

# FRANK AUBREY

A TRIP TO  
MARS

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# Fenton Ash

## A Trip to Mars

### PREFACE

In the case of my former book – my first written for young readers – I inserted a preface stating at some length my reasons for taking up the writing of stories of the kind. In it I pointed out that I had endeavoured to combine amusement with a little wholesome instruction; and that what might at first sight appear to be mere irresponsible flights of fanciful imagination had, in reality, in all cases some quasi-scientific foundation.

Doubtless such a preface is unusual in a work of fiction, and even more so in one intended chiefly for boys; but the result proved that its intention was understood and appreciated. I should show myself ungrateful indeed if I omitted, at the first opportunity, to record my deep sense of the kindly sympathy and approval with which that preface and the whole book were received by those reviewers – and they were many – who favoured my work with a notice.

In this, my second attempt in the same direction, I am conscious that I have set myself a difficult task, for it is not an easy matter to give verisimilitude to a story of a visit to another planet about which we necessarily know so little. Yet astronomy as a study is so fascinating, its mysteries and possibilities are so wonderful, so boundless, its influences so elevating and ennobling, that little apology is needed for any effort to attract the attention of youthful readers to it by making it the subject of a romance.

Amongst other difficulties the story-writer here meets with, by no means the least confronts him when he is called upon to decide which of various theories put forward by different scientists he shall adopt as a starting-point. Mars, for instance, may have an atmosphere which is like ours, or one that is either thinner or denser, or it may have no atmosphere at all. As to this nothing is known with certainty, and the most learned authorities differ one from another. In these circumstances, I have adopted the supposition which seems best suited to my story – namely, that the air there may be denser than it is on the surface of our globe; but I do not wish to be understood as asserting it as a fact. The same remark applies to the assumption that diamonds or other precious stones do not exist naturally in Mars. In regard to these two points, I have felt it may be allowable, as children say, to 'make believe' a little in forming a groundwork upon which to build up a story. As to the rest, I have refrained, in deference to the known prejudices of young people, from interjecting constant scientific explanations in the course of the narrative. Only sufficient has been introduced here and there to justify the hope that none will sit down to its perusal without getting up a little the wiser.

We are all of us, as Sir Isaac Newton so aptly yet reverently expressed it, 'only as children picking up pebbles on the seashore while the great ocean of knowledge lies stretched out before us.'

I shall be well satisfied if, in addition to affording pleasure to youthful readers, I enable them to pick up incidentally even so much as a few grains of the sand which lies beside the pebbles upon that wondrous, glorious shore.

THE AUTHOR.

## CHAPTER I

# THE FALL OF THE GREAT METEORITE

'What a magnificent night! What a scene! Jack, old man, I think you will have to go in to supper without me and leave me to myself. It seems a sort of sacrilege to go indoors – to exchange the moon's beautiful light for the miserable glimmer of a little oil-lamp, and this invigorating air off the sea for the smell of paraffin oil. Ugh!'

'You're a queer chap, Gerald; as dreamy, at times, as any girl, I declare! You amuse me vastly when you take on these sudden sentimental fits. When you are in this mood no stranger would ever imagine you were the same go-ahead, muscular young Christian you can prove yourself to be at other times.'

'Yes, I suppose I'm a bit of a dreamer, Jack. I've been told it so many times that I fancy there must be something in it. Yet "While you sleep, then am I awake" – you know the quotation.'

'Faith! I believe you there, Gerald. I believe you were cut out for a night-bird!'

'No, no; now you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick. It isn't that I prefer the night to the day; it is simply that by day one cannot see the stars, and one loses touch with the marvellous thoughts they inspire. Look at the sky overhead now! Look at those little shining points of light, and think how that they are all worlds such as ours is, or was, or will be! Imagine what it would be like if we could sail up amongst them from this old earth of ours – if we could roam at will through space, stopping here and calling there upon those which are inhabited – as I feel assured some must be. What sights we should see! What wonders we should encounter! Ah, think of it!'

'I'd rather think just now of having a bit of supper,' remarked the practical-minded Jack, with a yawn. 'And I'm going in to get it too; so, are you coming with me, or are you not?'

This talk took place upon a headland of a lonely island in the Southern Seas. A tropical moon cast its wondrous radiance over everything around, shimmering upon the water, and causing the whole island to appear as though floating in an ocean of molten silver. There was just wind enough now and then to start the graceful palms waving – cool, refreshing zephyrs that set millions of sparkling ripples in motion on the sea, and sent them dancing merrily shorewards to plash at last upon the golden sands at the foot of the cliff.

Gerald Wilton and Jack Lawford were two youths, orphans both, who, after having been brought up and educated in England, found themselves, through a curious series of chances, passing their time upon this island under the guardianship of a former friend of Gerald's father, named Armeath. The latter was a scientist who had chosen to make this out-of-the-way spot – absolutely uninhabited save for himself and his establishment – his home for a year or two, in order the better to pursue certain abstruse studies to which he was ardently devoted.

They were stalwart, well-grown, clean-limbed British youths, these two, with good-looking faces and well-knit frames, fond of hunting, shooting, fishing, and all outdoor sports. At first, therefore, it is needless to say, they had enjoyed the change to this far-off island home, and entered with zest into its free, open life. If limited as to space, there were larger islands near, amongst which they could take an occasional cruise, and where they could go ashore for hunting expeditions.

But after nearly a year, even this pleasant life had begun to grow a little monotonous. The two high-spirited youngsters were getting somewhat tired of it, and beginning to long – almost unconsciously – for other and more exciting adventures.

Of the two, however, Gerald perhaps was more troubled by these vague, restless feelings than his chum. As his friend had said, Gerald was given at times to fits of dreaming. In appearance he was fairer and a little taller than his companion, with gray eyes which often had in them an abstracted, far-away look. Jack, on the other hand, was almost swarthy of skin, with dark hair, firm lips, and

keen, alert eyes, which indicated an active, determined character, and a practical, matter-of-fact temperament.

That, in effect, constituted the essential difference between these two firm friends. Gerald was fond of indulging in speculations concerning all kinds of scientific research. The mysteries of the unknown, and the as yet 'undiscovered;' the limitless possibilities lying in the worlds surrounding our globe – speculations concerning such themes as these had for him an irresistible fascination. Jack, on the other hand, kept his thoughts and interest fixed upon the practical side of everything about him. He was a skilful mechanic and a trained mathematician, and had developed clever engineering abilities; he might possibly some day become an inventor. But speculative, dreamy fancies had little attraction for him.

'Jack,' said Gerald impressively, 'I can't come in just now – I really cannot! I can't exactly say why, but to-night I seem to be unusually restless. I could not sit down indoors, nor could I rest if I went to bed. I don't know what it is; but I have a feeling' —

'It's the electricity in the air. I suppose there must be more lying about loose to-night than suits your constitution,' remarked Jack prosaically. 'I said a minute or two since that you were as dreamy at times as any girl. I begin now to think you are developing "nerves" as well. However, do as you please! Stop here and enjoy yourself with your "nervy," dreamy fancies if you choose. For my part, I'm going in to supper, and' —

'What are you lads talking about?'

This question, which came from some one behind them, caused the two friends to start suddenly, and then glance at one another with wondering looks.

It was not that they had not recognised the voice. They knew it at once to be that of Mr Armeath, their guardian; the wonder was that he should have come out to them. Usually he spent the whole night shut up in his own rooms, immersed in his studies, or gazing through his telescope at the heavens above; for, amongst other things, he was an enthusiastic astronomer.

'Faith!' exclaimed Jack, in an aside to Gerald, 'I begin to think you're right after all. There must be something unusual in the air to account for this new move!'

The new-comer was a tall, fine-looking old man, with an ascetic face and a kindly voice and manner. His hair and beard were white, but his deep-set eyes glowed with the liveliness and fire of a vigorous young man.

With the self-absorbed, thoughtful air that so often marks the devoted scientist or profound student, Armeath, without waiting for any reply to the question he had asked, stepped past the two youngsters and walked almost to the edge of the bluff. There he gazed first at the sandy shore fifty feet or more below, then out over the glistening sea to the distant horizon, and finally at the deep-blue, star-spangled sky overhead.

Behind the three, at a distance of a few hundred yards, was the building – or rather group of buildings – which formed their home. These were built bungalow-fashion, save as to one part – the observatory – which rose above the rest, with detached dwelling-places for their attendants close by.

Inland, the ground fell away, and there was on one side a winding road down to the shore. On the other side, the ground rose again towards higher ridges in the centre of the island.

The old man remained for some minutes gazing fixedly upwards; the two young fellows, very much surprised, and – if the truth be told – a little awed by his demeanour, remained also motionless, gazing alternately at him and at each other.

Suddenly the sage uttered a sort of cry – an exclamation so strange, so thrilling, that his companions were startled, and stared anxiously about, seeking for an explanation.

Then they saw him raise an arm and point to the sky, and, following the direction thus indicated, they both started and stood and gazed fixedly as though spell-bound.

'Look!' exclaimed Jack. 'It is a meteor!'

And that was all that was said – all, indeed, there was time for. There was no time for questions, for comments, for anything, in fact, save a great gasp of astonishment, and scarcely even for that.

Careering towards them through the upper air, at what seemed lightning speed, was something which left a long, luminous trail behind it. Rays and flashes of light of different colours burst from it in its course, darting out in all directions. A low, rushing sound became audible, which quickly increased in volume until it became a terrific, deafening, overwhelming roar.

There was a sudden disturbance in the air, as of the approach of a whirlwind, and a crackling noise as of the discharge of fireworks.

Then something seemed to shoot past them into the sea, the 'wind' from it almost brushing them aside like that caused by a shell fired from some colossal cannon.

From the sea came a mighty crash as of a loud explosion, while columns of water and clouds of vapour rose into the air. The water came right over the top of the cliff, drenching the amazed spectators, and almost sweeping one – it was Jack – off his feet.

Hardly had the spray cleared away when there was another commotion in the water. The sea, boiling and chafing, seemed to rise up into a pyramid, and from it a huge dark mass shot up into the air, dropping back into the sea again with a plunge only a little less violent than that which had accompanied its first fall.

For a brief space it was lost to view, and then it reappeared, shooting again high into the air, as might a gigantic whale throwing itself out of the sea in sport or an endeavour to escape some terrible marine foe.

These mad leaps and plunges were repeated again and again, becoming each time less in height and violence, until at last they ceased.

It was some time, however, before the agitation in the water came to an end. Great waves rushed booming along the shore, dashing wildly up the face of the cliffs, sending clouds of spray flying over their summits far inland.

But after a while the commotion subsided, the sea became smooth on the surface, and there remained only a gentle heaving, as from a ground swell.

And there, at a little distance from the shore, the cause of all this disturbance was plainly to be seen – an immense, egg-shaped mass many hundreds of feet in length, floating as lightly and buoyantly upon the still-heaving water as if it had been an immense football.

## CHAPTER II

### WHAT GERALD SAW

Seldom, perhaps, have there been seen three people more puzzled and amazed than the little group who had witnessed the tremendous advent of the wondrous 'meteorite' – for such it appeared to be – and now stood gazing at it in helpless astonishment as it floated quietly in the sea only a short distance from the shore.

It was some time before either Jack or Gerald spoke, and when they at last found speech, they had little to say beyond vague, incoherent exclamations.

Presently an impulse came upon them to run down the path which led to the shore, thinking that they might get a better view from there of this extraordinary new arrival from the realms above. Perhaps a closer look might yield some clue as to the nature of the strange visitor.

But a nearer view did not help them much. All that they could see, when they arrived on the sandy margin, was what they had already seen from above – and that was a huge mass composed of some material not heavy enough to sink, and – as a natural consequence – light enough to float.

What could it be? It was, presumably, a meteorite – so Armeath pronounced – but of what kind? Who had ever heard of a meteorite of such a size, and above all, of a material light enough to float in water?

'Don't you wish you had gone in to your supper, Jack?' Gerald asked mischievously. 'Had you done so you would not have witnessed this wonder.'

'It's all very well to pretend to joke about it,' returned Jack, affecting to grumble; 'but it's rather serious, you know. The giddy thing might have hit one of us a nasty crack on the head, or something worse. This all comes of your busying yourself about what doesn't concern you, Gerald. You've bothered about the stars above us so long that, as you can't get up to them, one of 'em's come down to pay a visit to you.'

'Well, it's likely to prove a grand find, anyhow. It must be made of some substance unknown to science, and its discovery may bring us all name and fame; so its arrival is bound to be a gain to us.'

'It's been nearer bringing us pain than gain, I guess,' was Jack's retort. 'But what on earth are we going to do with the thing? How can we hope to get a great, round affair like that ashore?'

'Well, Tom, you seem to be pondering something very weighty in your mind. Have you thought of a likely plan for getting this pretty plaything ashore in the morning?'

Gerald addressed these words to one of their attendants, Tom Clinch by name, a grizzled, rough, but worthy old sailor, who had known Gerald all his days. He had been indoors when the meteorite fell, and had not therefore witnessed its arrival. As the sound of its fall reached his ears he had rushed out, with others of the attendants – chiefly natives – most of whom had gone off shrieking and panic-stricken towards the interior of the island. Only Tom and another sailor had stood their ground.

'Humph! It's a rum sort o' visitin' star, this 'ere, Mr Gerald,' said the old mariner, with a wise shake of the head. 'Got out of its coorse, I reckon, the channel not being buoyed; onless,' he added, a sudden thought striking him as he noted how lightly the mass floated, 'onless this be one of the buoys which 'as got loose from its moorin's above, an' toppled over down 'ere, d'ye see?'

With comments and talk such as this, the islanders passed the time while waiting for the morning. They felt too restless and excited to 'turn in,' with the exception of Mr Armeath. He, after a while, deeming that there was nothing to be gained by waiting outside, went back to his own rooms, leaving instructions that he was to be called at once if anything fresh occurred.

His wards remained on the watch, however, and with them their two sailor hands, Tom Clinch and Bob Reid; and in due course the moon went down and it became quite dark. Then, behold! there was another wonder to be added to the rest – the whole great mass became luminous! Not only that,

but queer shadows came and went upon it, as though something were in motion upon the surface or just beneath it.

The news of this being conveyed to Armeath brought him out again; but he could not account to his own satisfaction for this new phase.

'It may be that it is composed of some highly phosphorescent mineral,' was the only explanation he could suggest.

At last the morning dawned, and, immediately it was light, Armeath and his two young companions, without waiting for breakfast, put off in a boat, with the two sailors, to examine the meteorite more closely.

It was still there, but the slight wind had drifted it up to a sandy ledge close inshore, and it appeared to be now resting on the sand.

They rowed up to it and were not a little surprised to find that the whole mass was perfectly smooth like glass. Still more mystifying was it to see that there were bands at regular intervals extending 'from stem to stern,' as Tom expressed it, 'jest for all the world like the hull of a great boat.'

They rowed all round it, their wonderment and astonishment growing all the time. They computed that it must be considerably over a thousand feet in length, by, perhaps, a hundred feet in diameter.

Suddenly Gerald uttered a loud exclamation. Jack, glancing at him, saw that he was pointing to a place in the side of the mass and staring at it as though his eyes were about to start out of his head.

'What on earth's up, old man?' he asked in alarm. 'Have you got an attack of nerves again, or' — 'Jack!' cried Gerald, seizing his chum's arm, 'd-didn't you see — didn't you see them?'

'Them — what — who?' asked Jack, bewildered.

'People — men — moving about! I declare that I saw some men moving about inside the — the — thing!'

'You 're barmy, my good Gerald! This little astronomical raree-show has been too much for those imaginative nerves of yours. I see nothing. Perhaps you saw shadows thrown by some birds flying overhead.'

'No, oh no! A thousand times no! I tell you I saw people — two or three — moving about inside that smooth, slippery surface. They were very dim and shadowy, it is true, but they were there. I saw them just as one might see anything through very thick, semi-opaque glass. What does it mean? I tell you it's uncanny! There's some strange mystery about it all. This thing is not what it seems to be. What, in the name of all that is wonderful, does it mean?'

Jack looked at the smooth, shining sides which rose from the water and towered up high in the air. But he could see nothing to account for Gerald's wild words; and he then glanced inquiringly, with real alarm and trouble in his eyes, at Armeath.

'I am afraid,' said the scientist, with a grave smile, 'that Gerald is letting his exuberant imagination run away with him this morning. I confess I see nothing of the kind he described. It must have been some strange effect of the rays of the sun, which is not very high yet, striking at an angle upon these remarkable, shining sides.'

Gerald shook his head impatiently, but made no verbal reply; and they rowed round and round the phenomenon, without finding anything to satisfy their curiosity. Armeath examined the smooth sides closely, sometimes through a magnifying glass. He even tried to chip off a piece with a hammer and a chisel; but it was so hard that he could make no impression upon it, and so slippery that his chisel glanced off and flew from his hand into the sea.

After a good deal of rowing to and fro, and a considerable amount of critical examination, which threw not the slightest light upon the puzzling lump of mystery, it was decided to return to shore for their breakfast.

Even over their meal, however, their talk continued to run upon the all-engrossing subject. Jack rallied his chum unmercifully upon the extraordinary statement he had made; but Gerald refused to admit that he might have been mistaken.

'I saw what I told you!' he persisted doggedly. 'I may be a bit of a dreamer at times, but I don't "see visions" to that extent. No, there is some awful, inscrutable, incredible mystery about it all! Well, we 'll wait and see. We shall find out, I suppose, in good time.'

With such discussions and speculations the day passed, without bringing anything fresh in the way of enlightenment.

When evening came, Jack declared his fixed resolution not to allow the puzzle to deprive him of another night's sleep. After supper, therefore, he went off incontinently to bed; and as Armeath shut himself up as usual, Gerald was left to himself.

Still restless and perplexed, dissatisfied with the explanations and theories which had been propounded, Gerald felt no inclination to 'turn in.' Something within him – some vague impulse he could not analyse, above all, the recollection of the mysterious, shadowy figures he believed he had seen through the semi-transparent 'shell,' as Jack now called it – urged him to remain on the watch.

'As Mr Armeath says,' he thought to himself, 'if a wind were to spring up it might be gone by to-morrow. We may as well, therefore, keep an eye on it while it is here, and watch its departure when it goes.'

In order to carry out his idea, he required a reliable assistant, and this he found in Tom Clinch. Not only had Tom known Gerald all his life, as already stated, but he had served his father before him, and he had now transferred his devotion to the son. When, therefore, the young fellow sought him out and told him what he required, Tom was ready enough to lend his aid.

'We 'll keep a watch, Mr Gerald,' he responded, 'turn and turn about, all night, an' have the boat ready in case we wants it. Fur my part, I think ye're only actin' cautious-like. Nobody can tell what's goin' to happen next when things like this once begin fallin' from the skies. I've 'eerd it said as 'ow theer's supposed to be a great bear, an' scorpions, an' crabs in the sky. An' after this, who can say but they might come a-rainin' down on us an' eat us all up in our sleep?'

Honest Tom had heard vaguely of the constellations of stars called by those names, and had very loose notions as to what they meant.

'Well, I hope it won't be as bad as that,' Gerald answered with a smile. 'But I shall be very glad of your company on my night-watch, all the same.'

So it was arranged; and the two betook themselves to a part of the shore where there was a cave which had been utilised as a boathouse, and here they began their watch.

The night turned out as fine as the previous one, except that there were a few drifting clouds which now and again obscured the light of the moon. There was scarcely any breeze, however, and the sea was, as Tom put it, 'as calm and still as a pint of stale beer.'

For a long time nothing occurred, though they kept up their watch till the moon had set, and it had become quite dark. Then they saw again the luminous appearance which they had noticed before.

'Now this is what I want to investigate, Tom,' said Gerald. 'Get out the boat quickly, and let us pull close up as silently as we can.'

The boat, which had been placed ready for launching, was slipped into the water, Gerald putting in the stern a dark lantern, which he had lighted.

Like a gliding shadow, the boat and her two occupants – the sailor rowing and Gerald steering – approached the huge 'meteorite,' now all aglow with a strange, dim light. The oars, well greased, made no sound, and they passed silently along the side nearest the shore, rounded the end, and were making their way back upon the outer side, when Gerald put a hand upon his companion as a signal to stop rowing.

They were then about the centre of the great mass, on the side which was away from the shore and faced the sea. There the boat remained stationary, Gerald staring intently at the curious shimmering wall which towered up at a distance of twenty or thirty feet.

'See, Tom! Look!' he suddenly whispered excitedly. 'See! There are the shadows – the forms of people! There! Now, who was right?'

'Heaven defend us!' breathed Tom fervently. 'Whatever do it mean? Be the thing bewitched?'

'Hush! Whatever you see, do not utter a word – not a sound – on your life! I believe they're coming out!'

Decidedly it was no trick of the imagination this time, at any rate. There were actually figures, as of men, moving about inside. They could be dimly seen through the semi-opaque outer wall or shell. What they were, how they were dressed, or what they were doing, was not clear; but actual, moving, living beings they certainly were.

Something now seemed to be shifted inside, as though a screen had been removed, and at once the figures could be distinguished more plainly. But ere Gerald could fix his attention upon one or another among them, a sort of door had opened in the smooth, shining side, a platform had been run out, and now remained extended in a horizontal position.

Then a tall, noble-looking man appeared in the doorway, stepped on to the platform, and remained there, gazing out over the darkling waters.

## CHAPTER III

### STRANGE VISITORS

Gerald, resting almost spell-bound upon his seat in the boat, with difficulty repressed a gasp of astonished admiration as his gaze fell upon the stranger, whom he could see very clearly, even down to the smallest detail of his dress, in the soft but intense light which issued from the opening behind him.

Gerald saw before him a man, tall and commanding in stature, yet so exactly proportioned as scarcely to look his real height – muscular without being stout, light and graceful in carriage without being thin. His refined, clear-cut features, which were free from any trace of beard or moustache, were those of a man in the very prime of life. The skin was smooth and clear, and as light in hue as in the average English type. The mouth was delicately chiselled, and very expressive; and the high, massive brow had a character all its own, conveying an idea of lofty serenity. Beneath, as it were, were traces of an irresistible will and a certain sense of latent power, which were somehow felt by the spectator rather than openly declared. The eyes were large, dark, and luminous, and their gaze searching and penetrating, appearing to be capable either of winning gentleness or the most terrible sternness.

Altogether, Gerald decided, a man to be loved and trusted, or hated and dreaded, according to whether he were a friend or an enemy; a born leader of men, a being of indescribable majesty and dignity in general appearance, yet possessed of a singular simplicity and charm of manner.

As to the dress of this attractive stranger, it is more difficult to describe, for the reason that Gerald perceived at once that the material was unlike anything he had ever seen before. There was a long tunic, with a belt of gold, and a very picturesque head-dress not unlike that in vogue in England in the days of Henry the Eighth; while the arms and legs were encased in garments which fitted closely, showing the figure clearly. That much was plainly to be seen. But what the dress consisted of was a puzzle, for it seemed to have a sheen of its own, a sort of shimmer which did not appear to be altogether reflected light. There were several little ornaments here and there, such as buckles on the shoes and another on the shoulder; but the chief embellishment was a large star upon the breast, which flashed and sparkled and seemed to be worked in diamonds.

Behind this regal figure were three or four others, who stood respectfully in the background, evidently in attendance upon him. Suddenly, while Gerald still gazed in ever-increasing wonder upon the unexpected scene, the stranger reeled as though suffering from an attack of faintness. He put his hand to his breast, and appeared to be panting for breath. Blood showed upon his face and ran off on to his dress, and the next moment he staggered and fell off the platform into the sea.

Gerald did not hesitate. He guessed that the man must have fainted; he knew that the spot where he had fallen in was outside the ledge on which the supposed 'meteorite' was resting; that it was of unfathomable depth, and that, therefore, his danger was imminent and deadly. Throwing off his jacket, therefore, Gerald dived into the water, and that with such promptitude that the second splash followed closely upon the first.

But the stranger had fallen from a height, and the impetus carried him down faster than that gained by Gerald's dive from the boat, so that he failed to grasp the fainting stranger, and was compelled to swim downwards in the hope of finding him.

Down, down, ever down, he went, clawing at the water with fierce energy, and battling his way with feverish determination, knowing that, with those awful depths beneath him, the stranger's one and only chance of life lay in his – Gerald's – overtaking and gripping him.

It was a long and terrible struggle – long, that is, comparatively – and the pressure of the water became oppressive, when, at last, just as the plucky diver felt he must give up and return to the surface,

his hand touched something. His fingers closed at once upon it, and he felt that he had secured his prize.

A few seconds later he had regained the surface, and found himself, panting, and all but exhausted, close to the boat, from which Clinch was watching for him. The sailor was aiding his search upon the waters around by throwing on them the rays from the dark lantern, which had been lighted and placed ready to hand in the stern.

A stroke or two brought the boat close enough for Gerald to get a hold upon it with one arm, while with the other he supported in the water the stranger's insensible form.

'Wait, sir; wait an' get yer breath!' counselled the old sailor. 'Take it easy, Mr Gerald! I 'll hold on to t' other chap, never fear! You let go on 'im, an' get yer breath!'

So Gerald loosed his hold upon the one he had rescued, and a little later had recovered sufficiently to be able to scramble into the boat. Then he gave his aid to Clinch, and between them they lifted the stranger in also.

'Where to now, Mr Gerald?' asked Tom, a little dazedly. All these sudden happenings, as he afterwards phrased it, had been 'a little trying to the works of the upper story, an' had set 'em spinnin'.' In other words, his brain was in a whirl.

Gerald looked round, and saw that a ladder had been lowered from the platform; and seizing the oars, he rowed the boat to the place. Two strangers were waiting on the lower part of the ladder. To Gerald's surprise they wore masks upon their faces, and he noted that all the other strangers were now masked also.

As the boat came alongside, and Tom raised the inanimate form in his arms, the two on the ladder seized it, and carried it up the ladder, across the platform, and out of sight. A moment or two later the ladder was drawn up in very sudden fashion, the platform was run in, and then the doorway closed up completely, leaving nothing to mark the place where it had been.

The great mass lost its luminous appearance, and the two in the boat found themselves in complete darkness.

'Well, I 'm sugared!' exclaimed Tom, or words to that effect. 'If that don't take the cake! Never so much as a "good-bye," or "thank yer kindly," or – Well!' He gave a great gasp, words altogether failing to explain his feelings.

'You forget, Tom, that they probably don't know our language, and we shouldn't understand theirs,' said Gerald. 'You must remember that they are foreigners – er – that is – h'm! – strangers, you know, from another' —

He hesitated, and broke off. For what could he say? Strangers these people certainly were; but foreigners? Well, that depended upon the point of view – travellers from where? Another world? The suggestion seemed monstrous – preposterous! Yet where else could they have come from? If it seemed impossible – incredible – to think of them as travellers from another sphere, it was certainly no less impossible to regard them as inhabitants of the Earth. No mortal upon our globe had yet succeeded in manufacturing an affair like this 'meteorite,' and travelling about in it; that much was certain. To conceive it possible was to imagine a miracle quite as wonderful as to suppose that this extraordinary flying-machine – for something of that sort Gerald now felt certain it must be – had come from another planet.

However, Gerald realised that he was not in a state of mind to be able to think clearly or logically about the matter at all. His brain, like honest Tom's, was in a whirl; and he tried in vain to collect and marshal his thoughts. The whole affair was too puzzling, too extraordinary for sober thought.

'Tom, row me ashore,' he said abruptly. 'This is too much for me. I'm going to bed.'

'Ay, ay, sir; I can unnerstan', said Clinch, wagging his head helplessly. 'I feels jest the same, Mr Gerald. Lawks! To think as I should ever 'a lived to see this day!'

Gerald went ashore, but was far too excited in mind to really go to bed. He passed the remaining two or three hours of darkness in restless pacing up and down between the dwelling-house and the

bluff, whence he could keep observation upon the cause of his wonderment, as it lay placidly in the water below.

Great was the astonishment of his friends when, in the morning, he related to them the adventures of the night. It is scarcely to be wondered at that they were – Jack certainly was – disposed at first to regard it all as an extraordinary hallucination which had seized upon the relater. But there was Clinch's confirmation; and in the end they saw that there was no room left for doubt.

'Then it comes to this,' said Jack, 'we have to face the fact that we have here, close by us, some people who are paying us a visit from another planet! Phew! What a wake-up for our scientists! What a snub for those wiseacres who have declared that the planets could not possibly be inhabited! But why have our visitors shut themselves up again? It's rather churlish after your saving that Johnny from drowning! What do they mean by it? And what was the matter with him?'

'I read it this way,' said Armeath thoughtfully. And it may as well be here stated that after-events fully proved the correctness of his deductions. 'These people from another world either came involuntarily – that is to say, by accident – or they made some mistake which resulted in their being landed upon the Earth in a fashion different from that which they had intended. They narrowly escaped destruction, which would certainly have come to them had they struck the ground – this island for instance, instead of the sea – or if they had fallen in the sea at a place where it was shallow.

'Even as it was, I imagine, their method of arrival came very near to being a disaster. In all probability something has gone wrong with their engines or machinery – whatever they may be – and also, probably, some of the voyagers were injured by the shock, and required time to recover from it. This would explain how it is that they have not shown themselves outside sooner.'

'It's a far-reaching sort of guess, sir,' said Jack reflectively; 'but it seems to fit the situation. It scarcely explains, however, why the beggars should have gone off without signifying their thanks in some way. It appears pretty certain that Gerald saved that chap's life.'

'Yes,' said Armeath slowly; 'Gerald certainly saved his life. Let us hope that the circumstance is of good augury; that it may lead to their being friendly when the sufferer has thoroughly recovered, and they venture out again.'

## CHAPTER IV

### GERALD CARRIED OFF

Several days went by after the adventure recorded in the last chapter without anything further being seen of the strangers. The friends kept a watch upon their curious-looking abode from the shore, and sometimes from the water; but the voyagers gave no sign. At times a muffled hammering and clanging could be heard from inside, 'which,' as Tom Clinch expressed it, 'confirmed Mr Armeath's 'pinion as there's summat wrong with the works.'

To the impatient youngsters the time seemed to drag by slowly, and even Mr Armeath himself did not conceal the curiosity he felt.

'I confess,' said he, 'that I am waiting with the most intense interest to see what developments are in store for us. Before these people could have constructed such a machine, they must have made many wonderful discoveries in the sciences. What marvels they will be able to show us!'

But Gerald's feelings in the matter went beyond mere scientific curiosity. He had been most strangely attracted by the face and general appearance of the man whose life he had saved. The recollection of his countenance, the expression of lofty nobility, and wondrous, indefinable graciousness which he had read there, had fascinated him, and now seemed to haunt him. He looked forward with eager expectation to meeting this wonderful being again, and longed for an opportunity of becoming friendly with him.

Under the influence of these feelings, Gerald became more restless from day to day. He could not sleep at night, and took to staying out upon the beach instead. There he passed the time marching to and fro opposite to the great dark mass which, sphinx-like, remained silent and inscrutable, and refused to divulge any more of its mysterious secrets.

One night, as he thus paced up and down in the darkness, he suddenly saw one part of the structure light up as though screens inside had been removed. He heard voices, and dimly saw a gangway open, after which something which looked like a boat was pushed out quietly and smoothly on to the water. Then shadowy figures stepped into her, and began to row or paddle towards the shore.

'At last! At last!' thought Gerald, highly pleased. 'They are coming ashore at last! I will go forward to greet them!'

Had he not been so taken up with the expectation of meeting again the one who had so attracted his interest, he would probably have felt some distrust at the fact that these strangers should be coming ashore thus stealthily in the darkness instead of in the daylight. No suspicion, however, entered his mind, and he ran forward to welcome them just as the boat grounded on the sand. From her stepped out three figures, who came towards him.

What happened next he was never able to say with certainty. He was conscious of a quick movement on the part of one of the three, and he felt a slight pricking sensation in one of his hands, somewhat as though he had been touched by a very sharp needle.

Then a giddiness seized him, his legs seemed to give way under him, and he sank, rather than fell, to the ground, and rolled over. When he tried to rise he found that he had no sort of control over his muscles; they refused to act, and he was unable to move so much as a finger. Even his voice refused to obey his will, for he vainly tried to cry out; no sound issued from his lips.

Two of the dark figures who had just landed came forward, picked him up, and carried him to the waiting boat. There he was thrown down very much as if he had been a deer which had been captured. He next felt the craft moving through the water, he heard the *lap, lap* of the ripple against the sides, followed by a bump when it reached the end of its short voyage.

Then he was hauled up through the air and carried some distance through seemingly interminable passages, which he knew were well-lighted; for, though he could not move, he was quite conscious, and could not only hear but could see whatever came within the range of his eyes.

Presently he was cast down upon the floor of a small chamber, where he was left to himself, his captors closing the door with noisy accompaniments which sounded like the turning of keys and the shooting of bolts into their sockets.

And there he lay, utterly unable to move, in an agony of mind which can be better conceived than described. He was like one in a trance; and wild, weird tales came into his mind of persons who had fallen into a similar state, and had been believed to be dead when they were really still alive. Did the people who had brought him there think he was dead, he wondered, or were they aware of the true state of the case? The question suggested terrible possibilities. These strangers must be formidable beings indeed! Seemingly, they possessed dread powers and strange secrets. It looked as though they could throw an enemy at will into this terrible condition. But why they should regard him as an enemy to be treated thus, more especially after what he had been able to do for the one who had fallen into the sea, poor Gerald was at a loss to guess.

In his helplessness and dread of what the end might be, he prayed earnestly for help and deliverance. It seemed as though no earthly friends could aid him, but he did not lose faith in the power of the one Great Friend above, and to Him his prayers were many and fervent. And after a while it seemed as though those supplications were heard. Slowly, but surely, feeling crept back into his useless muscles, and the power to use them returned. Little by little the control over his limbs returned, until at last, with a long breath of relief and a grateful prayer of thankfulness, he was able to stand up and move about his prison-chamber.

First he examined himself to see if there was any wound which would account for what had happened to him; but he could find nothing save a slight mark on the right hand. He remembered that he had felt a pricking sensation there just before he had collapsed upon the beach; after which there had been a tingling which had spread quickly all over his body. And that was all he knew.

Ere, however, he could carry his memory and his speculations further, the door of the chamber was opened, and several persons entered abruptly and stood for a while regarding him in silence.

Gerald, on his side, looked back at them curiously, and he was not by any means favourably impressed by his first survey of them. He decided at once that they were soldiers, though their dress and accoutrements were very different from anything he had ever seen before. They all wore beards, and were dark, both as to their hair and their complexions.

Their costumes, which were a curious dull-gray in tint, had that peculiar, shimmering sheen which he had noted in the dress of the stranger who had fallen into the sea. The fashion, too, was much the same, the principal garment being the tunic, with a belt, and the picturesque head-dress.

These people all bore shields, which, strange to say, seemed to be of glass, for they were perfectly transparent; and by way of arms each had an odd-looking twisted pole or spear, which looked like two rods of polished steel entwined together. At the top was a flat, spear-shaped piece of light-coloured silvery metal, with three points or prongs instead of one. Stuck into the belt of each, as people might stick pistols, were two or three smaller articles. One of them looked like a hunting-knife or dagger; but regarding the others, Gerald could form no sort of idea as to their use or meaning, and could only vaguely guess that they were probably weapons of a kind unknown to dwellers upon the Earth.

One of these men, who appeared to be their officer, motioned to Gerald to follow him, and turned and led the way. Outside there were half a dozen more men in waiting, all similarly dressed. The officer signed to Gerald to follow a couple of these, while he himself, with the others, fell in behind; and thus they all marched onwards in double file, like a squad of soldiers.

They traversed many passages and galleries, where Gerald saw plenty to attract attention and excite wonder. They passed also people standing about in small groups, and these looked as curiously

at the prisoner – for such he felt himself to be – as did he at them. There was, however, no time or opportunity for more than a fleeting glance; he was hurried onwards, till suddenly there came a great surprise.

Passing through an entrance, which in massiveness and design seemed to the wondering captive more like the gateway to a medieval castle than a doorway one might expect to find in such a place, they emerged into a large open space.

Gerald looked round, and as he did so, a gasp of astonishment escaped him. He found himself in what had all the appearance of a spacious, lofty hall, with a domed roof, around which glittered numerous lights.

But his attention was at once drawn to the other end of the room. Here was a dais, and upon it were several persons. They were seated, for the most part, on handsomely carved and upholstered armchairs; but two of the latter were higher and larger than the rest, so that they partook rather of the character of thrones, and of these one again was larger and more important-looking than the other. Very strange affairs were these two high seats, ornamented as they were with carvings representing heads of the queerest-looking creatures that can well be imagined. The high backs curled over above, fashioned again in the shapes of heads of most horrible, fantastic monsters; smaller heads, vying with them in frightful ugliness, formed the ends of the arms.

Behind this array of chairs hung a curtain on which was worked weird pictures of the chase. They depicted men hunting, and the creatures they were in pursuit of were again strange beasts, such as, Gerald thought, seemed rather the outcome of a bad nightmare than the representation of anything which had ever lived. Over all was a canopy with more carved heads as corner-pieces.

Noting these details in two or three quick glances, Gerald turned his attention to the occupants of the chairs; and as he did so his spirits fell considerably.

He had hoped – expected indeed. – that he was about to be ushered into the presence of the man whom he had rescued from the sea. Gerald had already made up his mind to like this man of the noble countenance, and therefore, notwithstanding that the treatment he had received had not been over friendly, he had felt no great anxiety or misgiving as to what was in store for him.

But now, as he looked round, he very quickly perceived that the one he had hoped to meet was not there. Instead, upon the large chairs or thrones, he saw two dark, bearded men, who returned his looks with anything but friendly gaze, and whose general appearance filled him with feelings of dislike and alarm. Looking round the semicircle, he found it was much the same with the others. There were no friendly glances at all; they gazed at him in solemn, gloomy silence; and the expression upon their faces was at the best merely a sort of contemptuous curiosity.

As to one of them in the centre – the one who sat upon the second highest seat – Gerald thought he had never looked upon a more unprepossessing being. His frame was large and muscular, his head massive; but his dark, bearded face seemed full of brooding evil. His eyes were crafty, and lighted now and then with cruel, cunning gleams. He reminded Gerald somehow of ancient tales of horrible old ogres, whose principal amusement might consist in planning new tortures for the unfortunate victims who fell into their power.

Nor was his master – as Gerald judged him to be, the one seated upon the principal seat – much more attractive. His, too, was a huge figure, and his countenance was dark and forbidding; but it was relieved by a certain air of haughty authority and natural ease, imparting to his bearing a dignity which was lacking in the case of the other.

The more Gerald looked at the men before him the more he wondered at the innocent, open-hearted expectation with which he and his friends on the island had welcomed the coming of this wonderful 'chariot of the skies.' Had they known – he now bitterly reflected – had they but known the sort of beings it was peopled with, they would certainly have regarded its advent with very different feelings!

What evil fate, he vaguely and sadly wondered, had they in store for him?

## CHAPTER V

### KING IVANTA

Gerald stood in the midst of his captors, regarding them with steady eyes and undaunted mien. Critical though his situation might be, he was determined that these strangers from another world should have no reason for deeming him wanting in courage. He gazed round, and took note of everything about him with an outward appearance of calmness; though the more he saw of the people in whose hands he was the more he instinctively distrusted their intentions. He noted that the man who was seated upon the higher of the two chairs was treated with great deference by all the rest, and was evidently a sort of chief amongst them. The next in rank – the one Gerald had privately dubbed the 'Ogre' – appeared to be his principal councillor, while the others seated on the dais were officers of lesser degree. The rest of the people present were attired much as the soldiers had been who had brought Gerald to the place, save that their costumes were handsomer, and bore many ornaments and special marks denoting superior rank.

As regards their ornaments, it was noticeable that only the chief and the 'Ogre' wore jewels. The former had upon the breast of his robe a large, curious figure worked in diamonds, and the latter a similar ornamentation of a smaller kind. But Gerald, who knew something about precious stones, was surprised that these people, if they wore diamonds at all, did not display something larger and finer. In his own mind he appraised the value of those he saw at a very moderate figure, and considered that they were altogether paltry as compared with what he would have expected such men to wear.

'Diamonds must be scarce where these people come from!' was the idea which flashed through his mind; and therein he had made, as it afterwards turned out, a very shrewd guess.

And now the chief addressed some words to the prisoner, which, being spoken in a strange language, Gerald could not understand. Then the other one – the Ogre – rose up, and stepping off the dais, came close to him. Taking him by the shoulders, he turned and twisted him round, now this way, now that, as one might a fat bullock that was offered for sale.

Under this treatment Gerald became indignant. There was something in the man's manner so contemptuous, so insulting, that the young fellow's blood grew hot in his veins. He clenched his hands and bit his lips, striving his best to keep down his fast-rising anger.

But the man's behaviour only became more intolerable; and another now came up to join in the amusement – for such it seemed to be considered. Then Gerald, exasperated beyond all control, struggled fiercely to get free, throwing one of his persecutors off with so much force that he fell backwards upon the floor. His head must have struck against something, for there was a heavy thump, which was followed at once by an angry outcry from the man's friends.

The latter rushed upon the hapless captive, and began to pommel him in cruel and brutal fashion.

How the scene might have ended if no interruption had occurred it is impossible to say. As it happened, however, it was brought to an end in an unexpected manner.

A man came rushing in, calling out in tones of warning. Evidently he was the bearer of news, for every one turned to listen to what he said; and it was curious to see the effect it produced upon the assembly when they had gathered its purport. They appeared not unlike a lot of unruly schoolboys who had ventured to amuse themselves in some forbidden manner in the absence of their master.

They looked at one another inquiringly, and somewhat guiltily. Those who had been mixed up in the fray busied themselves in hastily trying to remove all traces of the struggle; while others who felt themselves less compromised tried their best to appear innocent and at their ease.

Then were heard the blare of trumpets, hoarse calls, as of men in authority giving words of command or ordering people to clear the way, and the rattle and clatter of accoutrements. Great,

massive doors at the end opposite to the dais swung apart, throwing open to the view another and larger hall, and a brilliant and unexpected scene.

Gerald turned and stared in mute wonder. There, before him, was a vista presenting one of the most magnificent spectacles it is possible to imagine. He had thought the hall he was in large and imposing when he had been ushered into it; but it was small and almost commonplace compared with the great space into which he now gazed.

Ranged on either side were ranks of magnificently dressed persons, who looked like courtiers attending a levee. Above, from the ceiling, hung gorgeous banners, and the walls were decorated with beautifully coloured frescoes. Spiral columns of sparkling lights rose here and there, ever turning and ever ascending, and dazzling the eyes with their splendour. Music clashed from some unseen band of musicians; and, as the strains floated through the air, they came mingled with the scent of subtle and delicious perfumes. At the farthest end of all was an empty throne, evidently awaiting its occupant.

Gazing in wonder at all these things, Gerald shortly became aware that he was himself becoming an object of curiosity to the whole of this brilliant company. He had turned his back to the dais upon which his persecutors had been seated, and he was standing out alone in the open space in front, his homely dress contrasting curiously with the splendid costumes around.

The music ceased, there was another blare of trumpets, and then a man entered near the throne. He stood upon the steps for a few moments, his keen eyes travelling round the whole assembled throng as they all bowed their heads in respectful salutation. He was about to seat himself, when his eagle glance fell upon the wondering captive. At the same moment Gerald recognised him – he was the man whose life he had saved!

Evidently he was the real chief. He was the king of these people; not the evil-looking, cruel man whose prisoner he had been. Gerald's heart gave a great bound of relief and thankfulness; for he no longer felt fear or doubt. One look at that stately figure, one glance in return from those flashing eyes, told him all he wished to know. He felt that he was saved! Such a being as this was incapable of either cruelty or injustice!

The king – for such he was – ordered Gerald to be brought up to him; and two of the principal officers, whom he knew afterwards as Arelda and Abralda, came down the long hall and conducted him to the steps of the throne.

There Gerald stood, whilst he whom he afterwards knew as King Ivanta made inquiries concerning him. For as yet, though Gerald had recognised him, he, on his side, had no idea that Gerald was the one who had saved his life; having been, it will be remembered, insensible when he had fallen into the sea.

There followed much talking in a strange language. The king was evidently making inquiries; and the more questions he asked the darker grew the lowering cloud upon his brow. A tense silence fell upon the assembled company, the hush that tells of coming trouble.

Then one of the officers suddenly recognised Gerald. He was the officer who had been with the king when he had fainted, and he was the only one who had seen his rescuer's face. He now informed his master, who turned and regarded the young stranger with new interest, in which there was a kindly and friendly welcome. Then his brow grew darker than ever, his eyes seemed literally to flash fire, and he looked truly terrible, as, with outstretched arm, he thundered out some stern orders.

What these were, or what was their effect, Gerald could not learn. There was some stir near the place where his captors had been seated, and he guessed that they were being brought forward to be dealt with. But he himself was led out through a small side doorway into an antechamber, where there were only a few officers in waiting; and these in turn conducted him into another and still smaller room, where they bade him be seated. Then they went out and left him alone.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE KING'S OFFER

Gerald felt like one in a dream. His adventure had been such a strange one, events had followed one another so quickly, the change from fear and almost despair to hope and safety had come so unexpectedly, that he had scarcely had time to realise all that was going forward. And then the stately magnificence of the scene at which he had been present, the sudden revelation of the personality of the being he had rescued – all these things, crowding into the short space of a single night, made his brain reel.

For some time he remained alone, turning these things over and over in his mind. He almost doubted the evidence of his own senses, and began vaguely to wonder whether it could all be real, or whether he had fallen asleep and was dreaming some extraordinary, fantastic dream.

After what seemed a long time, the door opened, and some one entered behind him; some one who, even before Gerald caught sight of him, was adding to the confusion of his ideas by speaking to him in English! Turning round sharply, he found himself face to face with a tall, good-looking man with a shrewd, intellectual face, who was regarding him with a smile which seemed to be half-kindly, half-amused. He was dressed like some of the principal officers he had seen; but there was that in his manner and general appearance which, apart from his speech, seemed to tell Gerald that he was one of his own race.

'Well, young sir, will you tell me your name?' was the query which came to Gerald's consciousness after a moment or two of bewilderment.

'My name is Gerald Wilton,' he said simply.

'And how did you come into these parts? Parents live round here?'

Gerald shook his head. 'I have none,' he answered sadly. 'I have a guardian, who is at present living on the island, however. His name is Armeath – Mr Marcus Armeath.'

The stranger uttered a long whistle, then he exclaimed, 'So, so! Marcus Armeath living on this island! I knew him some years ago. He was then in England engaged in some experiments, trying to discover – But never mind that now.'

He broke off abruptly, and regarded Gerald again with his enigmatic smile, which, however, now seemed to have in it more of friendly interest. Then he took to pacing up and down the room, his hands behind him, as though lost in thought.

'Young sir,' said he presently, 'I don't know what star you were born under, but it seems perfectly clear that you are marked out for some experiences such as scarcely any one else on this Earth can boast of. You are in possession of a great secret, which we wished to keep to ourselves; and, further, it has been ordained that you should save the life of – of – well, of one who is never ungrateful to those who do him even the smallest service. He is my most gracious master, and he will talk with you himself later on; but, meanwhile, he has deputed me to see you, and prepare your mind for some tremendous facts which you might otherwise find it difficult to grasp all at once. I am instructed to tell you certain things which must appear to you so incredible, so impossible, that I doubt if you will believe them without further proof.'

'I think I can give a good guess at one or two of them, sir; or, rather, my guardian has done so. This monster airship, or whatever you call it, has found its way here from some other planet – probably Mars' —

'My word, young gentleman, you've hit it!' cried the other, in very evident surprise.

'And,' continued Gerald, 'you made some mistake in arriving here, and very nearly came to awful grief.'

'Yes, yes! There, too, you guessed well,' returned the other. 'It was but a slight miscalculation, but it nearly smashed us up! It was a fearfully narrow escape!' He drew out a handkerchief and passed it over his forehead, as though the mere recollection made him hot. 'I expect that was Mr Armeath's guess too, wasn't it?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Ah well! there are certain other things, however, which you do not know – cannot know – which I will now explain. In the first place, you do not know that my master is a great king in Mars – a mighty ruler over nearly half the population of that globe. His name is Ivanta; he reigns over the empire of Ivenia – which, by-the-by, is the name of this airship, as you called it. He named her the *Ivenia*, after his own country.'

Gerald listened with growing wonder, and eyes that lighted up more and more as the stranger continued:

'Very well! The next thing is that this is not the first visit my master has paid to this Earth. He came here some years ago.'

At this Gerald stared harder than ever. 'Is it possible?' he exclaimed. 'I never heard of it!'

'Nobody – on the Earth – ever heard of it, save myself and one or two others who were all sworn to secrecy. My royal master came here for purposes of his own, and did not wish – and does not wish now – that his visits should be made known. If they were, he would have a lot of people pestering him with questions, and possibly some one might imitate his inventions and build airships like this one, and he might have explorers from here coming over to Mars – which he does not wish. Do you understand?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Very well! At his first visit he came to this very island, and made it his headquarters. It was uninhabited then' —

'Yes; so it was when we came to it. We have only been here a year or so.'

'I see. Well, my master hoped to find the place still uninhabited, and that he would be able to hide the *Ivenia* away here this time, as he did before, when no one upon the Earth was ever the wiser, save the one or two I have referred to. He had brought with him a yacht of his own. She made a bit of a stir, being unlike anything previously seen, but no one suspected the truth. In her he made a tour of the world, travelling about for three years, during which time he and his chosen companions picked up English, a little French, and so on. They also picked me up, and I also saved the king's life, even as you have done, though in a different manner. He was so grateful for what I did that he told me his secret, and offered to enrol me in his service and take me back to Mars with him. I had nothing particular to tie me here, and I am fond of adventure, so I took him at his royal word. Now you can begin to understand how it is that I, an Englishman by birth, Kendal Monck by name, engineer by profession, happen to be here, in these days, in the suite of this great king from another planet, and talking to you in your own tongue!'

'Yes, sir, I understand,' answered Gerald, his face aglow with interest and excitement. 'It's very, very wonderful! What strange, marvellous scenes and adventures you must have passed through!'

'I have that, my lad! I have passed through many grave dangers too; have had many hair-breadth escapes in the service of my royal master, who is of a very adventurous disposition. His search after knowledge has led us into queer places, I can assure you. But he is a wonderful being! This marvellous airship was constructed from his own inventions and designs. And then, as a man – Ah!' Here the stranger drew a long breath. 'His is a character which makes you feel you would go through fire and water for him!'

'I 'm sure of it!' cried Gerald with enthusiasm. 'I felt it the first moment I set eyes upon him! How I should like to do as you have done – go with him to Mars and back! What an experience!'

'Ah!' exclaimed the engineer again, 'it would do you good, my lad. It would do anybody – everybody – good, physically, morally, in every way. It gives you a different, a more glorious, outlook

on life when you realise that the mighty works of the Creator are not confined to this globe on which we live, but extend through endless "universes" in space. Even comparatively near us there are great planets compared with which this Earth is scarcely more than a big football. There is Saturn, for instance. When we were there' —

'You have visited other planets, then, as well?' Gerald gasped.

Monck nodded. 'Yes, even great Jupiter, but we could not get very near to him. Saturn, however, we landed on, and spent some weeks there – awful, terrible weeks they were. My young friend, even to think of the things to be seen there is almost too much for the ordinary human brain. But, as I have said, it does one good. It instils into the mind some faint conception of the vastness, the greatness, the endless variety to be everywhere found in what we call the creation!'

'Would that your king would make me the offer he made to you!' cried Gerald, with glistening eyes.

'Perhaps he will. What if he has?' was the unexpected reply.

Gerald started up from the chair he had been sitting on. 'You cannot mean it!' he exclaimed.

'What would be your reply if he made you the offer?'

'I would accept only too gladly!'

'You see,' Monck explained, 'the service you rendered is one that a man like my master would never forget. I dare say you wonder how it happened that he fell into the sea. It was because the air here is so different from that which he is used to upon Mars, and which we all had been living in inside this airship. At his first visit to the Earth, years ago, he was extremely careful, and made the change gradually and cautiously. This time he seems to have been rash, or to have forgotten. Hence the air here – which is thinner and lighter than that on Mars – served him as the air on the top of a very high mountain would serve you if you were suddenly transported there. He was attacked with what you have doubtless heard of as mountain-sickness. There is vertigo, bleeding at the nose and ears, and fainting. However, his danger was your opportunity; and I must say you acted very promptly and pluckily.'

'I only did what I would have done for any one,' said Gerald modestly.

'I am sure of that, my boy. But I won't keep you in suspense any longer. To come to the point, my master said I could make you the offer I have hinted at if I found you were likely to regard it with favour. I do not want your answer now, of course. You can take time to consider – there are lots of things we can talk over first. Briefly, however, when we go back to Mars we shall only be away a few months. At the end of that time we shall return here again; and if you are then tired of the adventure you will be free to leave his service and remain here.'

'I do not need any time to make up my mind,' Gerald burst out impetuously. 'All I should hesitate about would be as to whether my guardian' —

'Well, we can talk to him.'

'And Jack!'

'Who is Jack?'

'My chum! He must come too!'

'Oh – h'm! I don't know what to say about that! You had better ask King Ivanta yourself when you see him!'

'I will!' cried Gerald. And he did, with what result will presently appear.

## CHAPTER VII

### OFF ON A TRIP TO MARS

'Our last morning upon the Earth, Jack, for many a day to come! Think of it! It scarcely seems possible, does it?'

'It's true enough, though, old chap! In a few hours we shall "sail away," as the song says, and shall be winging our way through space!'

'Fancy gazing down and taking our last look at our own globe! The daring of the thing gives me a bit of a shock, now that the event itself is so near at hand! How is it with you?'

'Well, I confess, Gerald, that I have to brace my mind up to it, as it were. But it's always the same when you start upon a journey or a new adventure. One never exactly likes saying good-bye to the old familiar places.'

Many months had passed since the events recorded in the last chapter. King Ivanta had been to Europe and finished the business he had in hand – for it was generally understood, amongst those who knew of his presence on the Earth, that he had come here on his second visit for some definite purpose. What the purpose was remained for the present a secret confined to the Martian monarch himself and the few he chose to take into his confidence.

Amongst those who shared the secret Mr Armeath was probably one; for he had grown high in favour with the illustrious traveller, and had been invited to accompany him in the forthcoming trip to Mars and back. He had also been accorded the privilege of taking with him his two wards Gerald and Jack, and his two servitors Tom Clinch and Bob Reid; and the latter, loyal and faithful followers that they were, had not shrunk from the risks of the adventure.

There were some other passengers also – namely, Amos Zuanstroom the multi-millionaire (the well-known 'Diamond King'), his son Silas (who was about the same age as Jack), and a much younger lad, named Freddy Whitcomb, his nephew.

Why King Ivanta should choose these particular persons from all the millions of inhabitants of the Earth was another matter which was wrapped in mystery, and which, for the time being, he kept strictly to himself.

As the engineer Mr Monck had predicted, Gerald had good reason to congratulate himself upon the fortunate chance which had enabled him to render so great a service to the Martian king. The latter had shown himself extremely grateful, and had conferred upon the young fellow many marks of his favour. In particular, he had confirmed the offer Mr Monck had made, and had graciously extended it, as stated, to his guardian and his chum.

And now, behold them all, then, on board the *Ivenia*, the colossal 'chariot of the skies,' awaiting the moment when she should rise in the air and commence her tremendous journey.

She lay in a sort of natural harbour in the island, a spacious salt-water lake almost landlocked.

From this she presently rose easily and smoothly, like a huge bird wending its way upwards in a series of graceful circles. Like a bird, too, she had at first enormous wings spread out to the air. But after a time, as she gained the upper air, these were folded away, the upper covering was replaced, and she became once more the great, egg-shaped mass she had appeared when she had arrived beside the island. How, afterwards, she continued to force her way upwards against the attraction of the Earth, was King Ivanta's own secret. It was believed that he had discovered a means of using the sun's more powerful attractive force, and so controlling it as to make it do whatever he required; but that was probably only a guess. What is certain is that the whole structure continued to rise steadily and smoothly upwards, till presently Gerald and Jack were called by Mr Armeath and the engineer, Mr Monck, to come to a sort of periscope, from which they could take their last look at the Earth.

They stepped forward and stared through the opening in startled wonder. There, they saw our globe, looking like an enormous ball. The great airship itself was perfectly steady, and appeared to be absolutely motionless. Not a tremor was to be felt, and it seemed as though it was the Earth which was receding from them at a rapid rate, not they from the Earth. No longer, however, could they make out details upon its surface; the distance was already too great. All they could distinguish were the respective masses of land and water, broadly mapped and marked out as they are upon a school globe representing the Earth. The side they were looking at showed the New World – the great continents of North and South America and the oceans surrounding them – and that was all.

Who shall attempt to describe their feelings, or guess their thoughts, as they stood there gazing at this strange appearance of the planet upon which they had lived all their lives? Probably they then for the first time fully realised the actual nature of the risks they were running; and it is more than likely that they were wondering whether they were looking their last upon the Earth, as they watched it sinking silently away into the immeasurable distance!

## CHAPTER VIII

### A NARROW ESCAPE

The first part of the time which followed upon the departure from the Earth of the *Ivenia* on her long journey through space was one of great enjoyment to the two chums. The marvels and mysteries of the great airship – or aerostat, as Mr Armeath preferred to call her – seemed to be inexhaustible. 'Every day' the young people found something new and strange, to puzzle over. Every time they moved about they came upon some unexpected revelation of the wondrous inventions and contrivances which it had been necessary to bring to perfection before the great machine could start upon the adventurous journeys she had undertaken.

The above words, 'every day,' require an explanation. Of course, once they were really out in 'the realms of starry space,' there were really no alternations of day and night, for the sun shone upon them continuously. But within the aerostat artificial nights, so to speak, were produced by drawing huge screens across the semi-transparent outer casing.

Mr Monck explained this to the young voyagers, giving them, incidentally, a little lecture, as it were, in astronomy and general science; and on this occasion he had as his auditors all four of the young passengers – including, that is to say, the two cousins, Silas and Freddy.

'I expect you all know,' he said, 'that out in what is called space, where there is no atmosphere – no air – the sun's rays seem to have no heat. The cold there is most intense – far greater than anything ever experienced upon Earth. You feel the sun's rays warm on your globe because they pass through the Earth's atmosphere, which acts like a lens or magnifying-glass. Here the same effect is obtained by passing them through the wonderful semi-transparent metal of which the outer shell of the airship is composed. It is harder than the hardest steel, yet almost transparent like glass, without being brittle, while it is far lighter than aluminium. It was discovered by King Ivanta, and is called "ivantium" after him. He found that when the sun's rays were passed through it the result was exactly the same as when they pass through the atmosphere of the Earth or of Mars. That is how it is we are so warm and comfortable on board here. But for the discovery of that metal such a journey as we are taking would be impossible. We should be frozen to death.'

'Then there is no need to have day and night unless you like,' Freddy observed, his blue eyes opening in surprise. He was a fair, good-looking youngster, and a great favourite with Monck and the chums.

'No, my lad. But King Ivanta considers it best to keep up the same habits as those you and his people are all accustomed to "at home;" for Mars turns on its axis in about the same time as the Earth – namely, twenty-four hours or thereabouts. That is to say, the average day on Mars is just about the same length as the average day on the Earth.'

On many other occasions, when he had the time and opportunity, the good-natured engineer 'trotted them round' and explained to the young people, in similar fashion, the why and the wherefore of many of the things that puzzled them – so far, that is, as he himself understood them. But as to a great many, and those some of the most surprising, he was obliged to confess his own entire ignorance.

'There are most essential secrets connected with the structure and working of this remarkable "chariot of the skies" which no one but my master understands, and he takes good care to keep them to himself,' he declared. 'When you reach Mars, for instance, you will see there numerous airships and flying-machines of many kinds. It has, indeed, been much easier for the Martians to learn to build such contrivances than for the dwellers upon the Earth, because, as I have before mentioned, the air upon Mars is so much denser. But though you will see many such things flying about, you will not see one that can compare with this; not one that can venture out into space, or, indeed, very far above the surface of the planet.'

Often Mr Armeath accompanied the young people, and listened with interest to the engineer's explanations; for, scientist though he was, he found he had almost as much to learn in their new surroundings as they had.

Truly, the great airship was a wonder from every point of view. It may assist readers to understand the stupendous scale upon which she had been designed if it is explained that she was more than twice the size of Britain's great warship the *Dreadnought*. But nothing less in bulk would have been of any use if we consider the tremendous strength required, and the accommodation necessary for the number of people she carried – of whom there were between two and three thousand. In addition, room had to be provided for enormous quantities of stores and other equipment.

Another feature which illustrates the gigantic scale upon which everything was carried out was to be found in the fact that a large space was given up to ornamental gardens and conservatories. In these were graceful, waving, palm-like trees, wondrous flowers and shrubs, and trees growing delicious fruits, interspersed amongst fountains and pleasant walks, with what appeared to be a sunny sky overhead. There was even a sort of 'Zoo' or menagerie on board, in which were many very curious animals which the new passengers had never seen or heard of before. To these had now been added quite a collection of more familiar creatures which King Ivanta had acquired during his stay upon Earth, and was taking back for the edification of his subjects at home.

The chums were fond of wandering about in this miniature zoological garden, looking at those creatures which were new to them, and studying their ways and habits. Some were natives of Mars; these were mostly small, for – as they soon learned from Monck – just as Mars was a smaller globe than the Earth, so the animals generally were smaller in proportion. But in this Zoo were specimens brought, as it appeared, from the great planet Saturn, some of which were large and terrible creatures.

It was with one of these that Gerald met with an unpleasant adventure one day when they had been but a short time 'out.' He had strolled in alone, in the early morning, as was now his almost constant habit, and went towards the cage of a creature called by the Martians an *amalpi*. Gerald was especially interested in it on account of its resemblance to an immense unicorn. It was, indeed, something between that fabled creature and a rhinoceros. It had a very long, straight, sharp horn upon the frontal bone, and a body very much like a heavily-built cart-horse, covered with skin almost as thick as that of an elephant. It was a most savage, dangerous creature, and all attempts to tame it, even in the smallest degree, had failed.

When Gerald walked up to its cage on this particular occasion he met with a surprise, for the cage was empty and the barred gate was standing ajar. Ere he had time to consider what this might mean he received a second surprise. There was a loud, bellowing roar, and the next he knew was that the creature itself was charging down upon him with lowered head like a bull, the terrible, long, sharp horn pointed straight at him.

For an instant the young fellow stood as if spell-bound; then, by a happy flash of thought, he dashed into the empty cage and pulled the gate to after him. It fastened, as he knew, automatically, with a huge spring-catch. A moment later there was a frightful crash as the ferocious animal ran full tilt at the bars, its long horn pushing between them, and just failing to reach Gerald by some few inches.

For some time he had the novel experience of being a prisoner in the great cage, while his enemy, furious with disappointment, charged again and again at the bars. Such was the strength and determination of its rushes that it seemed almost as if the bars must give way.

At last the noise of its bellowing brought some of the keepers upon the scene. Then Gerald had an opportunity of learning more of the weapons the Martians were armed with, and how they used them. Each keeper carried in his hand one of the large wands or staves, with triple points at the top, similar to those the soldiers had carried who had marched Gerald as a prisoner before the 'Ogre' and his chief. Gerald had seen similar wands many times since, but had never seen how they were used. Nor was he, indeed, much the wiser now. All he saw was a slight flash of very brilliant light which seemed to leap from the tridents towards the great roaring animal, as it stood for a moment tossing

its head and stamping its feet ere charging clown upon the rescue-party. But it never started upon its rush, for, lo! it suddenly sank upon its knees and rolled helplessly over upon the ground, where it lay quiet and still – a big, inert mass.

The keepers opened the gate, and Gerald walked out, wondering greatly at what he had seen, but unable to ask any questions, because he could not speak their language.

Just then, however, Monck arrived upon the scene. He looked very grave when informed what had occurred, and examined the lock with a perplexed air and many dubious shakes of the head.

'What will they do with the dead *amalpi*?' Gerald asked, as he walked away with the engineer.

'Put it back again. It is not dead; it will recover in a few hours, and to-morrow will be as lively as ever,' was the answer. Then the speaker went on to explain. 'Those tridents,' he said, alluding to the three-pronged wands, 'are really a kind of electric gun, if I may use the term. This weapon also – like so many of the Martians' greatest discoveries – is the invention of our royal master, King Ivanta. He tried for years to discover a weapon which would stun or paralyse and not kill. He has a horror of bloodshed, and he set himself to devise a weapon which should do away with the horrors of war by rendering killing and maiming unnecessary. He found it at last in this weapon, which simply paralyses the muscles for a certain time, without killing or inflicting any permanent injury. People or animals – even the largest and most ferocious creatures, as you have here seen – struck in this way are merely rendered quite helpless for a time, so that you can bind them, or do what you please with them.'

'Ah! like I was! I understand now!' cried Gerald. 'All I felt was a slight prick, as if some one had hurt me with a needle, and immediately I collapsed and rolled over, utterly unable to move, yet not unconscious.'

Monck nodded thoughtfully. 'Ay, I remember,' said he.

'So do I,' said Gerald, in a tone which indicated that the remembrance was a sore one. 'And that reminds me that you have never given me any explanation as to why I was treated in that fashion! I frequently see the chap I have to thank for it – who, I have been given to understand, is a sort of king in his own country – and his confederate, the one I called the Ogre. I know their names too – Agrando and Kazzaro. Whenever they catch sight of me they glare at me as though they would like to eat me!'

'Well, they got a precious good wiggling from King Ivanta over that affair before the whole Court,' Monck declared with a smile. 'So it is not surprising that they do not exactly fall upon your neck and embrace you.'

'But what was their object?' Gerald persisted.

Monck seemed to be ruminating. 'I cannot say with certainty; I can only guess,' he answered thoughtfully. 'Agrando, you must know, is the ruler of one of the last countries which Ivanta conquered and brought under his sway. He reigned over a numerous and powerful nation, and there was a long and bitter struggle ere Ivanta was completely successful. Agrando did not like giving in, and I don't think he has become quite reconciled to it even yet.'

'Was that why King Ivanta brought him with him – so that he might be able to keep an eye on him?' asked Gerald shrewdly.

Monck laughed. 'Perhaps,' he said.

'Well, my impression is – and always has been – that the old ruffian intended to keep me there as prisoner in secret, and carry me secretly to his own country, and there exhibit me as a raree-show, or keep me as a slave to wait on him, or some infamy of that sort.'

Monck looked puzzled. 'I hardly know what to say as to that,' he said musingly. 'But I feel sure that you have no friend in him or his chief councillor. I should keep clear of them if I were you. Have you any other enemies, think you, on board?'

Gerald started. 'Why do you ask?' he queried.

'Because this little business of the *amalpi* is a rather strange affair. It looks to me as if it had been done on purpose. That lock did not open itself, nor did the animal burst it open. It is not injured in any way. Now, you are in the habit of going there regularly in the early morning, are you not?'

'Yes, Mr Monck,' returned Gerald gravely. 'But I don't like to think there is any one on board who hates me enough to plan such a wicked thing! I know, of course, that the Zuanstrooms are anything but pleased at the fact that King Ivanta invited us to come with you on this trip; and Silas has behaved very strangely once or twice, just as if he were jealous, or envious, or something. But still – I could not imagine they would carry their dislike as far as that!'

'Well, to me it looks very much as though it had not been altogether an accident,' Monck declared bluntly. 'So, take my advice, my lad, and keep your eyes open; and if you get into any trouble, or suspect any danger, do not hesitate to let me know at once.'

## CHAPTER IX

### ARMEATH'S SECRET

The weeks passed on, and still the *Ivenia* continued on her tremendous journey through space to meet the advancing planet Mars. She travelled at a rate which would make the heads of young readers swim if it were set down in figures. Yet she glided on so smoothly that those on board might well have thought she was all the time standing motionless in one place. How this was accomplished was one of those secrets which Monck confessed himself unable to explain. And the same may here be said of some other mysteries which puzzled Mr Armeath not a little. One was, that there was a feeling of weight or gravity on board much the same as upon the Earth. Another puzzle was, how was the supply of air kept always pure and wholesome? These were among the things that Ivanta kept to himself. The Earth sank away into the distance, gradually diminishing in size till it became no larger to the view than the moon when it is full. Then came a time when it looked like a rather large star of a pale-bluish tint.

On board, the time passed, for the most part, pleasantly enough. There was plenty to do – plenty of work and plenty of amusement. King Ivanta was a ruler who believed in the policy of keeping his people busy in one way or another. Every person on board was compelled to give a certain amount of time each day to work or study of some kind; while a certain interval was also set aside for recreations. The latter were of many kinds. There were concerts – for the Martians seemed to be all fond of music – games, somewhat after the style of football, tennis, and other athletic sports; and, not least, military exercises, in which the soldiers took part and contended for prizes. These – which the chums always watched with the utmost interest – often took the form of actual combats. Sometimes they were between two champions, sometimes between parties of fifty or a hundred; and amongst the latter there were often many 'slain' on both sides; but they always came to life a little later, none the worse for the experience.

Then it was that the chums saw the use made of the shields borne by the soldiers, which Gerald had first noticed when he had been a prisoner. They were, as stated, transparent, and it now appeared that they were used as a protection against the mysterious power of the 'tridents,' or 'electric guns.' Just as electricity will not pass through glass, so the curious 'flash' from the tridents could not pass through these shields. The heads, feet, and legs of the combatants, and some other parts of their bodies, were also protected in similar fashion, so that they appeared to be partly dressed in shining armour. They wore helmets, breastplates, and leg and thigh pieces, which looked like glass, yet were not brittle, and which, like the shields, were proof against the power of the tridents.

Thus, a duel between two antagonists equipped in this manner resolved itself, to a great extent, into a trial of skill in the use of the shield. Through it each could see the other; and many were the feints and stratagems resorted to by a practised fighter to get at his foe behind his shield.

Every night King Ivanta held a levee or other Court function, which all who were off duty were free to attend, and at which very curious entertainments were sometimes provided.

Altogether there was no lack either of occupation or amusement during the three months which the voyage lasted.

Gerald and Jack applied themselves assiduously to learn the Martian language, and in this they were joined by Mr Armeath. Then, by way of relaxation, they gained the king's permission to learn the mysteries and use of the trident and shield. Monck fitted them out in suits of the shining armour, and they practised under the instruction of one named Aveena, a young noble of the Court. Thanks to his tuition, they became so expert that they entered for contests before the king, and came off victorious in more than one bout with others of their own age. Silas Zuanstroom was one of those

they each vanquished in turn; only with the result, however, of increasing the coldness which had grown up between the two parties of travellers from the Earth.

One day, Gerald met with yet another disagreeable adventure in the Zoo, and again narrowly escaped a terrible death. This time it was a large venomous serpent of vicious and aggressive disposition, which (again by some 'accident') had got loose just about the time when Gerald, unarmed and unsuspecting of danger, was taking his stroll round the cages. Monck came upon him, a little later, clinging to the upper branches of a tall palm-like tree, which the serpent was slowly climbing, bent on reaching him.

This time the engineer reported the matter to the king, who sternly ordered a strict inquiry with the object of finding out who was to blame. But no evidence was forthcoming to show that the occurrence had been other than an accident; and the affair ended in the punishment of one of the keepers in charge for negligence.

But more exciting events were steadily preparing, and began to develop as the voyage went on.

One morning the two chums were called into Armeath's private apartment, where he was awaiting them with Monck. He explained that he had received the king's permission to impart to them an important piece of information. 'I am going to entrust you with a bit of a secret,' said he, 'and I must ask you to regard it as confidential, and say nothing about it to any one – particularly to the Zuanstrooms; which, of course, includes the two lads. Doubtless you have wondered what it was which induced King Ivanta to pay a second visit to our Earth. It is this, that what we call precious stones do not exist naturally in Mars. None were ever seen there until the king brought back a quantity after his first visit.'

Gerald burst into an exclamation. 'Just what I guessed, sir,' he cried. 'I have had that idea in my mind for some time!'

'It was a shrewd guess, lad,' Monck observed. 'The fact is, that once the Martians had set eyes on them they went almost mad over them, and became clamorous for a larger supply to be brought, in order that those who could afford it might be able to purchase some.'

'Our gracious master, who is continually thinking what new thing he can do to please his people, determined to pay a second visit to the Earth specially to secure a large supply. Hence his taking up with Zuanstroom, the "Diamond King." But Zuanstroom was not easy to arrange with. When he learned the actual state of the case, he insisted, as a part of the bargain, that my master should promise to bring him over to Mars for a trip, and take him safely back. Nothing less would satisfy him.'

'I see,' said Jack. 'And I suppose his diamonds are on board too – a whole shipload of them, so to speak?'

'Exactly. The greatest load of treasure, I suppose, that has ever been carried on any ship of the air or the sea.'

'But,' said Gerald, 'the Zuanstrooms know all this. Why mustn't we speak to them about it?'

'Because, at this point, I come to my story,' Armeath said, with a half-smile. 'For years I have been experimenting, trying to manufacture precious stones artificially. At last I succeeded in getting diamonds from a certain mineral; only to find, however, that the discovery was almost valueless, because I could not get enough of the particular mineral. I found out that there was some in the island we have been living on, and that was the reason I went there to stay for a time. When, however, I understood what King Ivanta wanted, I told him of my experiments, showed him the results, and he was highly delighted. He said it would be easier and cheaper to manufacture diamonds than to buy them from the Diamond King on his own terms.'

'But how can that be done, sir, if the necessary material is so scarce?' asked practical Jack.

'You shall hear. King Ivanta recognised the mineral, and declares that there is plenty of it to be obtained from the planet Saturn. He saw quantities of it when he was there!'

'Then we are to go to Saturn to obtain a supply; I suppose?' cried Gerald, full of enthusiasm at the prospect of this new and unexpected addition to their programme of adventure.

'That I cannot yet say,' replied Armeath. 'We must hear what the king says.'

'But, sir,' exclaimed Jack, 'you would not think of leaving us alone – stranded – upon a strange planet! Suppose you never came back!'

'It is not a pleasant place to visit; I can tell you that much,' Monck put in. 'Saturn, at the present time, is in the stage which the scientists tell us the Earth was in, ages ago, when the great antediluvian monsters existed. Those monsters – or similar ones – are alive now on Saturn; and terrible creatures they are, I can assure you! The *amalpi* – the unicorn-like animal which hunted you, Master Gerald – is one which we managed to capture and bring back from Saturn. But it is small and almost harmless compared with some of the animals and reptiles we saw there! I do not think I would go there again, Mr Armeath, of my own choice, even for the sake of bushels of diamonds!'

'If I go, it will not be exactly for the reason you suppose, my friend,' returned Armeath. He spoke very gravely, and with a note of sadness in his tone. 'Your king, in most things, has shown himself a very wise monarch; but I think he has made a mistake in introducing jewels at all amongst his subjects. Upon our globe they have always been the cause of heartburning, envy, jealousy, and all kinds of evil passions. In too many cases they have proved, as all of us know, a veritable curse, and have led to crimes innumerable. But, for good or for evil, your master has made certain promises, and arranged certain things with the Diamond King. King Ivanta's people are all agog, waiting in clamorous impatience for the cargo of jewels which we are taking to them. It is too late now to alter that; but, look you! what if I prove to them that jewels just as good can be made as cheaply as bits of glass? What will be the consequence?'

'Nobody will want them,' Monck answered, laughing.

'Just so! And that, in my opinion, would be for the future benefit of all the inhabitants of Mars! It is for that – and with that idea alone – that I am ready to risk the danger of a trip to Saturn.'

'If that be so, then I am with you,' exclaimed the engineer. 'It is a worthy object, and I will help you all I can! But to obtain the mineral you want will be almost like undertaking over again the fabled labours of Hercules, for the place where it exists is guarded by creatures more formidable than the fabled Hydra, and more terrible than the worst of the ancient dragons!'

## CHAPTER X

### CAPTURED BY A COMET

The *Ivenia*, the great Martian airship, sped onwards upon its wonderful voyage for a period of nearly two months without anything occurring to interrupt its continuous progress. Then, one night, there came a startling interruption of its smooth, gliding flight through space – one that nearly terminated it for good and all.

It so happened that the two chums were sitting up that night with Mr Armeath in the conning-tower, a privilege but seldom accorded to any one not actually engaged in the navigation of the ship. The officer in charge, however, was one named Malanda, the one who had been in attendance on the king when Gerald had saved his life. He it was who had recognised the lad at the critical moment when he had been a prisoner, and since that time he had treated him with marked kindness.

The conning-tower was a roomy apartment, very curiously constructed. It could be raised or depressed by mechanical means, so that at some times it projected above the outer surface of the ship, while at others it was just level with it. In the former case there was a clear view in all directions except immediately beneath; in the latter there was no direct view save upwards; but the images of outside objects were then thrown on to a screen, as in a camera-obscura.

Upon this eventful night the conning-tower had been raised, and the two chums had been amusing themselves by peering through powerful telescopes at the heavenly bodies around them.

It was truly a wonderful, a fascinating sight, and one which Gerald, especially, was never tired of contemplating. The various constellations blazed out with a vividness and beauty far exceeding their appearance as seen through our atmosphere from the surface of the Earth. Thanks to Malanda, the two lads had learned to distinguish the planets from the far-more distant fixed stars. They knew that the latter were at such tremendous distances that they 'didn't count,' as Jack put it; the only ones they were likely to have anything to do with being the planets, which, like our Earth, are always revolving round our sun.

Of course, as they were going to visit Mars, they watched that orb particularly; and they felt a special interest in noting how its pinkish-red light increased in size and intensity as they drew nearer. Next in interest came our Earth, which they had so recently left, whose bluish light waned exactly in proportion as that of Mars waxed stronger. Then there was beautiful Saturn, with its wondrous rings of light; perhaps they were also to visit that mysterious orb, and learn what those lustrous bands were composed of!

Besides these, there were plenty of curious things to watch and admire. The planets had their moons in attendance upon them – some having two, some as many as eight – all behaving as our own moon does – each, that is to say, showing in turn as a thin crescent, a half-moon, a full-moon, and so on; and the voyagers had watched these changes with interest which never flagged. It seemed such a strange thing to think of: several moons round one planet; one, perhaps, a new moon; and two or three others near the full, all shining at the same time!

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