham, "on the condition that Professor Quinn signs over to the four of us all his right, title and interest in his non-gravity invention, and covenants to leave that field entirely alone in future."

Quinn seemed to enjoy these propositions, and it was apparent at a glance that he had no intention of accepting twenty thousand dollars and renouncing his discoveries.

"Gentlemen," said he, "you are already half convinced that I am no dreamer, for you are financiers, and, while twenty thousand dollars is no more to you than twenty cents is to me, it is not your habit to give your money away. I repeat that you are inclined to have faith in me, and before many minutes I shall have made your belief in my abilities complete."

"Am I to understand that you decline our offer?" demanded Popham.

"Most decidedly!"

"Then there is nothing more to be said. Come on, gentlemen," and Popham started toward the door.

"A moment more, if you please," requested the professor.

"Not another second!" cried Popham. "Our offer is withdrawn; and, if your so-called discoveries amount to anything, we shall find other means for making them ineffective."

I had been interested in proceedings to an ex-

tent that had all but caused me to forget my purpose. The plutocrats were about to leave the castle in a temper, and if I wrested tribute from them it must be now or never.

Starting up, I drew my revolver and ran hastily down the iron stairs.

CHAPTER III.

PROFESSOR QUINN'S FEAT.

My unexpected advent upon the scene proved as startling as I had anticipated. Even the professor was dashed.

Stepping in front of the steel door, I toyed menacingly with the revolver and surveyed the plutocrats with a grim humor I made no attempt to conceal.

At that period of my life, inspired by the sophistry to which I have already adverted, I was a cool and dangerous man.

"Pardon me for entering unannounced," said I blindly. "You have listened to Professor Quinn's theory and witnessed its demonstration. I am but an humble philosopher, yet I have a theory of my own which I should also like to expound and to demonstrate."

"Who are you, sir?" demanded Quinn.

"I am a bird of like feather with these, your guests," said I facetiously, "albeit my methods

are more direct if less extensive. My name is James Peter Munn; my specialty is robbery of the out-and-out variety, for I have the courage of my convictions, and do not hide behind a technicality.

"I do not wish to intrude my presence here longer than necessary to accomplish my designs, and if these amiable gentlemen will aid me"—I indicated the amiable gentlemen with my revolver point—"I will take my departure quietly from the castle. But"—and here I scowled blackly—"some trust or other will be minus its guiding power in case any resistance is attempted."

The threat was sufficient, and the usual sunny smile returned to my face as I added:

"Mr. Gilhooly will advance to the table, spread his handkerchief upon it, and lay thereon his watch and fob, the ring on his finger, the kohinoor in his tie, and the wallet in the breast of his coat. It is my theory that one thief has the right to take from another property that does not belong to either of them. It is Mr. Gilhooly's privilege to give the first demonstration."

Fidelity to truth forces me to chronicle the

above speech. The *éclat* with which I made it is far from me now as I pen it verbatim.

There are speeches in life which we could wish unsaid, and this one of mine I would give much to consign to the limbo of things unspoken. Reformation has worked wonders in me since that evil time.

I will say for Mr. Gilhooly that he was alacrity itself in carrying out my command. His hands trembled a little as he placed his belongings on the handkerchief and knotted the four corners over the plunder as I requested.

The professor, smiling strangely, sank down on the divan and watched proceedings with twinkling eyes. His manner filled me with a foreboding I tried not to manifest.

"Evidently this amuses you!" cried Gilhooly, in anger, his snapping eyes on the professor.

"Your inference is correct, Mr. Gilhooly," answered Quinn. "I am profoundly amused. It is all so unexpected, so dramatic, and so—useless."

"By gad, sir," cried Popham, "I see more in this than a desire on your part to interest capital in a fake discovery. There is a plot here, gen-

tlemen," and he turned to the other three. "Our folly in allowing ourselves to be lured to this place was stupendous. I make no doubt but that there is a plot here between this man Quinn and this thief. Quinn gets us in the thief's power, and the thief does the rest."

"A pretty scheme!" snapped Meigs.

"Clever, very clever," put in Markham.

"And successful, too," growled Gilhooly with a regretful look at the plunder on the table. "But there will be a reckoning. When we are once clear of this place we can set the police at work."

I was surprised at the way Quinn took this talk. He continued to smile and was in no way ruffled.

"You're wrong there," cried I, hot and indignant. "Professor Quinn had nothing to do with my being here. I've had my eye on this castle for a long while, and I let myself in, just before you came, hoping to make a haul and get clear. You interrupted me, and I stowed myself away upstairs. From what I saw and heard, I must say that it is a pleasure for me to turn my back on Professor Quinn's property and to give my entire attention to you four."

"Mr. Munn," said Quinn, "how long have you been engaged in this business?"

"For some years now, sir," I answered.

"You were honest—once?"

"Every man is born honest, if it comes to that. I used to work in an iron foundry, but the works were taken over by a combination and a lot of us were thrown out of employment. There was nothing for me to do but beg—and I'm above that. This came handiest, and I went into it. I like the business. Matching one's wits against the law keeps one constantly in the midst of alarms, so to speak, and I like excitement. And I have ability, for never yet have I worn the stripes or learned the lock-step. I have written some on the subject of my vocation, in the hope of beguiling others into the work."

"A dangerous man!" muttered Gilhooly.

"What are we coming to?" clamored Popham. "Here is a thief who is actually proud of his profession, and who actually writes books about it!"

"Merciful heavens!" gasped Meigs, in horror. "I feel sorry for my country when it produces such men."

"We—we are tottering on the verge of chaos!" added Markham, in a stage whisper.

I laughed at all this, for I enjoyed it hugely.

"Spare yourselves any needless worry about me, gentlemen," said I. "Look to home, and you will probably find enough there to fret your consciences."

Professor Quinn continued to take pleasure out of the queer situation.

"I can honor a man like Munn," said he, "where I am tempted to despise men like you, Gilhooly, Meigs, Markham, and Popham. As Munn said, he has the courage of his convictions. He does not take from the poor, for in the very nature of things he cannot. His loot comes from those who are able to lose it, while you are vampires, and sapping the very lifeblood of the nation. You are all criminally deluded, although, perhaps, doing what you conscientiously believe to be exactly right. Would to Heaven," and here the professor grew suddenly sincere and intensely earnest, "that something would conspire to open your eyes to the exact truth. But I have despaired of that, and I am trying, in my own feeble way, to meet the present emergency."

"You are either a fool or a madman!" cried Popham.

"A rattle-brained zealot!" chimed in Meigs.

"*You* are the one who should see things differently," said Markham. "You preach a doctrine which you fail to apply personally."

"Enough of this talk, gentlemen," I interposed. "My situation is precarious and I must ask you to hurry a little."

"Sir," shouted Popham, leveling a forefinger at me, "I shall see you properly jailed for this. Why, you miserable footpad, I can——"

"Save your breath," I interrupted tartly, meeting his forefinger with the muzzle of the pepper box. "Lead is no respecter of persons. One of you has called me a dangerous man. I am all of that, and desperate. Mr. Popham, you saw how Mr. Gilhooly carried out my orders. You will proceed in the same manner, and without further loss of time. In five minutes I must be out of here."

He started to argue the point with me, and I allowed my forefinger to flex, ever so slightly, upon the trigger.

That was enough. A man values his life in a

direct ratio with what he considers his importance; therefore, the esteem in which these four millionaires held themselves must have been overwhelming.

The Honorable Augustus Popham finally yielded up his personal property with the same readiness that had characterized his friend. Hannibal Markham followed him, and after Markham came J. Archibald Meigs.

I had a pleasant word for each as I marshaled the four bundles, strung them on the fingers of my left hand and backed toward the door, which was a few paces behind me.

"When a good general beats a retreat," said I, preparing to pull open the door and let myself out, "he places as many obstacles in the path of the pursuing force as possible. When I leave, therefore, I shall lock this door on the outside."

I was watched by the plutocrats in philosophical silence; by the professor, with a geniality that nothing seemed able to shake.

I had spared Quinn because he was a friend of the poor, as I had discovered. And I had been poor myself some fifteen minutes back.

"Good-by," said I airily.

"*Au revoir,*" answered the professor. "Look well where you step."

I threw open the door with a laugh. The laugh faded into a shout of terror.

I threw out my hands, revolver and packets of loot falling through the door, and I only barely saving myself with one foot over the threshold.

The horror that gripped me then is such a horror as comes to a man but once in a lifetime. My brain sickened and chilled, my heart all but stopped its beating, and my limbs grew rigid.

In the black of the fearsome night—not the atmospheric blue-black I had been accustomed to, but the ebony dark of Erebus—I saw a wild greenish star below, a huge disk whose gleaming nimbus danced on my sight in quivering lines.

Half crazed, I flung back into the room and fell groveling to the floor, my ears echoing with the professor's merriment and the startled exclamations of the four men I had robbed—all to no purpose.

Presently I sat up, rubbing forehead and eyes.

The professor stood in the open door, gloating over the vista below.

"Come!" he called, beckoning to the huddled

quartet at the other side of the room. "Come, Gilhooly, Meigs, Popham, and Markham—come, look down upon the scene of your feverish activities. You were plutocrats there, more powerful than kings! Here you are no more than shoulder high with me, and yon muddled thief on the floor! You have been snatched from the scene of your pernicious labors—exiled into planetary space where you will be powerless to work further evil. I have not lived in vain; for this, *this* is the triumph of my career."

Slowly Meigs disentangled himself from the mute group by the opposite wall and crept on all fours to the threshold that overlooked the void and the greenish star.

He recoiled with a yell; then, maddened by what he had seen, he leaped erect and tried to hurl himself out into space.

"Fool!" cried the professor, laying hold of him and struggling to keep him back. "Would you become a satellite of this twenty-by-thirty planet? We are beyond the atmosphere of the earth—look! See the four packets of loot and the thief's revolver."

He pointed through the door and the bulging

handkerchiefs and my six-shooter were abreast of us, hanging in space, turning slowly, weirdly —a sight to upset the strongest mind.

Gilhooly jumped forward, gave vent to a maniacal laugh, then crumpled down on the floor.

"Bid up for the G. H. & D.," he mumbled, "bid to the limit! I must have that road—I *will* have it."

"Brace up, Meigs!" said the professor sharply, pulling the key from the outer side of the lock, slamming the door, fastening it, and putting the key in his pocket. "Take care of Gilhooly, man! His mind falters! Heavens, are you all mad? Are your keen minds, unshaken in the contemplation of vast deals for the enslavement of the poor, so quick to break? I had thought better of you than this!"

Meigs, white as the spotless linen that covered his breast, advanced upon the professor. He tried to speak, but without success. At last, with a supreme effort, the words came:

"Madman, what have you done?"

"That is better," returned the professor, smiling as he looked at Meigs and noted how Markham and Popham ranged themselves at his side;

"much better. You were engaged in plots back there on the earth, and the success of those plots would have proved a great calamity. I have saved the world from the calamity!"

"Your—your castle has risen from the earth?" asked Meigs.

"It has fallen off the earth. As you and I and the others happened to be inside, we fell with it!"

Sudden rage convulsed Meigs. He crouched downward, his eyes ablaze and his fingers working convulsively.

"Scoundrel!" he screamed, and launched himself at the professor's throat like a tiger.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PLUTOCRATS RECONCILED.

Looking back now at that dreadful hour when the realization of our awful predicament burst upon us, I wonder that I preserved my own equilibrium.

The first shock came near to throwing me off my poise, but after that I gained the whip hand of my wits by swift and sure degrees.

I verily believe the professor would have been strangled by Meigs, aided and abetted by Popham and Markham, had I not rushed to his rescue. I had muscles of iron, and after I had caught Meigs by the nape of the neck and thrown him backward, I planted myself between Quinn and his foes.

"Leave the professor alone," said I. "You men show mighty poor judgment, it strikes me, in trying to lay violent hands on him."

"He deserves death," babbled Meigs. "He had no business shooting us into space in this summary manner."

Fear and anger had made Meigs childish. He measured our dilemma in terms so common a smile came to my lips.

"Judgment, poor judgment!" sniffed Popham. "Look at Gilhooly, and then talk about poor judgment, if you can."

In truth, the railway magnate presented a sorry spectacle. His clothing was in wild disorder, his hair was rumpled about his head, and he was hopping back and forth with two fingers in the air.

He was under the impression that he was dealing in railroad stocks, completing the huge transaction that had made him the talk of two continents.

"This professor ought to be flayed alive," declared Markham. "Where are we going, and when will we get there?"

"Now," said I, "you are striking the keynote. Who knows where we are going if the professor doesn't? And who knows when we shall arrive there if it is out of his power to tell? We need the professor, for if we are to be saved it will be his knowledge that does it."

"But what will my family think?" whimpered Meigs. "And my business interests!"

He threw up his hands and fell back in his seat with a groan. Then abruptly he straightened up again.

"This is a dream! By gad, it must be! The whole affair is too outrageously unreal for any sane man to believe."

Gilhooly gave a maudlin chuckle.

"I was dead sure I'd get that last block of X. Y. & Z. stock! That road is the last span in my network of ties and rails. Ha! *Now* we'll see! *Now!*"

Meigs shivered. Gilhooly's maunderings struck sharply at his desire to coddle himself with a myth.

"It's awful to have Gilhooly like that," spoke up Augustus Popham. "If he had not been thrown out of balance, his wide knowledge of matters relating to transportation might have proved of inestimable service to us now."

Professor Quinn laughed. It was an eerie laugh, and it shook me to hear it.

"Oh, you!" cried Markham reproachfully, whirling on Quinn. "After causing this disaster

and overthrowing as brilliant a mind as there ever was in Wall Street, you have the heart to indulge in levity. Look here: how far are we from the earth at the present moment?"

"That is a difficult matter to estimate, even approximately," answered Quinn calmly. "Ordinarily, gravity exerts a force that can be measured definitely on the earth's surface. A body falling freely from rest acquires a velocity which is equal to the product of thirty-two and one-fifth feet and the number of seconds during which the motion has lasted. What is the time now?"

Three gentlemen reached for their watches, failed to find them, and turned hard looks on me. I appreciated their dilemma and drew from my vest an open-face timepiece that was personal property and honestly come by.

"It is twelve-fifteen," said I.

Quinn took a pencil and notebook from his pocket and did some figuring.

"We might be a little more than two miles from our native planet," said he, "but——"

"Only two miles!" cried the three exiles in chorus.

"You can take us back, sir," said Popham, who had been pacing the floor nervously. "Shut off the power of this infernal machine and let us drop back to where we belong. Two miles is no great matter. Your castle is a slow freight compared with some of Gilhooly's express trains."

"I cannot take you back, sir," returned the professor, "and I would not if I could. You did not hear me out. The law of velocity, recited for your benefit a moment ago, does not measure the speed of this car."

"No?" murmured Markham.

"Decidedly not. The earth sweeps along in its orbit at the rate of eighteen miles to the second, while some aerolites and meteoroids attain a speed of twenty and thirty miles to the second. In building this car, I equipped it with an anti-gravity block geared up to fifty miles to the second. The lever on the wall"—and here Quinn turned and pointed to it—"is thrown so as to give us the maximum."

"In other words," said Popham feebly, "we are sailing skyward at a rate of—of three thousand miles per—per minute?"

"Presumably. As we left my city lot in New

York at about eleven-fifteen, it follows that we have been one hour on the way."

"And should be one hundred and eighty thousand miles from home," faltered Meigs.

"About that," answered the professor calmly. "I do not know just how much our progress was impeded by the atmospheric envelope of the earth, but I think we may call our distance from the mother orb some one hundred and eighty thousand miles, in round numbers."

These startling figures came near to unsettling the three gentlemen again. In that flight through space we were confronting immensities well-nigh beyond our puny comprehension. And the professor was not yet done.

"In the storeroom overhead," he continued, "I have a supply of cubes and insulating compound which I can combine and give tremendous added velocity to the car."

"I am sure we are traveling fast enough," said Meigs, leaning back on the divan hopelessly dejected.

"If you are now ready to listen to reason," proceeded Quinn, "I will tell you how Mr. Munn

here saved your lives by rescuing me from your mad attack."

"Our lives, forsooth!" exclaimed Markham bitterly. "Of what value is life to us, situated as we are?"

"That is one way to look at it, of course," rejoined Quinn caustically. "But I did not exile you into planetary space for the purpose of wiping you out of existence."

"You might as well have done so," said Popham severely. "That is what this harum-scarum plot of yours amounts to in the long run."

"You may not care to learn how I am preserving you at the present moment," continued Quinn, "nor how I shall do so in the future, yet I will tell you so that you may understand how much you owe to Mr. Munn's foresight and courage."

I was beginning to entertain a high regard for Quinn in spite of what he had done. He may have been laboring under terrible delusions, but his resource certainly commanded respect.

"To my forethought," he continued, "is due the fact that you are breathing oxygen at this moment; and had I not invented a liquid which

fortifies animate or inanimate bodies against heat and cold, our rush through the atmosphere of the earth would have incinerated this car and its contents—nay, would have caused it to explode and settle back on our native planet in impalpable powder."

These were things that none of us, aside from the professor, had so much as taken thought of. My respect for him was growing into something like awe, and I fancied I detected traces of the same sentiment in the other three.

"There are roving bodies in space," Quinn went on, noting with apparent satisfaction the interest he had aroused, "with which we might come into collision. I have a good telescope at the observatory window upstairs, and while I cannot guide this car, I can at least increase or slacken its speed so as to dodge any other derelict that may come into dangerous proximity with us."

"Hadn't you better be up there on the look-out?" queried Markham in some trepidation.

He was manifesting an interest in his personal safety that pleased the professor.

"There is not much danger at present," re-

turned Quinn. "When we have plunged farther into the interstellar void, it will be well to stand watch and watch about at the telescope."

"Will it not be possible to land on some other planet, Mars, for instance?" queried Popham with sudden hope.

"I should prefer Mars," added Meigs, reflecting the hope shown in his friend's face. "They have been signaling from Mars, and perhaps we can find out what they want over there."

Quinn shook his head.

"We are in the hands of fate, gentlemen," said he. "We may drop into some port, but what that port will be is beyond my power even to surmise."

"The moon isn't so far off," suggested Markham.

"Only two hundred and forty thousand miles," said Quinn.

"We should be there in less than two hours from the time of starting," remarked Meigs, after a mental bout with the figures.

"If I wished," said Quinn, "I could increase our speed; traveling at the rate we are, however, something will have to be deducted for the re-

sistance of the earth's atmosphere. If we drop on a planet it must be a planet with an atmosphere. The moon has none, and consequently is a dead world. Besides, fate might not throw us into its vicinity, or——"

"Just a minute, sir," interposed Markham, "for I am a man who likes to understand thóroughly every situation with which he is called upon to deal. You invited us to your castle, not, I am constrained to believe, to have us victimized by Munn, here, nor to have us invest in any of your discoveries, but to snatch us away from the scene of our labors. Is that correct, Professor Quinn?"

"Entirely so, Mr. Markham," replied Quinn.

"Evidently," proceeded Markham, "your plot has cost you some time and labor. You had first to find your gravity-resisting compound——"

"The plot followed as a result of my discovery," smiled the professor. "I did not first evolve the plot and then go searching for means to get you off the earth. When I had made the discovery, it remained for me to give it to the world—or to better the world by taking you four gentlemen away from it. Had I given the public the benefit, you shrewd men of affairs might

have devised means for setting it aside, or for controlling it. Not being a business man myself, I feared to take chances. For that reason the present enterprise appealed to me."

"You have planned so well in the smaller details that I wonder you overlooked the main point."

"And that is——"

"What you are going to do with us, now that your plan has succeeded."

The professor tossed his hands deprecatingly as though that was really the most insignificant part of his startling scheme.

"We can't go bobbing around through interstellar space," grumbled Popham. "I don't relish the idea of being cribbed, cabined and confined in a steel room indefinitely. I should go mad from the very thought."

"It's awful to contemplate," said Meigs, casting a melancholy glance through the iron latticework at one of the windows.

The bags of loot were in that vicinity, at the moment, and his glance swerved reproachfully to me.

"We shall make a landing, I have no doubt," said the professor soothingly, "somehow and somewhere."

"By gad, sir," cried Popham, bringing his fist emphaticaly down on the table, "I don't like such a hit-and-miss way of doing things. Whenever I set out to accomplish anything, the goal is always clear in my mind; yet, here I am, through no desire of my own, afloat in the great void, without a single aim or a remote prospect. If we are going to land anywhere—and you remain firm in your decision not to take us back to our native planet—I demand that you make landfall on some orb that is worth while."

"Very good, Popham," approved Meigs. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, that was the very idea Markham had in mind when he began questioning the professor. Eh, Markham?"

"It was," replied Markham. "A full knowledge of where we are going is necessary to a thorough understanding of our—er—most remarkable situation. Now, there are worlds larger than the one we have recently left. Personally, I am predisposed in favor of a large planet—one on which there are traction inter-

ests, fuel supplies, and products of the soil similar to those we have been accustomed to."

Under the spell of Markham's words, Popham began to glow and expand. Meigs, all attention, pressed a little closer.

"The bigger the planet the bigger our field of operations!" cried Popham. "What's the matter with Jupiter?"

"Or Saturn?" echoed Meigs.

"Or Neptune?" put in Markham.

"What's the matter with the whole solar system?" inquired Quinn, with gentle irony. He turned to me. "Observe, Mr. Munn, how extravagant are the ideas inspired by monopoly! These gentlemen are hardly started on their journey into space before they forget the business interests, the friends and the environment they are leaving behind and begin planning the commercial conquest of the stars!" He shook his head forebodingly. "Your regeneration," he added to the millionaires, "calls for a landing on some barren world, some outcast of the solar system, where you will have nothing to do but think over the evil of your past and learn something of the duty you owe your fellow-men."

Popham, Markham, and Meigs were visibly annoyed by the professor's remarks. Withdrawing as far as the limits of the steel structure would allow, they put their heads together and held a brief but animated conversation in tones so low that the professor and I could not overhear.

"Think of that, professor!" I muttered. "And yet there are people who find fault with a respectable burglar."

"Softly, Mr. Munn," returned Quinn. "Before we are done with this journey I am fain to believe that all of you will have a different outlook upon life, and a higher regard for your duties of citizenship."

Just then, Popham turned from his friends and stepped toward the professor. His manner was truculent—probably just such a manner as he was accustomed to use in facing a board of obstinate directors.

"If you will not return us to our native planet, Professor Quinn," said he sharply, "then we shall stand upon our rights. We are unalterably opposed to landing upon any orb whose diameter measures less than——"

At that instant a most astounding thing happened. The car ducked sideways, throwing the whole structure out of plumb.

Loose articles began to drop from shelves and other places and to slide across the floor to the lowest point. By a quick movement I saved the lamp and braced myself in an upright position.

Cries of terror went up from Markham, Meigs, and Popham.

"Where's Gilhooly?" shouted the professor.

He was answered by a wild yell from overhead.

"He's in the storeroom!" cried Quinn. "Follow me witn that lamp, Munn—quick!"

The professor rushed for the stairway and I made after him with what speed I could.

CHAPTER V.

TRAVELING SUNWARD.

There never lived a man, I suppose, who did not, at some time or other in his career, submit his veracity to question. A reformed burglar, therefore, although animated by the most disinterested motives, can scarcely hope to escape the shafts of the incredulous.

Although well-grounded in the science of cracksmanship, and with some store of legal learning as to alibis and so forth, my mind was as empty of astronomical lore as a drained bottle. The professor's sayings were jotted down in a sort of commonplace book at a later day when leisure offered.

Memory may have played me false in some few minor points, but in all of major importance this narrative is to be taken with the same sincerity in which it is written. I ask no more of the reader than that; and if he is not averse to strolling through unfrequented ways touching

elbows with a man who has a past, we shall get along famously.

To return, then, to the steel car, and the obliquity it suddenly presented to the direction of its course. Startling disclosures had somewhat obscured Gilhooly, and he had vanished from the lower room without being missed.

For a man of sixty-five, the professor was very agile, and he took the winding iron stairway two steps at a time. I gained the storeroom close behind him, and there we found Gilhooly, crooning to himself and working like mad.

He was not working in the dark, but had possessed himself of my bull's-eye lantern, which I had left on descending from the loft some time before. Mounted on a pile of packing cases, he was engaged in painting a large steel cube, taking his pigment from an open cask with a whitewash brush.

"My anti-gravity compound!" exclaimed the professor in an irritated tone. "There are several blocks on the floor, as you can see; Gilhooly began painting that one, and it rose as insulation proceeded, lodging to the left of the dome and tilted the car."

"This is the shabbiest lot of coaches I ever saw in my life," said Gilhooly, dabbing away with the brush. "I won't own a road with such rolling stock."

The three men downstairs had followed Quinn and me. After some coaxing, Meigs got Gilhooly to descend from his perch and give up the whitewash brush.

Thereupon the cube was pried over until it rested directly under another block in the point of the dome, and the professor finished the insulation begun by the railway magnate.

"Gilhooly will have to be watched," said Quinn, "or he will play havoc with the materials I have stored up here. He has wasted at least a quart of that anti-gravity mixture, and it is worth its weight in gold. Nay, it is worth more than that, for after this supply is exhausted there will be none to be had for love or money.

"Our rate of speed has been multiplied by two, and we are rushing through space with frightful rapidity. There is my telescope"—and the professor pointed to the instrument which stood beneath a window in the sloping roof of the car. "Suppose Gilhooly had demolished that!

Or what if he had wrecked the oxygen vat, or the anti-temperature reservoir! Gentlemen, I shudder to think of what might have happened."

The professor sank down on a copper tank and brushed his perspiring brow with a bandanna handkerchief. I placed the lamp on a box beside the bull's-eye lantern and reclined on a bale of something or other that lay conveniently near.

Meigs and Popham dropped down on a packing case with Gilhooly moored between them, and Markham took up his station on an overturned cask.

The loft of the car, stored as it was with odds and ends of science, together with a supply of provisions made ready for us by the farsighted and wonderful man who was conducting this select party into the unknown, was an object of deep solicitude and interest.

Out of a desire to tag the various materials understandingly, I lifted the lid of my curiosity and let out a few questions.

"If I mistake not," said I, "you mentioned this anti-temperature material once before. What is it, professor?"

"A liquid," he answered amiably. "As a dis-

covery, it is outranked only by my anti-gravity compound. An ounce of the fluid in a bath renders the bather impervious to heat or cold, keeping in the animal caloric and keeping out all other extremes of temperature. Some of the mixture was incorporated into the paint with which this car is coated.

"Yonder is the water receptacle," and the professor nodded toward a large tank opposite him. "With economy, the supply in that reservoir will last us several months. The food I have provided is of the ready-prepared kind, mostly in tins, with an alcohol lamp for the brewing of tea, coffee, and chocolate. During this hegira into infinity I have omitted nothing, gentlemen, which will minister to your comfort."

"You are a very able man, professor," acknowledged Popham. "How long have you been planning this little excursion?"

"Ever since I began erecting what the Harlemites were pleased to call my castle," smiled Quinn. "The plan was conceived at the time the success of the manipulations of yourself and your friends seemed assured."

"It was your purpose to foil the speculative

gentlemen," I struck in, "and so come to the aid of a long-suffering public?"

"You hit off the matter finely, Mr. Munn," replied the professor. "That was my purpose."

"Could not your anti-temperature mixture have been donated to the poor with beneficial results?"

"It is altogether too expensive for general use. I will not conceal from you gentlemen the fact that we are falling sunward. If we make landfall on a planet where the heat is several hundred degrees beyond our earthly powers of endurance, the mixture in question will preserve us."

"Falling sunward!" exclaimed Markham. "It was hard upon midnight when we left the earth. If my school-day learning is not at fault, the sun, at the hour of our departure, was on the opposite side of our planet. How, then, does it happen that we are falling toward the great luminary?"

"Bravo!" cried the professor, vastly pleased. "I am glad to see, Mr. Markham, that your intellect has not suffered a total eclipse by the demands of commercial supremacy. Night is the result of one of the earth's hemispheres being

turned from the sun, and, other things being equal, we should now be falling toward the outer limits of our solar system; but, if I may use the term, the castle was not aimed for a direct fall from the earth's crust. We dropped at a very sharp angle, and the influence of the sun has attracted us still farther out of a straight course. I trust you follow me?"

The three millionaires understood the situation, but, judging from the expression of their faces, the knowledge brought keen disappointment.

"There are only two planets between the earth and the sun," observed Markham, "Mercury and Venus, if I remember rightly."

"Both insignificant," grumbled Popham.

"Venus is about the size of our own planet, gentlemen," said the professor. "However, it has long been supposed that there is another group of planets between Mercury and the sun, among them a little world called Vulcan, which——"

"That does not interest us," cut in Meigs. "Sunward the planets are smaller, but they get larger as you go the other way."

"Larger," expounded the professor, "but less dense."

"As I was about to tell you, a moment ago," pursued Popham, "Meigs, Markham, and I have decided that either Saturn or Mars would about fill the bill so far as we are concerned. There are lights on Mars, which, as we figure it, presupposes electricity; and electricity means civilization to a degree that affords us a promising prospect. Then, again, there are canals on Mars, and, if canals, certainly water transportation. Transportation problems of any sort will interest Gilhooly; indeed, we are prone to think they would bring him back to his normal poise. Saturn, on the other hand, has rings, and such a condition might afford opportunities to wide-awake men such as are unknown anywhere else in the solar system. Take us either to Mars or to Saturn, Professor Quinn, as you may find it most convenient. We demand it!"

"It is impossible to do anything of that kind, Mr. Popham," returned the professor decidedly. "The influence of the sun upon our course is too powerful."

"Are we to understand, then," cried Markham,

"that we are compelled to put up with either Mercury or Venus?"

"Even there, gentlemen, we have no choice. We are in the grip of circumstances and must perforce accept whatever fate throws our way. Possibly we shall become a satellite of the sun, revolving around and around it—Quinn's Planet, the smallest of any in the great system."

Although I felt drowsy, I aroused myself with an effort and kept sharp eyes on the professor's face. I do not think he was in earnest, but merely talking to see what effect his remarks would have on the three millionaires.

"Corner, corner, corner," babbled Gilhooly; "make a corner, corner everything."

Markham dropped his face in his hands, Meigs bowed his head, and I saw a shiver run through Popham.

"Egad," muttered Popham, "this castle of yours, Quinn, is little short of a steel tomb. Inasmuch as we are safely interred, what's the use of living? Gilhooly is the only fortunate one among us, for his reason is shattered and he cannot realize what he is facing."

"You are talking less like a man, now, Pop-

ham," reproved Quinn, "than like a driveling idiot. While there's life there's hope. How many brilliant minds have been overthrown as a result of your manipulations of stock in Wall Street? How many bright futures have been wrecked by an adverse trend of the speculative market? Were those unfortunates any better off because thrust into madhouses and unable to realize the fate that had overtaken them? For shame, sir!"

"You are perfectly sure, are you, professor," I struck in, attempting to give a more pleasant twist to the conversation, "that we shall come out all right in the end?"

"I have my plans, Mr. Munn," he answered, not unkindly, "and the success or failure of them will depend largely upon the mental attitude of these gentlemen."

This was too deep for me, and I cast about for some equally important question which would bring a less indefinite response.

"Anyhow," said I, "we have plenty of food for a long journey? It would be a fearful thing to have a famine so—so many miles from a base of supplies."

"The food supply, Mr. Munn," answered the professor, "is adequate. There will be no famine."

"And the water, the oxygen, the——"

"I have looked after everything necessary to our safety and comfort."

"I had confidence in Quinn. He had shown that he was an able man, and that his promises were to be taken at face value. With a sigh of relief, I settled back in tolerable comfort.

Meigs took the rôle of questioner out of my hands at this point, and, although I was eager to hear all that was said, "tired nature's sweet restorer" got the better of my curiosity and I fell asleep on the bale.

CHAPTER VI.

A LANDING EFFECTED.

It is not my purpose to cumber this narrative with the smaller details of our journey, novel and thrilling though some of them proved to be. It is with our experiences on the planet which finally claimed us that this account has mostly to do, so I shall glide over intermediate incidents in a somewhat cursory manner.

Our faculties, keyed to an understanding of earthly conditions only, found themselves continually at bay; and at nothing did they stand more aghast than at the lightning-like speed with which we shot through space.

The energy developed by the two insulated cubes gave to our steel car the stupendous velocity of one hundred miles per second, six thousand miles per minute, three hundred and sixty thousand miles per hour! Human reason might well falter at the threshold of such immensity.

Yet while I slept peacefully on that bale in the storeroom, these figures were verified by the

professor and J. Archibald Meigs, who happened to be the only two who were wide awake. It has been my lasting regret that they did not rouse me so that I might also have had a view of the noble spectacle for the first time unrolled to earthly eyes.

We passed the moon, a dreary, burned-out world, and the professor was able to check off two hundred and forty thousand miles of our sunward plunge. We had traveled a little more than half an hour at our ultimate velocity; taking this into consideration, and noting the exact minute when we crossed the centre of the satellite's orbit, the professor was able to do some figuring and so test his theories as to speed.

The car skimmed through ether less than five hundred miles above the lunar crust. Quinn was doubly pleased, for he not only proved that our velocity was substantially as he had supposed, but also discovered that the moon's attraction, so powerful on the tides of our mother sphere, could not swerve the car by a hair's breadth from its direct course, or overcome the influence of the sun.

Meigs told me later that the marvelous beauty

of the satellite, gleaming against the black void with ghostly radiance, was probably worth the trip and its attendant inconveniences. He and Quinn had looked their fill on the hemisphere which is never seen from the earth.

After this the hours literally flew past, the novelty of our journey precluding any such thing as monotony. In fact, we hardly allowed ourselves a sufficient amount of time for rest and refreshment.

A lookout was kept continually at the eye-piece of the telescope to signal the approach of any asteroid with which we might possibly come into collision. Only once did this danger threaten us, and then, as may be supposed, it was the professor who proved our salvation.

The lever in the wall of the lower or living room of the car communicated with screens, ingeniously arranged for shutting off the power of the anti-gravity cubes. By lessening our speed, the professor suffered the asteroid to cross our course, our car ducking through the luminous trail that swept out behind it.

Night reigned around us constantly. Our car caught the rays of the sun, it is true, but the

lack of an atmosphere caused the light to be thrown back into space and lost.

The castle was nothing less than a small planet, attended by five satellites which, held to our vicinity by the car's attraction, circled around us continually. These satellites were the four knotted handkerchiefs containing the tribute I had levied upon the plutocrats, and also the revolver which had assisted me in the work.

These objects went through varied phases exactly as more pretentious satellites would have done. It would be difficult to describe my feelings as I watched them from the car windows.

I am prone to think, at the present writing, that this lost booty, waxing and waning under my eyes, planted in my nature those first seeds of regret which finally grew into a reformation.

I recall a conversation that I had with Markham while I sat with my eye at the lower end of the telescope, watching for stray asteroids.

The millionaires had given me to understand that I was not in their set. Circumstances over which they had no control had brought us together within the narrow confines of the car, but no social barriers had been leveled. Occasionally

the novelty of our situation, and the consequent excitement, would cause one or other of the wealthy gentleman to forget the gulf that yawned between us.

This attitude of the magnate afforded me a good deal of innocent enjoyment. They had left social prestige, no less than their bank accounts, behind them, and what little collateral they had had upon their persons was now "satelliting" about the car. The line they drew between themselves and me, in their thoughtful moments, was a distinction without much of a difference.

Markham, I remember, was munching a sandwich, contrived out of two crackers and a slice of tinned beef.

"Did you never reflect, Mr. Munn," said he, "upon the evil of your past?"

"When a man writes books which are mainly drawn from his own experience, Mr. Markham," said I, "he has to go into his past pretty exhaustively."

"Ah, yes, I was forgetting about the books. Were you not horrified with the results of your retrospection?"

"Horrified? Well, yes, here and there. I lost

a big haul once through the breaking of a jimmy, and I was horrified to think how any dealer in burglar's kits could have foisted such an unreliable instrument upon a well-meaning cracksman."

Markham stared at me dazedly.

"I have set down the experience in Chapter One of 'Forty Ways for Cracking Safes,'" I proceeded, "and one of the first of my ten rules for success in any safe-cracking job was this: Be sure that your kit is reliable, and without flaws."

"Mr. Munn, Mr. Munn!" whispered Markham hoarsely. "Think of the people from whom you have taken property dishonestly."

"I never think of them but to wish that I had been able to relieve them of more."

"This is awful!" muttered Markham. "You really exult over what you have done."

He would have started down the iron stairs had I not restrained him with a word.

"Let me ask you something, Mr. Markham," said I. "Last fall, bread went to ten cents a loaf because the wheat market was cornered—and a man by the name of Markham did the cornering.

The people who had to put up that extra five cents missed it more than did those from whom I took five hundred dollars."

Markham coughed. "Any asteroids in sight?" he inquired absently.

"I wonder if *you* ever did any reflecting?" I asked tartly.

"What do you think of Quinn?" and Markham looked away as I took my eye from the telescope and gave him an expressive wink.

"I don't think," I continued, "that you ever wrote a book called 'Forty Ways to Starve the Poor.' You have material enough for a pretty effective volume on the subject, but you haven't my nerve."

"No," he returned slowly, "I haven't your nerve. It requires unalloyed impudence and a mind incapable of clear thinking to liken the results of high finance with those of your own petty and highly criminal proceedings. You are too bright a man, Mr. Munn, to allow yourself to be led afield by sophistries of that kind."

"Mr. Markham, Mr. Markham!" I breathed, in horrified protest.

"You have bolstered up your nefarious busi-

ness with false ideals," he went on, "and you are unregenerate and lost!"

"This is awful!" I murmured.

"When we get to where we are going," pursued Markham, either failing to note my sarcasm or else hoping to ride it down, "I trust you will hold your criminal instincts in check. If there are any people there, don't give them any false ideals or implant the notion that your standards belong to the rest of us."

"I would not so belittle my ideals," I returned bluntly.

"Sir," he cried sharply, "am I to understand that you set yourself up as being any better than Mr. Popham, Mr. Gilhooly, Mr. Meigs, or myself?"

"What you understand doesn't concern me in the least," I answered airily. "What you don't understand, it strikes me, is the matter that ought to claim your attention."

"Confound you, sir! Your overwhelming ignorance is equalled only by your colossal egotism. I am sorry that I allowed myself to be beguiled into any talk with you."

"Our regrets are mutual," said I, "for your conversation is demoralizing. You are a past master in successful trickery—trickery of the sort that ought to be stamped out. If the law was as quick to deal with you as with me——"

"Hold!" fumed Markham, plunging for the stairs, "I have heard enough."

I have said that I was a hard man, in those times. I could call a spade a spade with never a thought that my angle of vision was distorted. I have regretted expressing my views in this frank fashion to Markham, yet I believe that there was injustice in his remarks no less than in mine.

Being the only person in the car who possessed a watch, the professor appointed me official time-keeper. It was my duty to bulletin the hour, with its equivalent in days such as we were accustomed to, upon a blackboard in the lower room; I had also to enter this information upon a book, which the professor called the "log-book."

Every ten hours we had a class in astronomy, with the professor as instructor and with every man save Gilhooly and the lookout as students. The railway magnate's aberration continued; all we could do was to watch him solicitously and

prevent him from doing any injury to himself or to our paraphernalia.

The class learned that the nearest planet with an atmosphere, and supposedly habitable, was Venus, which, at inferior conjunction, is distant some twenty-five million miles from Terra, as Quinn called our own planet. Counting out the delays at starting, and in maneuvring to escape the asteroid, our instructor asserted that we should reach Venus in something like seventy-five hours.

Markham, Meigs, and Popham, on consulting the bulletin board and finding that seventy hours had passed, began to brush their clothes and tidy themselves against the hour of landing. But they were destined to disappointment.

Unable to locate Venus at the point where he had hoped to find it, the professor decided that it was nearing superior conjunction and was somewhere on the other side of the sun. Meigs made a deplorable display of temper.

Quinn was a mighty poor astronomer, he said sneeringly, if he could find himself so far wide of the mark on such a simple matter. Meigs further added—with a good deal of childishness

as I thought—that the rôle of a derelict was distasteful to him; a derelict, he argued, was nothing more than a tramp, and he objected to being a tramp, even a celestial tramp.

I was out of patience with the man. Admiration for the professor had taken fast hold of me and I would not have him sneered at or maligned.

A war of hot words was on between myself and the Wall Street broker when Quinn interfered.

"True," said he, "we have missed Venus by a few millions of miles, but we are aimed directly at the orbit of another world, and I can so manipulate the lever as to wait for it, if necessary, and drop upon its surface when it overtakes us."

"What world is that?" said Popham, pricking up his ears.

"Mercury," answered the professor. "It is the smallest orb in our solar system and measures some three thousand miles in diameter."

"I thought Venus was rather contracted for men with such large schemes as ourselves," remarked Meigs, shaking his head, "but this other planet seems to be smaller still."

"I wonder if they have coal mines there?" murmured Popham meditatively.

"And if they grow wheat and cotton?" added Meigs.

"If Mercury is inhabited," spoke up Markham eagerly, "food will certainly be as necessary there as on the earth. I don't know, gentlemen, but it strikes me we might fall into worse places."

"Poor Gilhooly!" sighed Meigs. "What a pity it will be if the Mercurials prove to have traction interests!"

"How long before we shall reach this planet you speak of, professor?" inquired Popham.

"Well," answered Quinn thoughtfully, "Mercury is rather slow. It travels along its orbit at the rate of thirty miles per second, while we are moving at one hundred miles. At a rough estimate, I should say we can effect a juncture with the planet in ten hours, although an extra hour may be required for maneuvres to secure a landing."

The ten hours that followed were hours of great anxiety and feverish labor. Believing that my nerves were the steadiest, the professor placed

me at the telescope to act as pilot while he served as engineer and manipulated the lever.

The responsibilities of my position so worked upon me that I had no time for the glories of the planet we were endeavoring to intercept. Through the telescope I saw huge mountains and broad plains, but they were blurred over with a reddish light and the lesser details of topography were lost.

When five hours were gone, the professor left the lever and came upstairs to have a look through the telescope for himself.

"You have done very well indeed, Mr. Munn," he was pleased to say, "but I think that I had better take this post from now on, while you go below and station yourself at the switch board. The slightest mismanagement, when the critical moment arrives, might hurl us against Mercury with a force that would result in annihilation.

"The lever turns in a half circle, as you may know. The arc is divided into spaces, numbered from zero to ninety. I will call down to you the number to which you must throw the lever; you will repeat the number back to me, and instantly obey my order."

"Trust me, sir," said I.

But the professor was loath to let me go without still further impressing upon me the importance of the work before us.

"In order to alight safely, Mr. Munn," he continued, "we must graduate the power of the anti-gravity cubes to the Mercurial atmosphere. By proceeding intelligently in the matter, we shall make the car weigh slightly more than the atmosphere we encounter; then, when we are about to land, we will let the car just counterbalance the 'pull' of the planet and there will not be the slightest jar."

"I understand, professor," I answered and went downstairs.

Markham, Meigs, and Popham ascended to the upper chamber, this position bringing them a few feet nearer the goal of our desires as well as giving them a point of vantage from which to watch events. Gilhooly was the only one besides myself in the lower room; he was kneeling on the divan writing imaginary stock quotations on the steel wall with the point of his finger.

For four hours or more the professor called out for slight variations in the speed of the car,

but in the main the lever was held on the number 90, which gave a maximum velocity. The tension of the minutes ushering in the last hour of the ten is beyond my power to describe.

Once in my evil days I manipulated the tumblers of a combination and pulled open a vault door. Behind the door stood two men with revolvers. For two seconds I stared agape at the trap which I had sprung upon myself; and when I got away I had a bullet in my shoulder.

Intensify my feelings fourfold as I stood looking into the leveled revolvers of those two men, then spread out the two seconds to cover a half hour. In this way only can I describe my state of mind while we fought for a safe landing on the planet Mercury.

Cries of wonder and apprehension echoed to me from overhead. Above them I heard the shrill voice of the professor:

"Zero."

"Zero," I repeated, throwing the lever clear over.

There followed a jolt as the screens covered the cubes and shut off their energy. Instantly there came the sickening sensation of a fall, ac-

companied by a rush of displaced air that roared and bellowed all about the car.

"Forty-five!" shrieked Quinn.

"Forty-five!" I yelled, throwing the lever half over.

Then we caught ourselves with a suddenness that threw me to my knees. We were moving upward again—I could feel the steel floor rising under me.

"Twenty!" came down from above.

"Twenty," I answered hoarsely, struggling erect and shifting the lever.

I felt that we were still rising, but slowly. The professor was juggling with an unknown atmosphere, and on the success of his judgment depended our lives.

"Fifteen!"

"Fifteen!" and over went the lever for five degrees.

We were swinging stationary in mid-air. From the window by the switch board I looked outward and downward with bulging eyes.

A dazzling glow covered peak and plain, and I turned away that my sight might not be blinded to the lever numbers.

"Ten!" cried the professor.

"Ten it is!" and I threw the switch to the number given.

Then again we dropped, but slowly, very slowly.

"Five!"

I repeated the order, and again the air rushed against the blunt base of the car, yet not so fiercely as before. Then, all of a sudden, I felt a grip of fingers about my throat, and I was hauled from the lever and thrown back on the floor.

Gilhooly had a knee on my breast and was strangling me with fingers of steel. The fire of an insane purpose gleamed in his eyes, and he seemed possessed of the strength of a dozen demons.

I struggled, but I might as well have tried to rise under the thousand-tons pressure of a hydraulic press.

"Ten!" cried Quinn.

I did not answer—I could not, for my tongue was lolling between my lips.

"Ten!" screamed Quinn. *"Ten—or we're lost!"*

A groan, hardly audible, escaped my gasping throat. I heard a frantic clamor above and then there was such a jar and crash as I hope I shall never experience again.

All tangible life slipped away from me, and I collapsed into an unconsciousness that I felt might be death itself.

CHAPTER VII.

FACING A MERCURIAL STORM.

That our lives were preserved and the car saved from destruction was due to two circumstances, one of them most peculiar and of far-reaching importance.

The lesser of the two circumstances was this: the car had not dropped to the plain, but had had its downward rush intercepted by an elevation, so that the force of our fall was just about half what might have been expected.

As to the other and more vital circumstance, the fall itself was not what it would have been on our own sphere. The "pull" of gravity on Mercury, as we afterward discovered, has only one-third the power it has on Terra. To this phenomenon were due many wonderful things, as the reader will discover before we have gone very far.

I was not the first of our party to open his eyes after the landing, for when I sat up and stared about me I saw the professor moving

around the steel chamber and ministering to the others.

Gilhooly was creeping toward the divan on all fours, muttering something about " a great slump in the market" and chuckling over the way in which he had "got out from under."

J. Archibald Meigs was groaning and trying to lift himself on his elbow; Augustus Popham was on his knees, wobbling erratically and apparently undecided whether to say his prayers or to try and get up; Hannibal Markham was flattened out along the floor, the professor kneeling over him and chafing his temples.

"What sort of a navigator are you, Quinn?" asked Meigs crossly. "By gad, it is more dangerous to make port with you than it is to sail through space."

"Don't blame the professor for a fault of mine, Meigs," I spoke up warmly.

The broker looked at me with something like contempt.

"I blame him for placing an incompetent and irresponsible person at such an important post as the switch board," said Meigs. "He should have known that a man who holds your distorted

views on the subject of personal property is not to be trusted."

"That's right," added Popham, lifting himself to the divan.

"Gilhooly made an attack on me," said I. "He bore me down and came within one of strangling me."

"Quinn is the cause of Gilhooly's abnormal condition," persisted Meigs, who was bound to have Quinn at fault for every evil that overtook us.

I got up, rather more wrathful than the situation demanded. The fall had jarred my temper no less than my body, and I was in a mood to have the business out with Meigs at close quarters.

"Softly, Mr. Munn!" cautioned the professor. "It is well to have a deaf ear for these gentlemen at times. Help me lift Mr. Markham to the divan."

The professor's words dispelled my anger. Without another word to Meigs I went over and assisted in getting the food trust magnate into a more comfortable position.

Markham was not long in recovering, and

when we took stock of ourselves we found that we were not much the worse for our shaking up. Quinn called to me to go upstairs with him and see if any havoc had been wrought there.

We found that no particular damage had been done to the instruments or other material. When we descended to the lower chamber, after an absence of fifteen or twenty minutes, Meigs had the key in the steel door and was standing at the entrance with Popham and Markham on either side of him.

"Where did you get that key?" demanded the professor, one hand groping in his pocket.

Heretofore he had been careful to keep the key upon his person. Small wonder that he was now surprised to find it in the possession of Meigs.

"I found it on the floor," replied the broker with a good deal of dignity. "Probably you lost it out of your pocket when you fell from the stairs a few minutes ago."

"What are you intending to do?" asked the professor quietly.

"Professor Quinn, sir," returned Meigs with elaborate condescension, "we have reached the

parting of the ways. While we were traveling through space, I and my friends could do nothing less than bear with your company, and with that of the rogue at your side; but now that we are safely moored on Mercury, and can debark, we see fit to withdraw ourselves and renounce further intercourse with you."

"Ah!" murmured Quinn, a slow smile hovering about his thin lips.

The smile caused some acerbity to manifest itself in the three gentlemen at the door. They drew themselves up haughtily.

"Quinn," went on the broker sharply, "you lured us into your castle and abducted us from our native orb, with small regard for the feelings of our relatives or friends, and no consideration whatever for the business interests with which we were engaged; so——"

"Your business interests had my every consideration," interrupted the professor.

Meigs took no notice of the remark.

"So," he continued, "remembering these wrongs, we feel that we can no longer associate with you. As for Munn"—here he turned a fastidious eye in my direction—"he is utterly impos-

sible to men of our social standing. This planet, you tell us, is three thousand miles in diameter. May we request that you and Munn take one end of the diameter and leave the other end to us?"

The professor laughed softly and seated himself.

"Sit down, Mr. Munn," said he. "We have been ostracized by our fellow-exiles. Let us see how well they get along without us."

"We bid you farewell," finished Meigs loftily.

Thereupon he turned the key, threw open the door—and dropped on the threshold as though he had been shot! Markham and Popham cried aloud, threw their arms across their faces and reeled back.

A blast as from a furnace drove in at the opening, filling the chamber like a draft from Hades. I could scarcely breathe in the stifling atmosphere.

"Hurry, Munn!" cried Quinn. "Drag Meigs away from the door or he'll be burned to a crisp!"

The broker was already smoking when I

caught his ankles and jerked him inside. The professor slammed the door.

Presently the air within the car readjusted itself to normal conditions. Meigs, red as a beet and breathing heavily, was little the worse for his warm experience.

"I fancy, Mr. Meigs," cooed the professor, "that you will wish to avail yourself of one of my anti-temperature baths before cutting loose from myself and Mr. Munn. There is plenty of water left for all of us, and I will go aloft, set up the collapsible tub, and make the bath ready. We have alighted in the tropics, evidently, and at the period of mid-summer. The temperature is about five hundred degrees, fahrenheit."

With that the professor took the key from the door to keep Gilhooly from making a dash outside, and started for the storeroom. I followed him, the three disgruntled gentlemen gazing after us mutely.

The professor and I were the first to fortify ourselves with the anti-temperature bath. After dipping our bodies, we rinsed our clothing in the liquid.

Aside from a pleasant, cooling sensation the bath gave no evidence of its potent qualities. There was no hardening of the skin, as I fancied there might be, no change in its ruddy color, no inconvenience.

When we went down again we sent the other three gentlemen aloft, the professor instructing them as to the necessity of making their clothing as well as their bodies proof against the climate. In due course, Popham, Meigs, and Markham once more showed themselves.

Gilhooly, of course, had also to be made immune; and he struggled against it so fiercely that we were obliged to hold him in the tub while the professor poured three buckets of the mixture over him.

He was not disrobed, and when sufficiently drenched he leaped from the tub and fled, raving, to the lower chamber.

"Now," said the professor, "we are prepared to fare forth. You gentlemen"—he addressed himself to Markham, Meigs, and Popham—"may go with Mr. Munn and me, or keep by yourselves, as you may elect. But it will be well to make this car our headquarters. Here we have food and

drink, also a stronghold in case of attack by the Mercurials—if there happen to be any."

"How can there be any life in such an overheated atmosphere?" inquired Markham.

"Nature is a great leveler of barriers," replied Quinn. "She is able to adjust life to its environment, you may be sure, just as easily as she can bridge the social chasm that separates a thief from a trust magnate."

His eyes twinkled.

"Such a bridge," he added, "would not prove much of a tax on her resources. For my own part, I do not think the chasm either so wide or so deep as you gentlemen appear to imagine."

I chuckled at that, and Meigs and his two companions grew duly resentful.

"As for Mr. Gilhooly," continued Quinn, "we cannot take him with us on our tour of observation. It will be best to leave him locked in the car. I will close the trap leading into the storeroom and I do not think it will be possible for him to work much damage in the room below."

"I don't know what good it will do me to go out with your exploring expedition," said Pop-

ham dejectedly; "in a country as hot as this there can be no earthly use for coal."

"Or wearing apparel," added Meigs listlessly. "Cotton couldn't grow in such a temperature. And as for wheat!" He shook his head wearily.

Cotton and wheat were the a b c of his Wall Street experience. Beyond those commodities he groped in the dark.

"What sort of food can be grown on such a sun-baked planet?" grumbled Markham.

The railway man was shouting something about watered stock, and his babbling was wafted up to us.

"Gilhooly," added Markham, "is the only fortunate man in the party. Realization will blast the hopes and mayhap prove the death of the rest of us, while he—he cannot realize!"

"You gentlemen lose courage too quickly," said the professor. "In my lectures on Venus I told you how that planet was inclined to the plane of its orbit. The axis of Mercury has a still greater inclination; in fact, the orb leans on itself as though about to fall. Its days are of about the same length as the days of Terra—only three minutes longer—but its years, owing to its con-

tracted orbit, are much shorter. In eighty-eight days Mercury makes its round, so that each season is only twenty-two days in length.

"At the poles of Mercury, in what answers to the polar regions of our own earth, there must be a more tempered climate——"

"Then let us get there, by all means," cut in Popham.

"In whatever we do," answered Quinn, "we must make haste slowly."

"Let's get out and look around, anyhow," cried Meigs. "It may happen, after all, that we have a world to conquer here, and I have not the patience to remain longer in this steel cell of yours."

"Very good," returned the professor. "We will make our preparations and go forth."

He shut off the flow of oxygen from the tank and then followed the rest of us to the under apartment, closing a steel door over the trap at the head of the stairs and locking it. Gilhooly, imagining himself a conductor, was walking around the edge of the circular divan collecting tickets from imaginary passengers.

"Sing Sing!" he called out as the professor

unlocked the door at the entrance and pulled it open.

"Here's where you get off, Munn," said Meigs maliciously.

"Here's where we all get off," returned the professor, smiling.

Thereupon we passed hastily into the blinding glare of the Mercurial day. For several minutes our eyes rebelled at the brightness; when finally they became inured to it, we looked around us upon a desolation that struck dismay to our hearts.

We saw then that our car had alighted upon an elevation which was nothing less than the rim of an extinct volcano of vast proportions. From ridge to ridge across the abysmal crater at least half a mile could be measured.

It was beyond the power of our eyes to penetrate to the black depths of the great pit.

"Listen!" cried the professor, his voice resounding so thunderously as almost to deafen us —some trick of the atmosphere.

We stood silently, our ears alert, and heard a confused babel of sound proceeding apparently out of the very core of the volcano.

"Sub-Mercurial fires may be at work down there," whispered the professor, nodding toward the crater.

Even the whisper sounded unpleasantly loud to us.

"What a world!" came from Augustus Popham in bellowing tones. "With fire within and without, what chance is there for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?"

Some of Meigs' peevishness had got into the coal man, and he rent the air with it. We remained mute after this outburst, I with my gaze hopefully on the professor and the professor blinking at the sun.

In a little time I allowed my own eyes to falter zenithward, and the glory of the sun in Mercury's mid-heaven has ever since been one of the treasured memories of my life. Its disk was six times its diameter as viewed from Earth, and the grandeur of its flaming surface is beyond the powers of my feeble pen to make known.

I was oppressed and held captive by a feeling of awe and wonder. There was a red tinge to the atmosphere, caused by a reflection from the

red of the planet's brick-like crust; through this warm color pulsed the golden streamers—yellow and scarlet overhead, fading to faintest orange on the horizon.

"Think you, Mr. Popham," murmured the professor, his voice awakening us as from a trance, "that all yon splendor, which has been in these skies for ages upon ages, was created for the enjoyment of no living thing? If so, you are wrong. There are now, as there have always been, beings with an intelligence capable of appreciating all this magnificent profusion of light and color. But enough. We have looked down into the crater and up into the heavens; suppose we turn our eyes another way and see what there is to offer."

He faced about as he spoke, and gazed down the bare rocky slope of the volcano and off across an equally bare and forbidding plain.

"No trees, no water, no life of any kind," muttered Meigs querulously.

"There is a bright spot over there," said Quinn, shading his eyes and pointing.

Our eyes followed his finger and encountered a glittering object on a slight elevation. As we

gazed, the object, whatever it was, slowly vanished.

"We might investigate that," suggested Popham excitedly. "Perhaps it was a Mercurial wearing a sort of armor to protect him from the heat. It may be that there are people here, and that they live underground."

He would have started forthwith, but the professor stretched out a hand and detained him.

"Just a moment," said Quinn. "Before we get too far from the car, let me make sure that all of you are sufficiently immune from the heat. Do you feel that you are fully protected in that respect, gentlemen?"

So far as I was personally concerned, I had not felt the slightest inconvenience from the sun's rays. I declared as much, and the others likewise so expressed themselves.

"There's another one of the things!" spoke up Meigs, pointing in another direction.

We were just able to detect a glow on another low elevation when it also flashed into thin air. Then we began looking for the little hills, and counted no less than a dozen within our range of vision.

Some of the hills were capped with the mysterious gleam, which dazzled for a time and then twinkled out.

The professor was perplexed, as I could see plainly.

"We'll examine one of those hills," said Meigs, "and find out what this means."

The top of the volcano, where we were standing, was perhaps five hundred feet from the plain. As Meigs spoke, he leaped for a rock a yard or so below him.

To the astonishment of all of us, he rose in the air like a human balloon, soared over the rock by a score of feet, and alighted several rods down the slope.

It was a titanic jump, but Meigs had regained a foothold with the lightness of a piece of down. He was a large man, was Meigs, his ponderosity exceeding two hundred pounds, Fairbanks.

He was as much surprised at his agility as we were, and began to essay various feats. He leaped straight upward, gaining a maximum height of a dozen yards and returning lightly and easily to his original position.

Next he coupled his leap with an aerial somer-

sault, and carried on with an abandon much beneath the dignity of a Wall Street broker, as it struck me. In fact, he acted like a schoolboy out for a holiday, and so full of animal spirits he hardly knew what to do with himself.

"You'd think he belonged to a circus," observed the disgusted Popham. "I'll go down there and put a stop to the performance."

"And I'll go along and help," added Markham, visibly distracted because of the broker's folly.

They started down the steep with rod-long steps; and presently one would have thought they wore seven-league boots from the amount of speed they developed.

Instead of putting a stop to the broker's performance they joined in. By and by they were playing leapfrog, every bound taking them forward half a hundred feet.

"Gravity here is far from having the force it has on Terra," remarked the professor. "Exertion comes easy and gives most astonishing results. Those men, Mr. Munn, are not used to such activity, yet their marvelous gymnastics do not seem to tire them in the least. Suppose that

we ourselves make a test of the Mercurial gravity?"

I needed no second bidding, and Quinn and I took the descent as buoyantly as thistle-down before the wind. Somehow the lightness of our heels got into our heads, and the staid professor and myself began cavorting like a pair of ten-year-olds.

The delightful freedom of movement was as novel as it was exhilarating. Liberty of muscle bred license of mind; had we been smoking opium we could not have acted more outrageously.

Nor was there any fatigue apparent. I felt that I could have run a hundred miles in as many minutes and never paused for breath.

Carried away by the wonderful effects of diminished gravity, we forgot all about our projected investigation of the little hills. In the midst of a game of tag we were suddenly brought to our senses with a round turn.

A pall had fallen over the landscape. The sun was blotted out by inky clouds, and a tremendous wind began to blow.

"We must get back to the car!" cried Quinn

His voice, great in volume though it was, was all but drowned in the shriek and roar of the blast. The lightness that had afforded us so much enjoyment in still air now became a source of grave danger, for we could not keep our feet in the fury of the tempest.

"Merciful powers!" roared Popham, as he and Meigs were driven against each other with a terrific impact.

Although sorely put to it to keep myself from being blown away, I managed to cling to a rock and watch the weird gyrations of the two millionaires. Their collision had caused them to lose their footing, and, clinging desperately to each other, they were hurled back and forth, touching the ground now and then, only to rebound from it like rubber balls. And all the time this ground-and-lofty tumbling was going on both men were whooping frantically for some one to come to their aid.

I was too hard beset to think of leaving my place of temporary refuge, and it was only when I saw the professor and Markham, their right hands clasped, staggering toward the two men, that I made up my mind to join them. Three of

us, in a chain, might be able to do something toward rescuing Popham and Meigs.

Breathing deep, like a swimmer about to plunge through a whirlpool, I cast myself adrift and allowed the wind to drive me in the direction of the professor and Markham. No matter how strongly I braced backward against the blast, every time I lifted a foot I was hurled onward and almost overturned. Finally, more by good luck than anything else, I came close enough to catch the professor's hand.

"Popham and Meigs will be killed if we can't get to them!" shouted Markham.

There were eddies in the wind, like those in the swift current of a stream, and Popham and Meigs had become entangled in them. Had they been blown off on a straightaway course, they would long since have been too far away for us to do anything toward laying hands on them and getting them upright.

The professor had taken note of the gyratory movements of our hapless companions, and he called upon Markham and me to plant ourselves as firmly as possible and remain in our present positions. This was easier said than done; yet,

by calling upon every ounce of our reserve strength, we contrived, after a fashion, to keep our places.

Popham and Meigs were bounding and leaping through the arc of a great circle. All we had to do was to remain where we were and wait for them.

They came to us in mid-air, and we had literally to reach up and pull them down. For a space the five of us were tangled in an indiscriminate heap, our united weight offering greater resistance to the wind and giving us an opportunity to rest and collect our scattered wits.

"Join hands," cried the professor, "and we'll get under the lee of that rock. Careful, now! We must not get separated again."

By desperate work we succeeded in getting to our feet and clasping hands; then, hurled and buffeted, we gained the rock and fell breathless under the leeward side of it.

"What a place, what a place!" groaned Popham.

"I wish Venus hadn't been out of our course," wailed Meigs. "Certainly we couldn't have been any worse off there than here."

"No wonder nothing can grow on this sun-scorched world," growled Markham. "Even if plants could stand the heat such a wind would pull them up by the roots."

"What are we to do now?" demanded Popham. "You got us into this, Quinn, and you've got to get us out of it."

"Now's a good time for you three to go off to the other side of the planet," I remarked. "Whenever there's danger, you suddenly realize that you can't get along without the professor. Oh, you're a fine lot of nabobs, you are."

"Peace, Mr. Munn," called the professor. "We have enough to occupy our minds without wasting time in useless bickering. I was at fault, for I knew what terrible gales visit this planet, and that they come suddenly. It was a mistake to venture so far from the car."

"A mistake," breathed Meigs, with some heat, "that came near having tragic consequences. Popham and I were knocked about like a couple of footballs."

"What's to be done, what's to be done?" cried Popham impatiently. "The gale is increasing, and who knows but this rock may be plucked up

bodily and rolled over us? We can't stay here."

"That is true," said the professor. "We must get back to the car."

"There's no telling what will become of us if we try that," called Markham.

"And there's no telling what will become of us if we remain here," answered the professor. "If we form a chain, it is quite possible that we may succeed in getting back to our refuge."

"Even the car may not be able to stand up against this wind," clamored Meigs.

"We shall have to take our chances with it, nevertheless," went on Quinn. "If we should get separated, each of us must make the best preparations he can to weather the gale, and then, when it has blown itself out, hunt for the car. That must be our rendezvous during the time we are here."

The professor got up slowly, bracing himself against the fierce swirl that came around the side of the rock.

"Come," he called; "it is now or never."

I could see that the gale had increased alarm-

ingly. Its force seemed irresistible, and yet I knew that we could not remain where we were.

We clasped hands again, but were unable to cling together, being lifted high and thrown helter-skelter in all directions. Lightning flashed —such lightning as I have never seen before or since.

It snapped and crackled overhead and ran like trailing serpents over the rocks. We were in a sea of flame.

And the thunder! It seemed to split the heavens and crack open the lava-like hills. Rain came; yet not rain, for it turned to damp vapor in the red-hot atmosphere. The Mercurial elements were at war—wind, steam, thunder, and lightning all marshaling their hosts and charging to conflict.

To regain the steel car was impossible. We were lost in the fearsome fury of darkness and storm, driven helplessly and with smashing force across the vast plain.

I was hurled against something which I gripped with convulsive energy. The something gripped me in return.

"Help!" I cried, bereft of my wits and eager only for rescue.

"Munn!" shouted a voice. "Is this you?"

"Quinn!" I exclaimed.

"We must hang together," said Quinn.

And then, tightly locked in each other's arms, we were lifted high on a billow of fog and driven relentlessly I know not how far.

When the blast released us, we fell to the rocks and rolled over and over; then the surface beneath us gave way and we dropped.

The distance we fell could be only a matter of guesswork, and even guesswork was out of the question in the disordered state of our minds at that moment. Suffice to say the fall did not render us unconscious, and we struck on something that vibrated under the impact of our bodies. We were still in blank darkness, and the turmoil of the tempest no longer beat about us, but could be heard crashing somewhere overhead.

"Thank Heaven!" murmured the professor, withdrawing himself from me. "Are you alive, Mr. Munn?"

"I believe so," I answered. "What has happened to us, professor?"

"We have been flung into some sort of a shelter, it seems to me," he replied.

"But we are not on stable ground," he added. "We are sitting on an object that is descending with us, descending rapidly and—ah, wonder of wonders!"

Abruptly we fell into broad day, surrounded by such sights and sounds that I thought myself dealing with the mysteries of a disordered dream.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MERCURIALS.

Professor Quinn and I were sitting on a large box constructed of metal that was polished to dazzling brilliancy. So far as our purposes were concerned, this box was nothing less than an elevator; we had fallen upon it and it had carried us down into the wonderful interior of the planet.

Now, truly, we were in another world—a world that teemed with life—a smiling and pleasant region underlying a most barren and inhospitable shell. The scoriated exterior of the planet was the husk; here was the kernel.

It was a white world, extending league on league in every direction and roofed with a lofty vault that sparkled as with stars. From every hand came a bee-like hum, proving that we were in a hive of industry and life.

Houses spread out before us in rows, queerly shaped structures that looked as though they might have been built of alabaster, and so diminutive that the tallest scarcely came more than

head high. Back of the houses were fields thickly covered with nodding blossoms that looked like snow; through the fields ran water-ways dividing each into small squares.

So intent were we on the background of this strange picture that we failed to take account of what was going on in our immediate vicinity.

Suddenly a weird creature hopped to the top of the box and stood between my companion and myself, regarding us fixedly. This, I supposed, was one of the Mercurials. If he considered the professor and myself objects of curiosity and surmise, we were no less keen in so regarding him.

He stood twenty-three or twenty-four inches high; his head was an ivory billiard ball, and his trunk a larger spheroid; from his middle downward hung a red kirtle. He had one eye at the front of the head and an ear at the back; the olfactory organ was missing, but there was a mouth opening perpendicularly under the eye.

The upper spheroid rested directly on the lower; and at each side of the lower one, corresponding to the shoulders, were two tentacle-like arms, sinuous as whips and ending in hands that were made up of a palm and seven digits. Queer-

est of all, there were two more arms set in the breast and back.

From the creature's shoulder was suspended a round object like a canteen. For all of five minutes Quinn and I eyed this surprising figure and were eyed in return.

"Can you talk English?" asked the professor at last.

It was a foolish question, such as I was far from expecting from the professor, but something had to be said, and I suppose that was as good as anything else. As the professor began speaking the head whirled squarely around, presenting the ear.

After my companion was done, the head spun back again, and the breast arm caught the canteen while the fingers of a shoulder arm began manipulating a set of keys. The result was language, with all the variations of tone and accent. But it was an unknown tongue, if an expression of that kind may be allowed in such a case.

Since the word-box was as ineffective as our own speech, we fell back with more success on the language of signs. At this the Mercurial had

the better of us, for he could make signs with four hands.

The professor signified that we were hungry, and the Mercurial signified that we were to descend from the box This we did, and found ourselves in the centre of a group of Mercurials whose word-boxes were chattering like so many magpies.

The Mercurial with whom we were already on gesticulating terms played off some orders on his own canteen, and two of the others advanced upon the box from which we had just descended. Pulling out a slide in the side of the receptacle, they exposed two ewers of steaming food, and we were motioned to fall to.

We stood not upon the order, but obeyed instantly, using a pair of small paddles which were thrust into our hands. I had no idea what the food might be, but it was tender and of good flavor.

"A bright little people," observed the professor as he ate.

"Seemingly," I responded.

"Nature has denied them the power of speech, yet see how they have surmounted the difficulty.

I must give that talking machine of theirs a close inspection. We are in a most wonderful country, Mr. Munn."

"The little I have seen of it already quite dazes me," said I. "What a pickpocket a man could make of himself with all those hands!"

Quinn gave me a reproachful look, and I hastily apologized for even mentioning a branch of my profession.

"Do you understand now," said he, turning the subject very pleasantly, "what those bright objects were which we saw on the tops of the low hills?"

"No," said I.

"They were ovens," he answered. "Food is put in them and sent up to the hot surface of the planet. When properly cooked it is lowered again."

Association with this learned man was a liberal education in itself. I can never be sufficiently thankful to fate for causing our paths to cross.

"You think, then," said I, "that we were blown to the top of one of the hills and fell into a shaft used by the traveling ovens?"

"Nothing else could have happened."

The professor gave a start and looked worried.

"Dear, dear!" he exclaimed. "I was quite forgetting our friends. While we are here feasting and taking our ease, they are battling with the storm, and are no doubt in peril of their lives. How very, very thoughtless we are, Mr. Munn."

I was not greatly exercised over the matter. The trust magnates believed that there was a figurative gulf between myself and them, and I was more than willing that this gulf should grow from the symbol to the reality.

"I doubt if we can return to the outside of the planet at present, professor," said I, "and even if we were able to do so, what could we accomplish in the face of that tremendous storm?"

"True, very true," said he.

"That oven," said I, by way of taking his mind from the plutocrats, "must have been very warm when we landed on it and descended to these regions."

"We should have been grilled, sir," returned

the professor, "but for the fact that we are coated, and our clothing impregnated, with my anti-temperature fluid."

"These Mercurials appear to stand the heat pretty well," I remarked.

"Covered, as we are, with the anti-temperature compound," he returned, "it is impossible for us to judge, even approximately, of the degree of heat that obtains in these sub-Mercurial regions. Naturally it must be very much less than prevails on the surface of the planet, and yet, even at that, if left unprotected we should probably be shrivveled to cinders."

"Hardly, professor," I ventured to protest. "Those fields"—and I waved my paddle toward the open country—"are growing rank with a white herb, which is evidently cooked in these ovens and served for food. Quite likely we are eating of it now, and very good eating I find it. However, the point I wish to make is this: If the heat was so intense as you surmise, those fields would be wilted and dried up."

"Nature, Mr. Munn," answered the professor, "adapts itself to every condition. On our own planet we see how life and comfort are rendered

possible in every zone from the farthest north to the tropics; and this same adaptability of intelligent creatures to their environment, we may be sure, proceeds throughout the universe. These one-eared, one-eyed, diminutive creatures are formed in the manner best calculated to afford them comfort and happiness amid these surroundings. And, as with them, so with the products of their husbandry."

"You could argue a squirrel out of a tree, professor," said I, with whole-souled admiration. "I am sorry I did not take a course of scientific training, for it would have helped me immensely in my business. A burglar should be an all-around man. If I ever return to Terra——"

"So long as you feel as you do regarding your odious profession, Mr. Munn," broke in the professor, compressing his lips, "you will never return to Terra."

"A return is possible?" I asked, hiding the wonder his words aroused.

"Anything is possible."

"How about the millionaires? Are they to return provided the means are at hand?"

"Provided they experience a change of heart;

In their present state of delusion, they are mere firebrands of destruction. Before they ever again take part in mundane affairs, they must be taught to see things differently. I wonder what has become of them?"

The professor's brow clouded with anxiety.

"Don't fret about them, professor," said I. "They are not overeager for our society. Let them have a taste of shifting for themselves without your knowledge and resourcefulness to shield them from everything that goes wrong. It will do them a world of good."

"Perhaps you are right, Mr. Munn," my companion answered musingly. "If I could know they had survived the storm, I should feel tolerably easy in my mind. These little Mercurials appear to be a friendly people, and if our comrades escaped that frightful tempest they must sooner or later fall into the hands of these dwellers of the under-world."

"I suppose," I ventured, seeking to draw my companion's mind from the plutocrats, "that this Mercurial under-world is another illustration of the way Nature takes care of her protégés. After baking the outside shell of the planet to a degree

that makes all life impossible, she thoughtfully scoops out the interior so that these small creatures will have a place to go."

"You have stated the case correctly, Mr. Munn," and the professor's face lighted up as he swept his gaze over the country immediately adjacent. "These ovens," he proceeded, "are a remarkable example of adapting means to an end. The fierce heat of the surface does the cooking."

"Popham will find little pleasure in that," I laughed.

"Like the rest of us," answered the professor grimly, "he will have to accustom himself to new conditions."

"Everything must be different here from the surroundings with which we have been familiar all our lives. I wonder what form of property is considered most valuable to these Mercurials?"

The professor frowned. My mind was running in its old groove despite its novel environment.

"That query was inspired by an unworthy motive, Mr. Munn," said Quinn severely.

I bowed humbly. "Every man his own way,"

said I. "I cannot help trying to adjust myself along the line of the principles I know best. Nevertheless I am of an intensely curious disposition, and those talk-boxes fill me with wonder."

"The Mercurials are dumb, it seems," answered the professor, "and they have to resort to purely mechanical means for an exchange of ideas. Language appears to flow readily enough from the little boxes."

"If any one of them ever lost his four hands," I observed, "he would not only find it impossible to help himself but would be unable to tell others what to do to help him. Nature has been prodigal with them in the matter of hands, and in this, no doubt, showed her usual wisdom."

"I am glad to see your thoughts taking a philosophical trend, Mr. Munn," said the professor. "It argues well for your future."

By that time we had emptied the receptacle of food, and as we dropped our paddles and drew back, the word-boxes of a hundred Mercurials shrieked despairingly. The pygmies clustered about the empty basins, glared into them, and then turned their menacing eyes on the professor and myself.

"Goodness me, Mr. Mumm," exclaimed the professor. "We have probably eaten the food supply of the entire district. If we do not have a care, our voracious appetites are like to prove our undoing. Look, there come more of the Mercurials. They're after their supper, I'll warrant, and they are going to be disappointed."

I looked in the direction indicated by the professor, and saw a long line of billiard balls rolling our way.

It was a procession, headed by a pompous little Mercurial whose trunk and arms were gorgeously gilded. With two of his hands he carried a metal plate and spoon, and with the other two he wielded a silver baton about the size of a match.

Plates and paddles were also carried by the rest of the advancing Mercurials, their wordboxes chanting a sort of quickstep. The sight of the professor and myself, towering mountainlike over the throng about us, brought the procession to an abrupt halt with a squeak of dismay.

The gentleman in the red kirtle went forward and held converse with the gentleman of the gilt torso. Before they got through, their word-

boxes were fairly roaring, and stricken groans went up from every talk-machine in the line.

The advent of two leviathans like my companion and myself must have had a demoralizing effect, but that seemed as nothing in comparison with the harrowing results of our voracity.

The leader raised his baton. Silence fell. The leader then advanced to where we were standing and circled around us, examining us critically with his solitary eye.

The survey finished, he tried his word-box on us, the professor answering in all the languages of our home planet, living and dead, of which he was master. But in vain; we could not come to an understanding.

The begilded gentleman finally gave over and whirled on the underling in the red kirtle. His fingers flew over the keys of his canteen, and speech of a swift and commanding kind was poured out.

A skurrying about of the oven tenders resulted. From somewhere a fresh supply of uncooked food was brought and placed in the huge metal box.

While this was going forward, Quinn suddenly seized my arm, a troubled look crossing his face.

"What is the matter, professor?" I asked.

"Matter enough, Mr. Munn!" he answered. "The lever was left on Number Five!"

His thoughts were up with the steel car. I was surprised at this, for it appeared to me that there was more than enough to claim our full attention right in our immediate vicinity.

"And what of that, sir?" I asked.

"The anti-gravity cubes lighten the car by five degrees," he answered excitedly. "Thus buoyed, and in its elevated position, I doubt if the car should hold its own against the fury of the storm!"

"You think it has been blown——"

"Aye! Blown to the uttermost parts of Mercury and perhaps wrecked and lost—lost with all our scientific apparatus and other paraphernalia!"

"But——"

"And that is not all," went on the professor. "The lever should have been thrown to zero and then removed to prevent Gilhooly from tampering with it. Who knows what that mad railway

magnate may take it into his head to do? Suppose he were to grasp the lever and give the cubes their full power. He would be launched into the void, sir, and we should be marooned on this sun-baked planet, compelled to live out our lives with these one-eyed quadrumana, devastating the country of its food supply—our presence a curse instead of a blessing!"

I had already imagined a possible return to Terra, and from this it seemed that the professor had not lost sight of that contingency.

"What is to be done?" I asked, catching some of his excitement.

"We must return to the outer shell—we must find the car—we must go back on the oven when they send it up!"

As he finished speaking, Quinn ran frantically to the metal box and leaped to its top. I followed, clumsily upsetting a half dozen Mercurials who chanced to get in my way.

The oven was loaded by that time and ready for its return to the intense heat; nay, more, the *chef* in the red kirtle already had his hand on a wheel which presumably released the lifting power.

Our movements, however, had acted as a check on proceedings.

"We've got to go back!" cried the professor, forgetting in his stress of feeling that his words were lost on the throng around us. "Don't attempt to stop us, don't! We'll return——"

The Mercurials began leaping to the box from all sides in a veritable swarm. Carried away by the excitement of the moment, I sank to my knees and swept my arms about me, throwing them back pell-mell.

The professor also resorted to violence. In the midst of it all, I caught a glimpse of the gilded gentleman aiming his baton.

A moment more and there was a lurid flash, which enveloped my companion and myself in a billow of violet fire. Every atom of strength was drawn from my limbs, and I fell limply to the ground with the professor on top of me.

CHAPTER IX.

LEARNING THE WORD-BOX.

It was not the violet fire that did the work for the professor and me. Rather it was some chemical, known to the Mercurials, and which manifested its presence by an overpowering odor.

Long after we had regained consciousness, the drug-like smell clung to our clothes and sapped our strength. Shackles of iron could not have been more effective in making us prisoners.

Cords were made fast to our feet, and we were dragged by a small army of Mercurials down the principal street of their city and out into one of the white, irrigated fields.

Had a dwelling been found large enough, I presume we should have been comfortably housed, but we were of such stupendous proportions that there were no walls capable of containing us.

When we reached the field, a ring a foot high was reared about us. As the odor lessened and my strength increased I tried to roll over this

low barrier, but received such a shock that I was only too glad to roll back to the professor's side again.

"It is of no use, Mr. Munn," said the professor, who had been watching my attempt. "These Mercurials are possessed of ways and means beyond our earthly powers to combat. We must accept the situation with all the philosophy we can muster."

This great man, who could remain unshaken under any fate that befell him, was a constant source of strength and inspiration to me. While we lay forsaken by our captors and couched on the strange white herbage of that underground field, our discourse drifted along many channels.

I remember that I asked him a question concerning a matter that had long been weighing upon my mind.

"How is it, professor," said I, "that your anti-gravity compound remains in a liquid state in an open cask? I should think its inherent energy would cause it to fly upward *en masse*."

"I can demonstrate that by means of an algebraic formula," said he. "Are you acquainted with algebra?"

"No," I answered humbly.

"Then," he went on disappointedly, "I fear you will have to remain in ignorance. You must rest content with the evidence of your senses, since an explanation in terms you can understand is impossible."

And thus the matter rested. When we were so far recovered as to be able to rise, we made an attempt to step over the ring that hemmed us in, but were shocked by the same unseen power I had already encountered, and driven back.

"See with what weapons nature has provided these people!" murmured the professor. "Throughout the universe everywhere you will find, Mr. Munn, that Nature takes care of her own. Ah, here comes Captain Goldman! Retainers follow, and they are bringing—now, what *are* they bringing? Why, as I live, they have manufactured a couple of large word-boxes. Evidently we are to be taught the use of them."

The professor was right. Ever since our disastrous attempt to regain the surface we had been tabooed by the inhabitants of the country.

"Captain Goldman," as my companion referred

to the little man who had used his mysterious baton with such telling effect, was crossing the fields toward us, followed by six of his countrymen bearing the talking machines. As a precautionary measure, the captain carried his weapon.

Arriving at the ring, Captain Goldman reversed the baton and with the black tip of it cut an imaginary doorway for himself in the air. He then stepped through and joined us, without shock or resistance.

Thus, by means to us inexplicable, he broke the power of the circle at a given point. The others followed him through the entrance he had cleared.

Wielding the baton with two of his hands, Captain Goldman began manipulating his word-box with the other two. He was not addressing us, however, but those who had come with him.

Three of his followers advanced to me with one of the machines, while the remaining three conveyed a machine to the professor. At once our instruction in the art of mechanical speech began.

It is not my intention to burden the reader

with the details of our lessons, although a few remarks under this head may not be out of place.

As to the word-box itself, it had seven keys. This made it somewhat difficult for a five-fingered creature to operate with any great degree of fluency, although the professor did get so he could peg out his ideas at a remarkable rate.

There are but six syllables in the Mercurial language, each syllable being represented by a corresponding key. The way these syllables were fingered gave the words. As they could be combined and repeated and combined again, the vocabulary of the boxes was practically unlimited.

The syllable notes were of resonant quality and of such divergent timber as to be quickly and easily recognized. The syllable for Key 1 was synonomous with our personal pronoun "I," and was the most assertive and determined note in the whole gamut of the box.

The seventh key emitted a sound so utterly unlike the other sounds as to be in a class by itself. It was used for spacing between words, for exclamatory purposes and for the audible expression of laughter and grief.

It was likewise the expletive or swear-key;

for these small egotists had all the passions of other mortals, and Key 7 acted as a sort of safety valve. The manner in which the key was used gave it its versatility.

Day by day our lessons proceeded, the professor learning with a rapidity that was marvelous. He was well along in the polysyllables while I was struggling with the basic tones and acquiring some facility in spacing and in the expression of the feelings.

Our ears kept pace with our fingers, and in a fortnight the professor was so eloquent with his word-box that he could now and then play off a metaphor, or some other frill, to the great delight of himself and his auditors.

Next to a wonderful jimmy invented by a cracksman named "Cricket" Doniphan, whom I knew well, and who, at that period, was doing time in Stillwater, I take off my hat to that Mercurial word-box as the most marvelous contrivance ever evolved by a thinking mind. I have a very good memory, and when sufficiently proficient with the keys I practiced by repeating passages from "Forty Ways of Cracking Safes," which, as distinguished from "The Sandbagger's

Manual," I considered my *chef d'œuvre.* I could not discover that my terse English, faulty enough though it was, lost anything in force from translation into the Mercurial tongue. (The word "tongue" is used with reservations, for, of course, tongue that language was not.)

Difficulty was experienced in getting a suitable Mercurial equivalent for the good English word "cracksman." Finally, however, I hit upon three quick touches of the swear-key, which made the w intelligible in my own ears if not to any one's else.

Soon I began to observe a little throng gathering across my side of the prison ring, listening intently as I practiced. From day to day the throng increased.

Over on the other side of the ring Professor Quinn was absorbed in cutting all manner of scientific capers with his word-box. "The Mutability of Newtonian Law" formed his staple theme, and he was able to put it through the keys with amazing variations.

But no crowd gathered to listen to the professor. The Mercurials were all on my side of the compound. Thus it was clear to me that

my brand of science was more attractive to the little people than the professor's. While "The Mutability of Newtonian Law" languished for an audience, "The Sandbagger's Manual" was fast acquiring one that taxed the capacity of the word-box.

The professor, for a long time, had been so wrapped up in his attempt to master the Mercurial language that he had paid little heed to me and my efforts. The attention my work was securing, however, finally caused him to sit up and take notice. Halting his weighty remarks, he laid aside his talk machine, came over to my side of the circle, and stood behind me, listening. The first I knew of his presence was the reaching of two angry hands over my head and the snatching away of the instrument on which I was, at that moment, reciting the ten rules for a cracksman's success.

My audience was as greatly put out as I was myself. While I was leaping to my feet and whirling around, my listeners were clamoring on their word-boxes for me to proceéd.

Professor Quinn, white-faced and in a greater temper than I had ever before seen him, held

my talking apparatus over his head and seemed of a mind to dash it down on the earth at his feet.

"I say, professor," I called restrainingly, "don't do anything rash."

"Mr. Munn," he gasped, his voice thick with suppressed emotion, "is my confidence in you to be destroyed utterly? I singled you out as one of the worthiest of all those brought from Terra, and yet I find you busily inculcating false ideas of personal property into the keen minds of these Mercurials! For shame, sir! Would you demoralize this planet? Would you turn these law-abiding people into thieves?"

"Professor," I answered, "your ideas and mine do not harmonize on this matter of property rights."

"While I admit, Mr. Munn," he answered, "that conditions on our own planet in a measure condoned your actions, yet I maintain that you have no right to air your ideas in Njambai. Here the conditions are of an altogether different sort. So far as I have been able to learn, this orb has not fallen under the noxious spell of the monopolists. You have no excuse for instructing the

Mercurials in the alpha and omega of your contemptible profession."

"Contemptible?" I repeated. "That is a hard term, professor. Besides, they seem to be fond of the instruction. Everybody listens to me, while you haven't had so much as a corporal's guard to enjoy that astronomical stuff you have been playing off on your concertina."

"Your line, perhaps, is more attractive than mine," and the shadow of a smile curled about his thin lips, "for the notion of getting something for nothing has a direct appeal to every thinking being. On the other hand, my thesis on 'The Mutability of Newtonian Law' requires profound thought before it can be assimilated. Yet, be that as it may, I shall not allow you to degrade these people with the unworthy ideas that have been coming from your word-box. I can destroy this machine, sir, and I shall do so unless you promise never again to let an ignoble thought come out of it. What do you say?"

"Your mere command is enough, professor," I replied. "It is not necessary to couple it with a threat."

His face softened, and he at once returned to me my talk-producer.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Munn," said he. "I have confidence in your word, and know that I can trust you."

Thereupon he went back to his own side of the ring, and I applied myself assiduously to undoing any evil my ill-considered practicing may have wrought. I told the Mercurials that my utterances had been in the nature of a fairy story, and I gave the lie to my convictions by declaring that the reasoning, as in all fairy tales, was unsound.

From that hour my audiences vanished. The professor, although his talk was profound and somewhat wearying, seemed to the Mercurials as more worth while, and they flocked to hear him.

We began acquiring a knowledge of the country, and of its people and institutions, with our very first lesson. In two weeks we had gathered most of the information that follows:

Their planet they called Njambai; their country was Baigol. Baigol was one of four kingdoms comprising the under-world of Njambai. The other three kingdoms were Baijinkz, Bai-

gossh, and Baigadd—all derived from the root word "bai," signifying planet.

There were only two places on Njambai where water was able to collect and defy the absorbing power of the sun. These places were at the two ends of the planet's axis, corresponding to the polar regions of Earth. Here there were seas feeding rivers that ran through the under-world and irrigated the fields.

The kingdoms of Baijinkz and Baigossh lay on the shores of these seas, the former at the north and the latter at the south. They were the only kingdoms on the outer shell of Njambai, and levied tribute from the interior kingdoms of Baigol and Baigadd for water rights.

The distribution of light and heat throughout the nether kingdoms was by a system of gigantic reflectors, located at either end of a radius drawn through the equator. There was one stupendous reflector on either side of the planet, measuring no less than twenty *spatli* across—a *spatl* being the equivalent of a geographical mile.

These reflectors, we were told, followed the sun as it moved through the heavens, and reflected heat and light to countless other reflectors

ingeniously placed to acquire and radiate the solar energy.

The heat thus secured was further intensified by the planet's shell, which, forming the vault of the nether kingdoms, constantly diffused warmth.

The king was Golbai, the nine hundred and twenty-fifth of his line. The name of the pompous gentleman whom the professor had christened "Captain Goldman" was Ocou.

Names of people, places, and things, as here given, are simply a rude equivalent as nearly as can be rendered into English.

From my wording the astute reader will probably discover more than the six basic syllables of the Baigol language. The flexibility of the word-box will account for this, and the inconsistency is only seeming and not real.

Baigol had one half the inner sphere, and Baigadd the other half. These two kingdoms were not on the best of terms, owing to a wretched piece of business carried out by Gaddbai, king of the other country, which will be adverted to later.

The four kingdoms were connected by a railway, if such the mode of transportation could be

called. The roadbed was a "V"-shaped groove, and the wheels of the cars were solid spheres with axles pierced through their diameter. On these axles the carriages were supported.

For a people so wonderfully progressive the Baigols were strangely backward in their motive power, their trains being dragged by hand —relays of the small creatures taking them in charge.

Owing to the diminished force of gravity, large weights were easily handled, and a fair rate of speed was developed by the train haulers. But it was a very primitive method of transportation.

The trunk line connecting the nether kingdoms was known as the Baigadd and Baigol Interplanetary System. When two weeks of our enforced stay in Baigol had passed, a startling rumor was wafted from the word-boxes of the other kingdom to the effect that the management of the line had secured a wonderful new traction power of tremendous speed and unlimited endurance.

The kingdom of Baigol was agog with excitement, for the president, vice-president, and board

of directors of the Interplanetary were to take a trial spin over the road in a special equipped with their new motive power.

We had not yet been allowed to leave the mysterious circle which imprisoned us, but we could stand erect, and so overtop the fields and houses that we were able to see the railway station.

Billiard balls came rolling in from every direction, clustering about the right of way and clambering to roof tops and other elevations that would afford an unobstructed view of the centre of excitement.

At last, far off, the professor and I heard a thunderous shout:

"Toot, t-o-o-t! Ting-a-ling-a-ling!"

No word-box could have been the source of that echoing cry. The professor gave a gasp and clutched my arm convulsively.

"Do you recognize that voice?" he asked hoarsely. "Merciful powers, Mr. Munn, how could such a thing happen? Look! Look!"

Over the fields beyond the city, leaping along at fifty-foot bounds and dragging behind him a train of queer-looking cars crowded with offi-

cials of the system, came no less a person than Emmet Gilhooly!

The professor threw himself at the barrier that hedged us round. He could not pass, although he struggled frantically.

"Take it coolly, professor," I urged, grasping and holding him upright.

"But this is outrageous, Mr. Munn!" he cried. "Poor Gilhooly! Is *he* the new traction power the other kingdom has been talking about? How does he happen to be here? And why are they treating him like that? This must be stopped! Where's my word-box?"

His eyes swept the ground. Glimpsing his talking machine he dived for it and began working the keys like mad.

No one paid any attention to the furious language that went up under his frenzied fingers, however. Leviathan in harness absorbed the entire attention of all the Baigols, and with another "Toot, toot! Ting-a-ling-a-ling!" the railway magnate galloped out of sight.

It was a sad spectacle indeed. I was almost as completely unmanned by it as was Professor Quinn.

CHAPTER X.

HOW WE WERE CATALOGUED.

Let it not be supposed that we had given no thought to our companions in exile during our two weeks' probation in Baigol. The professor and I had talked of them frequently, wondering whether they were alive or dead, and, if alive, where they were and what they were doing.

Our story had been punched out of our word-boxes for the benefit of the Baigols, but had not seemed to make much of an impression on Ocou, or on others who came to see us.

Now the sight of Gilhooly would add corroborative detail, and we harped on that key until Ocou promised to communicate directly with King Golbai, and find out what his wishes were in the matter.

As for the professor, he wanted to go roaming the four kingdoms looking for the other exiles, first visiting Baigadd and appropriating the motive power of the B. & B. I. system.

The most we could get from Ocou was a promise to learn his majesty's pleasure in our affairs; and while we were abiding the king's decision, other events took place which were of prime importance to us.

Ocou had a queer-looking machine borne to our "home circle," which was the humorous fashion in which the professor referred to our prison ring.

The machine was an upright shaft measuring some three feet in height. To its base was attached a golden cord several yards long and terminating in a small silver disk.

Professor Quinn and I were consumed with curiosity while this contrivance was being set up and made ready. We put a question through our word-boxes, but were only smiled at mysteriously.

Presently I was made to sit down, Turk fashion, while one of Ocou's attendants came to me and passed the silver disk over my head. One end of Ocou's baton had a black tip, the other a white.

As the disk passed over my head, Ocou rested the white tip of the baton on the pedestal. In-

stantly a slide flew out of the shaft's top bearing a painted ideograph.

The professor and I were not "up" in the Baigol ideographs, and were very much surprised at the actions of Ocou and his companions when they looked at the slide. They recoiled, stared at me suspiciously, and moved about me with caution.

I grabbed my word-box.

"What's the matter, anyhow?" I asked.

"We have just discovered that you are a robber," said Ocou.

"I am no robber here," I answered, "no matter what I was in the place I came from."

"Once a robber always a robber," retorted Ocou, "unless you touch the Bolla."

"Well, well!" murmured the professor, rubbing his hands delightedly over the pedestal and giving little heed to Ocou's remark. "What do you call this machine, Mr. Ocou?"

"That, sir," Ocou replied, "is a character indexograph. We find it very useful in cataloguing the natural tendencies of subjects of the realm."

He sighed.

"The number of indexographs in the kingdom is limited, and they have all been working overtime of late. This is the first opportunity we have had to use one on you and your friend. Now, professor, if you will oblige me."

The professor dropped down, the disk gliding over his bald head, and another ideograph shot into sight.

"Ah," murmured Ocou, reading the sign: 'philanthropist, scientist, a man to counsel with!' You'll do, sir; but your friend!"—and he shook his head sadly as he dropped his talking machine.

"I suppose," said I, watching Ocou and his attendants make off with the indexograph, "that I shall be kept within this circle indefinitely?"

"Let us hope not, Mr. Munn," rejoined the professor, laying a kindly hand on my arm. "Rather let us hope that you will experience a moral rejuvenation, so that when the indexograph is tried on you at another time it will show a different result."

"I wish they would try that thing on J. Archibald Meigs!" I exclaimed. "The Baigols would

find, I think, that I have no monopoly on that particular ideograph."

The professor laughed quietly.

"Let us see what comes to us now after we have been catalogued," said he. "I think they have simply been waiting to make trial of our tendencies before allowing us to pass out of this enchanted circle."

Ocou came back in a couple of hours, carrying a roll of parchment in addition to his baton. He came alone.

"Gentlemen," said he in his mechanical way, "your names have been entered and tagged. In accordance with the information secured through the indexograph, a task has been set for you. Perform that task faithfully and you are to have the freedom of the realm."

"What is the task, Mr. Ocou?" inquired the professor.

"You are to restore the sacred Bolla to his majesty, the king of Baigol."

"And what is the Bolla?"

"It is the stone of happiness and peace. Merely to touch it restores a mortal to health, physical

and moral. Crime is a contagious disease, and since the Bolla has been lost to us and untouched of any in the kingdom, lawlessness has become widespread."

"Where is the Bolla?"

"It was loaned some seasons ago to the king of Baigadd, who now refuses to return it. As Baigadd is a more powerful country than ours, it would be an act of destruction for us to make war for the stone. So our king has graciously decreed that Mr. Munn shall proceed to the neighboring kingdom and steal the Bolla, taking you along with him, professor, as adviser and general aide."

Nothing could have pleased us more.

As I have stated elsewhere in this narrative, stealing property from some one to whom that property does not rightfully belong can hardly be accounted a crime; and when property thus purloined is restored to its rightful owner, the theft is transformed into a high and noble act.

Such a task filled me with enthusiasm, and I was ready to go forth among the four-handed enemies of Baigol and demonstrate my abilities. The professor, thinking of Gilhooly, would have

welcomed any undertaking which carried him into the neighboring realm.

Ocou told us that the king of Baigadd was a very grasping individual, although he was very careful to abstain from touching the Bolla. Had he touched the wonderful stone, so great was its power that he would have experienced a change of heart immediately, and could not have shirked returning the property to its rightful owner.

King Gaddbai was very wealthy, according to Ocou, drawing his revenues principally from the kaka industry, of which he had a monopoly. Ka was a fibrous plant from which kaka, the only cloth known in the four kingdoms, was made.

This plant would grow nowhere else than in Baigadd, so that the people of the other three kingdoms had to go to Baigadd for their kirtles. Every time the king of Baigadd suffered a pecuniary backset, or donated a large sum to charity, he recouped his exchequer by boosting the price of kirtles.

There was a time, Ocou declared, when all the inhabitants of Njambai went clothed from neck to heels, but wardrobes dwindled as the price of cloth rose. Very few people could now

afford the luxury of a full suit; and since the upper half of the body could not be covered with a garment, it was covered with paint—the paint being usually of a color to match or harmonize with the kirtle.

A variety of black kaka was the only serviceable material to be had for writing purposes, ideographs being traced on its surface with white ink. We were told how gentlemen once wealthy, but who had fallen upon evil days, had drawn upon their libraries for wearing apparel.

Books of poetry, essays, travel, fiction, all yielded their leaves to the making of various garments, thereby clothing the body as comfortably as they had already clothed the mind.

What could be more apropos than a morning gown inscribed with choice ideographic sonnets? Or a student's robe begemmed with the brilliant wit of an essayist? Or a traveling costume bearing an account of some voyage of discovery?

The only fault to be found with this arrangement was that such clothing advertised the wearer's poverty; and in Njambai, as in Terra, the pride of wealth was most pronounced.

King Gaddbai, it appeared, had so enhanced

the cost of black kaka that literature lay languishing. Writers had not the requisite material on which to inscribe their thoughts, and the four kingdoms were threatened with a blight of ignorance.

From what we heard of King Gaddbai, the professor and I were not disposed to regard him very favorably. He seemed a greedy and unscrupulous person, more than ready to swell his coffers by trampling on the rights and the welfare of others.

The parchment roll brought by Ocou was a map, showing us how to direct our steps in order to reach Baigadd. Ocou also delivered to us a royal banner, direct from the hands of King Golbai, which was to procure us favor en route and entitle us to be received and cared for as ambassadors when we reached the other kingdom.

The professor asked for a baton, but this was denied him. The Baigols feared, I suppose, to trust such a terrible weapon in the hands of aliens.

The professor's pleasure over the prospect of being allowed to leave our prison ring and jour-

ney in search of our friends while seeking the Bolla was marred somewhat by Ocou's revelations.

He had hoped to find Njambai free of monopoly and greed, and yet here was King Gaddbai boosting the price of kaka whenever the whim struck him; and he had hoped to find a people where poverty was unknown, and yet he discovered how the educated were obliged to raid their libraries in order to cover their nakedness.

"Human nature, professor," I expounded, "is the same all over the universe. If a man finds himself in a position to gouge his neighbor, he is as apt to do it on Jupiter, or Mercury, as he is on Terra."

"I am grievously discouraged," he sighed.

"Furthermore," said I, "my practicing on the word-box could not have caused the havoc you imagined it might. Ocou tells us that, since the Bolla has been taken from Baigol, lawlessness has been widespread, and increasing."

"Your rehearsal of the false sentiments contained in your book may have helped on the lawlessness. I am more sorry than I know how to express in finding, among this gifted people, some

of the worst elements of our own civilization. And my regret is the more pronounced on the score of Popham, Meigs, Gilhooly, and Markham."

"How do they figure in your disappointment?" I queried.

"Can't you understand?" he cried. "I had the same hopes of them that I had of you. Suppose we found on this planet not a trace of monopoly or greed; suppose we had found here a peace-loving, justice-serving people, with plenty to eat and wear, needing no laws to govern them, and all happy and contented. The moral effect upon you and the rest of our friends would have been uplifting. You would have seen, admired and coveted the same conditions for our own orb. A change would have been worked in you, and for the better.

"That," he went on passionately, "is the full measure of my disappointment. So far from finding such conditions, Mr. Munn, you are immediately catalogued as a thief, and given a task commensurate with your supposed abilities—a task or robbery!"

"But a righteous robbery," I averred. "Re-

covering stolen property and returning it to the rightful owner is a meritorious act."

"We must call it so," he answered bitterly, "since so much hangs upon our joint attempt. But what a lesson for these poor, benighted people!"

"The ability to get the stone is beyond them, and they call upon us," I pursued. "Their action is flattering, rather than otherwise. If we succeed, it means that we shall stand even higher in their estimation."

"We, who ought to know better, are making ourselves living examples of successful thievery."

"The end justifies the means, professor."

"We must strive to think so."

"I suppose Gilhooly has been catalogued, the same as you and I, and that he was found to stand so high in traction affairs that they——"

"Let us not dwell upon poor Gilhooly."

"He is just where he ought to be," I declared. "I only wish he had a glimmering of sense still left him in order that he might realize his position. The effect would be salutary."

This frank expression of my views rather startled Professor Quinn. He walked back and

forth, his hands clasped behind him and his head bowed in deep thought.

"The indexograph is a most remarkable invention," he finally observed, "and would be of inestimable value on our native planet. The detection of crime would be an easy matter, and on the testimony of the indexograph alone justice could be meted out without the intermediate application of the courts. Furthermore, justice would never miscarry."

"I hope," I exclaimed in a panic, "that I shall never live to see the day when the police officials of Terra are equipped with indexographs! It would prove a knockout blow for my profession. Every citizen would be tested, and his proclivities jotted down in black and white."

"That would mean," expanded the professor, "that crime would be relegated to the limbo of lost arts! Before a lawless act could be committed, the artist in crime would be placed where the deed would be impossible."

"That's the way I figure it out, professor."

"But that is not the least of the indexograph's merits. Children could be duly catalogued, and,

if they showed criminal tendencies, could be sent to institutions for proper moral training. The inclination of the young toward certain trades could be learned, and they could be given instruction along the line which would best serve their future careers. There would not be so many failures in life, Mr. Munn."

"Perhaps not," I answered stubbornly, "but I still maintain that the overturning of our customary standards would land us in chaos."

"Tut!" he exclaimed half angrily. "Some day, I trust, your angle of vision will change materially. Until that time, Mr. Munn, it would be well for you to repress your peculiar views, for you are going to be sorry for them."

Just three weeks to a day from the time we reached Baigol we fared forth from the royal city, bent upon the performance of our mission. We were armed only with our word-boxes, the king's standard, and a firm determination to achieve our liberty by securing the Bolla, no matter what the cost.

Our journey led us through a pleasant country, level for the most part and covered with irrigated fields growing the white blossoms which

the Baigols gathered and cooked for food. The king's will, as made known by the banner, secured us rest by the way.

I have not considered it necessary to refer to the fact that there was light and darkness throughout the kingdoms of Baigol and Baigadd during each period of twenty-four hours and three minutes. Light and heat were sent through the under-world by means of the two huge reflectors already mentioned, and when the sun passed from the heavens of course night fell.

But the climate was at all times delightful. We were armored against the temperature, and could not ourselves experience the equable air, yet our eyes and ears assured us of its presence, and this proved another surprise for the professor.

By day we traveled and by night we rested, often covering as many as five hundred *spatli* in a single day. Four days, at that rate, were to carry us to the capital of the other kingdom.

I gathered much wisdom from the professor as we journeyed, and there were two of our conversations which made a deep impression on me. The first had to do with the reflectors that

turned the sun's rays into the bowels of the planet.

"Without the sun, Mr. Munn," remarked Quinn, indicating the white fields beside us with a gesture of the hand, "there could be no vegetable life in Baigol. Those fields must be quickened to life by the solar rays or they would be as barren as the outer shell of the planet. Finite ingenuity may always be trusted to accommodate itself to its environment. I can set the astronomers of Terra right on one mystery, at least."

"What mystery do you refer to, professor?" I asked.

"Why," he answered, "a luminous point has been detected by earthly telescopes on the disk of Mercury. The phenomenon has been explained as a huge mountain, whose top reflects the sun; yet it is only one of the great reflectors fabricated by these ingenious people."

Then at another time:

"Professor," said I, "have you made any discoveries relative to that powerful little weapon which the Baigols know so well how to use?"

"A few," he answered. "The baton is called a zetbai, and its ammunition is drawn from a peculiar ingredient of the atmosphere. The white tip of the zetbai furnishes the destructive force, while the black tip combats and nullifies it. The inhabitants of this orb, Mr. Munn, have a weapon of such awful power in the zetbai that a dozen of their number, armed with the batons, could descend upon our own globe and devastate it.

"Well is it for Terra that means are lacking for interplanetary communication; otherwise the Baigols and their fellow-creatures might prove the Napoleons of the universe. Such a contingency is terrible to contemplate."

"Had the zetbai anything to do with that invisible power that stayed us from crossing the circular wall?"

"It had everything to do with that. An unseen barrier was placed around us—a barrier of zet, drawn from the atmosphere by these Baigols and made to serve their ends. Unlike powder and ball, which destroy themselves in creating destruction, zet is indestructible; it can be regathered into the zetbai and used over and over again. The resisting medium, controlled by the black tip

of the baton, is alone powerful to annul the energy of the white tip."

These were the points that impressed me. Another which we discussed, but which did not appeal to me as logical or accurate, had to do with the object of our quest—the Bolla.

"With all due respect to Mr. Ocou," said I, "he was certainly talking moonshine when he described the Bolla."

"I would not go so far as to say he was talking moonshine, Mr. Munn," the professor answered. "There are stranger things in Heaven, Earth, and Mercury than are dreamed of in our philosophy. Take yourself, for instance. You are a sick man——"

"Never sick in my life," I declared.

"I mean morally," went on Quinn. "If crime is a disease, you will admit, I think, that you are sick."

"No," I averred, "I am healthy in mind and body. I take no stock in Mr. Ocou's assertions —which ought to prove that I am mentally sound, I take it. But we'll get this palladium, just the same, for our liberty depends on it."

Toward noon of the fourth day, as we drew

near the boundaries of Baigadd, we entered a rocky and uneven country, the well-defined road we had been following cutting and circling through the low hills. When we were well in among the bowlders a frantic shout reached us from around a bend in the road a few *spatli* ahead.

"That was a cry in our own tongue, Mr. Munn!" exclaimed the professor, coming to a halt. "Did you not hear it? It was certainly a call for help."

"You are right, sir," I answered. "That was a lusty English yell, if I ever heard one."

"It was given by one of our friends, of course."

"No doubt; it is not hard to distinguish a human voice from the bleat of one of these Baigol word-boxes. Possibly the new motive power of the B. & B. Interplanetary has rebelled and is fleeing this way."

"No," answered the professor excitedly, "I do not think that shout came from Gilhooly. It was—— Ah, Mr. Meigs!"

At that instant, J. Archibald Meigs came bounding into sight around the bend. But he

was not the well-groomed, richly appareled Mr. Meigs of Earth and the steel car. His only garment was a kirtle.

He must have been surprised at seeing us, but so great was his fear that he did not show it. Panic left no room for any other emotion.

"Quinn! Munn! Save me—save me from the soldiers!"

A few dozen prodigious leaps brought him trembling to our vicinity, and he fell exhausted to his knees.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DILEMMA OF MR. MEIGS.

"My, my!" cried the professor. "What has happened Mr. Meigs? How is it that we find you in this—er—forlorn condition?"

"I'm a wretched man!" wailed Meigs, grabbing the professor's knees in the stress of his emotion. "You have got to save me, Professor Quinn. It was you who brought me to this awful planet, and if I am slain my blood will be upon your head!"

That was Meigs for you. Even in his dire extremity he did not forget to heap censure upon the head of our great savant.

"You are not going to be slain," said the professor confidently.

"But these creatures are as venomous as centipedes!" murmured Meigs, suffering himself to be lifted erect by the professor. "Horrors! There they come now. Oh, this is too much, too much!"

Meigs got behind the professor. Turning our

eyes toward the bend, we saw a detachment of the Baigadd army just hurling itself into sight.

We had made some acquaintance with military affairs in Baigol.

Soldiers, as may be surmised, were armed with zetbais, but word-boxes were kept out of the ranks. Only officers carried talking machines, matters being ordered on the principle that privates were to hear and obey. Each soldier wielded two zetbais—one with each pair of hands—thereby enormously increasing his capacity for destruction.

The fighting force of Baigol, we had been informed, although organized on a smaller scale, was equipped and maneuvred exactly as was the military arm of Baigadd.

The detachment approaching at a double-quick in pursuit of Meigs was, as we afterward found, a company of Gaddbaizets, or royal guards. They numbered fifty, wore yellow kirtles, had the torso gilded, and were commanded by a single officer carrying nothing but a word-box.

The sight of the professor and myself caused the Gaddbaizets to come to an abrupt halt. They had undoubtedly heard of us, but they were

far from expecting to encounter us there at that time.

The officer was the first to recover his wits, and approached the place where we were standing, holding his talking machine over his head and punching its keys vigorously. His first words were a command to the soldiers: "Hold your zetbais and make no move against these fierce colossi until you get further orders from me!"

Then, to us:

"Behemoths! Whence come you and why are you protecting the monster in the red kirtle?"

Meigs, it could easily be seen, was not on familiar terms with the word-boxes. So far as he was concerned, the captain's words fell on deaf ears.

"We are from Baigol," said the professor, giving an amiable twist to his words by a deft use of Key 7, "and come on an errand from the king of that country. This gentleman is a friend of ours——"

"A friend!" screeched the captain's machine. "He is a thief and has stolen a hundred djins of kaka from our sovereign storehouse."

I thrilled an amused laugh on the seventh key of my own machine.

"How do you know he is a thief?" I asked. "Did you try the indexograph on him?"

"I'll do the talking, Mr. Munn," said the professor in our own tongue; then added to the officer: "There must be some mistake, captain. This gentleman has a very good reputation and would not commit a theft, such as you describe."

"He bears the proof of it upon his person," answered the captain. "It is the kirtle."

Now, a djin is a unit of measurement and corresponds to the inch of our system; from which it follows that Meigs stood convicted of stealing about eight feet of red kaka—enough to make kirtles for a score of the Baigadds.

"What are you harping about?" asked Meigs.

"They say you are a thief, Mr. Meigs," said I.

"Thief!" he blustered, glaring at the captain over the professor's shoulder. "I deny it, sir, I deny it!"

"He says you stole that kirtle you have on," I continued.

"A man has a right to clothe himself as well as

he may," answered Meigs, aggrieved. "I do not count that theft. The country should see that a man is provided with a respectable covering."

This was too good an opportunity for the professor to let slip.

"Suffer your mind to drift back to your own planet, sir," said he. "It is your opinion that our government owes every poor man a suit of clothes?"

J. Archibald Meigs cringed under the blow. It was a thrust at his clothing trust, and it found the weak point in his armor.

"Circumstances are different here," he mumbled.

"In some ways, yes; in other ways, no. King Gaddbai is the monopolist of this planet. He controls the kaka output and charges for it accordingly."

The captain of the royal guard was growing impatient.

"If you are here on an errand from the king of Baigol," said he, "we shall be glad to escort you to the capital—but not until you have surrendered the giant who stole the king's property."

"Take us to his majesty," returned the professor, "and we will explain everything in a satisfactory manner."

But this the captain would not do, and he became so threatening that we retreated behind a barrier of bowlders.

"Display the banner, Mr. Munn," said the professor, and I held up the royal standard so that the captain could not help but see it. His one eye gleamed insolently, and he came as near swearing as the seventh key of his word-box would allow.

"Deliver up the thief," he ordered, "or I will command my men to annihilate you with their zetbais."

It was certainly a critical situation. I had already had a slight experience with the overpowering properties of zet and didn't care for further acquaintance with it. Meigs was nothing to me. He would have stripped the coat from a poor man's back, if he could have had his way on Earth, and it afforded me secret pleasure to see him hoisted by his own petard.

The trust magnate did not fail to take note of the war-like movements of the soldiers.

"Can't you do anything to save me, professor?" he pleaded.

"We shall not give you up," answered Quinn firmly. "Can you think of any way, Mr. Munn, whereby we can extricate ourselves from this difficulty?"

I have a quick mind, if I do say it, and a happy thought presented itself on the spur of the instant. Stooping, I picked up a stone; then, raising myself, I let the missile fly straight at the captain.

His shoulder-arms still held the word-box above his head, and the stone smashed against it and carried it away. It was rather neatly done, for the captain himself was left untouched.

"Bravo!" cried the professor. "You drew the fangs of the enemy by that trick, Mr. Munn. You have rendered the captain mute, and his men cannot act without orders."

I had already figured this out in my mind, and it was presently proved that I had not gone far from the mark. The captain recovered the word-box and attempted to use it, but its mechanism was so disarranged that the order to attack be-

came a confused jumble that seemed to sound a retreat.

The whole company whirled and fled, their leader following and gesticulating wildly and helplessly with his arms. Meigs was saved for the present, and he should have thanked me for it—but he did not.

Seating himself on a bowlder, he gazed pensively down at the red kirtle.

"This is what I call the irony of fate," said he in a morose tone. "And then, on top of it all, to be called a thief!"

He leaned his bare elbows on his knees and dropped his face in his hands.

"How did this happen, Mr. Meigs?" asked the professor gently.

"Happen!" cried Meigs, lifting his head with a jerk and glaring at Quinn. "It would never have happened but for you!"

"Have you seen Gilhooly?" went on the professor, ignoring the reproach.

"Poor Gilhooly!" sighed Meigs. "He has become a power in the traction interests of the country. The last I saw of him he was hauling trains throughout the kingdom."

"We know that much already. How about Popham and Markham?"

"Alas!" groaned Meigs. "Popham is working like a galley-slave in a coal mine; and Markham —well, these little fiends are slowly starving him to death. All Markham does is to wander about the kingdom with a plate and a paddle begging food enough to keep body and soul together. Think of it! And the great Augustus Popham, owner of a controlling interest in all the great anthracite and bituminous fields of Earth, delving in the mines of this planet—no better than a two-dollar-a-day miner!"

"Coal fields!" I exclaimed. "What do they need of coal in these underground kingdoms?"

"They use the coal in the kingdoms of Baijinkz and Baigossh, which are situated at the poles," explained the professor. "During the long nights in those countries a certain degree of cold must prevail. But"—and here Quinn turned again to Meigs—"tell us what happened to you and the other two gentlemen during the storm which separated us."

"We managed to regain the car," replied Meigs. "We could not get in, of course, because

you had the key, but we hung to the latticework at the windows. I am a little hazy as to what happened after that, but I think the car must have been picked up by a terrific gust and thrown to the bottom of that crater in the volcano."

"Ah!" murmured the professor, looking at me. "You remember, Mr. Munn, I told you I feared something of the kind would happen."

I nodded.

"Proceed, Mr. Meigs," added the professor. "This is all intensely interesting. Was the car seriously damaged?"

"I haven't seen the car," resumed Meigs. "A hiatus followed the blowing away of the castle, and when I opened my eyes again I was a prisoner in the hands of a legion of those one-eyed creatures. For two weeks I was kept confined—an object of curiosity for the whole kingdom, if I could judge from the way the little imps flocked to stare at me.

"After a time I was led off to a place where I joined Popham and Markham. Need I tell you how affecting that meeting was? Popham shed tears, and both Markham and myself were nearly unmanned.

"Our captors had some sort of a contrivance consisting of a small shaft and cord. One end of the cord was put to Markham's head and a slide flew up on the end of the shaft. Then Markham was led off, given a plate and paddle and cast adrift.

"Popham was the next one to have the queer machine tried on him. When he was removed my turn came."

Meigs wrung his hands despairingly.

"After the storm," he continued with an effort, "my costume was not as complete as I would have had it, but those impudent creatures denuded me still further. In self-defense I was forced to steal this red cloth and run for my life. Oh, it was terrible! Woe is me that I should ever have lived to see this day!"

"Some good may come out of this unfortunate experience, Mr. Meigs," said the professor.

"Good!" almost shouted Meigs. "Sir, you express yourself strangely. Is it good to have a man used to such luxury as I have been fleeing through these rocky underground hills merely because he committed theft in order to retain his self-respect? Have a care, sir! Do not think

for a moment that I am under any misapprehension as to the real cause of my sorry situation."

"The king of this country is evidently a man of a humorous and practical turn," observed Professor Quinn after a little thought. "The indexograph made him familiar with the natural bent of you three gentlemen and he is seeking to show you the error of your ways. On Earth you were at one end of a trust; here you are placed at the other end. Really, I think the experience will prove most wholesome."

J. Archibald Meigs stared at the speaker with distended eyes.

"Is it possible," said he, "that your brain has been turned, like Gilhooly's?"

"Nonsense!" I struck in. "The professor's head is as clear as a bell. He's got the right of this thing, Meigs. The king of Baigadd is making you take a little of the medicine you measured out in such large doses on the other planet."

"You are both crazy," snarled Meigs. "I never stripped a man to his hide and threw him out in the cold world—as the king of this country has done to me, in a figurative sense."

"You don't know how much evil you have

done," said Quinn, an expression on his face similar to the one I had seen when he jerked the lever and shot us into the unknown. "You have taken your pound of flesh, Mr. Meigs, but are now under the heel of a monopoly yourself."

"Stuff!" cried Meigs. "We will talk no longer about a matter in which you display such poor judgment. Although I have told you my story, I have heard little of yours. Am I to conclude that you and Munn purposely cut loose from myself and my friends? After bringing us to this miserable planet did you have the heart willfully to abandon us?"

"Not at all, Meigs," said the professor hastily.

I wondered if Meigs had forgotten all about the attempt he and his friends had made to abandon the professor and me? He was one of the most inconsistent men I have ever encountered.

"Like yourself and the others, Mr. Meigs," continued the professor, "Mr. Munn and I were taken prisoners——"

"But you were not treated with the same barbarity as the rest of us," burst out Meigs, his small mind finding even that a cause for temper. "You, who engineered the plot, and plunged us

all into these terrific difficulties, escape the consequences. What is that banner?"

"We are under the protection of the ruler of the neighboring kingdom of Baigol. That is the royal standard."

"Ah," said Meigs bitterly, "you are even received at court—you and a professed thief—while Markham, Popham, Gilhooly, and I are no more than outcasts! Is there no such thing as justice, even on this disgusting planet? Look at me! *Look at me!*"

His final request for us to look at him was a frantic wail. He yanked savagely at his kirtle, and twisted his bare feet around in fearsome dejection.

"We are looking at you, Mr. Meigs," observed the professor quietly.

"Do you find any pleasure in the spectacle? Does not my situation arouse even a spark of pity? I do not ask Munn for his sympathy, but you, Professor Quinn, although criminally careless in evolving plans and carrying them out, are a scientist, and you must have a heart."

"My heart is wrung with your misfortunes,"

replied the professor gently, "but I realize that desperate diseases require desperate remedies."

"What disease are you referring to," snapped Meigs, suddenly changing his tack, "and what remedy?"

"The disease that afflicts our common country, and which you would deny and ridicule were I even to name it. The remedy, too, you would consider no remedy at all, but a useless infliction of discomfort and mental anguish. What you are undergoing, Mr. Meigs, is not accidental, but providential. The workings of fate are as marvelous as they are effective. Patience a little, and we shall see what we shall see."

"This is no time for oracular remarks!" scowled Meigs. "These four-handed, one-eyed demons are forcing Gilhooly, Markham, Popham, and me steadily toward destruction. Gilhooly, daft as he is, is pulling his heart out on their ugly little transportation system; Markham is galloping from place to place pounding his paddle against his dish and begging a few morsels of food; Popham is working like a galley-slave, and his wages, already insufficient to give him the necessary food he requires for his heart-

breaking labor, are being systematically cut down; as for me, the army of Baigadd is at my heels. Baigadd!" and, in his extreme discouragement, Meigs gave vent to a wild, mirthless laugh. "Baigadd and Baigol! They sound like expletives from our own good planet, but altogether too mild to express the state of my feelings."

"Be calm," adjured the professor, with an apprehensive look at me.

"Calm!" echoed Meigs brokenly. "I shall be as mad as Gilhooly if this keeps up much longer." He started forward with a truculent air. "What are you going to do for me, Quinn?" he cried. "How are you going to get me out of this fix? Those infernal little soldiers went away, but they'll come back again. Then what?"

"We are here in the rôle of ambassadors," answered the professor, "and——"

"Munn an ambassador!" sneered Meigs, drawing away from me.

"And, as such, we are entitled to some courtesy at the hands of King Baigadd. I feel quite sure that, when the higher authorities understand you are my friend, they will be lenient in their treatment of you."

"That is rather a vague supposition on which to ground a man's hopes of life or death," muttered Meigs.

"It is all we can fall back on, Mr. Meigs. There are but six of us on this small planet, and we must make the inhabitants our friends. If we do not, annihilation will overtake the lot of us."

"We were fools ever to land on Mercury in the first place," pursued Meigs, still wild and unreasoning.

He stamped with his bare foot to emphasize his anger, and a sharp stone unexpectedly gave point to it. With a howl of pain he caught his foot in his hands.

I have never been called particularly hard-hearted, but somehow I took a measure of enjoyment out of all this. However, I had the grace to turn my head and conceal the smile.

"You must be careful, Mr. Meigs," warned the professor. "Sit down and rest yourself."

"Rest!" fumed Meigs, "just as though such a thing were possible! I am one of the miserable victims of your duplicity, and if I could have

recourse to the law of our planet for about an hour, I would soon put you where you belong."

"Be sensible," I struck in, perhaps ill-advisedly. "You act like a whipped schoolboy, Meigs."

"I'll hear nothing from you," he cried, glaring at me.

"As I was saying, Mr. Meigs," proceeded the professor, "Mr. Munn and I, although we appear to be free, are, nevertheless, virtual prisoners of the king of Baigol. We are being sent to Baigadd upon an important mission, and on our success or failure depends, very largely——"

"That will do," interrupted the broker irritably; "I don't care to hear an account of your experiences, Quinn. It is evident, I think, that you and Munn have not been crossed by the same adversity which has overtaken myself and the others. I have a demand to make."

Meigs arose from the bowlder and struck an attitude which he intended to be both dignified and compelling. With his unshaven face and red kirtle he succeeded only in making himself ludicrous.

"What is the demand?" inquired Quinn.

"You and Munn are fairly well-clothed," replied Meigs, "and I demand that you share my distress to the extent of donating enough of your own clothing to make me presentable."

On the impulse of the moment the professor began removing his coat. When the garment was half off he changed his mind and slipped back into it again.

"No," he returned. "You have made your own bed, Mr. Meigs, and I think you should lie in it until you experience a change of heart. When you can truly say to Mr. Munn and me that you realize how sadly mistaken you were on the other planet, we will share your distress —but not till then."

"Out on you for a pair of heartless wretches!" exclaimed the broker angrily. "Your reasoning is false, and I will never yield assent to it. I wash my hands of both of you"—and he went through the motions—"and if our paths should cross in the future, it is my desire that we pass as strangers."

He glared at us, turned on his bare heel and made his way to the road. Then he strode off in the direction of the bend.

We watched him silently, the professor with apprehension and I with unrestrained enjoyment. As he was about to vanish from our sight we saw him come to a startled halt, gaze off along the road that lay beyond the bend, then throw up his arms, whirl and race back to us.

"They're coming!" he shouted frantically; "the whole army is coming! Is there no way you can save me, gentlemen? Think, for mercy's sake, *think!*"

Meigs was continually building barriers between himself and the professor and me, only to knock them down again whenever the slightest danger threatened him. Had I been the one to decide, he should then and there have been left to shift for himself.

CHAPTER XII.

CONDEMNED TO DEATH.

"Have courage, Mr. Meigs," said Professor Quinn. "It is my hope that some high personage may be with the approaching army, in which event the royal banner given us by the king of Baigol will be respected and prove the salvation of all three of us."

This great and good man was utterly incapable of harboring resentment against any one. He beguiled the plutocrats into his castle, I grant you, and shuffled them from the scene of their grievous labors, yet this was not because he loved the rich man less but the poor man more.

As I write these words, piecing my narrative together out of my commonplace book, a wave of affection and reverence rolls over me.

And often I steal forth o' nights when skies are propitious, gaze at Mercury through my telescope, and can almost fancy myself in communion with the gentle soul forever lost to its native planet. But I anticipate.

The retreating Gaddbaizets had reached headquarters and acquainted the high chief in command with the fact that two more colossi had appeared; so the major part of the king's forces had been ordered out. By tactful maneuvres, they were approaching from all sides.

A cordon was drawn around us—a cordon of soldiers with their flashing zetbais presented. One hostile move would have placed the seal on our death warrant.

The high chief, perhaps fearing his word-box might be wrecked as his captain's had been, had evidently laid plans and given all orders in advance of his attack on our position. The assault was noiseless, swift, and sure.

When completely surrounded by the troops, a number of the soldiers disengaged themselves from various points of the circle. These soldiers carried lances at least ten feet long.

The lances were held high, and to the point of each the upper edge of a net was made fast, the lower edge of the net trailing along the ground.

As the lancemen advanced the net took the

form of a rapidly contracting circle, the professor, Meigs, and myself in the centre.

In less than five minutes we three colossi were stoutly encompassed by the net, hurled together and thrown in a helpless jumble. The web was finely woven and of a material that defied our efforts to break through it.

Professor Quinn made a fierce attempt to use his word-box, but he was held so rigidly that he could not do so. One by one we were disentangled, the upper parts of our bodies were wrapped about in sections of the net so that only our legs were free, and we were forced to proceed with our captors, the army marching on every side of us.

Meigs was loudly bewailing his evil fortune.

"Take heart, man!" cried Quinn. "If I can see the king or get word to him I am sure that all will yet be well."

"It's all day with us," returned Meigs with a groan, "and you cannot make me believe otherwise."

There was no twilight in the nether kingdoms. Day leaped into night as swiftly as a curtain falls on a stage play.

Long before we reached our destination we were in Stygian blaekness. There were no artificial illuminants known to the creatures of the under-world, and they had no need of them. Their single eyes were gifted with power to see at night almost as keenly as in the daytime.

When we had traveled several hours we were made to halt and a circle of zet, similar to the one that had imprisoned Quinn and myself in Baigol, was reared around us. Thereupon we were freed of the nets and left to ourselves.

The instant he was able to make use of his hands the professor grabbed his word-box and began shooting questions into the opaque gloom that hemmed us in.

"Why have you taken us prisoners? What harm have we ever done you? We are under the protection of King Golbai. Did not the captain of the other detachment so inform you?"

Answer came back:

"You have been taken prisoners because you resisted the royal authority and tried to protect a man who stole goods from our regal master. Theft of goods from his majesty's storehouse is punishable with death. Even ambassadors

from King Golbai are not above the laws of our realm."

"What is to be our fate?"

"Zet," was the laconic answer. "You will all three be slain by the executioner-general as soon as may be after the great reflector sends its first gleam of day through the kingdom."

That ended the professor's talk with our unseen enemy who, presumably, was the high chief of the forces. It was sufficiently discouraging, although I was reckless enough to ease my feelings with a few expletives on Key 7—the most insolent and defiant that I had learned in Baigol. Baigol.

"Mr. Munn, Mr. Munn!" cried Quinn in rebuke. "This is no time to express yourself in that key."

"I am not endowed with your magnificent forbearance, professor," said I, "and I had to say something."

"What's it all about, anyway?" asked Meigs.

"We are to die at sunrise, Meigs," I answered roughly, "or as soon after sunrise as the executioner-general may find it convenient."

"I would have spared Mr. Meigs that information," said the professor.

"He ought to have time to prepare himself," I returned. "As the night is far spent I am going to turn in and snatch forty winks against the time the reflectors begin to work. Good night, professor," I added, as I stretched out on the ground. "I don't amount to much more than Meigs, and will never be missed, but I am sorry for you."

Quinn groped for my hand.

"Life, in itself, is a small thing," said he, "no matter whether it is long or short. It is what we do with life that counts, Mr. Munn."

"I have no regrets for what I have done with mine," I declared.

And I had not. Conscience did not accuse me in the least. Never had I taken a penny from those who could not afford to lose it.

"Think again, Mr. Munn!" implored the professor. "I would not have you face your doom in that mental attitude. Surely your senses are not blunted to the evil of your past life?"

"Sir," I answered, imbued to the core with the sophistry that had made me what I was, "I

have been a financier in a small way. Not having the requisite capital for large operations, I was compelled to work in a small way. My business, however, while it may not have been as legitimate, was every whit as honest as that of Meigs and his associates."

"If you men would stop that useless palavering," called Meigs, from somewhere in the dark, "and try to think of some way for making our escape, you would be putting in your time to better advantage."

"Never mind him, professor," said I. "This is probably the last opportunity we shall ever have for an extended talk. At such a time a man speaks from the heart, and I want you to know just where I stand."

"Just a moment, Mr. Munn." The professor turned his head to answer Meigs. "It is impossible for us to escape," said he. "Even if we could get away from here, we should find the entire country in arms against us."

"Possibly we could get back to that other benighted kingdom from which you and the thief come accredited as ambassadors?" returned Meigs.

"It is a hard journey from here, Mr. Meigs, and we should be overtaken and recaptured before we could cross the border into a friendly country. Before we could take to flight, however, we should have to beat down the barrier of zet that hems us in. That, as I know from experience, is out of the question."

Meigs began to complain, and to find fault, and the professor turned from him and went on talking with me.

"I have brought these troubles upon you, Mr. Munn," he continued, a sad note in his voice, "and upon the others. It seems impossible to accomplish any great good without causing some small amount of misery."

"Don't let my situation worry you," I remarked. "While constantly exercising my wits to secure the best fortune for myself, I have always made it a point to be prepared for the worst. I shall face the zetbais in the morning without the quiver of an eyelid."

"Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Munn," said the professor earnestly. "While I grieve that matters should have fallen out in this fashion, yet I would not undo the one thing which brought

us into these troubled waters. In other words, I would rather be here, in Njambai, with death staring us in the face, than back there on Terra, with Meigs, Markham, Popham, and Gilhooly free to work out their nefarious plans."

"That's the spirit!" I cried warmly.

"It's the spirit that has put many a man in the penitentiary," called Meigs, who appeared to be following our conversation even if he was not taking any part in it.

I turned with a stinging reply on my lips, but the professor dropped a hand on my arm, and I held my peace.

"We are sharing together our last few hours," said he, "and let us have no quarrelsome talk. Personally, I have a good deal of charity for Meigs. He is a man who, until very recently, has been accustomed to having scores of people wait upon his slightest nod. Here he has been subjected to much indignity, and at the hands of a people whom he believes to be his inferiors. Naturally that renders him disagreeable."

"He might, at least, have the grace to leave you alone," I answered.

"Not so, Mr. Munn. He is perfectly right in

badgering me. I am at fault, so far as he and his associates are concerned, and he knows it. I do not expect approbation at their hands, but at the hands of those, in far-away Terra, whom my drastic actions have helped. Your calm acceptance of your fate is so different from the attitude of Meigs that it touches me deeply. You have the same cause to blame and abuse me, and yet you let the opportunity pass."

"It has been worth something, professor," I responded, "to stand at your side and to pass through these remarkable adventures shoulder to shoulder with you."

"Thank you for that, my friend."

"I have no doubt," I continued, "that if you and I were to be spared, you might in time lead me to see what you are disposed to call the error of my way, for you are a master hand at arguing; but, as I am at present, I feel that my chances in the next world are as good as any one's. The rich have taken from the poor in a way that the law sanctions; and I have taken from the rich in a way the law does not sanction, and, in a few rare instances, have given to the poor. There's nothing in that to oppress

my conscience. The only thing I am sorry for is that I entered your castle with my felonious intention centred upon your property. Now that I know you so well, my plan to steal from you looks more like a crime than anything else I have done."

"Munn," he replied, "it grieves me to think that your career is to be cut short before you have had an opportunity to reform. However" —and he sighed softly—"there is no escaping fate on our own planet or on this. Good night to you."

I was dog-tired and went off into slumber the moment I closed my eyes. About the last thing I heard was the peevish voice of Meigs resisting what little comfort the professor tried to offer him.

I was aroused by the professor.

"The first gleam of day, Mr. Munn," said he, bending over me with a quiet smile.

I rubbed my eyes and got the cobwebs out of my brain. Yes, it was the first gleam of day—our last day.

We were in an open square in the heart of a diminutive city. From every side radiated trim

little streets bordered thickly with white dwellings.

In front of us was a palace, rising dome upon dome until it stood full thirty feet high. Inhabitants of the royal city were already abroad, walking rapidly or gathering in groups and using their word-boxes excitedly.

"Toot! toot! Ting-a-ling-a-ling!"

The familiar sounds came from a distance, and I sprang erect and with the professor gazed in the direction from which they reached us. Presently Gilhooly came along with a loaded train.

He halted in front of the palace, the passengers disembarked and Gilhooly bent over the cars, picked them up carefully and turned them the other way along the V-shaped groove.

"All aboard!" he cried, and a minute later he was off and away.

"Poor Gilhooly!" murmured Quinn. "He is bringing excursionists to witness our execution. I am glad that he does not know what he is doing and that Meigs is asleep."

Quinn laid his hand on my shoulder.

"I deeply regret, Mr. Munn," he went on, "that I am the indirect cause of Gilhooly's lunacy. It was a great surprise to me to find that his intellect was not strong enough to withstand the ordeal to which I subjected it."

"It couldn't be helped, professor," I returned. "It was a grand idea of yours—that of abducting these trust magnates and placing them where they could do no harm to the poor of our planet. What though one mind has been wrecked? Better that than the misery and enslavement of hundreds of thousands."

"Mr. Munn," said the professor with feeling, "I thank you. Such words from a companion who is about to suffer jointly with me the extreme penalty prove that you are a man of parts and fitted for a nobler walk in life than the one you have heretofore taken. I am very, very sorry that you are to be cut off so soon."

Quinn was fortitude itself, his courage born of a knowledge of duty well done. I am prone to believe, also, that I myself was not less firm, although a less laudable cause lay back of it.

The square, I should judge, measured about two hundred feet on each side. While the pro-

fessor and I were engaged in talk, sight-seers had been gathering in the streets, keeping carefully to the sidewalk boundaries of the open space.

Every eye was turned upon the professor and myself and the sleeping Meigs. The broker was snoring dismally, the sound rumbling above the babble of the word-boxes and echoing through the adjacent thoroughfares.

"What has happened to the executioner-general?" I said to the professor. "He isn't very punctual in keeping his engagement with us, it seems to me. We have had daylight for an hour."

"Something has gone wrong, Mr. Munn," Quinn answered, taking note of a ripple of excitement that ran through the crowds around us. "Ah! Here comes the high chief of the military forces. He has his word-box ready, so I suppose he is going to explain."

The high chief was pushing through the throng into the square, two of his hands holding a word-box and the other two a zetbai. Advancing upon us, he halted just without the ring.

"Be patient, gentlemen," he said through his

talk machine. "You will not be kept waiting much longer."

"We are not so wildly impatient as you seem to think," I sent back at him; whereupon he tittered a little with Key 7.

Seeing that I was getting ready to use the same key for a few expletives, the professor made haste to break in.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"It has just been discovered that there is no white paint in the king's storehouse," replied the high chief.

"What is the white paint to be used for?" came curiously from the professor.

"The executioner-general is obliged by law to give himself a fresh coat of white paint at every execution. It would be impossible for him to perform his function without first complying with the statute."

"Could not some one else, who has been freshly decorated, do the work in his stead?" I inquired, somewhat flippantly.

"No," answered the high chief. "He is the only one in the kingdom who is duly empowered

to execute criminals. Our executioner is a proud person, and jealous of the prerogatives of his office. He receives no less than two kanos for every happy dispatch that he performs. In this case he will be the richer by six kanos, so you will understand how anxious he is to have everything done as it should be."

A kano was the equivalent of a half cent of our own money; so that our one-time millionaire, Mr. J. Archibald Meigs, was to yield up his valuable life and help swell the executioner-general's income to the extent of a single copper. Had he been awake, I should have explained the matter to him so that he might have still further expatiated upon the irony of fate.

This kingdom of Baigadd differed from the other kingdom with which we had already made acquaintance in one material respect: The surface of the country had shrunk much farther from the outer crust of the planet.

In Baigol, for instance, we were always able to see the vault that covered us; but in Baigadd the sight reached into nothing but empty space.

Shortly after the high chief had finished speaking there came a flourish of word-boxes

from the direction of the palace. Turning our eyes toward that point we beheld two resplendent soldiers in turrets to right and left of the richly hung balcony.

"Hail to our munificent sovereign, Gaddbai, ruler of the realm and mightiest monarch of Njambai!"

Thus the pæans of the soldiers.

The words were echoed by the crowd, and a surging roar went up from the talking machines: "Hail to his majesty, King Gaddbai!"

On the heels of the tumult the kaka draperies parted at the rear of the royal balcony and the king appeared, bowed and seated himself. He had a reserved seat for the performance and could see everything that took place.

"Let the executioner-general stand forth, prepare himself for his work and then proceed—all in the royal presence!"

Instantly the master of ceremonies put in an appearance. He wore a white kirtle, carried himself with a lordly air, and was followed by a retinue of attendants.

Two of the attendants bore the official zetbais; another carried the official word-box; four more

were dragging a cart on spherical wheels—an open cart laden with an object that startled us.

"Great heavens, Mr. Munn!" gasped the professor. "Unless my eyes deceive me, the executioner-general is having my tub of anti-gravity compound hauled after him!"

"Your eyes do not deceive you, sir," I made answer.

"But what in the world are they going to do with it?"

"We shall be able to tell in a few moments. Look! The executioner takes his word-box and kneels; he is about to address the king."

"Your majesty," said the executioner-general through his talking machine, "your slave craves your indulgence in the matter of preparing for this happy dispatch. The supply of the official pigment is quite exhausted, and it has been found necessary to fall back upon the white paint that was found in the dwelling recently fallen from the top of the crater."

"Will it answer the purpose?" demanded the king.

"It is white, your majesty, and of proper con-

sistency. So far as I can see, it will answer the purpose well."

"Then proceed with your preparations. I would have this matter over with as quick as possible."

Of course Quinn and I understood all this. I knew that the professor was meditating a final appeal to the king, and he shot a strange look at me as his trembling hands lifted his word-box.

"Before the executioner-general proceeds, your majesty," remarked the professor, his fingers none too steady, "will you allow me a word?"

His majesty gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Where have you learned our language?" he inquired.

"In Baigol, your majesty. We come from that country on a visit to you, under the protection of the royal banner of Golbai."

The professor nodded to me and I shook out the banner and held it aloft.

"My royal friend," said Gaddbai, "should have been more particular in choosing the subjects he sends to visit my realm. The sleeping colossus in the ring with you raided my storehouse, and you sought to save him from capture. For that

lawless act death has been decreed to all three of you, and the sentence must be carried out."

"But we were ignorant of the law," pleaded the professor.

"Ignorance of the law is no excuse."

"The gentleman in the red kirtle is a friend of ours——"

"If we know a person by the company he keeps, that speaks ill for you," interrupted the sovereign.

"You are determined to have us slain, your majesty?"

"It is my royal will."

"Then I shall have to set forces at work to combat the royal will," said the professor calmly.

Cries of consternation and anger went up on every hand. The king rose wrathfully from his seat.

"You dare to dispute my authority?" he demanded.

"I dare to dispute your ability to slay us," returned Quinn. "Your executioner will disappear from before your eyes if he attempts it."

The king laughed ironically.

"We shall see," he said, sinking placidly back

on his seat. "Let the executioner-general proceed with his preparations."

I was greatly pleased with the drift of affairs. Circumstances had conspired to favor us, and the professor was making the most of his opportunity.

The executioner-general motioned to one of his attendants and then raised his four hands above his head. A moment later the attendant had seized the whitewash brush, dabbed it into the anti-gravity compound, and with two quick strokes had covered the executioner's chest and back.

Had a third stroke been needed it could not have been given. In a flash the official had been snatched away, vanishing like a streak of white in the void above.

The king rose gasping, clutching at the balcony rail. The throng around us was paralyzed for a space, and not a word-box was heard.

As for Quinn, he had struck an attitude, his left hand raised aloft and his glittering, bead-like eyes transfixing the king.

CHAPTER XIII.

A THREATENING CALAMITY.

And through all this J. Archibald Meigs slept placidly on. Presently a perfect roar of awe and dismay broke from thousands of word-boxes. In the midst of the hubbub the king could be seen waving his hands to command silence and attention. The glittering soldiers in the turrets sounded a clarion warning and silence fell once more.

"Marvelous are the powers of these colossi!" cried the king with trembling voice. "The sleeping thief receives my royal pardon; the offense of his two friends, in attempting to succor him, is condoned. From now henceforth these three are my honored guests! Let all take heed!"

I caught the professor's hand and gave it a fervent clasp.

"You saved our lives, professor," said I.

"Hardly," he returned, smiling. "It was the anti-gravity compound that did that. Now that

we can inflate our lungs without catching our breath, suppose we waken Mr. Meigs."

On being aroused Meigs sat up and stared around at him. He was not long in picking up the trend of events where he had left off during the night.

"Are they ready to—to kill us?" he asked, clasping his hands.

"They are not going to kill us, Mr. Meigs," answered the professor. "The king has changed his mind, and we are now his honored guests."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed the broker.

The professor replied that he did mean it, and went on to tell how the unexpected result had been accomplished. Before he had fairly finished, the king, clad in his robes of state and accompanied by a dozen members of his household, could be seen approaching across the square.

Attendants followed the royal party, bearing basins of food, a chair on which his majesty could repose himself and a canopy to shield his august person from the reflected rays of the sun.

"The first thing you do, Quinn," said Meigs, while the royal party was making itself comfortable, "tell the king I've got to have my clothes."

"Have patience, Mr. Meigs," answered the professor.

"Patience?" spluttered Meigs. "Merciful powers, man! How can I be patient and cut such a figure as this?"

"Attend his majesty!" came from a word-box among the king's suite. "Our gracious sovereign is about to speak."

Our close attention being secured, the king remarked:

"Now that these colossi have been spared they will need food. See that it is given them."

This command was very satisfactory to me, for I was little short of famished. Presently our paddles were flying over the basins, and we were breaking our fast in a way that made the king open his eyes.

The lord of the exchequer—a most important officer of state—drew near his majesty and said that if the kingdom was going to board us for any length of time it would behoove them to till all the crown lands and get every available acre into produce.

The king made answer that the little man with

the beady eyes was a wonder-worker; he had taken care of the executioner-general with a mere wave of the hand, and no doubt he could, with a stamp of the foot, materialize as much food as he wanted and whenever he wanted.

The lord of the exchequer thereupon retired in much confusion.

In the midst of our repast we were startled by a voice behind us.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen! Out of your abundant store will you not have the goodness to give me a few mouthfuls of food? I'm starving, literally starving!"

"Markham!" cried Meigs, whirling around.

"Mr. Markham!" exclaimed the professor.

The food-trust magnate was fully clad, although his clothing showed signs of much hard usage. His cheeks were sunken and pale, while his eyes were round and abnormally bright. In his left hand was a metal plate, and in his right a small paddle.

Both Meigs and Quinn started toward Markham with the food that still remained in their basins. The zet-ring, however, reared its in-

tangible barrier between so that Markham could not so much as touch the receptacles extended toward him.

It was pathetic to watch this one-time master of millions struggling to get the coveted food. He would throw himself at it and recoil trembling from the mysterious force that had shocked and baffled him; he would sink to his knees or leap in the air, trying to reach above or below the invisible barrier; and then he would dissemble, slink toward the basins and make a sudden dash, as though the strong chemical was an enemy whom he thought he could take off its guard.

At last he gave over and turned away with a despairing moan. Meigs faced the king and began an angry utburst which the professor made haste to interrupt.

"Your majesty," said Quinn, "this needy gentleman is also a friend of ours. Will you not supply his wants, or enable us to do so?"

"The indexograph informed me as to his character," answered the king, "and it is a law of the realm that punishment must fit the crime. When your friend will truly acknowledge himself in the wrong his needs will be plentifully sup-

plied. Until that time he must beg his food from house to house, morsel by morsel."

"And this other gentleman in the kirtle," proceeded the professor, "will you not exercise a little clemency in *his* case?"

"I have already exercised a good deal of clemency," the king answered; "nor can I go any further until he also announces a change of heart."

Markham was as deaf to the word-boxes as was Meigs, and his majesty's will was interpreted to them.

"I am not in the wrong!" declared Markham. "The principle involved is of vital importance, and I will die for it, if need be."

"So will I," averred Meigs.

"We will eliminate your friends from our calculations for the present," said the king. "Just now I would like to know what has become of my executioner-general."

"He is pinned to the roof of the under-world," said the professor.

"Can you bring him back?" asked the king, turning his eye aloft. "Really, I don't see how we are to get along without him."

"Possibly I can return him to you," answered the professor. "I will try, at least, providing you will grant a request I have to make."

This dallying with the royal prerogative was not well received by his majesty, nor by those around him.

"What request would you make, in case I was inclined to receive it?" asked the king.

"I would have you bring out the Bolla and allow these two gentlemen to take it in their hands."

The king gave a start, and a look of consternation overspread the faces of those in his retinue.

"Where did you hear of the Bolla?" the king asked sharply.

"In the other kingdom, your majesty," the professor replied.

The king was silent a few moments.

"We will take that matter up later," said he finally. "From whence come you and your friends? That point has been bothering me for some little time."

"We come from another planet which is called the Earth," said Quinn.

"Does the planet you speak of circle around our sun?"

"Yes, your majesty."

"Is it as large as Njambai?"

"Much larger, your majesty."

"And are all the creatures on Earth two-handed, as large as you, and able to communicate thoughts without a word-box?"

"The inhabitants of Earth are just as you see us. But they do not live beneath the crust of the planet. The sun's rays are so tempered by the time they reach the Earth that beings are able to live in comfort on the outer shell."

The king clapped two of his hands at this, and gave other evidence of his pleasure on the word-box.

"Most wonderful!" he exclaimed, and launched into a series of questions concerning the physical attributes of our mother planet and the character and institutions of its people.

Quinn answered him fully, expatiating on the progress in arts and sciences already made by the Earth dwellers. The king's wonder grew into awe and admiration. Rising from his chair

he paced back and forth in front of us, thinking deeply.

"What sort of weapons have your people?" he inquired at last.

The professor described our powder-and-shot machines to the best of his ability. The king was puzzled.

"Don't they know anything about zet on your native orb?" he inquired.

"No," answered the professor. "There is no zet in our atmosphere."

"Suppose a company of my soldiers were to land on Earth, fully equipped with zetbais. Could they be resisted?"

Quinn shuddered.

"No, your majesty, they could not be resisted. With your wonderful zetbais you could conquer and lay waste the entire planet. Candor compels me to tell you this, knowing full well that such a result would not be possible to you."

"Why impossible?" cried the king, with wild enthusiasm. "You and your friends must have come hither in that strange house which fell into the crater. Why could I not load a company

of my soldiers into the house and go back with you?"

Then, and only then, did we see what this crack-brained monarch was driving at. Quinn was in trepidation over the outcome.

"Such a thing is not to be thought of!" he cried. "Your majesty, let me beg you not to give your attention to such a quixotic project!"

"I am fully resolved!" exclaimed the king, striding up and down with clinched hands. "It is a very alluring picture you give me of this planet called Earth. I'll conquer it, annex it and own it."

He halted and raised his word-box.

"Ho, there, Olox!" he cried.

The high chief stepped forward and made the royal salaam of four hands.

"We are going forth to conquer the solar system, Olox," said the king in a brisk, matter-of-fact way.

"Yes, your majesty," answered Olox, as readily as though the capturing of a planet or two was an every-day occurrence.

"You have overheard what this strange two-

handed creature has been telling me?" went on the king.

"Yes, your majesty."

"Trains that burn the black blocks and need not be hauled by hand! Green vegetation, laughing rivers and babbling brooks all on the outer shell! Rich cities, stores of art and heaps of yellow gold! These, and myriad other marvelous things are on the Earth, Olox, and guarded only by two-handed, five-fingered colossi, who have to load a tube of iron with black powder and round missiles before they can attack their foes!"

The king threw back his head and laughed on the word-box. Taking a cue from the king, Olox also laughed, and so did the others.

"And these Earth dwellers can't even see in the dark!" rippled the king with contemptuous fingers.

"But they are large, your majesty," ventured the high chief.

"Large and therefore awkward; not quick like our people, Olox. The zetbai is the key to the situation. We could girdle the green star of these colossi, devastate it and destroy all who sought to oppose us. That is what we shall do."

"It will be a noble campaign, your majesty."

"Noble? That is not the word, Olox. It will be stupendous! We'll monopolize everything when we get there, my dear sir—everything we can get our hands on. And I guess we can get our hands on whatever there is—zet will clear every obstacle out of our way."

The king looked at the theoretical side. Olox, naturally, had an eye to the practical.

"What are your orders for the campaign, your majesty?" he asked.

"I shall leave a regent to look after Baigadd," said the king, "and myself accompany the expedition. You will be the military head, Olox."

"Yes, your majesty. We are to go in the metal house?"

"It is the only thing we have to go in. The metal house was unhurt by its fall into the crater?"

"That appears to be the case, your majesty, strange as it may seem. It fell into the kingdom right side up and——"

"The interior is in good condition?"

"Very good, your majesty."

"My orders to the effect that nothing should be removed from it have been carried out?"

"The executioner-general would have that tub of white pigment. Nothing else has been taken from the house."

"Very good. How many of our people will the house contain comfortably?"

"I should say that fifty or more could dwell in it without much inconvenience."

"Then select fifty soldiers, the flower of the Gaddbaizets. Among your stores be sure you have a good supply of black kaka. I want some one who is away up in ideographs to accompany the expedition as historian."

"It will be attended to, your highness."

The king turned and aimed his word-box at the professor.

"Is that tub of white pigment essential to the proper equipment of the metal house?" he asked.

"Very essential," replied Quinn.

Three weeks and more in the nether kingdoms had whitened us considerably, but the professor's face was now a sickly grayish color.

"Then I will have it taken back to the house," said the king.

He gave orders to that end at once, and the cart was laid hold of and drawn out of the square and down the street, Olox accompanying it.

"I had no idea," the king drummed on his word-box, "that there were any people in the solar system with so much wealth and so little power with which to guard it. I've got the other three kingdoms of Njambai pretty well under my thumb, and the regent I leave behind to boss things will have an easy time of it. Quite possibly I may conclude not to come back to Njambai. This other star has natural advantages which we do not seem to have here, and may prove a more comfortable place in which to live."

Professor Quinn was shivering, like a man with an ague. He proceeded to use his talk-machine, and the words shook under his unsteady fingers.

"What you are thinking of, your majesty," ran the professor's words, "is only the wildest of dreams."

"I have had dreams before, and wild ones," the king's word-box rattled off complacently, "and I have made them come true. It shall be

the same with this. I am a conqueror, and I come of a line of conquerors."

"There are millions upon millions of people on our planet," persisted the professor, despairingly. "They could hurl these countless numbers against you faster than you could slay them with your zetbais."

Key 7 of the royal word-box gave a screech of contempt.

"Suppose we draw a line of zet," the box added, when the derision had died out, "imprison groups of those countless numbers and then wipe them out by detachments? How would that work?"

"The atmosphere of Earth is different from that of Mercury," continued the professor. "You cannot draw zet from the air of our planet."

"Thanks for the hint," replied the king. "We will take an ample supply with us and charge the atmosphere with it. Then we shall have a store at hand whenever the need develops."

While the king was using his word-box with two of his hands, he was rubbing the other two together with ill-concealed delight.

"Conditions there are absolutely unknown to you, your majesty," persisted the professor in a frantic endeavor to turn the king from his designs. "You will be brought face to face, at every turn, with situations that will puzzle you and be fraught with danger. All the nations of the Earth will combine against you."

"Let them combine!" was the monarch's answer. "I hope they will display sufficient strength to make the campaign exciting. I will capture this Earth of yours and rule over it! From one end of it to the other I will make it mine! I have long felt that Njambai was too small for the proper exercise of my wide abilities."

"This is your world," the professor thumped angrily on his word-box, "and you have no right to meddle with any other planet."

That caused the king to turn his keen eye on the professor, and to keep it there for a full minute.

"I have the right to do whatever I see fit," snapped his talk machine. "There is no will in this kingdom but mine, and no other will in the four kingdoms, if I choose to have it so. But why are you saying such things on your word-

box? After firing me with a kingly ambition to capture and annex a distant planet, why do you proceed to throw discouragement in my way? Ha! I wonder if you have been telling me the truth?"

"Your majesty," hummed the professor's talk machine, with dignity, "I am not in the habit of making misstatements."

"We'll find out whether you are or not," came from the king. "This is an important matter, and I shall take no man's word for anything. Ho, there!" and the word-box was leveled at some of the retainers; "bring an indexograph, varlets! We will settle this question of veracity here and now."

Some of the retainers scurried away and vanished inside the palace. Presently they reappeared with the indexograph.

The professor was backward in facing the test —strangely backward, as I thought, for a man so clear-minded and conscientious.

"The test is not necessary," he demurred.

"Your actions are far from being open and aboveboard," remarked the king. "You must submit."

The royal eye was on the machine as the professor was tried out. The ideograph told of a truthful mind, sadly perturbed. The royal word-box chattered mirthfully.

"You are afraid I can accomplish my purpose!" laughed his majesty. "You are worried about your planet! Such a state of mind merely enhances my determination, for you, if I mistake not, are a clever man. You would not feel worried if you did not believe I could accomplish what I have in mind. But be at peace, my dear sir. You shall in nowise suffer. I will make you ruler of one of the captured kingdoms."

This was no lure for the professor. He maintained an attitude of dignified silence, watching the king with steady eyes.

"A wise general," went on his majesty, "always looks over his ground, as well as he may, before going out to battle. That will be advisable in the case of my present campaign."

"What do you mean by that, your majesty?" queried the professor.

"To-night," explained the king, again, "we shall mount to the upper crust and make a reconnoissance of this orb I am to subjugate."

"Have you any astronomical instruments?" asked Quinn.

"None whatever," replied the king. "Have you?"

"There is an instrument in the steel car which will bring the planet Terra much nearer to us than the naked eye could do."

"What is it? Describe the instrument to me and I will have it brought out for our night's work."

The professor described the telescope, and the king dispatched a messenger after Olox in hot haste, with supplementary orders. Thereupon the king bade us farewell and left the square, followed by his suite.

As I stood watching the royal party out of sight, I heard a gurgling groan behind me. Facing about I saw the professor reeling unsteadily; the next moment I had caught him in my arms and saved him a fall.

CHAPTER XIV.

WE PLAN TO STEAL A BUILDING.

Professor Quinn did not become unconscious. The frightful catastrophe that threatened Terra had preyed upon him at the expense of his strength. Easing him to the ground, I dropped beside him and held his head on my knee.

"Cheer up, professor," said I. "It surprises me to see you give way like this."

"Mr. Munn," he returned brokenly, "if this rattle-brained monarch goes out into the universe with a picked company of fifty men and a hundred zetbais, it will mean that the whole solar system will get a set-back to a period corresponding with our Middle Ages!

"These creatures of Njambai are far beneath those of Terra in civilization, and fate has placed in their hands the terrible zetbai, a weapon whose destructive powers are beyond compute.

"Oh, Mr. Munn, think of our government being overwhelmed by these four-handed, one-eyed creatures! Think of the word-box screeching

through the lofty corridors of the Capitol at Washington, where the soul-stirring eloquence of Senators and Representatives has been thundered amain! Think of the——"

The professor could give no added touch to the harrowing picture. Throwing his hands to his face, he groaned aloud.

"This hasn't happened yet," said I.

"No, but it will happen unless we can do something to circumvent the mad scheme. Anarchy will reign in our beloved land—over the whole earth—and I will be held responsible. Ah, me! In removing the trust magnates I have but paved the way for a mightier monopolist! I have but followed the sad example of Frankenstein, for out of my plans has sprung a monstrous project that will check progress and hurl civilization back five hundred years."

"Don't give up hope," said I, but not very cheerfully, for I was greatly cast down. "Let us pretend to help them. We will lend our aid in making the car ready, and then, at the final moment, perhaps we can dart away and leave them behind; or, failing in that, we may be able to throw the zetbais from the car while in space.

That will pull the fangs of the Baigadds, I think, and they will land on Earth as harmless as a lot of kittens."

The professor took heart at this. He would have rallied any way, for his resourceful nature could not struggle long in the slough of despond.

J. Archibald Meigs had been circling around the edge of our barrier seeking for another glimpse of Markham and even calling his name with all his lung power. But the food-trust magnate neither answered nor showed himself, being engaged in a house-to-house canvass for the pittance of provender that would keep him alive.

Meigs finally turned to us and demanded the cause of the professor's downcast air. Quinn revealed the king's plot and Meigs tore off into an outburst of recrimination, just as I expected he would do.

The professor bowed his head meekly to the tempest and even restrained me when I would have put a stop to the broker's intemperate language.

By and by we had our noon meal, and with the attendants who brought it came Olox, seating himself on the ground and watching us as we

ate. The high chief was quite amiable, and I began asking him questions relative to our surroundings.

He indicated the king's private apartments in the palace, and pointed out his own residence, as well as the dwelling occupied by the late executioner-general, besides vouchsafing other information of interest.

"What is that small, square building under the wing of the palace?" I asked.

"That is the imperial exchequer," said he. "Within that building the king keeps the most priceless of all his treasures."

"And what is that?" inquired the professor.

"The Bolla," was the startling answer.

Quinn and I exchanged expressive glances. Here, through a chance remark by Olox, we were suddenly reminded of our duty to the king of Baigol. It was necessary that Olox should not see the startled looks which the professor and I were exchanging, and Mercurial eyes were preternaturally sharp.

"Bolla?" I allowed to come limpingly from the talk instrument. "What may that be?"

"A stone," answered Olox, and there was sus-

picion in his manner in spite of my attempt to avert it. "You already know of the Bolla. Your friend requested his majesty to have it brought out, and at that time you said that you had heard of it in the other kingdom."

"So we did," I replied, trimming my sails to another breeze, "but what is it? Our information is rather vague."

"A stone, as I just said," went on Olox. "It has a beneficial moral and physical effect on whoever touches it."

"Where did it come from?"

"It has been in Njambai for ages," was the indefinite answer.

"How did King Gaddbai get hold of it?"

"He borrowed it from the king of Baigol."

"And yet you call it one of his treasures! If it was borrowed, Olox, how could it possibly belong here?"

"King Gaddbai has taken it," was the calm response. "What he wants he makes his own. If King Golbai had not loaned the stone, there would have been a war."

"Was that the right thing for your king to do?" inquired the professor.

"Whatever our sovereign does is right."

There was no getting around a flat statement of that sort. Evidently the ruler of the country had drilled his subjects thoroughly.

"What did you do at the car, Olox?" said the professor.

"At the iron house?" The professor nodded.

Nods and gestures were well understood by the people of Njambai, for, with four hands, they were well equipped for finger and whole arm movements.

"The king's orders were carried out, at the iron house," finished Olox.

"The paint was returned to its proper place?"

"Even so."

"And the telescope——"

"That matter was attended to."

"I trust you handled the telescope with care? It is exceedingly fragile and could be easily injured."

"After the king spoke as he did, death by zet would be meted out to the one who injured the instrument."

There were several things I wanted to ask Olox, and the principal one had to do with Gil-

hooly, and the way he had been taken from the car and made to serve the traction interests of the kingdom. However, the professor was keeping Olox so busy with his word-box that my own questions were crowded out.

"The family of the executioner-general are anxious to have him returned," remarked Olox, while the professor was looking for the proper key on which to formulate his next question. "Could that be accomplished?"

"It might," replied the professor guardedly.

"What has become of him?"

"He disappeared as he was about to commit a deed of base injustice," said the professor grimly.

"We are aware of that," and Olox looked uneasily around as he punched the words, "but we are ignorant of the cause of his disappearance. He is a distant relative of mine, and I promised his next of kin to put these questions to you. Is he alive?"

"Undoubtedly."

Olox pressed closer and muffled his word-box so that the sounds could not carry to dangerous limits.

"If you would tell us how to proceed in the matter of getting the executioner-general back," he whispered, "I can promise you and your friends help in getting out of the country."

"Look out for the indexograph, Olox," said I. "If they should happen to give you a try out with it, the ideograph wouldn't look well to the king."

Olox was greatly shaken—so shaken, in fact, that he could not pursue the subject further.

"I will talk with you later about the executioner-general," he finished, noting the empty dishes before the professor and Meigs and me, and the curious manner of those who had come with him. "Until then, pray consider that nothing has been said on the subject." With that, he arose and beckoned to his companions.

After Olox had led the attendants away with the empty food receptacles, the professor and I got our heads together on the mission that had brought us to Baigadd.

We did not think it necessary or advisable to let Meigs know of our purpose in regaining control of the Bolla.

"We are pledged to secure the mysterious stone if we can, Mr. Mumn," said Quinn. "Un-

doubtedly the work will put us in bad odor here, and may interfere with our attempt to balk the king in his comprehensive scheme of conquest, but that does not release us from the task in question."

A tingle of gratification shot along my nerves. The feeling of oppression that had burdened me was lifted, for I ever loved to crack a professional nut, and here was one that would certainly try me to the utmost.

I surveyed the small building with critical eyes.

"Here is where my inches get the better of me, professor," said I. "For one of my size to get into that house is out of the question. And I wouldn't know where to lay hands on the Bolla if it were physically possible for me to effect an entrance."

"I can make a suggestion, Mr. Munn," said Quinn, "which would get you safely around that difficulty."

"What is that?"

"Whisper." I inclined my ear to his lips. "Why not run away with the imperial exchequer?"

"Eh?" I gasped.

"Steal it bodily, I mean. When you get to Baigol with it, let the king effect entrance, secure his Bolla, and then you return the exchequer to its original location. Of course, it would be very wrong to steal the king's treasury, and I would not counsel that under any consideration. You merely borrow it to obtain the Bolla; the stone returned to its rightful owners, you return the exchequer."

"And get zetbaied for my pains!" I exclaimed.

"Let us hope," said the professor, "that before you can get zetbaied we shall be in a position to use the car and escape from the planet."

I gave much thought to the matter.

"It is a long chance," I returned frankly, "but I have been taking long chances ever since I became a cracksman. I will put the plan in operation, professor, at the very first opportunity that presents itself."

Thus we left the matter, the professor warmly congratulating me on my courage and expressing the hope that I would prove equally courageous in more worthy pursuits, if the chance ever offered.

CHAPTER XV.

SURVEYING OUR OWN PLANET.

Day slipped along to its close, and shortly after the reflectors winked out the king came, accompanied by Olox, a guard of Gaddbaizets, and six attendants bearing the telescope.

To our surprise and gratification, both Markham and Popham were in the midst of the royal guard.

"It struck me," said the king graciously, "that your friends might also wish to view the orb from which they came. It is a little thing and can be done without inconvenience, so I am pleased to favor them."

The high chief traced an opening in the zet ring with the black tip of his weapon, and Meigs was first to rush through and hurl himself into the arms of Popham. The unfortunate gentlemen were long in each other's embrace.

When they finally drew apart, Meigs groped through the black gloom for Markham, while the

professor felt for the coal baron's hand and gave it a gentle and reassuring pressure.

"Professor Quinn," said Popham, "I am being badly treated. The king has put me on the night shift in one of the royal coal mines and the soldiers make me work like a galley slave. This is the first night I have had off since they set me to work."

Popham was loud in his complainings, but was cut short by the king.

"We must proceed, gentlemen. I have word from above that the night is fine and everything propitious for an excellent view of your planet, but storms come suddenly and we can never be sure of the weather on the outer crust. It is well to make haste."

We started stumblingly, each of us led by a soldier to whom the way was plain. We were jostled here and there through the gloom, and finally were made to mount some object which gave a metallic ring beneath our feet.

"This is the royal lift," explained the king. "When the heat of the day is suspended I often go above."

He then addressed himself to Olox. "Give the signal at once."

The signal was given and we shot aloft. The transformation from the fury of a storm to the light and tranquillity of the underworld had been great and astounding; but this second transformation was none the less impressive.

We emerged into a wonderful night set with stars that were perfectly familiar to me. The Dipper and Polaris were in the north and occupying relatively the same positions that they do when viewed from Earth—so little effect has the immensities of distance upon their posts in the vault.

But our own globe! It hung huge and tremulous in the blue of the evening sky, so plain that we could almost note the continents that gemmed its surface.

Meigs gave a whimpering cry and he and Markham and Popham rushed together, fell upon each other's neck, and wept aloud.

"Oh, I wish I was back, I wish I was back!" moaned the broker.

"I'm lonesome enough to die!" sobbed Markham.

"Exiled, exiled, exiled!" was all the coal baron could murmur in husky tones.

I will not say that I was proof against the sentiments that had unmanned the one-time magnates, but I will declare that both Quinn and myself had our feelings under better control. In silence I assisted the professor to plant the telescope and we each gazed longingly at the greenish star magnified to many times its diameter.

"There's the United States!" cried Popham.

"Can you see New York?" whispered Meigs hoarsely. "Look for New York, man!"

Of course, a view of New York was out of the question, but the frantic ex-plutocrats imagined they could see it, and even look down into Wall Street for aught I know. Again were their emotions too much for them, and they gave way as they had done before.

"Mr. Munn," said the professor, 'this is harrowing."

"It is pretty hard on those gentlemen," I returned, "to be brought face to face with something they thought they owned and yet not be able to possess it."

"That remark is unlike you," answered the professor, and turned to the king. "A thought occurred to me while we were coming up on the lift," he went on, "and I should like you to explain."

"If it is in my power," answered the king, his eye to the telescope.

"When we dropped into the kingdom of Baigol there was a storm on the surface of this planet. That storm must have hidden the sun, and yet the reflectors below were sending day throughout the realm."

"The reflection came from other and smaller reflectors arranged to take care of just such an emergency," explained the king. "Storms are only local, you know, and when one gathers over the giant reflector the smaller ones at the other points are brought into use. But let's not talk of this planet, but of that other one up here."

And along that line the king's conversation ran for a full hour.

At last, when we were ready to descend, so far from being dismayed by the enormity of the task before him, the royal zealot was fortified in his resolution to carry it out.

His majesty was in great good humor, and when we had left the lift and marched back to the square he very graciously tendered us the freedom of the town.

He could not understand why the professor and I should have any desire to escape from his country, and inasmuch as he had made us his honored guests, to return us to the circle of zet would be to besmirch his hospitality.

The zet had been regathered into the high chief's zetbai and it was not again released. It was not necessary for Popham to return to the royal mines until the following night, so he remained with us, along with Markham, and we all bunked down in the centre of the plaza.

"Is there no way, Professor Quinn," quavered Popham, "whereby we can escape from the inhuman monsters who people this planet? The treatment I have suffered is monstrous! I feel as though I shall die if I have to go back to those royal coal mines again. Being a large man, they expect me to do the work of a dozen Mercurials. There are blisters on my hands and my feet are so sore I can hardly walk."

This wail from the brusque and tyrannical

Popham was in itself a highly edifying comment on his sad experiences.

"Your position was grace itself compared with mine," mourned Markham. "These people seemed determined to starve me to death. I am expected to travel from house to house, begging food, and they hardly give me enough at one house to take me to the next."

"You are on the surface," returned Popham, "and you are not delving continually in the hot, unhealthy regions where I must do my work. I have to toil like a galley slave for a cent a day, and a cent's worth of this vegetable food, which seems to be all they have here, does not furnish me with enough strength for my labor."

"You have your clothes, at least," whimpered Meigs. "Quinn ought to help us; he *must* help us."

"I shall do what I can, gentlemen," said the professor wearily. "I have not succeeded in showing you the error of your ways, but I must let that pass. A greater calamity menaces our planet than any you could possibly let loose upon our devoted country."

"Meigs was saying something about that,"

spoke up Popham. "What is it this mad king thinks of doing?"

"Why, with fifty warriors, armed with zetbais, he intends making an attack upon Terra. He hopes to conquer our mother orb."

Popham gave a faint cry of derision.

"Why, if that rascal ever landed on our planet," said he, "he and his warriors would be captured out of hand and turned over to some museum for exhibition purposes. If *I* happened to be around at the time of their capture," he finished angrily, "I would send every last one of them into mines that *are* mines. I'd make them toil with their four hands until they wore them off at the wrists. Gad, but that would be a revenge worth having!"

"This is not a time to think of revenge, Mr. Popham," spoke up the professor, more in sorrow than rebuke. "We have our planet to consider, and, next to the planet, ourselves."

"Our planet is big enough to take care of itself," averred Markham. "Leave that out of the question, professor, and confine your attention to some way in which we can better our condition."

"The danger that threatens Earth is greater than you appear to imagine," went on Quinn. "For whatever happened to our home-star because of King Gaddbai and his astounding plans of conquest, I should be responsible. The thought weighs upon me and will give me no rest. The king must be foiled."

"How does he intend to reach the Earth?" asked Markham.

"By means of our car."

"Is that in usable condition?" came joyously from Popham.

"So far as I can discover, it lies intact at the bottom of the crater on whose rim we landed. There is no reason why the car cannot be employed for a return to Terra; but," and here the professor's words became emphatic, "it shall not be so employed by King Gaddbai and his army of conquest. I shall prevent that at all hazards."

"How?" came hoarsely from the three ex-millionaires.

"By destroying the car, as a last resort and when other means fail," was the calm rejoinder.

"You would not dare!" breathed Popham.

"You would not have the heart to take from us our sole means of escape!" added Markham.

"Madman!" ground out Meigs. "If I really thought that you would destroy our only means of salvation, I'd——"

"You wouldn't do a thing, Meigs," I chimed in. "Whatever the professor thinks best to do is going to be done, and no two ways about it."

"I don't want to destroy the car," continued the professor, unmoved by this storm he had aroused, "if other means can be made to serve. And I may say that we shall exhaust every effort to make other means serve. I feel that it is my duty to return you gentlemen to the place from whence you were taken. I have not accomplished what I had hoped to do, but it is better to be disappointed in that rather than to let King Gaddbai get away in the car with his fifty warriors."

"Certainly it is your duty to send us back," said Meigs, "and you should consider that duty before anything and everything else."

"Exactly!" seconded Popham, "and we must take Gilhooly with us. If one goes, all must go."

"Leave the matter to me, gentlemen," counseled the professor quietly. "I shall do everything possible."

The coal baron and the food-trust magnate continued to dwell upon their harrowing experiences with various degrees of intensity until a command for silence came from a word-box somewhere around us. Our raucous tones were keeping the people awake all over the city, the talking machine averred, and unless we became instantly quiet the authorities would take the matter in hand.

This threat had the desired result. We gave over our conversation and settled ourselves for the night.

I do not know how long I slept, but it must have been some hours. I was aroused to find it still dark and to behold the professor with a lighted match in one hand and his other hand over my lips.

The burning match threw a fitful glare around the open space and even reached to the roof tops beyond. Both the palace and the imperial exchequer were brought shadowily forth out of the gloom.

"Now is the time, Mr. Munn!" whispered the professor.

"The time?" I returned sotto voce. "Time for what?"

Without a word he pointed to the square building under the wing of the palace. I understood. It was now or never if I intended to make my raid and secure the Bolla.

I started erect.

"You have matches, Mr. Munn?" the professor asked in the very faintest of audible tones.

I nodded.

"You must be very careful to keep to the street until you reach the country," the professor went on. "If you should make a misstep and wreck a block of houses the disaster would be irretrievable."

"I will strike matches and light my way until I get well into the hills," said I.

"Just what I should have suggested," said he. "Good-by, Mr. Munn. Fail not to return with the exchequer as soon as the king of Baigol has secured the Bolla. Meantime I shall hope to get the car in readiness to speed our departure."

We struck hands as men will when confronted

by an issue of life and death. Then I stepped into the street, bent over the imperial exchequer, and wrenched it from its foundations.

It was a well-constructed building, and, although its contents jingled like a rattle box when I took it under my arm, it did not give way in any part.

Striking a match on the roof of the exchequer, I lighted my way down the street, picking my steps with care and caution.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW ILL-LUCK OVERTOOK ME.

Good fortune fared forth with me from the royal city and remained steadfastly at my right hand as long as the matches lasted; but when the last one had flickered out and left me in impenetrable gloom, my troubles began.

I was well into the rough country when the lights failed, threading a road bordered by hills that in some places were shoulder high. About the first thing I did was to blunder off the trail; in trying to regain it I stumbled over a five-foot mountain and went down all of a heap.

Had I fallen on the exchequer I should have smashed it into a cocked hat—a result only narrowly averted. Regaining my feet and smothering some good strong language that rose instinctively to my lips, I essayed once more to find the Baigol road.

I had my trouble for my pains, and, after an hour spent in fruitless blundering, I sat down on a cliff, propped up the exchequer on the side of a

cañon and nursed my barked shins until day began flashing from the reflectors.

As I sat there waiting for the light my brain was filled with evil thoughts which I recall with contrition and chronicle with regret. I knew the exchequer must contain the king's wealth—golden pieces of eight of a rare fineness unknown to the mints of Terra.

I was not of a mind to return the gold after allowing the king of Baigol to take his Bolla. Why not stow the treasure away about my clothes and rely upon my native tact and discretion to get me to the steel car in spite of the grasping monarch of Baigadd?

I was much wrought up over the way I had lost the loot taken from the plutocrats. In my mind's eye I could see those four bulging handkerchiefs waxing and waning about the castle, and I had hoped they would fall to the surface of Mercury along with the car, so that I might still be able to secure them.

In this I was disappointed. Once the Mercurial atmosphere was struck the loot and the revolver had fallen away from the castle like so many pieces of lead.

The wallets, undoubtedly, had been incinerated by the sun's rays, together with the banknotes that were in them. I imagined that the intense heat had exploded the cartridges in the six-shooter and had warped and twisted the firearm until it was no longer serviceable.

The other plunder also, even if found, could not by any possibility be utilized by me or any one else.

All this had made me savagely eager to recoup my finances. And as I sat brooding on the cliff I asked myself why I should not do this at the expense of the Baigadd exchequer.

I did not arouse myself at the first reflected flash of day. Although I had decided to appropriate the contents of Gaddbai's coffers, I was casting about for a suitable method that would gain my end with the least inconvenience.

A maudlin chuckle from near at hand brought me abruptly out of my reflections. I turned, and there, on a neighboring elevation, stood Gilhooly, balancing the exchequer on the broad of his hand.

I was brought up staring. What could the motive power of the B. & B. Interplanetary be

doing there, at that time? His absence must have interfered sadly with the train schedule. Certainly the officers of the system would not have countenanced this neglect of duty, had they known of it.

Then it flashed over me that Gilhooly had run away. He had tired of racing up and down the V-shaped groove with a string of toy cars and had taken French leave of the system.

The fire of insanity was still in his eyes, and he retreated step by step as I advanced upon him.

"Look here, Gilhooly," said I in my most persuasive tones, "that building you have in your hands is the imperial exchequer. Put it down, there's a good fellow. Don't juggle with it in that way. Suppose you were to drop it!"

Gilhooly had begun shaking it up and down as though it were one of those cast-iron banks in which children sometimes deposit their coppers. The jingle of the exchequer's contents appeared to please him.

"If you want this road you have got to bid up for it," said he. "I'm not so young that I

don't know a good thing when I've got it in my grip."

"That road has gone into the hands of a receiver," I returned, humoring his fancy, "and I'm the receiver. Give it here, Gilhooly."

"I was not consulted when the receiver was appointed," he answered. "I have rights in the matter and those rights must be protected. It's a deal framed up to beat the pool. My, how it rattles!" and he shook the exchequer again.

I was at my wits' end. I knew that tact was far and away more effective than violence when dealing with a crazed person.

"Put it down for a moment, Gilhooly," I wheedled, "and come over to the directors' meeting."

"Who are the directors?" he asked suspiciously.

"Well, there are only two. I'm one, you know, and you're the other."

He exploded a laugh, tossed the exchequer in the air like a strong man playing with a cannon ball, and then caught it deftly as it came down.

"I'm the boy to juggle with railroads!" he

boasted. "Ask any one in the Street and they'll tell you."

"Look out!" I gasped, "or you'll drop it."

"Not I!" he mumbled. "I never yet wrecked a railroad."

"Where did you come from, Gilhooly?" I asked, seeking to get him into conversation while I edged closer to him by degrees.

"From distant parts," he replied. "I've been the whole thing for a big transcontinental line that I'm adding to the Gilhooly System." He chuckled craftily. "They thought they had me, but I got out from under with the rolling stock. I've hid the cars in a gully, and my next move will be to steal the right of way. I'm the big railroad man of the country. Just ask anybody who knows what's what in transportation circles and they'll tell you the same thing."

I had arrived within a few feet of him, and suddenly I leaped forward. But he was wary and sprang aside, the exchequer jingling sharply.

"No, you don't," said he. "You're trying to serve a subpœna on me and I'm too foxy for you. Get out of here or I'll have you thrown downstairs."

"Come over to the directors' meeting, Gilhooly," I urged, turning and walking away from him. "You've got to look after your interests, you know."

But the vagaries of a shattered mind are hard to deal with. Gilhooly laughed at me, sat down on a rock and took the exchequer on his knees. He was wary, and never for an instant permitted me to lose his eyes.

"You can't fool me," he cried, "so you'd better take the next train for home. I hold a majority of the stock, and after I've watered it a little I'll have enough to buy another line. It's easy being a railroad magnate when you know how. Clear out, you annoy me."

"Gilhooly," said I, with a gentleness I was far from feeling, "don't you want to know something about Popham?"

"Don't know him," snarled Gilhooly, "but if he's trying to break into this railroad game, just tell him that I control the whole bag of tricks and that it's not worth his while."

Hugging the exchequer in his arms, he rocked back and forth and began to sing.

"Well," said I, starting away again, "if you

don't want to attend this directors' meeting I'll have to look after it myself."

He made no reply but kept on hugging the exchequer, rocking back and forth, and timing his monotonous croon to the rattle of treasure in the king's strong rooms.

Warily as I could, I circled about, creeping on all fours and screening myself by the little hills and ridges. My design was to come up on Gilhooly from behind and snatch the exchequer away from him.

But he heard me. Before I had come within a dozen feet of him, he stopped his singing, leaped to his feet, and whirled around. The next moment he had placed himself at a safe distance.

"I'm too many for you," he shouted. "Go away, or I'll call the police."

I was in a sweat for fear some of King Gaddbai's soldiers would locate us and develop their zetbais. One flash of that violet fire would do the business for both Gilhooly and me, and the professor's cherished plans would go by the board. Besides, I had plans of my own, and it seemed as though Gilhooly was destined to make a mess of everything.

"Oh, come, now," I cried, in a bit of a temper. "That won't do you any good, Gilhooly. It doesn't belong to you, and you haven't any right to keep it."

"Don't we ever keep anything that don't belong to us?" he asked sarcastically. "I'm not that sort of a fellow, for I keep everything in the railroad line that I can get my hands on."

Logic and reason were utterly dead in his mind. Whims he had, but they were but fancies of the moment. As I stood there looking at him, I wondered how the people of Baigadd had ever managed to keep him hauling their trains as long as they had.

"Good-by," he called suddenly, taking the exchequer under his arm. "I think I'll go to the office and——"

Just then I made a dash at him. With a mocking laugh he whirled about and raced off across the hills, myself in hot pursuit.

Gilhooly's course intersected the Baigol highway and he turned into it, roaring defiantly as he sped along. Suddenly he stumbled and fell, and a cry of dismay escaped me.

He had fallen squarely on the exchequer and wrecked it completely!

Kyzicks—yellow coins the size of a gold dollar and worth five times as much—rolled. everywhere about the road, diverging from a heap that lay revealed by the collapsed walls of the building. Flinging forward, I went to my knees and began plunging my hands into the pile.

I believe that just then I was as daft as Gilhooly himself. In those days the glimmer of gold always had a demoralizing effect on me.

As I raked my outspread fingers through the yellow pile I brought up a round, jet-black stone the size of my fist. I regarded it as a bit of chaff in the bin of wealth and hurled it from me down the road. With a loud yell, Gilhooly leaped after it.

Then I became aware of a weird and inexplicable feeling that laid itself like an axe at the root of my professional instinct. What right had I to all this treasure? It belonged to the king of Baigall; he was an unworthy creature, perhaps, but still it belonged to him. What had I been about to do? My heart sickened and I sprang

up, spurned the kyzicks with my heel and turned my back.

That was my awakening. In one instant the iron of repentance had pierced my soul. The past rolled its turgid waters in front of me. I shivered and drew back from that wave of evil, covering my eyes to blot it from my sight.

How should I atone for the days that had been? Could I do it by an unflinching rectitude in the days there were to be? Conscience was belaboring me with telling blows. I had not been on intimate terms with my conscience for many years, and to have it thus suddenly overmaster me and drive me into reformation was a mystery beyond my power to explain.

While I stood there consumed with regret and hoping against hope for the future, a voice hailed me from down the road.

"Did you say your name was Munn?"

Could that calm, contained voice have come from Emmet Gilhooly? I looked in his direction and found him leaning against a jutting spur of rocks, his right hand clutching convulsively the black stone I had flung from me.

The crazed light had vanished from his eyes.

An expression of wonder was on his face, but it was a rational wonder developed by an awakening as abrupt and complete as mine had been.

"You have it right, Mr. Gilhooly," I answered, the extreme mildness of my voice surprising me. "My full name is James Peter Munn and——"

"You are the thief who just came into the castle and relieved myself and my friends of their valuables?"

Gilhooly's normal condition had come back to him at the point where it had been dropped. I was not slow in reasoning how this might be.

"I was a thief in the letter and spirit less than ten minutes back," I humbly answered, "but now, sir, I have turned a leaf. I promise you that the rest of the book shall read better than what has gone before."

Gilhooly passed his left hand across his forehead.

"Where—where am I?" he faltered.

"In the kingdom of Baigadd," I returned, "some distance out of the royal city."

"Baigadd? Royal city? You talk strangely, Mr. Munn. Where is the castle? Where are

Meigs, Markham, and Popham? And Professor Quinn? Are we"—he started forward and looked wildly around—"still in the castle? But no, that can't be. You just said we were somewhere else. I beg your pardon, Mr. Munn. I am confused and hardly know what I am saying."

I began an explanation, going patiently into every detail, and when I finally finished Gilhooly knew as much about our situation as I did.

For some time Gilhooly walked up and down the road, passing and repassing the heap of gold. At last he paused beside it.

"We should return this treasure to its owner, Mr. Munn," said he, and he dropped the black stone on the yellow pile. "From what you tell me, this is a strange planet and strangely peopled. Yet there is superstition here as well as in our native orb—as these wonder tales about the Bolla will bear evidence."

"I think with you, sir," said I. "The Bolla is simply a fetish and its miraculous powers are purely imaginary."

"That is the sensible way to look at it. Suppose we load our pockets with the gold and start

back with it to the city from whence it was taken?"

I assented and suggested using our coats as improvised bags for the easier transportation of the king's wealth, and we stripped to our shirt sleeves and set about our work. In half an hour we had collected all the scattered treasure, had bound it up in our coats and had started back.

Gilhooly preserved a pensive silence. His thoughts were far away and he seemed entirely oblivious of the fact that I was trudging along at his side. It was only when we turned an angle in the road and came face to face with Quinn, Meigs, Markham, and Popham that Gilhooly showed any interest in our present situation.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CHANGE OF HEART.

The meeting between Gilhooly and his brother exiles was most affecting. In the general joy at finding the ex-railway-magnate restored to reason the matter of the imperial exchequer was temporarily lost sight of.

And I think the man who rejoiced most over Gilhooly's returned sanity was Quinn. The professor's beady little eyes were fairly glowing as he caught and clung to Gilhooly's hand after the others had expressed their pleasure and tendered congratulations.

"This is a glad day for me, Mr. Gilhooly!" exclaimed the professor. "I had taken myself very much to task on account of your clouded mind."

"Your reproach of yourself was well merited," spoke up Meigs, who always had a venomous shaft in his quiver for Quinn. "Small thanks to you that our friend is himself again."

"Gently, Mr. Meigs, gently," came from Gil-

hooly. "I do not find Professor Quinn in the wrong in any particular."

Popham, Meigs, and Markham regarded Gilhooly with open-mouthed amaze. I think the professor also was startled; I know at least that I was.

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Gilhooly," cried Meigs, "that you can overlook Quinn's criminal folly in casting us adrift in the unknown?"

"I cannot only overlook it," was the quiet response, "but I can forgive it. Almost I am of the opinion that it was justifiable."

"Faugh!" rasped Meigs. "You have not recovered your reason after all or you would not talk that way."

"Let us not engage in useless disputes, gentlemen," put in the professor. "There is another affair to engage us. It was thought," Quinn went on, with an expressive look at me, "that Mr. Gilhooly had fled the realm and taken the imperial exchequer with him."

"It was I who took the exchequer," said I, "and it is I who hope to return it to the king."

"What about the Bolla?" queried Quinn, giving me a sharp look.

"It is here," said I, touching the makeshift bundle I was carrying under my arm. "At least," I added, "there is a strange looking black stone among the gold coins and I suppose it must be King Golbai's palladium."

"We were sent forth to look for Mr. Gilhooly and the stolen treasure," remarked the professor. "Olox and his Gaddbaizets are likewise on the road, but we have been able to leave them pretty well in the rear."

"What was thought of my absence?" I asked.

"Very little, Mr. Munn. Every officer of the state seemed united in fixing the blame upon Mr. Gilhooly. Since he was known to be mentally unsound, no crime could be attached to his act."

"I shall tell the truth of it," I declared.

"And be condemned to death by zet," said the professor, gazing at me fixedly.

"Let the king believe what he will," said Gilhooly. "I should rather have it so since it means so much to Mr. Munn."

"Why did you not keep on to the other kingdom with the Bolla?" inquired Quinn of me.

"Because I didn't think I should be doing the right thing," I replied.

"Ah! And why this sudden change in your sentiments, Mr. Munn?"

"I can't explain it, professor."

"I believe it is a theory of yours that one thief has the right to take from another what does not belong to either of them."

"Two wrongs do not make a right."

"Indeed! The change in your sentiments is most sudden—and remarkable. Will you please untie the sleeves of your coat and allow me to have a look at that black stone?"

I lowered my bundle and opened it.

"There," said I, but poorly concealing the contempt I felt for the black stone as I pointed to it. "You may take stock in the superstition if you will, professor, but I will have none of it."

The professor gave me a queer smile, then picked up the Bolla and surveyed it curiously.

"Would you like to look at it, Mr. Meigs?" he asked.

"A fetish like this is a sure sign of barbarism," observed Meigs, taking the stone. "The creatures who inhabit this planet are not of a very high order mentally."

He passed the Bolla to Popham and Popham

handed it to Markham. It was presently returned to me and I packed it away as before.

The professor then asked me for an account of what had happened during my flight toward Baigol with the exchequer. Gilhooly was not able to help me much in the recital, as the most important part of our adventures was a perfect blank to him.

I did not try to conceal anything from Quinn. I painted my designs on the king's money as black as they really were and he smiled as he listened.

"When did Mr. Gilhooly lay hands on the Bolla?" Quinn asked.

"How do you know that he did?" I returned.

"I am very sure that he did," was the quiet reply.

Thereupon I told the professor how I had thrown the stone from the heap of gold and Gilhooly had picked it up, his reason returning shortly afterward. Quinn wagged his head sagely and mumbled something I could not understand, but which had to do with the ridiculous pretensions of the Bolla.

I feared then for the mind of this great and

good man. Was he breaking under the tremendous responsibility incurred by removing the plutocrats from Earth?

A chill of apprehension shot to my heart. I was about to say something of a soothing nature to my patron—for I certainly looked upon him as such—when Olox and his Gaddbaizets appeared.

Key seven of the high chief's word-box titillated with relief the instant the officer got his eye on Gilhooly. The exuberance faded into a note of foreboding and the foreboding into the words:

"Where is the king's treasure house? If that has not been recovered, calamity threatens our expedition to the planet Terra!"

"The treasure house has been broken and wrecked," replied the professor, "but my friends, Mr. Gilhooly and Mr. Munn, are returning the gold to his majesty in their coats."

"Why should Mr. Gilhooly steal the gold and then help to return it?" came incredulously from Olox. "Is it simply a vagary of his unbalanced mind?"

"I am pleased to say, Chief Olox, that his mind is no longer unbalanced," returned the professor, warning me to silence with a look as I was about

to operate my talking machine. "Mr. Gilhooly is now as sane as you or I."

Olox looked worried.

"I declare," said he, "I don't know how the president and board of directors of the Interplanetary will regard this unexpected occurrence."

"They should feel overjoyed at the unclouding of so bright a mind as Mr. Gilhooly's."

"But what if it interferes with the traffic of the road? They have been running limited trains on a schedule heretofore beyond their wildest dreams. His majesty farmed out the concession to the management of the road for ninety-nine years, on a cash basis. If the traction power proves unavailable, a demand will be made on the king for a return of the money—and just now any depletion of the imperial coffers might prove fatal to the projected expedition."

It was just as well that the ex-magnates could not comprehend what was going on between the word-boxes. The utilitarian views of the king, as exemplified in Gilhooly's case, would have jarred somewhat on their conceit and self-esteem.

I noticed that a gleam of hope crossed Quinn's face when Olox spoke of a possible failure of the king's plan of conquest through lack of the sinews of war. But the hope died away almost instantly when Quinn reflected, as I did, that the monarch was as unscrupulous as he was resourceful.

No further conversation was indulged in. The royal troops executed an about face and returned to the capital, convoying our reunited party of aliens.

As we drew up in the square the two glittering soldiers appeared in the turrets and sounded a call that drew the king to the balcony.

His majesty listened to the report of Olox with a beaming face, but his smiles fled when he learned how the traction interests of the realm were threatened by Gilhooly's returning sanity.

While this momentous question was still up for debate, Meigs plucked at the professor's sleeve.

"Tell the king, professor," said he, his eyes downcast, "that I see the error of my way and frankly acknowledge it. If I am ever so fortunate as to get back to Earth I shall be a re-

former. Please ask the king when I can have my clothes."

And this was Meigs! Had the heavens fallen I could not have been more astounded.

"Tell him the same for me," spoke Hannibal Markham. "Make it even stronger, if you will. I have not been starved into submission—I should have withstood such a siege to the death —but the change has been wrought here."

He struck a hand against his heart.

"And ask him, professor," added Markham plaintively, "to have my wants supplied immediately from the palace kitchens."

"Allow me to join my honorable friends in this free announcement of a change of heart," chimed in Augustus Popham. "Look at my hands!"

He held his hands out to us and we found them calloused and scarred.

"I can't go back to those mole burrows!" he supplemented.

Professor Quinn showed no signs of amazement. After grasping the palm of each ex-magnate, he fairly electrified his word-box with the supplications of the exiles.

"Are these acknowledgments freely made and

do they come from contrite hearts," said the king, "or do they merely cloak a desire to escape further privation at the expense of truth?"

The professor indignantly repelled the insinuation. When he had finished his vigorous remarks, I stepped to the front and made a complete confession of my designs on the Bolla and the imperial exchequer. Quinn tried to stop me, but I would suffer no interference.

"Are you aware," said the king gravely, "that *lèsc majestê*, felony, and half a dozen other capital crimes are mixed up in your confession?"

"Am I less courageous than an ex-trust magnate?" cried I warmly.

"Their confessions free them from servitude and the inconveniences of hunger and lack of raiment," responded the king; "yours condemns you to a blast of zet that will consume and dissipate your body as though it had never been."

Professor Quinn groaned and turned away with one hand over his eyes. My affection reached out for the good man then as it had never done before.

"Bring on the indexograph, Olox," commanded the king. "We will see how much of

truth or falsehood it registers in the cases of these gentlemen."

The indexograph was brought and test was made of all of us except the professor. The ideographs must have registered mightily in our favor, for the king seemed more than convinced of our sincerity.

"Restore to the clothing trust man the apparel that is rightfully his," ordered his majesty; "allow the gentleman who would monopolize food to partake of a sufficient supply to satisfy his hunger; free the person who has been delving for my black blocks from further duty—and incidentally confiscate the funds paid into the royal treasury for his services, as well as for the services of the B. & B. traction power—for Mr. Gilhooly's sanity precludes his further use on the Interplanetary. Be happy, gentlemen! I feel that I must do some worthy deeds to commemorate this the day that witnesses our departure for the subjugation of Terra."

Quinn was rent with conflicting emotions, as was plainly apparent. He was glad the ex-plutocrats had fallen into royal favor, he was sorry to have me yet under that ban, and he was greatly

wrought up to learn that the king meditated such an early start on his inter-stellar campaign.

"What of Mr. Munn, your highness?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes," returned the king, "I was forgetting him. Olox, let him be decorated with the Order of the Open Hand and see that he is inducted on the morrow into the office of executioner-general. We need an executioner to fill the place of the late incumbent and I should have to look far before I found so conscientious a person as Mr. Munn. Leave orders with a subordinate, Olox. Neither you nor I will be here to attend the ceremony. My royal will shall be conveyed to the regent.

"And now," added the king as he rose from his seat, "while the treasurer counts the kyicks and takes care of the Bolla, Olox, you and I will proceed to the metal house, guarded by the Gaddbaizets and accompanied by our alien friends."

Some preparations were necessary before a start for the car could be made; and while these were going forward Meigs and Markham were led away to receive the attention their condition demanded.

In an hour we were on the road. Meigs and Markham were in jubilant mood; Popham was optimistic but subdued, Gilhooly was silent and thoughtful, and I was inclined to look at the future with reckless indifference.

But Professor Quinn was bowed under a grievous load. If this madcap monarch carried out his scheme of conquest, Quinn felt that on him alone would rest the responsibility.

"I am making my plans, Mr. Munn," he whispered hoarsely to me as we proceeded on our journey to the car. "If the king's expedition gets away, I shall have to accompany it; and I shall take care that neither he nor his Gaddbaizets ever reach our native planet."

"But suppose we can outwit the king in some way," I returned, "and escape in the car, leaving him and his subjects behind?"

"You and our other friends may go, if we can possibly manage it," said Quinn, "but I have made up my mind to stay here."

I stopped short and stared at him.

"Surely you can't mean that!" I exclaimed.

"I do mean it," he said firmly. "For the good

of Terra these creatures of Njambai must be watched. We have only a surface knowledge of them and their resources. What if they should bring forward other means of spanning space besides our car?

"Can't you see," the professor went on passionately, "that my misguided enthusiasm painted the wonders of Earth in such glowing colors that King Gaddbai will strain every effort to gratify his cupidity and lust for conquest? I must remain here to combat him and hold him in check."

"Sir," said I in trepidation, "I think you take fright too easily. Once we leave Njambai in the car, it will be impossible for any of the Baigadds to follow us. You overestimate their possible resources."

"Whatever is possible cannot be overestimated. It may chance that I alone shall stand between this resolute monarch and the welfare and happiness of Terra. To desert my post would be cowardice. Do not seek to argue with me, for I made up my mind to this last night."

The reckless indifference with which I had fared forth from the city gave place to deep sor-

row. Professor Quinn observed this and continued:

"Do not exercise yourself over my fate, Mr. Munn. I removed four rabid enemies of the people from our planet and I give back to it four eminent reformers. My end has been accomplished beyond my fondest dreams if this is brought to pass.

"And then, too, there is a work that I can do here, even if my dire imaginings prove unfounded. I can, after I know these Mercurials better, lead them perhaps to a higher round in the ladder of civilization. With the pattern of our earthly institutions before my eyes, I can choose the good, eliminate the evil, and build a fabric here that will be a glory to whatever resources the orb may possess. Is it not a fair destiny for one who was laughed out of the Astronomical Society because he dared to have convictions as I did?"

"It is a destiny, professor," said I, "which I intend to share with you. You remain here, and so do I. Possibly you may become prime minister; I will be executioner-general. Between us, we will have control of the situation."

"That is not to be thought of," answered the professor hastily. "If it is possible for the exiles to escape in the car, you must accompany them as the one cool-headed, resourceful man capable of guiding the car to its destination. I shall instruct you carefully and fully.

"And besides," he added, as I was about to demur, "you are a changed man, Mr. Munn. There is work for you on the home planet, for your native worth is to retrieve itself on the very scene of your unworthy exploits. I trust you follow me? Pardon me if I hurt your feelings by being too frank."

He had, wittingly or unwittingly, touched the vital chord which made me eager to regain the world I knew and loved. To stand fair in the sight of men who had known me at my worst was now my one consuming desire.

"Is this your wish, Professor Quinn?" I asked huskily.

"It is, Mr. Munn."

"Then I shall follow your instructions to the letter."

"Do so," he said, with one of his rare smiles. "And if our dear desires compass fulfillment,

open this packet when you have left Njambai and are in the great void. It will be my last word to you and your fellow voyagers in space."

He handed a sealed packet to me and I placed it carefully in my breast pocket. Then a hand-clasp followed in which heart went out to heart as it rarely does between man and man.

"Look, Mr. Munn!" exclaimed the professor, releasing my palm. "We have reached the car."

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW WE OUTWITTED THE KING.

We had come to a point in the under-world which the reflected rays of the sun reached but dimly. There would have been semi-gloom but for an unreflected glow that fell upon us from above.

The car, as has been brought out in the course of this narrative, had been blown into the crater of a dead volcano. This crater may be likened to a deep basin, pierced with a huge hole at the bottom.

Through the hole fell daylight from the outer shell, bathing the car in a soft radiance. The projectile-shaped house was standing upright, and appeared to have suffered no injury by its fall.

Professor Quinn had already explained to me how this might be possible. The screens of the anti-gravity cubes had been left open by five degrees.

The energy of the cubes lightened the house to an extent that made it offer less than normal resistance to the tempest, and it also buoyed it to withstand the shock of a tumble from the upper crust of the sphere.

How like an old friend that car looked! My heart labored at the mere sight of it. It was to be our bridge through space, if so we could contrive; although it might easily fall out to prove a bridge for the king and the Gaddbaizets to the earth's undoing.

After we had halted at the base of the car, the king approached the professor.

"Your metal house is intact and uninjured," said his majesty, "save for the door that gives admittance to it. It was necessary to burn out the lock with a draft of zet before the door could be opened. The telescope and the tub of white pigment have both been replaced, and you will, I think, find all your goods and chattels intact. How long before we can start?"

"Let me first understand your arrangements, your majesty," the professor answered. "Are you, or Olox, to guide the car through space to your intended destination?"

"You are to do that. Neither I nor Olox could manage the car, I fear."

"Then I am to accompany you?"

"I have so decided."

"What of my friends?"

"They are to be left here. You need not worry about them, however, as they will be well cared for. I have already given proof of my interest in them."

"Before I can give you an answer as to when it will be well to start," Quinn remarked, after a little thought, "I shall have to go into the car and make some calculations."

"We will go in with you," returned the king

"I should prefer to take only Mr. Munn with me, sir."

The king became suspicious, and Olox got the royal ear and said something in an undertone on his word-box.

"You and Munn may go in," the king said when Olox had finished, "but we shall keep the rest of your friends with us while you are making your calculations."

"Very well."

The professor and I thereupon entered the

car, watched with some apprehension by Meigs and the rest. Possibly they feared that we were about to desert them; if so, the look the professor gave them must have set their fears at rest.

A survey of the interior of the car showed everything to be exactly as we had left it. The door at the top of the iron stairway had been forced precisely as the other at the outside entrance had been, but this was a matter of small importance.

The oxygen tank was intact, and the professor showed me how to manipulate the lever that regulated the supply necessary for the car; there was still plenty of water, of good quality, in the reservoir, and of food, such as we were accustomed to, there was an abundance. Everything appeared to be in proper order and just as it should be.

"We are very fortunate, Mr. Munn," said Quinn, seating himself on a box. "I brought you in here with me less to have your help in examining the interior of the car than to seize an opportunity for giving you a few directions which you will find of use.

"When we left Earth we started at an hour which gave us a course that angled sunward; when you leave Njambai, however, you must do so at an hour when this part of the planet is turned *away* from the sun, and as far away as possible. That will cause the car to be hurled toward the outer edge of the solar system and in the direction of the earth's orbit.

"I wish I could inform you as to the exact position the earth will be in when you cross its orbit, but the king's mad project was sprung so suddenly, and he has acted upon his plan so quickly, that I have had no time for calculations in that respect.

"Your business, however, will be to overhaul the Earth. The telescope will inform you of the planet's position, and by properly regulating the screens of the cubes you can hang in the orbit of Terra until it reaches you; then, once within its influence, shut off the energy of the cubes and suffer the car to fall to its surface. Do I make myself plain?"

"Entirely so, professor," I replied.

"You understand the dangers of landing. All you can do is to experiment with the atmosphere

while you are falling, exactly as we did when landing here. On your quickness and discretion will depend the lives of yourself and the others who will be with you."

"It is a great responsibility, sir," said I, "but you can depend upon me to do my utmost to avoid a disaster."

He pressed my hand to assure me of his confidence.

"Midnight to-night will be the hour to start. The crater of the volcano will then be at its farthest from the sun. I shall so inform the king when we leave the car."

"Have you thought of any plan whereby we may outwit his majesty?" I inquired.

"I have thought of it. Prior to the moment of embarking, I shall request his majesty to allow you and the rest of our friends to come aboard while I detain him and his followers outside for a few final instructions. The king will suspect nothing, for he will not imagine that I would allow you to escape and leave me behind."

"I shudder to think of that part of it," I murmured. "Will you not reconsider your determination, professor?"

"No, Mr. Munn. On that point I am adamant. The instant you enter the car, hurry aloft and set loose the oxygen. I will drop this bit of rope near the door when we leave, and you will have to make use of it to tie the door securely shut on the inside. Mind what I tell you —do not pull the lever until the door is securely closed."

"I will remember."

"The car is exactly under the crater opening, and you will have a clear path aloft. Therefore I would advise that you throw the lever to ninety the instant the door is fastened."

I nodded.

"I think that is all. Your work is simple enough, for in order to reach Terra you have only to reduce or expand the energy of the anti-gravity cubes. We will now go below and rejoin the king."

"Just a few minutes more, professor," I begged. "This may be our last opportunity for a private talk, and there is something I wish to tell you."

He turned back from the top of the iron stairway.

"Go ahead, Mr. Munn," said he.

"All of us whom you brought to Njambai," I proceeded, "are changed men. To you alone we owe this, and I wish to go on record, here and now, for giving you credit. I see my past as I thought I never should see it, and I realize how I have wasted a large part of my life. I shall prove a worthy citizen, if we succeed in getting back to Earth, and it is you who have brought about my reformation."

A glow came to the professor's face. He held up one hand protestingly.

"It is the truth," I insisted. "You have argued with me constantly ever since we were thrown together, and it was while on the road to Baigol that the truth of your arguments suddenly came home to me."

I stretched out my hand, but he held back.

"You are too shrewd a man, Mr. Munn," said he kindly, "to be so deceived. There have been times when your artlessness made me wonder, but you have never aroused my wonder quite so much as you have now."

"Why is that?" I asked, puzzled.

"Answer me this, Mr. Munn," he went on.

"How did it chance that Mr. Gilhooly so suddenly recovered his reason?"

"He lost his wits suddenly, and crazed people have been known to regain their sanity as quickly as they lost it. It must have been so in Gilhooly's case."

"Indeed!" he said, smiling. "And was it merely a coincidence that you found your conscience, and Gilhooly his reason, at the same time?"

"Merely a coincidence," I replied.

He laughed, and it was his first happy laugh since King Gaddbai had announced his coming campaign in the direction of Terra.

"Let us go further," he went on. "What caused Markham, Popham and Meigs to change their points of view so miraculously? Was it the coal mines, the lack of food and the need of decent clothing?"

"All that merely paved the way," I averred. "Your arguments did the rest."

"You are blind, Mr. Munn! It was not the sufferings our friends endured, nor my arguments."

"Then what was it?" I demanded.

"The Bolla!"

I recoiled, staring blankly at the kindly face before me.

"Don't let me part from you, Professor Quinn," I whispered hoarsely, "feeling that I have left behind a man of unsound mind! If I thought that, I believe I should remain here with you at any cost."

"Unsound mind?" he returned. "My dear Munn! My brain was never clearer, nor my reasoning more sound, than at the present moment. You found the Bolla. The moment you picked it up, every unworthy thought vanished from your mind and you became morally the man you ought to be. You did not understand the cause of your salvation, and you hurled the stone from you. Gilhooly picked it up. What happened then? Did he not recover his senses and a true outlook upon life at one and the same time? Yet, as if this were not enough to prove a clear case for the Bolla, note the change in Popham, Markham and Meigs when I asked them to examine the stone. All this, sir, should prove my contention beyond all peradventure. I am filled

with wonder because you have gone so far afield in trying to explain what has occurred."

The notion amazed, and, in a measure, disappointed me. A black stone had turned me from my evil course—a mere bit of insensate matter about which clustered the traditions and superstitious veneration of all Njambians! My regeneration had come from without, and not from within, and if there was no credit for the professor in my awakening, then there was still less for myself.

Not the operations of my own mind, urged and guided by the friendly counsels of the professor, but a stone which I had picked up to cast away, had worked my transformation!

The fact still remained, and would always remain, but it was in no way flattering to me. What was going on in my mind must have been divined by the professor, for he stepped close and took the hand which he had a moment before refused.

"The methods of Fate are inexplicable to us mortals, Mr. Munn," said he; "but what matters it how a thing is brought to pass so long as it really happens? And why should we con-

cern ourselves with a failure to understand the underlying cause? Great is the Bolla, my friend, even though its powers pass our comprehension! I shall make it a point to see that it is returned to King Golbai, during my probation here. To accomplish that, and at the same time keep watchful eyes on King Gaddbai, will not let time hang heavy on my hands."

"And you will not reconsider——"

He knew what I was about to say, pressed my hand restrainingly and got up from his seat.

Presently he removed a few feet of rope from a bale, and took a last, long look around him. What his thoughts were I will not even hazard a guess.

Cutting loose from every tie that held him to Earth, I knew very well what my feelings would have been under the circumstances. But I have already stated that the professor was "queer" in his outlook upon life, and in his grasp of ways and means, so my pen hesitates to attempt a description of his emotions at this critical moment.

When we emerged from the steel shell, the king and his retainers crowded close to hear

what my companion had to say. His majesty was greatly disappointed on learning that the start was not to be made until some hours had passed, but he smothered his impatience and busied himself with a communication to the regent giving the exact hour the expedition intended to take its departure.

The historian chosen to accompany the monarch and put into imperishable ideographs the history he was to make transcribed the king's message, and it was dispatched by courier to the capital. Following this business, his majesty entertained us with a review of the Gaddbaizets selected by Olox for the expedition.

The diminutive soldiers were well-drilled, well-equipped, and presented a dazzling spectacle in their gilt war paint and yellow kirtles.

They were truly the flower of the country. Each carried a pair of zetbais, filled to the white tip with a special supply of zet.

Quinn, now that his mind was made up to defeat the king and to remain on Njambia, displayed much interest in the maneuvres, even going so far as to applaud them. Stores of prepared food had been collected in bales, which

were piled in a heap beside the car, ready for loading.

One bale was opened toward the close of day, and we used its contents for our supper rations. Night fell, and the professor asked me to enter the car and light the lamp on the table. I did so, and in the glow that came through the car windows we who were not gifted with the owl-sight of the Njambaians were able to see a little of what went on around us.

As the night advanced, and King Gaddbai evinced his impatience and excitement by walking back and forth in front of his picked guard, strains of the national anthem were borne to us from a distance. Louder and louder swelled the tones of the word-boxes, and at last the regent arrived, accompanied by a host from the town.

They were there to give their monarch a rousing send-off, and I smiled a little as I thought of the disappointment that was likely to overtake them.

While felicitations were being exchanged between the king and his people, Professor Quinn asked me to consult my watch. I found that we were within fifteen minutes of midnight.

My timepiece was not strictly accurate, inasmuch as in the exciting events of the morning I had neglected my usual custom of setting the hand three minutes back. However, the indicated time was close enough for all practical purposes.

"Into the car with you, Mr. Munn," said the professor as calmly as though his command were not going to separate him from his kind for all eternity. I would have taken his hand had he not observed the movement and said quickly.

"Be careful! We must not let these people suspect, by a word or gesture, the sort of *coup* we are planning. Take the others with you—I will speak to the king and cover your movements as I have already outlined."

Those were Professor Quinn's last words to me. My final glimpse of him showed me his resolute face and slender form drifting away into the gloom in the direction of King Gaddbai.

I felt as though I must run after him and drag him into the car whether he would or no. How I succeeded in fighting down the mad impulse has ever since been a mystery to me; but I did, and a word to Popham, Meigs, Markham, and

Gilhooly, who had already been informed that they were to expect a startling dénouement, brought them after me into the steel structure.

I heard Olox give a loud command for us to turn back, but his word-box was suddenly quieted, and I presumed that the professor had already gone far enough with his part of the ruse to lull any suspicions that had arisen.

"Rope that steel door on the inside, Gilhooly!" I cried as I bounded up the iron stairs.

Gilhooly did not know what had been planned, but leaped instantly to the task. With a quick pull of the lever I opened the oxygen tank and dashed below once more.

Something had gone wrong outside—I did not know what, and do not know to this day. The mysterious violet fire which accompanied a discharge of the zetbais was rolling all around the steel wall that hemmed us in, and a perfect tumult of shrieks and cries came frantically to our ears.

Violent hands were laid on the door, pushing it inward against the rope made fast by Gilhooly. Gilhooly and the others hurled themselves at

the portal and flung it back, holding it so by main strength.

"We'll be killed!" shouted Meigs.

"No," I yelled, and jumped to the switch board.

The next instant the switch was thrown, and the billows of fire faded from the car windows as if by magic.

We were saved! Again had we plunged into space, and behind us—living or dead I knew not—we had left Professor Quinn.

Sinking down on my knees I buried my face in my hands.

CHAPTER XIX.

BACK TO EARTH.

I have heard some one say that life is only a dream, and that when we awaken in the other country we shall find it so. Far be it from me to dispute this or affirm it, yet I know, of my own experience, that our waking moments furnish events that seem as illusory as the stuff that dreams are made of.

Of all our strange adventures, the flight from Njambai has been the one that I recall with most vividness, and, at the same time, as seeming the most unreal. The tension of my nerves at the moment may account for this.

As I stated somewhere close to the beginning of this narrative, what I set out to write was a description of the planet Mercury in so far as my limited abilities for observation enabled me to gather knowledge. In looking back over my manuscript, I find I have made it more of an adventurous tale than I intended.

Now, when near the close, I can hold more closely to my text and deal only generally with our return trip to Terra. It is needless to dwell upon the way we missed and mourned the professor. At every turn some want developed which he could easily have satisfied had he been with us.

However, his wisdom had started us correctly, and we had perforce to make shift and get along without him as best we could. As captain of the car, the weight of a great responsibility rested on me. I was almost constantly at the telescope, and I kept Gilhooly—in whom I had the most confidence—about as constantly at the switch board.

We were menaced by frequent dangers during the trip, our course being literally strewn with meteoroids which it required much deft maneuvring to evade; but we came safely out of these perils, and, as if to compensate us for them, we formed a most happy juncture with the Earth's orbit at a time when that planet was approaching and nearly upon us.

With Gilhooly at the lever, and myself at the telescope, we accomplished a very successful land-

ing. So evenly balanced did the car hang between the cubes and the drawing power of gravity that the last thousand feet of our descent was merely a floating earthward, and we alighted with so slight a shock that none of us experienced a particle of inconvenience.

The land that claimed us was a deserted island in mid-Pacific, where we remained for two weeks, living off our food supply and keeping a sharp lookout for a sail.

We had not been more than a day on the island before I remembered the document Professor Quinn had given me. I had been directed to open it while on our way through the great void, but I had been so burdened with responsibilities during that time that I had not once thought of the packet.

With my four companions as auditors, I read aloud one of the papers inclosed in the packet, which was addressed to all of us jointly.

"My Dear Friends: When you read this, I trust that the plans of myself and Mr. Munn will have proved so far successful that an impassable gulf will stretch between you and the undersigned—and I write this out of a desire

to have you speeding on your return to our native planet, not because I would willingly separate myself from you were circumstances here different from what we have found them.

"As long as I live, I shall stand between King Gaddbai and any monstrous plan he may form, and attempt to carry out, looking to the subjugating of the world we know and love so well. I am convinced that the king has resources of which we know nothing, and it shall be my aim to fathom the resources of Njambai and assist in their development along other and more peaceable lines. This is to be my work, and I enter upon it with a tranquil soul.

"No doubt I took what you gentlemen may think was an unwarranted liberty in luring four of your number to my castle and casting it adrift in the unknown. As for myself, I believe I had ample warrant for doing what I did; I will not dwell on that motive, as it is already familiar to you.

"The experience each of you has had on Njambai has been most salutary. You have undergone a change of heart, and reform has wrought its great work. Had I not been assured of this, none of you would ever have left this sphere for that other one which has been the cradle of your pet schemes in speculation.

"You are not the same men you were. As reformers, you will do your share to preserve our noble country from dire calamities that threaten it. That is your mission, and see to it that you fail not in its performance.

"It is my prayerful hope that you will reach your destination in safety, and with Mr. Munn at the helm I am prone to think that this result will be achieved. If a civilized country claims you, immediately upon landing it is my wish that you give full power to the anti-gravity cubes and send the car into space; it is my wish that none of you give a record of his experiences to the papers, either wholly or in part, until five years have passed, and then that this duty devolve upon Mr. Munn; and it is my final wish that Mr. Munn accept the enclosed deed to my Harlem lot, and the enclosed check making payable to him all the funds I have in bank. I would have him return to the other four of you an equivalent for the funds and valuables stolen the night we left Earth in the car.

"My second wish, as to the revelations you gentlemen could make, is born of a desire to save the earth dwellers any unnecessary fear on the score of King Gaddbai and his undertakings. If he has not invaded Terra with his terrifying yet bais by the time five years have elapsed, it

is my conviction that the danger will be done away with forever.

"Gentlemen, adieu. As you read this, I give you hail from Njambai. QUINN."

A fortnight after the reading of the above document, we sighted a sail on the horizon, and, by means of a rope reaching from the switch board through a window, the lever was pulled and Professor Quinn's castle shot into the clouds and vanished for all time. Three hours later we were picked up by a whale boat, conveyed to the tramp steamer *Mollie O.*, and in a month sailed through the Golden Gate into San Francisco harbor.

* * * * * * *

The five years have passed, and I have set my hand to the foregoing. Gilhooly and Meigs have crossed to the great majority, but the strenuous work they did in the interests of the people is an imperishable monument to their memory. Popham and Markham are still laboring for the good of the cause.

The return to home and friends of these four, long given up for dead, caused a sensation

throughout the country. True to the expressed wish of Professor Quinn, none of them has breathed a whisper of the marvelous things he saw, or of the weird experiences that fell to his lot while journeying to and from Njambai, and while sojourning upon that planet.

So far as I am concerned, my life since my return to Earth has been as spotless as a thorough reformation could make it. As far as I could, I have reimbursed those from whom I took what was not rightfully mine, I have pleaded the cause of the poor man, and helped him liberally out of the generous fortune bestowed upon me by Professor Quinn, and I intend to pursue this line of action until the last day of my life.

Could a reformed burglar have a more suitable occupation?

THE END.