

CHARLES WILLING BEALE

THE SECRET OF THE
EARTH

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The Secret of the Earth

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Содержание

I	6
II	17
III	32
IV	43
V	56
VI	67
VII	74
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	78

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PROLOGUE

When Dirk Waaijen, master of the *Voorne*, was five days out from the island of Celebes, a strange thing happened.

For nearly a week the Dutchman had idled along with a cargo of cocoa, jaggaree, trepang, some Manado coffee, a few bags of nutmegs and other products of the Archipelago, but without an incident worth logging; when suddenly, an odd looking cask, with mast and streamer, was seen floating in the waters ahead, and all hands became alive with excitement. A couple of burly fellows hauled the barrel upon the deck, with the expectation of a prize, but were discomfited on finding that it contained only some cotton cloth, carefully wrapped about a dirty water-stained document, written in a language which no one could understand. Even Captain Waaijen himself was unable to read a word of it, despite his wise look, and the volumes of smoke which he blew from time to time over the packet. Had he confided in me, his only English speaking passenger, I might at least have made him comprehend the importance of the paper, even if unable to render a literal translation; but the captain was surly, and took the bundle to his room. It is even possible that he was ignorant of

the fact that it was written in the English language. However this may have been, I was surprised on reaching Gravenhage, the end of our voyage, to have the paper thrust into my hands by Waaijen himself, and without a word of explanation. Believing it to be merely the record of some unfortunate craft foundered in the South Sea, I laid the packet aside, not even unrolling it for weeks. When I did so, I was amazed at the contents, and immediately sought the master of the Voorne; but he had left upon another of those endless voyages, the length of which even the company was unable to decide. Assured that no claim will ever be made upon the document, and overwhelmed with the profundity of its contents, I offer it to the public, convinced that in the history of our planet, there is nothing half so astounding as the revelation it contains.

It is to be regretted that the paper cannot be given in its entirety; the omissions, indicated by asterisks, being the result of damage caused by salt water to the MS., which has made it undecipherable in those places; the total thus lost amounting to more than a hundred pages.

The following is an exact rendering of the decipherable parts of the Attlebridge papers, handed me by the captain of the Voorne.

I

I am to write roughly of the past – more carefully of the present. Of the past that our identity may be established by reference to certain events which many will remember, should we be lost. Of the present, for reasons that will be obvious as I proceed.

On the morning of the 16th of November, 1894, I awoke to find myself the occupant of a narrow iron bedstead, in a small, poorly furnished room. The wall paper was mildewed, and the ceiling discolored with smoke. I was unable to remember where I was, and called aloud:

"Torrence!"

A sleepy answer recalled the situation, and assured me that all was well. Torrence, who was my twin brother, occupied the mate to my bed, on the opposite side of the room. Not wishing to disturb him, I lay quietly watching the approach of dawn through a small window with Venetian blinds, crank-sided and broken. Later, I was myself aroused by a curse coming from the other bed. The curse was launched broadly against the town, and concentrated into a deeper venom as it reached its objective climax – the room. I smiled and turned over.

"Glad you're awake at last," I ventured, observing that he was looking around the place with a disgust equal to my own. It was our first experience of London. We were Americans, and had

just landed. Torrence yawned and declared that he had been awake all night, despite my assurance that he had been snoring shamefully.

"I wonder when the old lady will want her pay for all this finery," he said, feeling the quality of the sheets, and looking up at the ceiling dismally. Indeed we had a right to feel blue, having but little money, and no friends, in a strange land.

"She wants it as soon as she can get it," I replied, having consulted our landlady on the subject the previous evening. "In fact, she told me on our way up the stairs last night, that she generally required her lodgings to be paid for in advance; but that as we were Americans she would not insist, although she trusted that we would be able to settle in a day or two."

"She's too trustful by a jugful. We may not be able to pay her at all!" yawned Torrence.

"Don't talk that way; you scare me!" I exclaimed.

The truth is, I was never so daring as Torrence, who resembled me only in looks, and when he alluded to our impoverished condition, and its possible consequences, I shuddered. Instinctively I glanced at the two modest trunks against the wall, and reflected that they contained the bulk of our possessions. I knew there was not enough value in both to pay our passage back to New York, when the little money we had brought with us should be spent. Moreover we had burned the bridges, and must look ahead.

We had come to England for the same reason that Englishmen

sometimes go to America, to ply our crafts, and earn a living, and now that we were there, I heartily wished we were back. My eyes rested in a kind of reverie on the ends of the trunks where our names were painted in large, white letters – Torrence and Gurthrie Attlebridge, respectively. Then I began to wonder if the Attlebridges would ever distinguish themselves, and if either of us would ever carve a fortune out of the Babylon we had adopted as a home. Torrence was an inventor, while I was a writer; and strangely enough, with proclivities so widely divergent, we had managed with twin-like harmony to quarrel with our patrons, and our bread and butter simultaneously and irrevocably. Torrence decided at once to accept the rather dubious offer of an Englishman, with whom he had corresponded, to aid him in the development of his air ship, and I – well I decided to go with Torrence. Accordingly we scraped together what little cash we could, and bade farewell to Gotham. We took passage in a cattle boat, and were nearly three weeks upon the water, having reached London on the afternoon previous to the opening of this record. A search for cheap lodgings in a moderately respectable part of town, had landed us in the cheerless apartment described.

Torrence was again stretching himself, preparatory to rising; but this time his invectives were hurled against the ship that had brought us over, and the bellowing beasts that had loaded it. Not heeding my brother's unhappy reminiscences of the Galtic, and being anxious for the future, I inquired how much money he had left. His answer was not cheering.

"About twenty pounds in those white paper things; three of those little gold pieces, and a couple of dollars' worth of silver. That is from my recollection of last night; but I must get up and count it."

We jumped out of bed at the same instant, and began emptying our pockets. We were not expert in estimating English money, but concluded that we had a little over two hundred dollars between us, and that being in a strange land, with no positive assurance of work, it behooved us to be up and stirring. We determined to part with nothing we could help until one or the other of us had found employment. At Torry's suggestion I had requested our landlady to remit her usual rule of advance payment, but reflection now made us doubt the wisdom of such a course.

"She may think we have less than we really have," I remarked.

"How much time did you say she would give us?" asked Torrence in reply.

I saw that he was anxious, and when my brother was anxious, I was generally more so. In fact, although twins, I had always leaned upon him, due, I suppose, to a tacit acknowledgment of his superior powers, and the fellow had powers superior to most men. Answering his question, I said:

"She didn't mention any particular day, but only remarked that gentlemen usually paid in advance, but that as we were Americans – "

"I see, as we were not gentlemen, but Americans, she'd wait

till she got it. What do you think under the circumstances we'd better do? Remember that a couple of hundred dollars for two men to live upon until they find work in a city like this, isn't exactly wealth. Remember also the saying about a fool and his money. Now what shall we do about the landlady?"

"Pay her," I said without hesitation.

"But when?"

"Now! Give her a couple of weeks in advance, and then if we want a couple more on credit, it will be easier to get it."

We decided that Torrence should take what funds we had, and in his off-hand, plausible manner, make the payment agreed upon. He had a wonderful way of impressing people with the idea that money was of no importance to him. When the settlement was made, I was glad he had done it, it being evident that Mrs. Twiteham was impressed. I make a note of these trivial circumstances to show our actual condition, as well as for future reference should it ever be needed.

This little transaction disposed of, we sauntered out into the street to look after breakfast, which we found in a neighboring restaurant. The voyage had sharpened our appetites, and we ate a dollar's worth of food in an alarmingly short space of time, an extravagance we agreed should not be repeated. After breakfast, however, we felt that having started the day so liberally, it would hardly be fair to "clip off the corners of a square meal," as Torry declared, by slighting its proper ending, and so we bought a couple of large cigars, and then climbed on top of one of those

great omnibuses with three horses, to seek our fortunes.

It is singular how indifferent men will sometimes be to expenses with the narrowest margin separating them from starvation, and yet how parsimonious they often become with untold wealth at their disposal; and in each instance their better judgment will condemn the course pursued.

My brother's air ship had been for years upon the verge of success. A fortune had been already spent upon it, and his friends had grown distrustful. It was always a trifle that was needed to perfect the mechanism, which was doubtless a triumph of inventive genius. It is not my purpose to describe the machine, in fact it would be impossible for me to do so, being neither a mechanic nor a scientist, but I will simply say that it was built of aluminum; shaped like an exaggerated cartridge sharpened at both ends and supported in the air by the application of an extraordinary discovery which neutralized the attraction of gravitation, and propelled by a horizontal screw beneath, which could be made to revolve at such enormous speed that the effect of the most violent hurricane was practically inoperative. As yet, only models had been made of the machine, the design being too intricate and costly to admit of a full sized apparatus until every detail had been mastered; but his last model had flown, and come so near perfection, that an English gentleman had written to him about it, offering assistance under certain conditions. This offer might never have been considered, were it not for the disaffection of his patrons about that time, but as it was, we left America at

once.

The business firm that we were seeking was that of Wetherbee & Hart, No. 3 Kirby Street. As the omnibus carried us through the crowded thoroughfares, it was plain that Torrence was growing uneasy. Things had looked promising in the distance, but as the time approached for an interview, we began to realize the consequences of a failure to elicit Wetherbee's interest. Should he refuse to aid us we could see nothing but the poorhouse ahead.

On leaving the 'bus, we had a short distance to walk, and it is safe to say that we were lost in less than five minutes. The multiplicity of ways and their labyrinthic character, was confusing to our rectangular conception of a town, and after a number of fruitless efforts we found ourselves back at the corner from which we had started. But perseverance finally conquered, and we stood facing a doorplate which read: "Wetherbee & Hart, Inventors and Solicitors of Patents." At that moment I was so oppressed by the thought of the pending interview that I wished we were lost again.

Walking up a narrow flight of stairs, we stood before a glass door with a blue paper shade screening the interior. There was no mistake; we were there at last, for the firm's name was painted in sprawling letters over the panel. The outward appearance was not indicative of wealth, and our hearts sank. There was an old-fashioned bell pull, in the absence of electricity, and I rang. A boy came to the door with many brass buttons sewed on to a dirty

coat, and Torrence inquired if Mr. Wetherbee was in.

"No, sir, but Mr. Hart is here," answered the boy.

It was a disappointment, no letters having ever passed between my brother and the gentleman named. We decided to go in, however, and having given our cards to the boy, passed in to an ante-room.

The place was scant of furniture, and had a poverty-stricken look. Two large tables were covered with models, while the walls were whitewashed and hung with mechanical drawings. As there were no chairs, we stood, and as we had not finished our cigars, continued to smoke. The sound of a deep, pompous voice proceeded from an inner chamber, presumably the sanctum of the proprietors. Presently the owner of the voice entered. He was a man with bushy eyebrows and a square chin.

"Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" he asked magnificently.

We were so taken aback that neither of us knew exactly what he could do. I believe Torry thought of asking him if he could turn a handspring in a half-bushel measure, a feat he had once seen performed at a circus, but something in my manner must have stopped him. I waited for Torrence to answer respectfully, the man evidently being accustomed to inspire not only respect but awe. My brother, however, took his time, and after a couple of pulls on his cigar, he said, without moving from the place where he stood:

"Mr. Hart, I presume!"

"Yes, I am Mr. Hart. Do you wish to see me?"

"Well, rather!" answered Torrence. "I've come all the way from America to see you: or I should say your partner, Mr. Wetherbee."

Hart coughed, and waved his hand a couple of times at an imaginary cloud of smoke.

"I must ask you to stop smoking. It is contrary to our rules," he observed querulously.

"Certainly!" answered Torrence, throwing his cigar stump upon the tiled floor and stepping on it. There was no receptacle provided for such things, and the floor looking as dirty as the street, I followed his example.

Hart called for the buttons, and directed him to pick up the stumps and throw them in the grate in the next room. The boy did as he was bid, and passed back into the sanctum.

"It was a matter of business," I began, observing that things looked squally, and dreading the consequences of an unfavorable impression, at the very beginning of our interview. "It was in relation to my brother's air ship that we came, and –"

"And what, pray, do you mean by an air ship?" demanded Hart, with a look of supercilious superiority that was more exasperating than withering.

"I supposed you must have heard of it," I ventured to observe.

"Heard of an air ship! The idea is preposterous!" he exclaimed.

"And yet," said Torrence, "I have one, which your partner, Mr.

Wetherbee, is anxious to investigate, and perhaps to purchase, as I have been led to believe."

"That is impossible!" cried Hart, holding his chin higher, and adding to his general offensiveness. "Wetherbee is a man of sense – and – the thing is absurd!"

He turned half around on his heel as if about to leave us, but my brother's quiet, well-possessed manner deterred him.

"I beg your pardon. I have Mr. Wetherbee's letters, which are sufficient evidence. We need capital to put the scheme into practical shape, and give it commercial value, and I have come to London to seek it."

"The old story. The one desideratum with you fellows always. You have nothing to risk yourselves, and everything to gain. If you can delude some fool into pushing your crazy schemes you are satisfied. But this, of all the absurdities, is the most preposterous – the most utter –"

"And has Mr. Wetherbee never spoken to you of my invention?" demanded Torrence, growing pale.

"Never! nor is he likely to do so. Mr. Wetherbee is a sensible and practical man."

"Perhaps it may have been his good sense and practicability that led him to take so much interest in my patent, and I can only express surprise that he has never mentioned it to you. But I do not wish to intrude, Mr. Hart, and as you are doubtless a busy man, I am merely going to ask you to tell me where I can find your partner, my business being with him."

"Mr. Wetherbee has neither the time nor the inclination to talk about such balderdash as you propose, and as my time is valuable, I must bid you good-morning."

"Stop!" cried Torrence, as the man was about to go, "when I came here I expected to find a gentleman, but now acknowledge my mistake, and yet I am going to honor you with a bet, if you have the nerve to take it, which I doubt; but I now and here offer to wager you a thousand pounds against a hundred that I will carry you to Paris in my air ship within a month!"

It was an absurd boast considering we had not fifty pounds in the world, and that the ship was not built, and that we depended on Wetherbee & Hart for the money to build it. But the speech had its effect, for Hart relaxed a trifle from his haughty bearing, and said, with a manner approaching civility:

"No, gentlemen, you will never carry me in your air ship anywhere, nor will I bet with you; but if you are determined to find Mr. Wetherbee, his address is The Bungalow, Gravesend. He seldom comes to this office, and you can reach him by either boat or train."

Torrence took down the address and we bid Hart good-morning; thoroughly disappointed, but rather pleased that the interview had not terminated in a fight.

In the street I observed that my brother looked more anxious than I had yet seen him. What was to become of us if we failed to interest Wetherbee?

II

The Bungalow was a quaint, old-fashioned place in neither town nor country. The house stood in a garden, and beyond the garden were some fields belonging to the premises; and in the distance scattered groups of buildings like an abortive effort to start a village. There was a barn in one of the fields, and from the look of his surroundings, we should have said that Mr. Wetherbee had been a farmer whose domain had been encroached upon by the vanguard of suburban residences.

We went through an iron gate with the words "The Bungalow" blocked in brass letters between the bars, and walked down a cemented path bordered with boxwood, to a green door opening directly into the house. There was no porch, and the entrance was only a step above the path. We were shown into a musty parlor, which felt damp and cold, although a small fire was burning in the grate. The windows were low and opened upon the garden, but the trees were bare and the flowers dead. There were pictures on the walls, and jars upon the tables and mantel, where bunches of withered grasses were displayed as relics of the summer. The carpet and furniture were old and faded. It did not look like the abode of wealth, and we saw no ground for hope. Observing the dejected look on Torry's face, I tried to comfort him with the reflection that some of the wealthiest of the English live with the least ostentation.

"I know it," he answered looking up. "The man may be worth a million, but I doubt it."

There was a cough in the hall, and the sound of some one approaching with a walking stick. In a minute the door was opened, and an old man bent nearly double, and supporting himself with a cane, entered the room.

"Two of you! I didn't expect to see but one," he muttered, hobbling across the carpet without further salute, and then, as he hooked the handle of his stick into the leg of a chair, and pulled it up to the fire for himself, added:

"Have seats."

"My brother came with me, as we have always lived together," said Torrence, by way of explanation, "although I only sent my individual card, as it is you and I who have corresponded. I hope we find you well, Mr. Wetherbee, and that this damp weather doesn't disagree with you."

Wetherbee grunted, and poked the fire.

"Nothing disagrees with me," he said after a minute. "I've been hardened to this climate for eighty years. It has done its best to kill me, and failed." Then with a grim smile, he added:

"My figure isn't quite as good as it used to be; but I'm not vain, Mr. Attlebridge; I'm not vain."

"I suppose you've been a sufferer from rheumatism?" I suggested, by way of talk.

Evidently he did not hear me, as he was raking cinders from the bottom of the grate. When he had finished, he said:

"Did you come over from America in your air ship?"

Torrence laughed.

"Not this time, Mr. Wetherbee, but I expect to go back in it," he answered.

"Great confidence! Great confidence!" exclaimed Wetherbee, "Well, I'm glad of it; nothing is ever accomplished without it."

The old man leaned his head upon his hands, while his elbows rested on his knees. It was impossible for him to sit upright. His hair was white, and his face wrinkled; he looked his age. Certainly he was a different person from what Torrence had expected.

"I suppose you have brought a model with you," continued Wetherbee; "you Yankees are so handy with such things." This was evidently intended as a compliment.

"No," said Torrence, "I did not suppose it was necessary. The transportation would have been costly, and I knew that if you insisted, it could be shipped after me. My last effort was deficient in some minor details, which would have necessitated a thorough overhauling of the parts, with readjustment. My position now is that of absolute mastery of the subject, and I thought, with your assistance, that I might build a full-sized vessel at once. There is no longer any need to waste money on models, as the next machine will fly, full size."

Mr. Wetherbee lifted his head a little.

"How can you be sure of it?" he asked.

"Because my last model did," answered Torrence.

"And yet you admit there was an error."

"There was a slight error of calculation, which impaired the power I hoped to evolve; but I know where the mistake lay and can remedy it. All my plans and formulas are with me. There is no vital principle at stake. The thing is assured beyond a doubt."

"And what would be the size of the vessel you propose to build?" asked Wetherbee.

"My idea is to construct a ship for practical aerial navigation, capable of carrying half a dozen passengers, with their luggage. Such a vessel would be about sixty feet long, with ten feet beam; while her greatest depth would be about eleven feet."

"And how long a time would it take to construct such a craft?"

"With everything at our hand, and all necessary funds forthcoming, I should say it would require about six weeks."

The old man's figure was growing wonderfully erect. His eyes shone with vivid intensity. I could see that my brother was making an impression, and hoped for a successful turn in affairs.

"And what did you say would be the probable cost of such a machine?" inquired Wetherbee, his back still unrelaxed.

"I did not say," answered Torrence; "but from the best of my knowledge – provided labor and material are no dearer over here than at home – I should estimate that the thing could be turned out ready for service, at an expense of – say, twenty thousand dollars."

Wetherbee's eyes were fixed intently upon the fire. He looked even more interested than our most sanguine expectations could

have pictured.

"That is – let me see!" he muttered.

"About four thousand pounds," I answered.

"And you will guarantee the result?"

"Mr. Wetherbee," said Torrence, drawing his chair a little nearer the invalid's, "I have not the means to make a legal guaranty; but this much I will say – so absolutely certain am I of success, that I will expend the few pounds I have with me, in a working model, provided I have your promise, in the event of my demonstrating satisfactorily the principle, to place the necessary means at my disposal for building and equipping a ship of the dimensions named. But let me repeat my assurance that such a model would be a waste of time and money. I have a large batch of evidence to prove all that I say."

Here Wetherbee left his chair and hobbled about the room without his cane. He seemed to have forgotten it. Suddenly he stopped, and supporting himself by the table, while he trembled visibly, said:

"What if it should fail?"

"Why, in that event I should be the only loser!" answered Torrence. "But it cannot fail. I have not the slightest fear of it."

The old man's excitement was contagious. Here at last was an outcome for our difficulties; a balm for every disappointment. I pictured the airship soaring over land and sea, the wonder of the age, and my brother eulogized as the genius of the century. I could hear his name upon the lips of future generations, and

I imagined the skies already filled with glittering fleets from horizon to horizon. Beyond all this I saw untold wealth, and a new era of prosperity for all men. My flight of imagination was interrupted by a long drawn sigh from Wetherbee, as he murmured:

"Four thousand pounds! Ah! if I could only get it!"

The dream of bliss was cut short by a rude awakening. I was dismayed. What did the man mean?

"If I could only get it!" he repeated with a sigh which seemed to come from the bottom of his soul. Then he hobbled back to the fire and resumed his seat. I watched Torrence, from whose face all joy had fled. He was more solemn than ever before.

Again Wetherbee stared into the coals. He had forgotten his surroundings. Neither Torrence nor I spoke, in the hope that he was considering the best manner of raising the money. The silence was ominous. A clock in a corner was forever ticking out the words – "*Four – thous – and – pounds.*" I listened until it sounded as if gifted with human intelligence. Each minute was like an hour while waiting for our host to speak, feeling that our doom hung irrevocably upon his words. Suddenly we were startled by a sharp voice in the hall:

"*Mr. Wetherbee, your soup is ready!*"

The old man pulled himself together, as if aroused from a dream; picked up his cane and tottered toward the door. At its portal he stopped, and turning half around, said:

"Gentlemen, I will consider your proposition, and if I can

see my way to the investment – well, I have your address – and will communicate with you. Meanwhile there is a barn in one of my fields, which is sound and roomy. It is at your disposal, and I heartily hope you will be able to raise the money for your enterprise. The barn you shall have at a nominal rent, and you will find the swamps about here to be the best locality anywhere near London for your experiments. I wish you well. Should you conclude to use the barn, let me know, and I will turn the key over to you immediately. Meanwhile I wish you luck!"

He went out without another word, leaving us alone with the talkative clock, and the dead grasses of the previous summer. I glanced at Torrence, who was pale, but with an indomitable look of courage in his eyes. I had seen it before.

It was impossible to say from Wetherbee's manner of departure, whether he intended to return or not. We could scarcely consider the interview ended, when we had made no movement toward going ourselves, and while deliberating what was best to do, there was a light step in the hall, and the door again opened, admitting a middle aged woman who approached us with a frown. We bowed.

"May I inquire the nature of your errand?" she began, without addressing either one of us in particular; but Torrence, stepping forward, answered:

"Our visit is hardly in the way of an errand, madam. We are here upon an important business engagement with Mr. Wetherbee, who I trust will soon return to give us an opportunity

to continue our conversation."

"I was afraid so!" she replied with a look of regret. She sat down in the same chair that Wetherbee had occupied, and asked us to resume our seats. There was something odd in her manner, which betrayed deep concern in our visit. Putting her hand in her pocket she drew out a spectacle case, and placed the glasses upon her nose. Then she looked at us each in turn with growing interest.

"You need not conceal your business from me, gentlemen," she continued, "Mr. Wetherbee is my father. As you are aware, he is a very old man, and I am acting in the double capacity of nurse and guardian for him. He does nothing without my knowledge."

Her manner was thoroughly earnest, and the expression of her face that of deep concern. Torrence replied after a moment's hesitation as follows:

"While not for a moment doubting your statement, madam, would it not be a little more regular to ask Mr. Wetherbee's consent before speaking of a matter in which he is equally interested with ourselves? If he says so, I shall be more than willing to explain to you all that we have been talking about. Meanwhile I can only say that our business was upon a matter of great importance, which I should hardly feel at liberty to divulge without the agreement of all parties concerned."

She did not answer for several minutes, during which time the hard look in her eyes softened; I even thought they were dimmed

with tears. For a moment she averted her face and taking off her glasses polished them thoroughly, returning them to her pocket. Then she stared into the fire as if thinking how to proceed, and then without removing her eyes, said:

"I shall not ask your business, gentlemen, but I will tell you something of mine. Mr. Wetherbee, my father, is, I am pained to confess, a monomaniac on the subject of inventions. His fortune, which once was ample, has been squandered in all manner of mechanical foolery, for I can call it by no other name. An inventor who could once gain his eye through the medium of print, or his ear, through that of speech, could wring whatever money out of him he chose. Finding that our means were becoming scattered, and our credit going, and my good father unable to see that he was imposed upon, I applied to the courts for his guardianship, on the ground of mental disability. He has no money whatever that he can call his own; the little that is left between us being at my disposal. Should you have plans requiring pecuniary aid, I must tell you frankly now, that it will be impossible to obtain it here."

She stopped, and Torrence and I stared at each other aghast.

"But, madam!" I exclaimed, unable to contain myself, "We have come all the way from America, and at great personal inconvenience and expense, in response to your father's letters, and should he refuse to aid us now we are ruined."

"It is impossible – quite impossible, I assure you, my dear sirs, to keep track of my father's correspondence. He answers

everything he finds in the papers relating to patents. It is unfortunate, deeply unfortunate, but cannot be helped. The public has repeatedly been warned against him through the newspapers, and we can do no more."

"It is indeed most unfortunate," said Torrence; "but let me ask you, madam, if in the event of my being able to demonstrate, to your entire satisfaction, the inestimable value of my air ship, you could be induced to aid in its construction?"

"Alas, my dear sir, I have not the means!"

There was a painful silence, in which, to me, the end of all things was in sight. Mentally I ran over the account of our cash, and roughly estimated how long it would last. Much as we had abused Mrs. Twitcham's lodging, I foresaw that we should have to leave it for a worse one.

"Is there, then, nothing that could induce you to take an interest in our scheme? Remember it is the invention of the century. All the railways, all the telegraphs in existence will be counted trifling by comparison when it shall be built and given commercial value. Remember also, that the insignificant sum required, will be repaid ten times over within sixty days. Remember, my dear madam, that in refusing to aid us, you are throwing away the greatest material blessing that man can possibly acquire. It is the dream of the ages – the culmination of every hope. Think well before you refuse!"

I was so wrought up that I spoke more earnestly than ever before, realizing that if we failed with Wetherbee & Hart, we

were outcasts. But all my enthusiasm, and all my brother's eloquence were futile.

"It is not that I will not, it is that I cannot," repeated the lady, who really did not appear lacking in sympathy. or a due comprehension of the situation.

"Then have you no friends," I persisted, "who might be induced to take a share in the invention, I should say discovery, for it is indeed more of a discovery than otherwise?"

"Most of our friends have already lost money through my father's infatuation, or weakness, and I dare not mention the subject to any of them."

We got up to go, thanking the lady for her explanation, and the interest she had shown. At the door, Torrence stopped.

"I was about to forget," he said; "your father told us of a barn which he would place at our disposal, should we need it for a workshop. Is the offer still open?"

The lady smiled, and said she could not refuse so simple a thing, especially when we had come so far, and had a right to expect so much. We thanked her, bade her farewell and departed.

We passed again down the cemented path between the boxwood bushes, and through the iron gate. When out once more upon the open highway, Torrence turned toward me, and with an air of surprising indifference, said:

"It looks as though we were checkmated, old man, but we're not. These people have only stirred up the mettle in me, and I shall build the air ship despite all of them."

As I have said before, my brother was an extraordinary man; possessed of a fertile mind, an indomitable will, and withal a secretiveness which even showed itself occasionally to me. We walked on in silence; the future looked black and disheartening, I had not the courage to discuss it. It was dark when we reached the river, and the small Thames boat wended its way through innumerable lights, reflected across the water in long, trembling lines. The minutest object claimed my attention, and I fell to speculating on the mental condition of a fellow-passenger who was whistling a familiar tune at my elbow. I looked over the taffrail into the black water beneath, and wondered how it felt to drown, and how many people had tried it in these waters. I pictured their corpses still lying at the bottom, and made a rough calculation of how many years it would take to disintegrate a man's skeleton, after the fishes had eaten all the flesh off his bones. Then in the dim light I saw Torrence walking past the man who held the tiller. He did not speak, and I did not disturb him. Possibly he did not see me, at all events we walked on opposite sides of the deck, each absorbed in his own thoughts. At last we met, as if by accident, although I had purposely wandered over to his side.

"Well, old man! What's the matter?" he cried with a heartiness that startled me.

"Nothing," I answered; "I was only going to ask why you made that inquiry about the barn."

"Because I thought it might be useful," he answered.

"And for what, pray?"

"Why, to build the air ship in, to be sure. Did you think I wanted it for a billiard room?"

"And how can you build the air ship without Wetherbee & Hart?" I inquired.

"I am not quite prepared to answer your question. But I have overcome difficulties before, and I shall overcome this one. Don't fret, Gurt! the air ship will be built."

His manner was confident, and showed such indifference to the gravity of our situation, that I looked at him in amazement. There was nothing more to say, and we wandered apart again.

Once more I began an exhaustive study of my surroundings – the river – the lights – the boat itself, and finally of my fellow-passengers. Thus occupied I allowed several landings to pass unheeded, when suddenly I became interested in a low but animated conversation between two men who were opposite me, the one standing, the other sitting. It was nearly dark in that part of the deck where we were, but presently the man who was sitting, shifted his position slightly to make room for the other, when they both came in range of a dimly burning lantern, and I was surprised to see that one of the men was my brother. The stranger was a rough, dirty looking sailor, and the pair, as I say, were deeply absorbed in conversation, in which they had evidently been engaged for some time.

"Yes, stranger," said the sailor, "you may believe me or not as you please, but I have proof enough of what I tell you; and three

times I've been locked up with lunatics for stickin' to the truth, and not lyin'."

"And you say you can prove this?" inquired my brother in a low tone.

"Ay, and *will do it!*"

"It is too marvelous. You astound me! I cannot comprehend it!" said Torrence in a voice that was scarcely audible, and which I observed was purposely subdued.

"And indeed you may well be all o' that, an' more too. I was good crazy for a spell when I first found it out, leastways I was nigh it, but I don't talk about it no more since they locked me up, but when I heerd you fellers a gassin' about a air ship, I 'lowed you was the kind, if ever there was any, as it wouldn't hurt to tell. For my part, it don't matter – I can't live long no way – and I hate to have *that secret* die with me. I'm a stoppin' down the river on the Kangaroo, she's a boat as is fitted up as a 'orspital for crippled seamen and the like. I'm tullable comfortable thar, and doubt as I'll ever anchor to any other craft for a home this side o' Davy Jones'."

"But surely you'll let me see you again," said Torrence, as the man made a move to leave the boat at the landing we were approaching.

"Course'n I will. I won't forgit ye," tapping his breast as if referring to a memorandum which I supposed Torrence had given him. "And I'll keep my word, too, and prove every breath I've done breathed to you to-night. Ta-ta!"

The man left the boat hurriedly, and the next landing was our own.

III

It was snowing, and the ground was already white when we reached our humble lodgings. All the way from Gravesend I had been struck with my brother's capricious manner, at one moment buoyant, the next meditative and despondent. Upon my inquiring after the singular acquaintance he had made upon the boat, he simply laughed, and said, "crank," entirely ignoring the scraps of conversation I had overheard between them. This being his mood, I decided to let him alone, feeling sure that if there were anything worth hearing, I should hear it.

We made a hasty inspection of our property, to take care that nothing was disturbed in our absence, and then, with renewed confidence in the landlady, walked again into the storm in search of food. We had eaten nothing since early morning, and were nearly famished. Our restaurant was not hard to find, and the light and warmth within cheered even my dismal soul into hopefulness.

Seating ourselves in an alcove by an appetizing table, Torrence pushed the bill of fare toward me, but I begged him to choose the dinner himself, and to select the cheapest and bulkiest dishes.

"Rubbish!" he answered; "I'm hungry and am going to have another square feed. If we are to go to the devil, what difference can it possibly make whether we get there on Monday or Saturday?"

I could never argue with Torrence; he had his own way in everything, and yet we never quarreled.

An elaborate meal was placed before us, with a large jug of beer; the dinner costing more than the breakfast.

"I don't know how it is," said Torrence in the midst of a huge chop, "but something tells me that I was never born to be starved!"

After dinner we lighted cigars, and continued to sit smoking over our coffee, having drawn the curtains of our alcove. We had been puffing away for some minutes when Torrence, putting his hand in his pocket drew out the money I had given him in the morning, together with his own, and placing the pile upon the table, said:

"Now listen! We will divide this money into two equal parts, and each take our part. There is no telling what may become of us, and it is better to seek our fortunes separately than together. If we travel the same path, we will meet the some difficulties, but if we divide, there will be double the chance for luck, and whoever hits it first can help the other. It will cost no more than to live under the same roof, with the exception of having paid in advance for our beds, but other considerations will more than compensate for that loss, which may not be a loss after all. We may see a very tough time before we get through, but we will get through in the end, never fear. Now don't starve yourself, old man, and don't get down in the mouth, but dig – dig – dig. Push your manuscript – push a hand car – jump into anything you see,

but don't be discouraged, and above all things, write regularly and keep me posted."

My heart was in my mouth, for I could not bear the thought of leaving Torrence. He had been the leading spirit in everything, and from my early childhood I had always believed that what Torrence could not do, could not be done. I had brought some manuscripts with me for which I hoped to find a publisher, but now the thought of it was abhorrent. I could not answer, and so Torrence continued:

"To-morrow morning, after breakfast, I shall leave you. Don't ask what I am going to do, because I don't know; but I am off in search of luck, and shall rely largely on my Yankee brains to bring me out on top of the game. Don't expect me 'till you see me, but I shall either write or return when there is anything to tell."

"Are you going back to Gravesend?" I asked.

"Probably; but don't hamper me with questions. In the first place it won't help you to know what I am doing; and in the second place, it won't help me to have you know. You can picture me as building the air ship, or running a haberdashery, or anything you please; but remember that whenever I run my nose up against luck you'll be sure to know it; and I only ask that you will do the same by me."

I gave him my hand, and then we ordered two portions of brandy and a bottle of Apollinaris.

While we were disposing of this, and still smoking our cigars,

the *portières* of our alcove were pulled suddenly apart, and a rough, unshaved face thrust in at the aperture, and as quickly withdrawn. Although it was for only an instant, I recognized the face as that of the sailor I had seen on the Thames boat. Torrence frowned, but did not look surprised.

When we got up to go, Torrence insisted on paying the bill out of his portion, which he did; and then, just as we were about to pass out into the stormy street, the same rough, dirty looking sailor approached us from one of the alcoves.

"Another word with you, stranger," said the man, advancing and touching his hat to Torrence.

"Certainly," as if he had never seen the fellow before, and then turning to me, Torrence added:

"Would you mind waiting a minute, Gurt, while I speak to this man?" and without another word, the twain entered one of the alcoves. I amused myself looking at some fish in an aquarium that stood near the entrance, and in watching the great flakes of snow falling against the glass panel of the door. How long I remained thus occupied is difficult to guess, but it seemed interminable. The sailor had taken the precaution to draw the curtains after him, so it was impossible to hear anything they said, and even the sound of their voices was drowned by the clatter of dishes, the tramping of waiters, and the noise of arriving and departing guests. At last the interview was ended, and my brother came out with rather a singular expression, as I thought, and we started for home.

"And what does he want?" I asked as we trudged along the sidewalk.

Torrence laughed; and then, as if thinking of how to reply, said:

"Oh, he's a lunatic! Wants the loan of twenty pounds on a house and lot he says he owns down in Deptford. Sailors are generally cranky, you know, and I thought I would talk with him a little just to get his ideas, and see if it would be worth our while to risk the venture, with the possibility of becoming the owner of his property. But I'm convinced the fellow's a fraud."

"If he's a lunatic I think you must be a greater one!" I exclaimed, and then feeling sure that he was putting me off with nonsense to avoid questioning, I turned the subject, and commenced talking about the weather. We did not allude to the sailor again, and I concluded that Torrence had simply run across some poor fellow who he thought might be useful to him, although how, I could not imagine.

The next morning we separated, and I waved Torrence a farewell as he took his seat on an omnibus, with Gladstone bag and umbrella. I stood watching him until the 'bus had turned a corner, and then directed my steps toward Paternoster row, with a bundle of MSS. under my arm.

I do not propose to harrow myself with a recital of the bitter disappointments I underwent in that quarter of the city, nor is it important for the identification of the Attlebridges as the real participants in the marvels about to be recounted, that I should do

more than allude to the fact that the firm of Crumb & Crumpet, after much haggling as to terms, long and tedious discussion regarding merit and character, finally refused my book, as well as all shorter papers submitted to them; a fact which those gentlemen will doubtless remember, should their attention be called to it.

Our lodgings were dreary enough at best, but now that I was alone they seemed unbearable. Beyond my own gloomy feelings, I was made to participate in those of my landlady, who constantly annoyed me with accounts of her financial difficulties; her inability to pay her rent, and the dread that she would be evicted. Greatly against my better judgment, she succeeded in coaxing me into the loan of a pound, a thing I could not afford, but which I did, partly out of sympathy, and partly to get rid of her importunities.

I now occupied myself in preparing a paper on the psychological evolution of the ape, which I hoped to be able to place with another publisher, and which, had it ever been finished, I cannot doubt would have succeeded; but circumstances intervened before the completion of the last pages, which compelled me to relinquish my work, and so the world must suffer. I continued my labor steadily for more than a week, and then began looking anxiously for my brother's return, and took several long walks in the direction from which I believed he would be coming; but I did not meet him, and returned home, each time a little disheartened. During these evenings I

retired early, having no one for company, and not being able to afford outside amusement. At the end of ten days I had been so economical that I was quite satisfied with the standing of my finances, and felt lighter-hearted than at any time since arriving. Still I had found nothing to do but write, and the future was uncertain.

Sunday morning was dark and gloomy, and it having been nearly two weeks since Torrence had left, I began to wonder with increased anxiety what had become of him. I had a right to expect him by now, but had neither seen nor heard a word from him since his departure. Could anything have happened? I did not believe it, and knowing how averse he was to letter writing, set it down to the fact that he was busy; and I sincerely hoped profitably so. Still I passed the day in gloomy forebodings, and resolved to go to Gravesend the following morning. That night, however, as I was going to my room, the servant handed me a letter, and I did not realize until I had read it, how anxious I was becoming. The letter ran as follows:

"20 NARROW LANE, GRAVESEND.

Sunday Morning.

"DEAR GURT: Sorry, but can't get over to-day as I expected. Will try and come before next Lord's day. How's the book? Keep your mouth straight, and don't get discouraged,

Yours,

"TORRY."

It wasn't much of a letter, but it was better than nothing,

and I was thankful for it. I put it in my pocket, and gave up all thought of Gravesend for the present. Evidently Torrence had found something to occupy him, and I didn't believe he was a man to work long for nothing, but felt provoked that he had not told me what it was. True, I had never written to him, which he had told me to do in Wetherbee's care, should there be anything to write about; but as there wasn't I felt justified in my silence. However, I should now see him soon, and comforted myself with the thought that all was well.

During the ensuing week, I answered several advertisements, in the hope of finding employment, for despite the satisfaction felt in my ability to economize, there were moments when the reflection that I was making absolutely nothing would come upon me with such force, that I grew despondent, and would gladly have welcomed anything offering even the smallest return. But every effort to find work was unavailing; evidently London was overcrowded.

Another week passed without Torrence, and when the following Sunday came and went without bringing him, I became not only impatient but provoked. Why could he not run up to see me? It certainly seemed strange. Had he not been so emphatic in requesting me to let him alone, I should have gone to Gravesend long before. But here was I scarcely daring to leave the house, fearing that he would come and go in my absence.

A few days after this an incident occurred which placed me in a most unfortunate predicament. My landlady came to me with

tears in her eyes, saying she would be dispossessed immediately if unable to raise ten pounds. She assured me that if I would advance her a part of the money she would – but why go into details – I was swindled out of much more than I could afford to lose; I had lost a friend, and injured my chances of success, and not only was the landlady dispossessed, but all her lodgers as well. I was obliged at once to find new quarters, and with greatly reduced means. Things now looked very squally, and I firmly believed the poorhouse was in the next block, and that I might stumble upon it any day, without warning. I wrote at once to Torrence to tell him of the change in my situation and circumstances, and urging him to come immediately for a consultation. By return mail, I got the following answer:

"20 NARROW LANE, GRAVESEND.

"DEAR GURT: Sorry to hear of your bad luck, but don't fret about a trifle. A handful of gold more or less isn't worth a thought. A beggar can pick it up on London Bridge without being much the better for it, and as I told you before, a day or two sooner or later at his majesty's hothouse won't count much in eternity. I shall be with you in a day or two, and hunt you up in your new quarters. Now be thankful you got off so cheap, and don't worry. I have been awfully busy.

"Hastily Yours, T."

My brother always took things easily, but in this letter he had quite eclipsed himself. I could not doubt that he had found some employment.

Again I had been obliged to pay in advance for my new lodgings, and my stock of cash had dwindled alarmingly. If Torrence did not come soon, I should be arrested as a vagrant.

About three days after this, just as I was about to start for Gravesend, having seen nothing of my brother since his letter, a hansom was driven to the door and Torrence alighted.

"Well, old boy!" he said as cheery as possible; "glad to find you at last. But what made you move to such a place as this?"

He looked with disfavor upon the dirty, sad-visaged house I had chosen for a residence. I explained everything as we went up the steps, even telling him to a penny the amount of money I had left. Instead of being dismayed, he only laughed, and turning to the cabby, tossed him his fare, with a liberal surplus, and then we went on into the house. My brother's extravagance had always surprised me, but in our present circumstances, his indifference to money seemed unpardonable.

Torrence looked around my little room with disgust.

"I don't like this place," he said. "We must move out of it."

"When?" I asked in amazement.

"Now!" he answered.

"It's the cheapest I could find."

"I should think so!" he replied.

"But even if you are making a little money, wouldn't it be unwise to spend it? Remember I am doing nothing."

Torrence smiled and said:

"Now, Gurt, don't undertake to lecture me, but order a four

wheeler instead – perhaps we had better say a couple – for I want to carry all our traps at once, before they become too strongly impregnated with these quarters, and – Do you owe anything?"

I explained that I had already paid in advance, that we had lost money once in that way, and that I hoped he would not consent to a further frittering of our funds; but Torrence was determined; and in less than an hour we found ourselves seated in a comfortable cab, with our luggage on top. As the driver was about to close the door, he stood for a moment to receive the order, I heard my brother say, quite distinctly;

"Hotel Mustapha!"

IV

Now, the Mustapha is among the very swellest hotels of London; indeed I doubt if there is any place of public entertainment in the whole of Europe, which is more magnificent, or whose rates are more exorbitant; and when I found myself standing in one of its superb corridors, I naturally wondered why we had come.

In a few moments we were shown an apartment consisting of three large communicating rooms; two bed-chambers with a *salon* between and all furnished palatially.

"Do you think it will do?" inquired Torrence, looking around with a critical air of indifference.

"For what?" I inquired.

"For us."

"The devil!" I exclaimed.

"No, not for the devil but for you and me."

I looked at him in dumb amazement, and then without another word, my brother dismissed the attendant, saying that he thought the rooms would answer the purpose, and ordered our luggage sent up immediately. Was the fellow losing his head? I feared he had already lost it.

When left alone, we stood for a moment taking in the grandeur that surrounded us, from the gorgeous frescoes on the ceiling, to the sumptuous carpets beneath our feet; and then unable to

contain myself, I asked Torrence if he were really going mad. The earnestness of my manner, and the dead serious look upon my face, made him laugh until he rolled over upon one of the Turkish divans.

"Yes! can't you see it?" he cried, "why don't you send for a doctor? But no, you couldn't afford the expense, find this is better than any asylum I'm sure. Don't fret, old boy; if I am mad there's a method in it, and a devilish good one too. Now you make yourself at ease, for your brother's madness will never hurt you. But it is rather neat, isn't it?" he added, getting up and looking around the room. "You know I searched all over London before I could find apartments to suit me exactly; and I'm glad you admire my taste!"

"Well!" I answered, drawing a long breath, "you certainly must be making a fortune, and rapidly, too; but all the same I don't approve of your extravagance. But tell me, have you paid for all this? and how much is it to cost us?"

"*Us!* I admire *that*, when you are my guest. Why it is to cost you nothing, of course! But wait here a few minutes, as it seems to worry you, I will satisfy your mind on the money question. I am going to the office, and will be back immediately."

While he was gone I interested myself in a further inspection of the rooms. The more thoroughly I went into their equipment, the more amazed I became at the lavish disregard for money displayed upon every hand. The beds were regal; the chairs and other furniture of the most costly type imaginable, and even the walls were adorned with paintings, which I saw at once were of

a very high order of merit. The bathrooms, of which there were two, were on a scale of princely magnificence, and everywhere were mirrors, bronzes, and decorations which appeared to me quite too costly for a public house; indeed there could be few palaces more splendid.

Presently I heard Torrence returning, and as he entered the room he held a paper toward me.

"There now read this, and make yourself easy!" he cried.

It was a receipt in full for the rent of the rooms for two entire months in advance, three hundred pounds.

"Well!" I exclaimed, looking first at the paper, then at my brother, "wherever you got this money, I can't guess, but I will say, that although my fears for the immediate future are relieved, I consider it a wicked waste for people in our circumstances to throw away their means as you have done."

I was provoked and showed it.

"Wait, old man, until you know what you're talking about," was his only rejoinder.

"I suppose you've sold some interest in your air ship," I suggested doggedly.

"How absurd! I haven't even thought of such a thing."

He seemed to enjoy my perplexity, and walked about the room whistling.

"You have sold the invention out and out, then?" I persisted.

"Guess again, dear boy, for I shall never part with the air ship to any human being!"

"And will it ever be built?"

"Rather! I am working on it now. What did you suppose I'd been doing at Gravesend all this time? Courting old man Wetherbee's daughter, eh? Well, you're mistaken, for I've been doing nothing of the kind; but the air ship is begun."

I might as well have pumped the clerk in the office for information, and so decided to ask no more questions. But my resolution was short-lived, for in the next breath I inquired how long it would probably take to complete it; to which Torrence answered that he thought six weeks would probably suffice, and had therefore only taken our rooms for two months, but that the time required for such delicate workmanship as would be necessary on the air ship, was difficult to estimate, and he had therefore stipulated for the refusal of our apartments, should we need them longer, at the expiration of the term, as he did not wish to go in search of lodgings again. He rattled on about contracts he had signed for work upon the air ship, involving such large sums of money that I could only stand with my mouth open and gasp.

At 8 o'clock we sat down in our *salon* to such a dinner as could hardly be surpassed by the royal board itself. The table was loaded with flowers and silver, and lighted with candles. Two men were in attendance; one behind each of us. The wines were of the choicest; each course being accompanied by its appropriate beverage. Such Burgundies and Tokays, such champagnes and liquers, and all dispensed with the utmost prodigality, bottles being opened, merely tasted and set aside for

a better vintage. I sat and ate and drank like one in a dream, and earnestly prayed that the money would not give out before we had settled this bill. For our credit, I will say that neither of us drank too much. Indeed the glory undermined my appetite, and I perceived that although there was quite an array of bottles and decanters, mere wasted material, Torrence was also extremely moderate.

After dinner the attendants were dismissed, while we continued to sit around the table, smoking and talking. Our cigars were of the finest, and our conversation consisted mainly of questions upon my part; some answers, and many evasions on Torrence's.

"And where have you located your workshop?" I inquired.

"The air ship is building in Wetherbee's barn; at least the parts, when completed, will be put together there under my supervision," answered Torrence.

"Do you expect to go to Gravesend every day to superintend the work? It strikes me as rather a long journey. Won't it take up a lot of your time?"

"It would under ordinary circumstances," he answered; "but you see I shall travel by private conveyance. In fact I have purchased a steam launch; she is very fast, so that I can run up and down without trouble."

"Oh!" I ejaculated, unable entirely to conceal my surprise even at this minor, and perhaps more reasonable extravagance.

"I suppose you will keep a crew on board then?"

"Oh, yes."

"And the thing will always be waiting for you?"

"Exactly!"

"Couldn't we have saved a lot of money by sleeping on her?"

I asked.

"Probably; but I don't think it would have been so comfortable. Surely, Gurt, you're not dissatisfied with our quarters already?"

"Dissatisfied! Heaven forbid! I was only thinking of your purse."

"That, my dear boy, can take care of itself. By the by, do you know we ought to have more clothes, and a couple of men—*valets*, I mean; for whoever heard of people in our position, dressing themselves? I think I shall put an 'ad' in the *Times* to-morrow."

"I hope not," I answered; "for my part I should feel like a fool to have a fellow tinkering about me, holding my trousers while I stepped into them, and washing my face – why I understand that even the Prince of Wales puts on his own clothes!"

"That ought to settle it then," said Torrence; "but a greater variety of wearing apparel is necessary; for the servants that wait on us are better clad than we are."

I didn't offer any objection to the clothes, feeling that they were a tangible asset, which in the event of failure might be turned to some account. But the *valets* were quite superfluous, a money sink, as well as an affectation which I swore to eschew.

The transition from poverty to opulence had been so

sudden, that it might have been unnerving were it not for my brother's extraordinary influence. I had always regarded him with unswerving confidence, and even now the relief from monetary anxiety quite outweighed any misgiving I might have felt concerning the manner of this suddenly acquired wealth. As it was, while my wonder was stimulated, my curiosity partook more of the nature of a child's toward a parent's resources, and my efforts to unravel the mystery being so successfully thwarted, I soon became, in a measure, satisfied to receive and ask no questions. I say, in a measure, for of course it was impossible at times to help thinking how this sudden change in our circumstances had been achieved.

After dinner I went down into the lower corridor of the hotel, and admired its superb finish, and elegant appointments, as well as the gay throng that constantly gathered there. Thence wandering into the reading room, I indited a number of letters to friends at home, feeling a peculiar satisfaction in using the gorgeous note paper with the words, Hotel Mustapha, engraved upon the top of each sheet. While I was writing Torrence amused himself in the billiard room, where he had already made acquaintances. When through with my letters, I joined the party, a bevy of fashionable men, who evidently looked up to Torrence as their leader. They were playing pool for stakes, and when the game was over, my brother, putting his hand in his pocket, pulled out a huge bundle of bank bills, and settled the score. The amount lost could not have been large, as he received several gold pieces

and some silver back in change, out of a single bill. I marked this fact with interest, as it tended to show that Torrence was not gambling to any excess. He introduced me to the men as his twin brother; and then we went into the smoking room and drank some hot Scotches, and smoked very expensive cigars, my brother again paying the bill.

We soon became looked upon as the Yankee millionaires, no distinction being made between us, and being well supplied with funds myself, I was always able to appear as a gentleman.

A few days after our arrival, I was informed that one of the best boxes at a neighboring theater was reserved for us. Torrence had taken it for the season. "Not that I expect to go there every night," he said, "but it is pleasant to have one's own corner to drop in upon, when one happens in the mood. To-night, for instance, I think it would be nice to take a peep at the ballet; don't you?"

I agreed that it would, and after our usual sumptuous dinner, we entered a very handsome closed carriage, and were driven away. There were two men upon the box in livery, and as we rolled noiselessly on upon rubber tires, I remarked that it was quite the swellest public rig I had ever seen. My observation was received with scorn.

"Public rig be blowed!" said Torrence; "surely you know better than to take this for a hackney coach!"

"What then?" I inquired.

"Private, of course. I bought the entire outfit, horses and all this morning. This is my maiden trip with them; and they – I

mean the animals – are a pair of spankers, I can tell you!"

"And how much did the whole outfit cost?" I inquired, unable to restrain my curiosity on the money question.

"Eight fifty!" said Torrence, in an easy off-hand way, as if four thousand two hundred and fifty dollars were the merest bagatelle. I would have been stunned had I not been growing gradually accustomed to that sort of thing. As it was, I simply remarked that I couldn't see how he was going to find time to exercise his purchase.

"Oh, I'll leave that to you," he answered, "I don't want you to go about town in a manner unbecoming the role; savey?"

We were ushered into the theater with all the deference that could have been heaped upon her majesty, so I thought; and I half expected the audience to rise as we entered our box.

The play was one of those dazzling effects of lights and legs, as Torrence expressed it, with little or nothing beside, and I soon observed that a pretty little soubrette was the principal attraction. Before the second act was over, an attendant was summoned and despatched with a five pound bill, and an order for the prettiest basket of flowers to be bought, which at the first opportunity found its way upon the stage. At times it made me sick to see the money my brother wasted, but I was a more puppet in his keeping, and could do nothing to deter him. I fully expected he would be going to the green room after the performance for an introduction, but to my amazement he did nothing of the kind, and instead we got into our carriage, and driving to a fashionable

restaurant, had supper.

"And why did you throw away your money on those flowers?" I asked him, lingering over a bottle of Pomard.

"Do you call that throwing money away? Why the poor little thing looked as if she needed all the encouragement she could get. I think of leaving an order with the florist to-morrow to send her half a dozen every night. Take them in from different parts of the auditorium, you know, so that she will never suspect they came from the same person."

"And you won't send your card?"

"Decidedly not!"

"And you don't want her to know it is you?"

"Decidedly not!"

"Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Decidedly not! Why, Gurt, don't you know it would give her a lot more pleasure to think she was a general favorite than a special one?"

"Decidedly not!" I answered, taking up his cue, "any girl would rather – but no, on further consideration, I believe you're right." And it seemed to me that Torrence was always right.

Later we got into our carriage and were driven to the hotel. The night was wet and cold, and I was glad to find myself once more in the cheerful Mustapha. We had a game of billiards, followed by some hot Scotch and a cigar, and then went to our rooms, and to bed.

Once in the dark and alone I kept revolving in my mind the

events of the day, and of the time since our change of fortune; and naturally fell to speculating as to the most probable manner in which all this wealth had been acquired. Nothing I could think of was satisfactory, and one idea after another was set aside as equally improbable. I suppose I must have fallen asleep when I began to wonder if the receipt he had shown me were genuine. It was an unreasonable doubt, and at variance with my faith in Torrence, and yet it took hold of me as sleeping thoughts some times will. Had I not seen his money? Why should he not have used it for hotels as well as anything else? And yet the thought annoyed me, so that I could not dismiss it; and finally I found myself sitting up in bed, brooding over it. Lighting my candle I walked quietly across the room and entered the *salon*. Listening at my brother's door for a moment, and making sure that he was asleep, I returned to my own room and dressed. The lights were still burning brightly all over the house, and looking at my watch, I saw that it was only a little past midnight. There could be nothing extraordinary in going to the hotel office and inquiring in a casual way if the rooms had been paid for. It would set my mind at rest to have the verbal assurance of the proprietor that they were. I could not help feeling that it was an underhanded advantage to take of my sleeping relative; but I was driven by a great fear, and after a moment's hesitation, I sped down the stairway into the lobby below. I sauntered into the billiard room, not so much to see if there were any players left, as to assume an appearance of merely lounging about the premises without

definite purpose. Half a dozen men were still plying their cues, and I recognized the one to whom Torrence had introduced me. I was invited to join the game, but dread of being led into a carouse deterred me, and after looking on for a few minutes, I said good-night and wandered back toward the office. I walked up and down a couple of times with an unlighted cigarette between my teeth, as if merely seeking diversion, and then going up to the desk, asked some irrelevant questions about the arrivals during the day. My question answered, I turned carelessly as if about to depart, and then as though the thought had suddenly presented itself, looked back, and said:

"Oh! by the by; did I understand correctly that my brother, Mr. Torrence Attlebridge, had settled for our apartments?"

The clerk did not have to refer to his books, but answered promptly with a pleased smile:

"Oh, yes, sir. Everything is settled for in full. Your brother has paid in advance for two months. He has our receipt for the amount – three hundred pounds. They are our very best apartments, sir; decorated by LeBrune, and furnished by Haltzeimer entirely regardless – I hope Mr. Attlebridge finds everything satisfactory!"

I assured him that everything was just as we desired and went away comforted, with the exception of wishing that I had the money instead of the rooms. But such thoughts were idle; I was in Torrence's hands.

After loitering about the smoking room for a few minutes, I

returned to my room, and to bed.

V

When I got up in the morning Torrence had gone. He had left without disturbing me, as he said he should, the journey to Gravesend requiring an early start.

I determined to put in the day writing, having evolved some ideas which I thought might suit a certain American journal; but it is astonishing when the necessity for work has been removed, how indifferent we become to it. Every effort seemed absolutely futile, and after an hour, I put away my writing materials and went out for a drive in the park. I could see that my brother's new outfit was greatly admired, and I leaned back upon the satin cushions, conscious that I was looked upon as an important person – possibly a duke. I lunched at a fashionable restaurant near the marble arch, and then, after a drive along Edgeware road, returned to the hotel.

The mail was just in, and there was a large batch of letters and papers for Torrence. Some of these were unsealed; presumably advertisements, and as such I examined them. But the examination was disappointing, only serving to whet my interest, and enhance my wonder. For what was here? Unaccountable scribbling – such extraordinary charts and figures – such attempts at drawing of birds and unknown animals – such efforts at natural scenery – and withal such crude and childish explanations, in such outlandish chirography, that it was quite

impossible to say whether the work was that of a madman or not. Indeed I was by no means sure what any one of the designs was really intended to mean. I pored over these papers for more than an hour, in the very ecstasy of wonder, and then without having reached a single conclusion, put them back in the envelopes to await the owner's arrival.

I tried to believe that the drawings referred to some of the more intricate parts of the air ship; although it was impossible to help feeling that this was absurd.

About an hour before dinner Torrence arrived, cheery as ever. I gave him his mail, and then seating myself near the window, watched him open it. It is not always easy to interpret the emotions by the expression of the face, but on my brother's countenance I was sure that a comprehensive wonder, a wonder that grasped the meaning of what he saw, was clearly depicted. At one moment he would smile with infatuation; a paroxysm of delight; at the next he would frown, and look frightened at the paper before him, and once he passed his arm roughly across his eyes, as if wiping away a tear. If the papers themselves were mysterious, Torrence's behavior was even more so. When through, he put them carefully together and carried them into his own room.

"Anything important?" I inquired, with an assumed indifference, when he returned to the *salon*.

"Nothing," he answered, glancing at me, as I thought, with a slight look of suspicion, "nothing only a lot of detailed drawings

about the work going on at Gravesend."

I did not answer, but felt sure that he had not told me the truth. Then he went on to speak of various contracts, which he hoped would soon be under way, and which were to be delivered at Gravesend within a month, and of others that would take longer to complete, and all of which were to be put together at Wetherbee's barn as soon as possible. He was afraid the vessel would be longer building than he had at first been led to believe, but concluded that it would not matter very much after all, as the season was not propitious for a trial.

"No," I answered, "I should imagine that warm weather would be better, but then your expenses here would be running on fearfully!"

Torrence sneered at the suggestion. Expense was always the thing he seemed to think of last.

We dined sumptuously again, and after dinner drove to a music hall. Here the usual extravagance was repeated, indeed it exceeded all bounds. Not only did he buy flowers in vast heaps, which he distributed upon the stage; but later went into the green room, and disbursed considerable money among the actresses. His prodigality was so absurd and unmeaning that I finally left him in disgust, returning to the hotel alone. It was quite late when he came in, and I met him in rather angry mood:

"Well, you have made a fool of yourself!" I exclaimed, as he threw himself upon a large Persian *musnud* to finish his cigar before retiring.

"How?" he asked, quite innocently.

"By throwing away your money among a lot of sharpies, who wouldn't lend you a copper to save your soul!"

Torrence roared, as if he thought it the best joke imaginable.

"Now, look here, old boy," he said in another minute, "don't lose your temper, because it doesn't pay. What's the use of money if not to give pleasure? That's my way of enjoying myself, and I don't either ask or expect any favors in return. As you see, it takes a lot of money to buy my pleasure, but I can afford it!"

"If you have such an income that you can't spend it," I replied, "suppose you give a little of it to me. You might be glad some day if you found that I had saved a few pounds for you!"

The speech would have been contemptible, considering the amount of money Torrence had already given me, were it not for the fact that I intended it for his good as well as my own, hoping to save at least a part of a fortune, which was being squandered so shamefully under my eyes.

"Why, certainly," he answered good naturedly, and half-rising from the lounge, "how much do you want?"

"Anything you have to spare!"

Without another word he got up, and going to the writing table, signed a blank check and handed it to me.

"There! fill it out for yourself!" he exclaimed.

"For how much?"

"Anything you please," he replied, with a look of utter indifference.

"But you must say," I persisted.

"Really, I don't care, Gurt," he answered, striking a match to relight his cigar. "My bankers will pay anything you put on it, I fancy."

"Have you as much as a thousand pounds with these people?"

He laughed outright.

"I should hope so!" he shouted; "but if that is all you want, I have probably as much about me, for you must remember that I am a business man now, and am conducting costly experiments in connection with the air ship, which I intend shall be the most perfect thing on earth!"

"I suppose then it will cost you more than the twenty thousand dollars you thought?"

"Well, rather! If I get off with as many pounds I shall be lucky!"

I gasped but said nothing.

"Why don't you fill out your check?" he continued, observing that I was standing idly by the table, my mouth open in astonishment.

"Shall I put down a thousand?" I asked, not knowing what to say.

"Yes, and two of them, if you wish. I really don't care."

I filled out the check for an even thousand, not being able to overcome my horror at the thought of a larger figure, for notwithstanding all the evidence to the contrary, I was unable to overcome a certain fear that the check might be refused. I

showed it to Torrence, whose only remark was that he couldn't see why I had not doubled it. I was determined to save this much for a rainy day, and resolved to go at once to the banker's when my brother had gone back to Gravesend and cash it. I also determined to find out, if possible something about his affairs, as the mystery of all this sudden wealth was preying on my mind. I had quite relinquished the hope of learning anything from Torrence himself, and should now apply to other sources.

That night we retired early, as my brother said he was fatigued with the work of the day, and not knowing what else to do, I followed his example, fully resolved to cash my check and investigate matters on the morrow.

After a couple of hours of restlessness, and finding it impossible to sleep, I got up to go into the adjoining room for a glass of water. I did not take a light, knowing exactly where to find it, but imagine my surprise, when half-way across the floor of our *salon*, at seeing that the light in my brother's room was still burning brightly and shining through the keyhole and under the bottom of the door. Scarcely had I observed this, when I caught the sound of low voices issuing from the room, as of two people talking in an undertone. I stepped noiselessly up to the door and listened.

"There is no danger; he is asleep!" said one of the voices, which I thought was Torry's; and then some whispering followed, impossible to understand. At this moment a horrid thought flashed upon me. Had Torrence embarked in any crime, which he

was trying to conceal? The mere suspicion sickened me. I could not believe it.

"It's for you to say," remarked the other; "for my part, I don't care a damn who knows it, provided the news don't come from me. Now look at this."

I could hear the rustling of papers.

"And this; and this. The society shan't never see one of 'em again – I'll let 'em rot first."

Then came Torry's voice.

"Of course if it's so, my brother Gurthrie will know all about it before long. Only I don't want to tell him yet. It isn't that I distrust you, Merrick, but naturally you can see for yourself what a laughing stock I should become if there should prove to be any mistake."

"Don't I know it? and without there bein' any mistake," answered the other.

"Precisely; and that being the case, I prefer to wait until the thing is proved to my own senses before announcing this most stupendous fact of history to anyone."

I was relieved. There was something in both the tone and words that convinced me there could be nothing criminal under consideration. And yet the mystery was deeper than ever. Here was no explanation of how the money had come; which was an assured fact, but dark innuendoes of problems yet unsolved. I continued to listen, absorbed with interest.

"Now, as to the matter o' beasts and birds, bein' no scholar,

I can't prove nothin'. Thim you'll hev to study for your own self, and make your own deductions regardin' em. Nayther can I explain the how and wherefore of the light – but it's thar all the same, and you'll see it. I could a' give my notions to the society, but the cussed fools wouldn't listen to nothin', and they can go see for theirselves if they wants to, afore I'll tell 'em another word. Now, don't let that slip your mind, 'cause you're the only man, 'fore God a' mighty!"

"Now, about this belt," said Torrence, "how wide did you say it was?"

By the sound I imagined him to be tapping on the table with a pencil; but the words that followed were impossible to hear; and then the men had evidently got their heads together in poring over some document or paper which I could not see. Suddenly it occurred to me to stoop down and peep through the keyhole. Undoubtedly it was contemptible, but was it any more so than listening? "An eavesdropper is bad enough, but a peeper is worse," I thought, and yet my curiosity was so aroused it was impossible to help it, and I excused myself partly on the ground that it was right to be forearmed if I was not to be led blindly as an accomplice into a possible crime. And so I succumbed, and placing my eye against the opening, obtained a circumscribed view of my brother's apartment. To my amazement I immediately recognized the stranger as the man we had met upon the Thames boat, and afterward in the restaurant. He was the same dirty, unshaved sailor; at least his appearance

indicated that he had followed the sea for a living, and I could not doubt that he had. The men were sitting on opposite sides of a table, upon which a pile of papers was heaped in confusion; and so far as I could judge some of these were the same that had come in the afternoon's mail.

"Give him as much time as he wants!" said the sailor, speaking again. "He won't believe it at first, and it ain't reasonable as how he should; but it 'ill come over him by degrees like. He's bound to believe it ef he studies on it – there ain't no other chance."

"No, not if it's so," answered Torrence, "and he won't be as hard to convince as you might suppose; perhaps no harder than I was, for I've half believed it myself, and talked about it before. You found me an apt scholar, didn't you?"

"The only one with any sense I ever had," snarled the man. "But I don't care now," he continued, "I haven't long to live nohow; but I did hate to die with that secret, 'case another million years might pass afore it was found out. I'm satisfied so long as you 'uns knows it, 'case the world's bound to get it. But as for them cussed fools – !"

The man rapped on the table with his clinched fist.

"Hush!" said Torrence, "you might wake him up!"

The sailor grinned and scratched his head.

"No harm done, I reckon ef I did," he replied.

"No, but I told you my reasons for keeping mum!"

"Precisely; I mind your word. And the proofs, you found them all correct?"

"Quite so; but tell me don't you want any yourself?"

"Hell, no. I'll send you up a trunk full to-morrow. I've got all the swag I want – a good bed, plenty o' company, and a place to die in; for I tell you I can't last long. It's taken the stuffin' out o' me – but the secret – the secret – Well, thank God, I shan't die with it, and that's all I wanted."

Of course, this talk might almost as well have been in Hindoostanee, for aught I could make out of it. At one moment my fear of evil was aroused to a terrible pitch, at the next, I felt nothing but idle curiosity. I was, however, surprised to find so little that was intelligible in what I heard. Presently the men began turning over bundles of papers, and Torry having moved his chair, it was impossible to see what these were, and this fact may have helped arouse the awful suspicion that suddenly seized me; a thought which I am sure would never have presented itself under any but the bewildering circumstances in which I had been so blindly plunged. Could it be possible that the money which my brother had thrown about so freely, was counterfeit? A moment's reflection convinced me that it was not possible, and yet a terrible distrust had taken hold of me. For a moment I hesitated. My first impulse was to call out and ask what was the matter. It would have been the frank and natural thing to do, had my suspicions not been aroused, but as they were, I felt that such a procedure would be silly and fruitless. A burning desire to know consumed me, and I walked about the room in an agony of unrest. Again I looked through the keyhole, and was relieved to see no plates,

stamps, dies or machinery of any kind. I drew a long breath. Then I recalled that there had been nothing in the conversation to indicate any such business; and I drew another breath. Finally, unable to gain the slightest clew to the mystery, I returned to my room, and went to bed in a very uncomfortable frame of mind.

VI

The next morning I awoke early, and resolved to go at once to Torrence's room and ask him to lend me a five pound note. It was my intention to have it examined by a banker in the city for its genuineness, hoping to relieve the anxiety which had so tortured me during the night. While my judgment was opposed to the counterfeiting theory as improbable, yet it was difficult to overcome the thought that it might be the correct one. The truth is, I was impelled to discover some plausible explanation of the mystery. I could not rest as the recipient of means which had no visible source, and especially when there appeared to be so much ground for doubting their legitimacy.

Torrence was already up, preparing for an early start, as I sauntered into his room.

"By the by, old fellow," I said, "have you a fiver about you? I think I might use one to advantage until I can get down to the bank with your check."

He took a roll of bills out of his pocket, and instead of one five, tossed me a couple of tens.

"Let it go for luck!" he called, as he hurriedly left the room on the way to his business.

We rarely breakfasted together, Torry being so full of enthusiasm about his work, that he would brook no chance of delay, and so it was understood that we should not meet until

after his return from Gravesend. On this occasion, when he had left me, and after breakfasting alone, I ordered the carriage, and drove into the city. Taking my check at once to the banker upon whom it was drawn, I inquired if it were all right. The cashier smiled, and simply asked how I would have it. I told him I did not want it at all, but wished to place it to my credit.

"Oh!" said the man looking up, "I thought you were Mr. Attlebridge."

"So I am," I answered, "but not Torrence. I am his twin brother. We look very much alike."

"I see!" he exclaimed, somewhat surprised. He then proceeded to take my signature, and give me a book with credit on it for a thousand pounds. There was no mistake about this. Here was an actual transfer of credit from Torrence to myself. I wanted to ask the man some questions about the amount Torrence held in the bank, but hesitated, fearing it might create a suspicion that I doubted his methods. Presently, while still chatting in a careless way, I took out one of the tens my brother had given me, and asked if it were all right, pretending to have received it at a place I was not quite sure of. The man looked at it carefully, and pronounced it perfectly good, and my doubts were relieved. I was about to say "good-morning," when the teller observed:

"We should be greatly pleased, Mr. Attlebridge, if you and your brother would keep your principal account with us, believing that we can offer special facilities, and – "

It was what I wanted. He had opened the subject.

"Oh!" I interrupted, "can you tell me which is my brother's principal banking house at present?"

"Unfortunately," answered the man, "he has not favored us with the name; although I believe it is one of the larger houses in the city. Mr. Attlebridge's deposits with us are all made through an American firm."

I was about to express surprise, but remembered myself in time, so merely smiled and tried to look as if I had known as much before.

"And why do you suppose that my brother keeps another account in London?" I asked.

"Oh!" said the man, shrugging his shoulders, "merely because I once heard him mentioned as the purchaser of a very large foreign draft from one of our city houses. Nothing else, I assure you."

"And you do not remember the name of the concern?" I asked, growing interested.

"No," answered the teller, "I do not. It is even quite possible that I never heard it. The remark was only one of those incidental scraps of conversation that referred more particularly to business in general, than to that of any special banker."

I had heard enough to give me a clew, although I confess, a slight one. Torrence evidently had business with another bank, and also had funds in America of which I had never heard, and could not understand. A thought had flashed upon me. I would

go into the different banking streets and find out where this other account was kept, if possible, by passing myself off for my brother. Doubtless I should be taken for him as soon as I entered the right establishment, as I had been here. Bidding the teller "good-day," I passed out, fully bent upon my new enterprise. It was a bold scheme, but I was growing desperate to know something about Torrey's affairs; moreover, I was conscious of greater independence with a credit of a thousand pounds in my pocket and a bank book, which I pressed against my finger from time to time when needing encouragement.

As luck would have it, the first place I entered was the right one, and as I had surmised, the clerks recognized me at once as Torrence. I had made up my mind how to act, and what to say while walking along the street, having dismissed the carriage as unnecessary, and was fully prepared on finding myself addressed as Mr. Attlebridge.

"By the by," I began quite carelessly. "What was that last – er – that last –"

I purposely halted to give the teller a chance to help me out. This he did, but I was utterly unprepared for the word. I expected to hear deposit, or check, but when the man came to my assistance with the word cable, I was dumfounded. Was Torrence trying to hang himself? However, my common sense returned, and I replied as if suddenly recalling my errand:

"Oh, yes, that was it. Will you let me see it again please, if you have a copy of it?"

I had not the slightest idea what the cablegram was about, but knew that copies of important messages were always preserved, and thought I might as well see this one. In a minute a clerk appeared with the copy in question, and the teller glancing at it for a second to make sure it was the right one, passed it over for my inspection, and I read as follows.

"LONDON, December – , 1894.

"To DEADWOOD AND BATES, BANKERS, New York City.

"Place to the credit of Torrence Attlebridge sixty three thousand eight hundred and forty pounds sterling, and charge same to our account.

"WHITEHOUSE, MORSE & PLUNKET."

I almost choked with astonishment. Here was a single deposit of considerably more than three hundred thousand dollars. No wonder he could so easily afford to give me the check for a thousand pounds. I was provoked that I had not asked for ten times as much. But where did all this money come from in the first instance? I continued to look at the message in amazement, not knowing what to say; and then pulling myself together, remarked, still as if trying to refresh my memory:

"And let me see – I gave you for this, a draft on – "

"You forget, Mr. Attlebridge," promptly responded the man, "you merely drew upon your credit with us, reducing your account to that extent!"

"So I did," I answered, apparently quite satisfied. "My

memory is so fearfully faulty sometimes, I not only forget amounts, but the manner of payment." Then remembering that Torrence had no doubt a further balance here, I thought I would make another effort to discover what it was before leaving. The question was not nearly so difficult as the others.

"By the by, be kind enough to tell me what my balance is to-day, here with you."

The big books were turned over, and in a minute I was informed that my brother had still more than one hundred thousand pounds with these people, Whitehouse, Morse & Plunket. I was astounded. Instead of solving a mystery I had only sunk deeper in the mire. Here was a credit that was practically boundless. A bank account worthy of a king. I could not show my amazement, and so for a minute turned my back, trying to collect my thoughts. Could I leave the place without one more question? I resolved to risk it, and so added:

"Sorry to trouble you again, but be good enough to tell me how my last deposit with you was made."

"By a large batch of your own drafts, Mr. Attlebridge, on prominent bankers in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, Constantinople, Munich, Rome, Naples, New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia and San Francisco, besides others. We have a list of the bankers here if you would like to see it; and, by the by, I forgot to mention that several of the drafts were upon London houses, which you doubtless remember. Beyond this you have not forgotten that several thousand pounds were paid to us in cash!"

"True!" I said, and turning hurriedly, left the place, only too glad to get away. Evidently my brother's drafts had all been honored, or the balance would not be to his credit.

I wandered down the street like one in a dream. I could see no earthly chance of ever solving this problem, except through Torrence himself; but I could not ask him, and if I did, had no reason to expect an answer. No, I must wait for further developments. Something was sure to turn up. To my certain knowledge, then, my brother had nearly a million dollars to his credit in New York and London, and from what I had heard it seemed probable that he had much more elsewhere.

VII

At the expiration of the six weeks the air ship was still far from finished. Contractors had disappointed; orders for material had failed to be filled, and only two courses of the hull were laid. As Torrence took everything good-naturedly, he was not seriously disturbed, although he considered it a duty to push the work forward as fast as possible, hoping to make his trial trip early in the Spring. The plans were difficult of execution, the more delicate parts of the mechanism requiring the labor of the most skillful workmen and my brother's constant supervision. He spent the whole of every day at Gravesend, and sometimes the night; meanwhile our expenses at the Mustapha continued at the same extravagant rate. The apartments had been retaken indefinitely, and the proprietor would have regretted losing us, as we probably spent twice as much money as a score of his best guests. Of course, I was the principal beneficiary of all this luxury, Torrence being at home so little, but this fact did not disturb him in the least.

At the end of two months there was no prospect of completing the vessel for a considerable time to come, as new complications and fresh disappointments had arisen; nevertheless, things were getting well in hand, and the first warm Spring days would probably see her ready for a start.

It is not my purpose to recount our life during this Winter

and the following Spring in the great metropolis. It is sufficient for the purposes hereinbefore named to say that it was a period of extravagance beyond reason, and of somewhat equivocal pleasures when I considered the vast sums these pleasures cost. Wherever we went we were looked upon as the great American millionaires; the men whose pockets had no bottom, and whose bank accounts were exhaustless. My efforts to discover the goose that laid our golden eggs continued fruitless, and if I still doubted the regularity of the methods, so far as I could see, no one else did. As the time wore on, Torrence would occasionally show some irritability at the unavoidable delays; though what he intended to do with the vessel when finished was a myth. The time was when I had looked upon it as a means of wealth, if not fame; but now with a vast fortune at our command, he seemed even more anxious about the machine than ever. More than once I thought seriously of leaving him, fearing some dreadful climax to our affairs in which I might be implicated; but when I alluded to the separation he seemed hurt, and so I remained.

During all this time we were in the swim of fashionable life, both entertaining and being entertained constantly. If Torrence gambled it was never extensively, so that he never either won or lost any considerable amount. Every effort had been made to keep the intention of the air ship a secret, and so thoroughly had the workmen been mystified, that when Spring came it was exceedingly doubtful if any of them knew what it was, and fortunately old Mr. Wetherbee was so laid up with rheumatism

that he never left the house. I think the general impression was that it was a new kind of torpedo boat, although some believed it to be a submarine passenger craft. The barn was kept closely shut during working hours, and the outer world had little chance of guessing what it contained.

By the middle of May the thing was nearly completed, and I saw by my brother's increased anxiety that his hopes were soon to be either realized or dashed to the ground. It was an unfortunate remark when I inquired, innocently enough, if he were sure the vessel would rise. He answered with an oath in the affirmative, but became moody and out of sorts immediately after. Upon several different occasions I felt sure that I heard him conversing with the sailor at a late hour, although I never again looked through the keyhole. Once when the conversation was particularly lively, I confess to listening, though only for a few minutes, and with poor result, as I could understand but little that was said. It was in reply to some remark of my brother's that the man answered:

"Don't bother about me. My pay comes in satisfaction! Revenge! Sabe? Now if you'll do as you're told, you'll do more for me than the five continents full o' men, women, and children ever would do. No, pardner, I'm alone in this world, and that stuff's no good to me, as I done told you; couldn't use it nohow; but I'll damn the society, and every one of 'em as turned a cold shoulder on me, through you. Now, I don't expect to live to see it, but I'll die happy, and that's worth more'n money can buy. Now, don't

ever let your nerve give out; in fact there ain't no occasion for it, seein' how much better you 'uns is fixed than I was. Promise you won't never turn your back on it."

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