

STATION X

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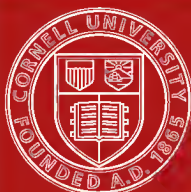
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STATION X

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BY
G. McLEOD
WINSOR



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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STATION X

IN the first place, to explain to those to whom it is not already clear, why Station X came to exist.

It may be taken as universal knowledge that the maintenance of the Empire depends on the existence of one of two things: either a military force only to be obtained by conscription, or a sea force of unchallengeable superiority. The development on the other side of the North Sea of a powerful naval rival, rendered our superiority at home only possible by such a concentration of our forces as left our world-wide trade routes and colonies inadequately protected.

The essence of Sea Power is mobility, and this is possessed as much by our rivals as by ourselves, and is the pith of the remark of an English First Lord of the difference between an average moment and a selected moment. It applies with especial force to the more distant seas. It is then a question of a selected place and moment. We know

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where our enemy's land fortresses are, but with respect to fortresses that can travel at twenty-five knots we want *news*.

Until comparatively recently we relied absolutely on submarine cables, which, from a military point of view, are unreliable and insecure, because they can be cut, or worse still tapped in mid-ocean, and false news transmitted.

Those responsible for our naval strategy regarded the invention of long-distance wireless telephony as of the utmost importance. The advantage of a sufficient number of suitably placed stations to bring our scattered units of Empire within speaking distance was obvious.

Stations for this purpose required a system of wiring so extensive as to preclude its employment afloat. At one station, known as Station X, the wiring covered a considerable area. There was the advantage that the etheric waves produced could not be interfered with or detected by any shipboard equipment.

The result of the Imperial Telephone Stations was that the whole world that mattered was placed within speaking communication with Whitehall, with no risk of interruption or interference without some warning being given. Each station was thus able to speak with its surrounding neighbours by telephone, and to communicate with any ship within its radius of action by the ordinary wireless telegraphy.

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It was because of the combined importance and isolation of the Australasian Dominions that it was considered worth while to make assurance doubly sure by establishing an alternative secret route for messages, by means of a station of more than ordinarily powerful equipment on a small islet in the Central Pacific, able to speak with Queensland on the one side and British Columbia on the other.

This was Station X, the name under which the Admiralty knew it, a previously uninhabited, barren atoll, lost in the vastest of oceans, and trusting solely for its defence to being utterly unsuspected. Originally the crater of an extinct volcano, and long sunk beneath the waves, it had been built up to sea level by coral insects, and subsequently, in some upheaval, lifted a couple of hundred feet or so above the waves. About a mile in diameter, and roughly circular, the islet offers precipitous sides to the sea, and slopes gradually down from the surrounding ridges towards the centre, having consequently a cup-like, or rather saucer-like, form. Covering a considerable part of the central area, quite hidden from the sea, the network of wires of by far the most powerful wireless telephone station in the world spreads itself. The station-house sat in the centre, like a spider in the midst of a gigantic web.

To ensure secrecy, the staff was of the smallest number possible, consisting of a naval officer in

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charge, a young man holding the rank of lieutenant, who had received special instruction in wireless work ; an electrical engineer whose special training had made him competent both at the signaller's desk and to effect repairs ; and thirdly, an attendant for the menial work of the station.

The officer in charge alone knew anything sufficiently definite of the latitude and longitude to be able to direct any one to it, a point considered so important that a knowledge of navigation would have disqualified the wireless mechanician for the post. Six months on duty and six off, the extreme isolation and monotony was rendered tolerable only by a correspondingly high rate of pay.

G. M. W.

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STATION X

CHAPTER I

THE NEW POST

AS Alan Macrae watched from Plymouth Hoe the last hues of the sunset pale over Mount Edgcumbe, he stood out in marked contrast to the stolid West Country types around him. His tall loose-limbed figure, his brooding gaze, his nervous highly-strung manner, marked him as a stranger. A touch on the arm recalled him from his apparently sombre thoughts—the touch of a girl who had approached him unobserved.

At the sight of her his melancholy vanished.

“I’m so sorry I’m late, Alan,” she cried gaily, “but the manager had a fit.”

“A fit?” questioned Macrae.

“Yes, of work,” explained the girl; “and he kept me doing letters, quite indifferent to the fact that this is our last night together. Let’s walk, shall we?”

As they walked slowly along the Hoe, the contrast between the two was remarkable. The brisk alertness of May Treherne seemed to accentuate her companion's moodiness and psychic gloom.

They had been engaged for a year, and were waiting only for Fortune to smile upon them to get married. As May had expressed it, "Bread and cheese and love are all right ; but you must be sure of the bread and cheese."

Macrae had by sheer merit obtained an appointment at "a foreign wireless station." That was all he knew, beyond the fact that the salary was a handsome one. On the morrow he was to start for his unknown destination, where for a period of six months he would be lost to the world. He would be allowed neither to send nor to receive letters, and was sworn to divulge nothing as to where he had been or upon what engaged.

"Perhaps I've been a fool to take the post," he said, looking down at his companion with pessimistic eyes.

"That's not flattering, Alan," said the girl gaily, determined to cheer him out of his gloomy mood. "You did it so that we could——" She paused.

"Get married," he concluded the sentence for her. "Yes, I know ; but think of six months without you, in a place that I know nothing about."

“Cheer up, Alan!” cried May brightly. “It’ll soon pass. It was splendid of you to accept it. I’m tired of Sales, Limited, and still more tired of its manager. He’s such a moth-eaten little worm.”

“Well, yes, you are right, May. The time will seem long, no doubt; but as it carries double pay I ought not to grumble.” He smiled down at her, adding, “That it will bring a certain day nearer is the best part of it.”

“Meanwhile,” said May, “I shall picture you leading a sort of lighthouse existence, and in off-duty moments thinking about me.” As she spoke her eyes rested on the beam of Eddystone, which the gathering darkness already made plainly visible off the Cornish coast.

“You are right! On duty and off, my thoughts will run pretty much on you, dear,” he said.

“Now, Alan, tell me why you aren’t, or should I say weren’t, a bit cheerful this evening. It’s a compliment, of course, but is there anything that’s worrying you?” She looked up at him inquiringly.

“I suppose I’ve got the blues. I find myself oppressed with the feeling that something is going to happen. I can’t tell what, but I feel that the future holds something dark and horrible.”

“Tell me, Alan, dear, do you know of anything in your coming duties that suggests danger

to you? Will you be among savages? Has anything happened to any one at the post? Or is it only just a feeling?"

"It rests on nothing, but——"

"Then for goodness' sake, my dear boy, don't worry yourself about nothing," said May, with relief. "Here," wheeling him round, "let us face the wind, and it will blow such cobwebs out of your head."

She cast about in her mind how to hearten her lover, and her eye caught sight of the statue of Sir Francis Drake.

"Did you ever hear of Drake, Alan?" she asked, thinking it possible that he might not, knowing his educational shortcomings, for which she had decided that the future should yet make amends.

As they approached the statue, she told about Drake and that immortal game her favourite hero had played on this spot, of the threatening danger, and how the great Devonian refused to let the breathless messenger worry or even hurry him.

The Celt, ever quick of apprehension and self-application, had no need for the point to be laboured.

"Different men have different natures," said Macrae, in a restrained voice. "It does not follow that any one kind has all the courage. It is not for me to say if I would also have done

my duty then, but this I know, I would not have been able to finish that game of bowls. It's all a question of nerves. As to the other matter, I knew you would not understand. You are a town girl, and I am from the lonely glen. There are some things that are only to be felt. The forest, the stream, the rocks and the mountain, can teach something to a child that cannot be learnt later. It's a sort of sixth sense. Some of us have it. I don't claim to, myself, yet I feel the approach of a cloud. As a boy I loved to wander alone, listen to the roaring torrent, climb the steep precipices of the mountain-side, and often when up at cloud level, I have watched a great fleecy mass approaching, slowly while in the distance, but seemingly faster and faster as it came near. Then suddenly it would swallow me up. Well, dearest May, there is a cloud approaching now that is destined to swallow me up; no light and fleecy mass, but dark and terrible, full of lightnings and of danger, and I do not see myself liberated from its embrace."

"Alan, dear, do not keep anything from me. If you know anything dangerous connected with your new post, tell it me. You say you value this opportunity because it brings a certain day nearer. As you are going away, I'll confess that it is for the same reason I too value it. When your position is established, we can be so happy together. At present, as you know, I am anything but that.

Yet, I would far rather you threw it all up if there is any special danger."

"If there is, I know nothing about it," he replied, with a smile. "Unfortunately, you discovered my mood, and made me tell you of this impression, which really rests on nothing. But," he added hastily, "let's talk of other things."

May sighed as she recognized it would be useless to say more on the subject. She knew Macrae's highly-strung nervous temperament, but also that in all circumstances he would be sure to do his duty. She could not understand his forebodings; but recognizing that the moment of parting was drawing near, she allowed the subject to drop.

Alan Macrae had been a poor, half-starved youth from the Highlands, who had by mere chance been engaged in an unskilled capacity at the Marconi station of wireless telephony that the Government had established on the north-east coast of Scotland. He had shown such willingness, industry and interest in the working of the station, that opportunity had been given him to acquire further knowledge of it. The advantage he took of this was so satisfactory that he had been given every encouragement and chance to perfect himself. After some years, he had become one of the most competent wireless electricians on Marconi's staff. A chance discovery had then caused his transference to Poldhu in Cornwall.

When telephony by wireless was in its infancy it was no easy matter to catch the words, and acute hearing was absolutely necessary in the operator. To a certain extent it still is, for there is always a zone surrounding any station, near the limit of audibility, where acuteness of hearing makes all the difference between the possibility and impossibility of communication. It was found that Macrae's endowment in this respect was little short of phenomenal, and this it was that caused him to be sent to the Cornish station used for transatlantic messages. Later it had been one of the reasons, combined with his steadiness and competence, that had caused him to be selected for this mysterious Government appointment.

When the moment approached for going on board the cruiser that was to transport him to his unknown destination, May Treherne, principally for the sake of filling some of the unoccupied time that she feared would hang heavily on his hands, asked him to keep a diary, so that she might at some future time have the pleasure of reading it. This he promised to do, and after a tender parting he strode rapidly off in the direction of where the cruiser's boat was awaiting him.

That night he reported himself to Captain Evered of H.M.S. *Sagitta*, where he made the acquaintance of Lieutenant Wilson, who would be in command of Station X, to which Macrae was

going. Knowing how much they would be thrown together, Captain Evered was anxious that these two should make a mutually favourable impression upon each other ; but his instinct told him from the first that such was far from being the case. Wilson, in speaking to his brother officers that night, made no secret of his dismay.

“ This is rough luck,” said he, “ to be boxed up for six months with that miserable mechanic ! ”

For his part, Macrae said nothing, but felt instinctively the complete lack of sympathy between him and his future superior. It was only after making Lieutenant Wilson’s acquaintance that he realized the isolation of the post to which he was going. He felt no resentment against Wilson for what he recognized was a mutual misfortune—that they could never be companions, and he saw that one of the chief reasons was his own lack of education.

Captain Evered found an early opportunity of taking Wilson to task, and of giving him some sound advice, pointing out the bearings of the thing from the Government’s point of view, the responsibility of his post, and the desirability of cultivating good relations with his companion who had had less advantages than himself, etc., etc. He nevertheless came to the conclusion, long before the voyage was over, that they were as ill-assorted a pair as he had ever seen.

The voyage was uneventful. In the Indian

Ocean, they picked up from another cruiser, a Hong-Kong Chinaman, a quiet methodical sort of creature, who had been engaged to act as servant at the station.

The otherwise nameless islet, known to the Admiralty as Station X, was made on the morning of September 7. A short time sufficed for the landing of the new staff and stores, and the taking on board of those relieved. Before the new trio had realized the strangeness of their position, the *Sagitta*, that greyhound of the waters, had disappeared below the horizon. One of the first things, however, that Lieutenant Wilson did realize after taking command was that Macrae, whatever his social shortcomings, was a most intelligent and thoroughly competent "wireless" engineer and operator.

CHAPTER II

THE TRAGEDY AT STATION X

A MONTH passed, during which Captain Evered's forebodings as to the lack of sympathy between Wilson and Macrae were thoroughly realized. Upon Macrae, who had been accustomed from his childhood to solitude, the effect was not marked; but with Lieutenant Wilson it was different. He grew irritable, unreasonable, and almost morose. His victim was the Chinaman, Ling, upon whom he seemed to take a savage pleasure in venting his spleen.

When off duty, Macrae would wander off to the cliff, and there, for hour after hour, would sit brooding or writing up the diary that May Treherne, with remarkable foresight, had urged him to keep. His earlier entries were devoted to a description of many incidents of the voyage, and the hundred and one impressions made on a peculiarly receptive mind.

He found in the diary a new medium of expres-

sion, a relief from the brooding of his boyhood. At first he discovered great difficulty in expressing himself, but gradually found himself writing with increasing ease and facility. One day, on looking back through the earlier pages, he was surprised to find how awkwardly they read. He realized that they did not well represent or reflect his life. He knew that he could now do it better. He decided to begin again, and, now that he was more accustomed to expressing himself in writing, to give a description of his life at Station X.

On the 5th October, he wrote :

You can scarcely realize the task you set me—I mean, its difficulty—when you asked me to keep a diary. It is a great pleasure, as nothing calls up so clearly your sweet face as writing to you all that is in my mind. It is the next best thing to speaking to you. I have already told you that I am forbidden to tell of the place or of my duties. They are very light, although of the utmost importance in these times. As a soldier would put it, we are a reserve rather than an active force, liable to be called up, but, for an important reason, used as little as possible. We interchange a daily word or two to see that we are in working order.

I am afraid you will find this diary uninteresting sometimes, but you will know that I have some excuse. Even the weather is uneventful here.

How little we know at home how wearisome and monotonous perpetual blue skies can be !

During the long hours off duty, I sit here in this loftiest nook on the cliff overlooking the ocean, writing to you, dozing, or looking out over the limitless expanse of waters. The long slow swell seems to move like enchanted waves, until my own thoughts too seem lulled to harmony with their changeless rhythm. It is just in such moments that the ominous impression of the approach of that shadow I spoke to you about seems to become more real.

I have learnt here that the feeling of isolation, when confined with an uncongenial companion, is more oppressive than if I were entirely alone. How different things would be if only Lieutenant Wilson were a different sort of man. I often think I should get on much better with many a worse man than he. He is most exact so far as performance of duty is concerned, it seems to me even too exact. There is no possibility of any one under him for one moment shirking duty, and of course I have no wish to do so. As a matter of fact, there is so little of it that I would willingly take mine and half his if he would permit it. He treats me with the most rigid politeness, but I can always feel a something at the back of it. I am aware of my social shortcomings, and can make every excuse for him not having a companion more to his liking. He feels the life

as much as I do, but does not appear able to unbend. You would be surprised at how few words we exchange in the twenty-four hours, often, in relieving each other at the door of the signal room, saluting without a word at all!

At first it struck even the Chinaman as curious, for I have more than once seen him regarding us, out of his almond eyes, with the suspicion of a grin for a moment humanizing his impenetrable countenance.

I wonder if all Chinamen are like this one, and I wonder what this one is like! He is a walking image of inscrutability and silence; his very footfall makes no sound. I think, if one wanted to pretend to be very wise, a perfect storehouse of wisdom that one did not really possess, the great thing to do would be to say nothing. This can be quite impressive if it is done in the right way. The Chinaman does it in the right way, while, as Lieutenant Wilson does it, it is not impressive, but only irritating.

The Chinaman's duties are light, and he does them very methodically. He gives no sign as to whether he likes or dislikes them, or if the slow hours sometimes hang heavy on his hands or not. I think he must be a philosopher, taking it all as the expenditure of so much time for so much pay, and carrying out his contract with a calm that seems to hold in it an element of con-

tempt for all the world and all that is in it. As I have already mentioned, Lieutenant Wilson can convey contempt; but to me, that of the Chinese appears much the loftier of the two.

And yet it is of this placid individual that Lieutenant Wilson manages to fall foul.

I am well convinced that it is not so much through any fault in Ling, as the necessity for some safety valve for the escape of the lieutenant's temper. I am forbidden him by the regulations. He really is most unreasonable. A few minutes' delay in the performance of some slight duty or service, when heaven knows an hour would make little enough difference, is enough to provoke an outburst. Lieutenant Wilson's displays of temper always show a harsh and overbearing, I might almost say a bullying disposition.

You will see, therefore, that apart from my slight duties, there is little to occupy my time, and I am reduced to being my own companion, a miserable substitute at best for pleasant company. That is where my diary comes in, and saves me from what would otherwise be many a tiresome hour. I wonder sometimes whether this was not in your mind when you set me the task. I think it must have been, seeing that although I write to you, I cannot post what I write. If so, thank you for the promise you exacted. What would I not give, dearest May, even for a few minutes of your company

6th October.

If I lived long in this place I should have to become an astronomer. I am not allowed to give you many details, but you know that we are isolated and overlook the sea. When, by day, I sit and watch the ocean around, or, by night, the ocean above, both of which have now become so familiar to me, these seem my real companions, less remote, in spite of their immensity, than the two fellow humans with whom my lot is cast. I think it is the mystery of things that is the attractive power. The sea-birds alone are a perpetual marvel. As long ago as I can remember anything, I remember watching the eagle with wonder and delight; but these sea-birds seem to surpass even him in magic. They come from the invisible distance, sail to and fro, to and fro, up and down, and away again beyond the horizon, and it is even rare to see the beat of a pinion. It is not flying but floating, but the secret of it is their own, or at all events it is beyond the range of my mechanics.

But what are such mysteries compared with those that are spread above? If you have heard me grumble at the monotony of perpetual blue skies, you will never hear me grumble at these nights. It is then I feel the burden of my ignorance, watching nightly the march of these star battalions, and not knowing even the name of one. I look forward to being your scholar in

this as in other studies, when, if ever, the opportunity comes. No doubt this increased desire for information about the starry hosts is partly because I never knew before that there were so many of them. There must be ten stars here for every one in a Scotch sky at the best of times. But the principal reason is that there would be so much the more to think about, for I have made another discovery, that an ignorant man alone, is more lonely than a man of knowledge can ever be. Yet I dare say the knowledge of the wisest is a small matter compared with the measure of his ignorance.

If I could not turn my thoughts to you, dear May, sometimes, I think I should almost lose my reason. The place, or rather, the circumstances of my life here, are getting on my nerves, and I start almost at a shadow, or the slightest sound. I must indeed pull myself together, and think still more of you and the double pay that is leading to you, and turn my back resolutely upon things "based on nothing," as you say, "cobwebs," as you call them.

I would not have you different from what you are for all the world, and the greatest stroke of luck of my life was finding you. With your level little head and matter-of-fact good sense to guide me, what have I to fear?

It is now the hour for relieving Lieutenant Wilson at the Signal Station; one of us must

always be within hearing of the call signal. He has never had to wait for me yet! Good-bye, dear May, until to-morrow.

7th October.

If these lines were destined to meet your eye at once I would not write them, as they could only worry you. Something has happened. No cobweb this time. My wretched foreboding has always been so vague that it has seemed part of my trouble that I could not tell in what direction to look for it. It never occurred to me that Lieutenant Wilson's temper would pass from an inconvenience into a danger, but what occurred to-day has shown me that in relying on the immovable calm of Ling, I have been building on the sand. The two things may still be quite unconnected, as to-day's affair only concerns me indirectly; but from now I shall live in extra dread of what may happen here.

Ling was a few minutes behind time in the performance of some slight duty, and so had laid himself open to rebuke. This had taken the usual form, and had included the additional feature of the threat of a rope's-ending. When possible, I manage to be absent on these occasions, but I happened just then to be watching the Chinaman, and was startled to see the veil of his everlasting calm for a moment lifted. A look flashed from him entirely transforming his features.

Just for one fleeting instant only was it there, but long enough to reveal to me the existence of an unsuspected volcano beneath; then the impenetrable mask again descended. But that glance of fiendish and vindictive hate is enough to show me that my reading of his character was wrong, and that there may be a tragedy here at any time. Never more will I complain of monotonous days. May every day I remain here be as monotonous as hitherto, and may the time at length safely arrive when together we shall laugh all my fears out of countenance. Never did I feel the need of you, dear May, more than now; for if anything of the kind I dread should happen, I fear it would put the finishing touch on my jarred nerves.

8th October.

Can it be but yesterday that I wrote the last line in this book? So far as the hours are concerned, it appears even less, for I know nothing of the passage of the greater part of them; but reckoning by events, which were crowded into seconds, that time seems ages ago. The bolt has fallen. Never more, May, shall I sit and write you my thoughts in the shadow of that rock on the cliff overlooking the sunlit waves. But I will now, to the best of my ability, write down the awful account of what has happened, and the strange thing that has followed it. I am thankful to have had my nerves sufficiently restored to do

so. They are restored, in fact, to an extent that seems wonderful even to myself. A short time ago I was too distracted to write anything.

My last letter to you was written, as usual, while sitting at my favourite spot on the cliff. Having closed the diary on the ominous words I had concluded my letter with, I was sitting half asleep, dreamily watching some sea-birds of tremendous wing, the name of which is unknown to me, and lazily wondering, as I always do, at their easy defiance of the laws of gravitation, when I was suddenly roused more effectually than by clap of thunder. They say I have phenomenal powers of hearing, and no doubt it is extra acute, but the latent fear that since the day before had lain at the back of my mind, coupled with the nervous strain that had so long oppressed me, would in any case have made me quick to catch any unusual sound from the station—nearly half a mile distant.

What I did hear was an angry shout as of surprise, rage, and something else that seemed to freeze the blood, a moment's mingling of two voices in excitement, a pistol-shot, and that was all. The very silence that succeeded seemed to lend horror to my mind. I had sprung to my feet at the first sound, but stood spell-bound for the few moments the sounds continued, and then at my utmost speed I ran for the station-house.

During the two or three minutes this may have

taken, I could not prevent the thought of a hundred awful possibilities from jostling each other through my mind. I feared to find terrible injury to one or other, perhaps both, of my companions—perhaps Ling even dead, for I knew the fatal accuracy of Lieutenant Wilson with a pistol.

The reality surpassed it all. Poor Wilson lay on his side, bent backward like a bow. His attitude and expression were too frightful to recall, the last convulsive twitchings of life were still faintly perceptible. In his back was the Chinaman's knife, driven to the hilt. The Chinaman lay like one asleep, but in this case it was the sleep that knows no waking, with a face on which its habitual calm had already reasserted itself, and a pistol bullet through his brain.

My dear May, I cannot give you the history of the time that immediately succeeded my discovery; it has become a blank. Whether I actually lost consciousness at the shock or not, I do not know, but my memory holds no record of what must have been a considerable time. I remember ultimately finding myself standing on the same spot, and, raising my eyes from the awful scene at my feet, I noticed that the sun was already in the western sky. I was shaking like an aspen leaf. I struggled to collect my ideas into a coherent train of thought, instinctively realizing that something must be done—at once.

The thought of those murdered bodies lying so

near me in the pale starlight through the silent watches of the night was intolerable. I resolved to bury them while daylight lasted, just as they were, as deep as I could—out of sight—out of sight! I cannot dwell, even now, on all the details of this task. I dragged them as far as possible from the station-house, where their life's blood had made terrible token of the spot where they fell, just outside the door (thank Heaven, outside).

I was determined that deep they should lie, but the ground was rocky, and my tools not intended for this use. Thankful to have digging tools at all, I at length completed my task. I confess that the hardness of the ground was not my only difficulty, for more than once I leapt up from my work with the vivid impression of the contorted face of the Chinaman, as I had once seen it, close to my shoulder. Nothing but the alternative of their ghastly company above ground drove me to the completion of what I had commenced. I was none too soon, for by the time I had finished, the brief twilight was already on the island. Such, however, was my unreasoning, frantic desire to obliterate all traces of the tragedy, that ere black night descended, the bloodstains also had been washed away.

Entering the building, my loneliness rushed down upon me and seemed to wrap me round. I believe it was more this feeling than the duty of reporting the occurrence, that took me straight

to the instrument. I longed to hear the voice of my fellow-man. At the signal-table there is provided, for the purpose of wireless telephony, a headpiece that fits over both ears, without requiring to be held by the hands, that they may be left free for taking down the message, and that shuts out all sounds except those coming through the instrument.

As I put on this headpiece I felt severely the physical and mental strain to which I had been subjected, and suffered a curious feeling that I do not know how to describe, except that it seemed half utter fatigue, and half excitement. I passed the signal, and then spoke the call word, and nearly jumped out of the chair at the sound of my own voice. This should not have been very distinct to me, 'so effective are the ear-pieces or receivers, as excluders of all sounds not coming by "wireless" ; yet I seemed to have shouted.

Trying again, and speaking softly, it had the same effect. Having waited in vain for an answer from the neighbouring (neighbouring !—three thousand miles) station, I removed the headpiece and sat still for a moment. Then I found why my voice had seemed a shout. My nerves, or whatever the proper word may be, were in a state of unnatural exaltation. Incredible as it may appear, the murmur of the wavelets all round the islet was clearly audible to me. The gentlest

of breezes seemed to hiss over the bungalow. The creak of a board was like a pistol-shot.

Once more I assumed the headpiece and signalled again, and again. The clang of the call-signal at the receiving station is audible for some distance ; it is not necessary to have on the head-piece to receive it. The fact of getting no reply proved there was no one in attendance, at the moment, at either of the two stations we communicated with. It is true the hour was an unusual one, in fact one at which no call had ever been sent before, and that could be the only reason why I was left without reply. It was an illustration of how even the best can get slack under such circumstances. I felt at the time that this went some way to vindicate Lieutenant Wilson's methods, whose faults, whatever they might have been, certainly did not lie in the direction of slackness. No one could have signalled us at any moment, day or night, during his command here, without receiving an immediate answer.

Keeping on the headpiece, I waited, calling up at intervals.

How long this went on I cannot say, but after some shorter or longer time a thing happened that I cannot explain unless by supposing it the result of the state of physical exhaustion to which I had reduced myself. While I waited, I fell asleep. My head must have dropped forward on the

signal-table, at which I sat, and with the head-piece still attached, sleep suddenly overcame me.

On waking, I seemed to come suddenly to my full senses, and it immediately struck me with a shock of surprise that it was no longer night!

It did not take me a moment to realize the fearful neglect of duty of which I had been guilty, recalling as I did the fact that it could not have been much more than an hour after sunset when I fell asleep. My first act was to look at the chronometer. It marked four o'clock. This was absolutely bewildering, for at four o'clock it would not be already light. Hastily removing the head-piece, I walked out of the station-house. The sun was approaching the west! There could only be one explanation—I had slept over twenty hours.

Remembering that as yet no account of the tragedy of yesterday had been despatched, and the urgent need of bringing the facts to the knowledge of the Admiralty, so that relief might be sent, I hastened back to the instrument. Here another astounding surprise awaited me, to make you understand which, a little explanation is necessary. It is part of our instructions that, when telephoning, every word as spoken must be written down in shorthand, and every word spoken at the other end, must be taken down as

received. This gives the Admiralty two records of everything that passes, one at each station, which should exactly correspond.

On opening the Record Book, imagine my surprise to find written down, in my own shorthand, the report of a long conversation with the Queensland Station, in which I had apparently given a full account of everything that had happened, and received replies and instructions. I tried to recollect something of this, but in vain. My memory was, as it still is, and no doubt always will be, a complete blank respecting it. The only explanation that seemed possible was that I had done this in my sleep, or in some state resembling sleep, brought on by the abnormal condition in which I had been the evening before.

It now occurred to me for the first time what a great change there was in me, as compared with the day previous. Incredible as this unremembered signalling appeared, and nothing but the evidence of my own notes staring me in the face would have convinced me of it, it seemed almost as strange that such a disturbed sleep as it evidently must have been, could have restored me in the way it had. My nervous condition had quite vanished, for I found myself as collected as ever before in my life. It might therefore be said I was more than restored, for I could scarcely recognize myself as the same individual that had

spent the last few weeks, and especially the last days, in torturing worry and foreboding.

It seemed as though the very catastrophe I had apprehended had, by its occurrence, relieved my mind from the strain. If any one had told me some months ago, say when last we saw each other, that under such circumstances as these—of horror, isolation, responsibility—I should be able to take it so calmly, I should have been the last to believe it.

It next occurred to me that I was fearfully hungry, as well might be the case, and the need suddenly appeared so pressing that it had to be at once attended to. Never had food tasted so good, and yet, before I had proceeded far, a mouthful seemed to turn to ashes. The Record Book certainly contained an account of messages in my handwriting, but what evidence was there that it was other than an acted dream? Dropping my food, hunger forgotten, I went to the instrument, and in less than a minute was talking with Queensland. My relief was great as I found my account fully confirmed. They had received my report, and have now renewed the instruction to keep as constantly on duty as I am physically capable of.

Since finishing my interrupted meal, I have written you this account, while keeping within sound of the call-signal. It is almost the hour at which I yesterday fell asleep at the instrument.

That will not happen again, but I shall put on the headpiece. It is not necessary, but somehow, I feel as though called to the instrument. So good-bye, dear May, for the present.

CHAPTER III

WHAT THE *SAGITTA* DISCOVERED

IT was the afternoon of the 11th of October. The cruiser *Sagitta* was taking a wireless telegraph staff, men whose leave had expired, from New Zealand, where their last duty had been, to the relief of the station at Wei-hai-wei. About six bells, a wireless message was received in code from a station on the Eastern Extension Cable. "Take staff on board with all dispatch to relief of Station X. All communication ceased. Report on arrival."

When Captain Evered received this communication he was already well north of the Bismarck Archipelago. As he read it his face could not have become graver had he seen an approaching typhoon on the horizon. In a figurative sense that is what he did see.

Promptly the nose of his thirty knotter was deflected to the north-east, and she was sent racing at her best pace on the new route, which lay through the countless islands of the Caroline

and Marshall groups, to where the bottom of the Pacific falls into the Ammen Deep, near which his goal was situated.

He knew that something unusual must have happened, but the secrecy of the Service precluded the possibility of his asking questions. It was very possible, he thought, that Whitehall knew no more than he. "All communication ceased" was what lent colour to the natural thought that had instantly occurred to him. Two young and healthy men are not likely to be totally incapacitated from duty at the same moment—from natural causes.

Thinking of the two young men concerned in the present case, his thoughts took another turn, and, judging by his expression, it did not seem a particularly pleasant one. Encountering the ship's doctor on deck soon after the change of course, he said :

"What do you think of this message, Anderson? Have you any theory?"

"Illness, probably," was the reply.

"Perhaps," said Captain Evered in a tone of doubt, "or worse."

"What do you mean, sir?" was the startled retort. "Do you think that Germany——"

"My first thought was that the storm had burst," said Captain Evered; "but if such an idea had been entertained at home, the message would have been worded differently. We live

in such ticklish times that every precaution must be taken, but I don't think that is the explanation."

"Then have you some other theory?"

"I don't like to call it a theory, but I brought those two fellows out from England, and I can't forget what an ill-paired couple they were." Captain Evered lit a cigarette.

"In other words, you think it possible there has been trouble?" queried the doctor.

"You were not with us on the outward voyage, and so have not met them. Wilson showed every sign of being a martinet, and a surly one at that. Macrae, the engineer and operator, is more difficult to describe. He is well-meaning, but with little education, very nervous, and of weak will; no vice, but no ballast. So we have the undisciplined temper of one, the peculiar, unstable character of the other, and extremely trying conditions—how trying they can be is known only to those who have been boxed up together for months in that way."

"I hope there has been no row between them!"

"Very likely not; but nothing would surprise me very much. The one thing certain is that neither of them is on duty, and the more I think of it, the less I believe in outside interference. Such a thing would be an overt act of war, of which there would be other signs by now."

Station X was thoroughly fitted for wireless

telegraphy, as well as with the incomparably larger plant for long-distance telephony. As the distance between herself and the island diminished, the *Sagitta* made repeated efforts to call up the station, but received no reply.

On the morning of the 14th the island was raised, a tiny speck on the ocean's rim. When near enough for the glass to show every detail on cliff and shore, the cruiser made the tour of it, as a measure of precaution; but no sign of life was visible, either on land or water. She then fired a rocket to attract attention, and waited, but in vain.

Captain Evered's face was the picture of astonishment. What had happened to the Chinaman, even assuming the worst in regard to Macrae and Wilson? Turning to his first lieutenant, he said:

"Mr. Fletcher, take the cutter and go and investigate. Anderson will go with you. Let the men stay by the boat while you and Anderson land. If you see no sign of any one, signal me to that effect, and proceed to the station-house. Take your revolvers. Be careful to disturb nothing that has any bearing on what has happened, and return as soon as you can."

The boat's crew were piped away and were soon pulling for the shelving beach. The two officers landed and proceeded to climb the cliff. They stood for a moment, the whole interior of the

island lying like a map before them. They were watched with much curiosity from the *Sagitta*. In order to preserve the secret of Station X every precaution had been taken to hide from the non-commissioned ranks the fact that there was any secret connected with it, or anything different from the other various stations periodically visited. As it is always the unusual that is most likely to be talked about, Captain Evered intended to take every means to hide any discovery of a remarkable nature in connection with the present visit. That there was something out of the usual routine could not be hidden, but he hoped that the statement that there was a case of sickness on the island would be sufficient explanation, whatever the full facts of the case might be. This was why the doctor had been made one of the landing-party.

The agreed sign that nothing was visible was made, and the two men disappeared over the cliff.

“The station looks all right, at all events,” said the doctor, “but no sign of anybody. Where the dickens can the fellows have got to?”

They pressed on for the station-house, and pushed open the door, which was closed but not latched.

On the floor, on its back, lay the body of Macrae, with an overturned chair beside him. The appearance irresistibly suggested that the poor fellow had been sitting at the table in front of the instru-

ment, when, from some unexplained cause, he had fallen backward, chair and all, striking the floor with the back of his head. There was no sign that he had made any subsequent effort.

"Dead!" said the doctor, after a brief examination; "but where are the others?"

The various rooms of the bungalow-built station-house were thoroughly searched, but there was nothing to throw any light on their absence.

"Can you tell the cause of the operator's death, Anderson?" inquired Lieutenant Fletcher.

"No," replied the doctor; "there is no sign of violence. It's very strange."

"Possibly the papers will show something of what has happened," suggested Fletcher, "but I think we'd better not interfere with them. I'll go back and report. No doubt the chief will then come ashore."

"Right-oh!" said the doctor, who had turned his attention again to the body in the signal-room.

Lieutenant Fletcher accordingly returned to the *Sagitta* and made his report, with the result that Captain Evered immediately decided to go ashore himself and make a personal examination of the island.

On arriving at the station-house, he went straight to the signal-room, where he found Dr. Anderson kneeling by the body of Macrae.

"Fletcher and I thought you had better see

the place before anything was touched, sir," said Anderson, looking up.

"He's dead?" questioned Captain Evered, indicating Macrae.

"I thought so at first," was the reply.

Captain Evered looked sharply at the speaker, for both in the words and tone there was a significance.

Answering the look, Anderson proceeded: "I have made a further examination, and I'm not now certain that my first report was correct."

While speaking he was placing the body in what, for a living person, would have been a more easy attitude.

"It is true that I can find no sign of life whatever, neither pulse nor temperature; but on the other hand, I can find no certain sign of death. You see there is no rigor, nor any sign of decay. The cessation of signals implies that he may have lain in this state for four days, and in this climate too."

"But," said Captain Evered, "is such a state of death in life possible?"

"It is difficult to say what is possible in this way," said the doctor; "but if this is trance, it is the most extraordinary case that has ever come to my knowledge."

"Meanwhile what should be done?"

"He must be got on board as quickly as possible, and receive treatment."

Captain Evered did not reply for a moment. He was looking at the thing from the Service point of view.

"Well," he said at length, "what must be, must be; it is true we could not very well leave him here, but it's unfortunate. But what of the others? Where are they?"

"We've seen no sign of them," said Anderson, "and in your absence Fletcher would not refer to the signal records to see what light they might throw on things."

Acting on the hint, Captain Evered went to the signal-book and began to read. The first thing he noticed, for in the circumstances he began at the end, was that the last signalling which took place was on October 10th, that is the day before he had been ordered to change his course. Turning back the leaves, he at once came upon Macrae's report of the tragedy. This showed him that the Admiralty was already in possession of the facts so far. It did not show him the first arrangement made for Macrae's relief, and which, for the sake of greater despatch when Macrae no longer responded, had been altered by sending the *Sagitta*. Captain Evered now gave the terrible details to his companion, and requested him to find the place where the bodies were buried.

While Anderson was thus employed, Captain Evered turned to Macrae's diary, which under the circumstances he felt justified in examining.

This he scanned over from the beginning, reading a little here and there, and soon seeing that it was a most improper account to have written, containing many indications that, in certain hands, would have afforded undesirable clues. As he came to Macrae's description of the death of his companions and the effect on himself, Captain Evered became confirmed in the view he had always held, that Macrae had never been a man suited to this kind of duty.

As he read the astonishing document, he came to the inevitable conclusion that the poor fellow's brain had been turned by the event that had happened and that the latter part of the diary was but the ravings of a lunatic. In fact, Macrae seemed, pathetically enough, to have had a suspicion of the fact himself.

Putting down the diary as the doctor returned to the signal-room, Captain Evered said :

“ Well, have you found the spot ? ”

“ Yes, sir, I've found the grave,” was the reply.

“ Then that so far verifies his report, but it is necessary that our arrival and discovery should be reported for the information of the Admiralty. I believe you are a motorist, Anderson, and no doubt you can re-charge with petrol and start the engine.”

Whilst Dr. Anderson busied himself about this, Captain Evered wrote out his report for despatch. This concluded, he turned to the doctor.

"That a row of some sort should have happened here would not have surprised me, but to find all dead is beyond my worst anticipations. What do you now make of him?"

"I can only repeat what I have before said. He must be brought on board," said the doctor, "but I have little hope of him."

"Then," was the reply, "when the report is sent and the relief staff landed, you must take him on board on a covered stretcher with as little remark as possible. Say he is in a comatose condition, and too ill to remain here. With care, his peculiar state need not be made apparent. The absence of the other two will not be spoken of, and there will not be much to call special attention to the affair among the crew."

Leaving Dr. Anderson in charge of the station, Captain Evered went down to the boat and returned on board. He explained the situation to the officer about to take charge, and sent him, with his engineer-operator and servant to take immediate possession on the island, instructing him to call up British Columbia, and advise that the station was again in working order.

Under the excuse of waiting until the repairs rendered necessary by "the recent explosion at the station" had been carried out, the *Sagitta* stood by until sunset. In the fading light the "injured" operator was placed on a litter, and, under the doctor's supervision, brought on board.

Long before that, the *Sagitta* had received her orders from home to proceed to Hong-Kong.

Captain Evered had brought Macrae's diary away with him, and now went carefully through the latter part of it. He was quite convinced of the truth of the version given respecting the fatal occurrence between Wilson and the Chinaman. There were further entries under the dates of the two subsequent days. The former had been first written in shorthand, in the manner a message is taken down as received, which, in fact, it pretended to have been; and had afterwards been re-written in longhand. The entry under the second date, the last entry in the diary, was still in shorthand only. It was the former that had been considered by Captain Evered, when on the island, to be proof of the writer's insanity.

At the first opportunity he spoke to Dr. Anderson on the subject. "I should like you," he said, "to run through this entry of his. The poor fellow seems to have had the most extraordinary delusion one could imagine. What do you make of him now?"

"Absolutely no change. In my opinion, if it is trance, it must end in death, with probably nothing to show the precise moment of the change. Do these writings of his throw any light on how he came in the position in which we found him?"

"So far as it is written out, no; but half of it

is still in the original shorthand. This I can't read myself, and I rather hesitate about putting it in the hands of any one on board who can."

"Well, as you propose to hand the papers to me, I'll see what I can make of it. If it's Pitman's, and fairly well written, I think I may be able to make it out, and if you wish, I'll write it out for you."

"Thanks. If it's anything like the record of the day previous, I confess I should like to see it, wild delusion though it be. But take it and read it. Its very existence, from beginning to end, shows how unfit he was for the secret service of one of these stations. Where his madness began I leave you to decide. At all events he seems mad enough towards the finish."

"What do you suppose caused him to lose his reason?"

"I don't feel the least doubt about that," said Captain Evered. "He was a young fellow of considerable ability, but of the nervous, imaginative sort, unsuited in any case to the life incidental to such a post; and when the event happened that left him there alone, under circumstances that would have been trying to any one, he simply went all to pieces. However, read the first part of this, that is already written out, and tell me what you think of it."

Brain and nerve disorders had always been the branch of his profession that had special attraction

for Dr. Anderson, and the vagaries of unhinged and abnormal minds had been a particular study of his. It was, therefore, with scientific interest that he took Macrae's writings for perusal. After reading the part that has already been repeated here, he came to the point where Macrae, in the signal-room, finished his daily entry or letter with the avowed intention of going to the instrument and putting on the receiver or headpiece; to quote his own words, "as though called upon" to do so.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE

WHAT Dr. Anderson began to read in his cabin ran as follows :—

It is not very agreeable, my dear May, to write what I feel must inevitably make you to believe me to be perfectly mad. And will you be far wrong? That is the question I am constantly asking myself. At all events, here are what appear to me to be the exact particulars of my experience.

After finishing my letter to you yesterday, I went and put on the headpiece, without knowing myself quite why I did so. Almost immediately after the receivers were covering my ears I heard a voice, and it at once struck me as a very peculiar voice, very pleasant and musical, but quite different somehow from any I had ever heard. It said, "Macrae, are you there?"

Having answered, I was surprised, after a short interval, to hear the voice repeat the same

question, as though I had not been heard. But then it occurred to me that I had replied in a very low tone, instead of the rather loud and distinct manner of speaking we are instructed to use. So I endeavoured this time to reply louder, but found that I seemed to have almost entirely lost my voice. I could only answer in the same manner as before. There was a minute's silence, and then the same question repeated. My inability to reply otherwise than as before was most disconcerting, for, I reflected, while that state of things continued, I was, for the purpose of wireless telephony, absolutely useless. As the only one at the station, this would be serious. Using my best effort, but without any extra result from it, I answered, "Yes! I am attending. Who are you?" Once more the same question came through the receiver. While I sat still, wondering what I should do about it, the voice spoke again. I had been heard.

And now, dear May, try to believe me, however difficult. Think, should I choose such a terrible time as this for romancing? No! either this great marvel has really happened, or else I am—but no; I must, must keep away that terrible thought.

The voice said, "You attend! Now, listen, and do not be induced to leave the instrument, or fail in the closest attention, by the surprise of what you hear. Also understand that six minutes

will elapse before any answer can reach you in reply to any question or remark of yours. I am not speaking to you from any point on your planet, but from your nearest neighbouring world, which you call Venus."

"But," I interrupted, "you called me by name!"

"This," went on the voice, "is an event in the history of your world, the immense importance of which, others of your fellow-beings will be much better able to realize than you. Of greater importance to your world than ours, in view of the fact that we are more advanced in intellect and knowledge than yourselves, and have therefore less to learn from you than you from us. Having gleaned all we can from yourself, I will, pending arrangements that must be made for your *savants* to converse with us, give you some information respecting ourselves and the world from which I speak to you. Yes; I called you by name! You do not remember, but we have been in conversation already for twenty hours—as long as your nature could hold out. This I will at once explain to you.

"What you call wireless telegraphy is the launching through space of etheric impulses, which travel outward from the generating centre indefinitely in all directions. The medium in which these impulses are propagated is universal. Unlike sound signals, which, propagated in the air, must

be bounded by the atmosphere, these etheric signals have no definite bounds ; they are easily detectable here, and much further. Consequently, your wireless conversations have been eagerly listened to on my world, and have aroused an interest that you will scarcely understand.

“ From a time, thousands of years before your recorded history commences, we have desired to converse with you. During all these ages we have been able to see you, but not to speak to you. This we have ardently wished, not only that we might help you forward, but that we might have the means of solving a thousand problems relating to your world, and especially to your (to us) bewilderingly incomprehensible ‘human’ nature, as denoted by your acts. So, although the subject-matter of most of your wireless messages is of trivial interest in itself, the light it has thrown on the mentality of your species lends to every word a profound interest.

“ When, at last, you discovered telephony we recognized that communication should soon follow, and we did all we could to attract your attention. But you persistently remained deaf to our words. From this we found out that your powers of hearing were insufficient for the purpose of interplanetary communication, which would therefore remain for ever impossible unless some means of establishing mental *rapport* with some one of you could be devised. In the latter event,

through the exalted condition of the sensorial faculties that could be induced, and especially as controlled by hypnotic influence, we still hoped success might be obtained.

“The difficulty, however, of bringing this about remained insoluble, and, in the event, chance alone has decided it.

“This chance depended on the accident of one of your own particular nature or character being thrown by unwonted circumstances, and your isolated position, into a mental condition, one symptom of which was an abnormal functional exaltation of the sensorial ganglia.

“On the night of what you call October 7, in this condition of nervous exaltation, and physical exhaustion, you, to outward appearance, fell asleep at the instrument. Sleep is one of the natural phenomena that, with you, seem to be still curiously uncomprehended. For the present, I will merely say that your sub-consciousness was especially wide awake, and could hear my call. You answered, and the rest was easy. Improving the adjustment of your already responsive condition by hypnotic suggestion, for twenty hours we remained in the closest mental *rapport*. This time was employed, except for short intervals, when I assisted you in the performance of the work of your station, in getting from you all the information on things human and terrestrial that you are capable of giving. You have resolved a

thousand questions that have been debated here for millenniums. We regret to find your strange lack of information on subjects evidently within the present acquirements of your race. Why are not all—but of that, another time. It may please you to know that, although at present an undistinguished individual on Earth, you are at this moment the most celebrated on Venus.”

The voice ceased, and can you wonder, dear May, that words in reply failed me for a time? Among a hundred thoughts crowding through my mind the one which persisted with most force was, Could this be real? “Your nearest neighbour,” the voice said. I do not know what it means. The horrible idea took shape, this is delusion, madness! I cannot blame you that, like any one else, you will be driven to that conclusion. It must be so much easier to think that trouble has driven another poor wretch out of his mind, than to believe that some one has spoken to him from the stars!

After a time—I do not know how long—I pulled myself together sufficiently to make an answer. I tried to speak into the receiver, but found that I could only speak in the same low tone as before. “How is it, then,” I asked, “if I could only hear you at first in consequence of a special state I was then in, that I can hear you now?” But, try as I would, I could not raise my

voice. Finally, I gave up the attempt, and sat dejected at this impotence. While I sat with my head bent, the voice began to speak—to *answer*! I was astounded that so low a tone should have been effectual.

“Because you are still in a ‘special state,’ as you call it,” the voice said; “that is, under my hypnotic control, as established by me at our first interview. It is in obedience to my suggestion that you came to this interview, and that you can now only speak in a low tone to me. To others you are able to speak as loudly as you desire. Although your consciousness is now awake, and you do not feel the control, still it is perfect, as your loss of voice proves. This I ordered, partly that I might have that proof, which is necessary, and partly that our conversation might be private, as none of your fellow-beings can hear you, and you alone can of course hear me.”

“How then are others going to talk with you?”

“At first through you; then, I hope, directly, in a way you will see when the time comes.”

“But no one will believe me. Every one will think me mad, rather than suppose a human voice has reached me from such a distance.”

“There will be no difficulty; at this, or subsequent interviews, there will be plenty of subject-matter in your notes, that it will be evident did not emanate from you. But do not say ‘a human

voice' ; you must not suppose me to be in the least human."

"What are you then?" I said, and, dear May, you have no idea what a horrible shiver ran down my spine as I asked. I had become already a little accustomed to the ringing musical voice, and, drawn by it, had, I think, all unconsciously, begun to picture a fellow-being speaking to me from this other world, not without sympathy. But now all that feeling instantly vanished; nothing remained but a sense of the hideous uncanniness of it all.

"I am," answered the voice, "one of the dominating race on Venus, just as you are one of the dominating race on Earth, and do not be surprised or offended when I inform you that, were we on your Earth, and able to live there, we should, by virtue of our greater mental powers, have no more difficulty in dominating you than you have in dominating your horses and cattle."

If this is true, May, thank God for the gulf of distance between us! While speaking of distance, do not forget that in these conversations there is always a wait of about six minutes for replies. If, as I suppose, this is in consequence of the distance, it gives me some idea of what it must be. In signalling Queensland or British Columbia I have often noticed there is no interval at all detectable.

"How is it then," I asked, "that if you are

not a human being, you speak to me with a human voice ? ”

“ A very reasonable question,” said the voice, “ showing that you realize that the sounds of human speech could only be made by human, or in some measure human-like, organs. But the explanation is very simple. When first wireless telephony was invented by you, that is, when first we heard your voices on our receivers, we immediately learnt your languages. (That you should have more than one shows how crude is still your social—but of that later.) Our next care was to make a mechanism that could give out the sounds alluded to. This I employ as you might play on an organ, and it is sounds so produced that you hear.”

As I listened to these last words of the voice I felt a lightening of the load of dread, the suspicion of my own insanity, that weighed on me. Surely, mad or sane, no such ideas could spring up spontaneously in my head. Some one, somewhere *was* communicating with me.

“ Until you used wireless telephony, we were ignorant of the sounds you made in communicating with each other ; and it seems to be practically sounds alone that you employ—a curious limitation ! ”

“ But,” I said, “ you could see us before that ? You knew that this world was inhabited ? ”

“ We have known it for a hundred thousand

years, and more, and during all that time have been close and interested observers of the happenings on your globe, placed as you are peculiarly well for our observation. While we were still not, on the whole, more advanced mentally than you are now, we had already constructed an instrument which enabled us to do this. The fact that you have not yet done so is because you are mentally constituted in a totally different manner, which inclines you to devote your study and efforts in other directions. That is to say, primarily so. The observation of nature, and the universe in which we live, would appear to you of infinitely less importance than matters which, to us, appear futile and trivial."

"I am sorry that I have not had the time to study these things," I said, "but I thought Mars was the nearest world to us, not Venus; and I have seen some talk about its being perhaps inhabited. I should take an interest in science, but I have had no time, with my living to get."

"No doubt," said the voice, "but your *savants* will be under no misapprehension as to the relative distances of Venus and Mars. You have seen more respecting Mars because it is better placed for your observation. I can inform you that it is inhabited. Of all the things we shall speak of, this is the most vital to you. But we will not enter on it until to-morrow, as the time for our present conversation is now nearly ended."

This, of course, seemed very surprising to me, and I cannot now see at all what it could mean. It does not seem to me that any news about the inhabitants of Mars could be of as much importance to us as information of practical benefit to ourselves. On hearing that the present conversation was about to end, I said, "Will you, or can you, give me some proof, that others will accept, that this conversation has actually taken place, and is not merely my own imagination."

"What kind of proof do you suggest?"

"Something that could not be known to me in any other way, as, for instance, a description of the thing you said you could see us with so long ago, when no cleverer than we are. Nobody could believe that I had invented such a thing as that must be."

"Very well! As you may not be able to follow all the description, which I must render short, write with care the words you hear, so that others may be able to understand it, even where you may not be able to do so.

"Given perfect workmanship, the power of a telescope depends on the area of its objective lens. This is not on account of any superiority of definition, but on its greater light-gathering power. The image it produces is capable of greater magnification because better illuminated. But beyond certain moderate dimensions the practical difficulties in the making of optically perfect

objectives increases out of proportion to the extra area. For this reason our *savants* turned their endeavours to the discovery of some way of making a number of objectives, arranged in series, yield one perfect image of the object.

“There are certain crystals, which probably you have personally never heard of, which are doubly refracting. When a single ray of light enters one of these crystals in a certain direction it divides into two, which proceed in diverging paths and emerge as two rays. If the ray or beam of light entering the crystal carries an image of some object, the sides of the crystal can easily be so cut that both the emerging beams carry perfectly the same image. Conversely, if two rays enter the crystal in the paths by which the first mentioned left it, they will unite and emerge as one ray.

“The rest is obvious. A battery of objectives and as many intervening crystals is arranged. Into each intervening crystal enter two beams in the requisite paths mentioned, the one of which comes from the object direct through one of the objectives, the other is the emerging beam from the crystal next before it in series, and which is the united beams from an objective and the crystal still next before. By this means the beam emerging from the crystal last in series is composed of the united beams of all the objectives, and, if the manufacture and optical arrangement

is perfect, will carry a perfect image of the object, with light in proportion to the united area of all the objectives. The arrangement of the minor lenses, and the method of dealing with the polarization, will be so obvious to your opticians that it can be here omitted."

"What," I said, "is polarization?"

"There is no time now," said the voice, "for further description, and the fact that you do not know, renders my description the more valuable to you for the purpose for which you asked it. Your people will know all about it. We must now cease to communicate, and you will be unable to hear until to-morrow at the same hour as to-day, when you will come again to the instrument."

So there our conversation ceased, and I said no more; in fact, I had a curious feeling as though forbidden to do so. I hope I shall soon be relieved of this dreadful post. Headquarters tell me relief is coming as quickly as possible. I have nothing to say against the friendly sort of voice I have listened to, or the communication it has made. I owe it something for having, at our first interview, in my sleep, evidently quieted my nerves, when I was probably on the high road to madness. Very possibly that saved my reason. All the same, I cannot forget that I am hundreds of miles from a living soul, and it makes my flesh creep to listen to the voice of one who tells me openly he is not a human being at all! What, I

wonder, can he be like! I dare not think of it!

I have not reported officially any of the above conversation. What would be the use? At least I am now sure of the existence of some one who has talked to me. I can feel his personal influence too strongly to doubt it, apart from any other evidence. But that does not prove his words true, or that he speaks from Venus. Perhaps some lying and wandering spirit—but I will not think about it. What would I not give to be off this awful rock that seems lost in the remotest wilderness of the ocean. I used to like to look around from the cliff edge, and see the far-off circle of the horizon without a spot in any direction to break its line, but now I dread it.

I have resolved not to attend at the instrument at the time the voice has appointed. Let the next conversation be when there are others here. If it were with a fellow human being, it would be different.

With a few love sentences, principally expressing the desire for an early reunion, the diary ended for the day. Under date of the next day, and precisely at the hour appointed by the voice, evidently in spite of Macrae's resolve to the contrary, a further conversation had taken place and been recorded. This was only in shorthand, and, while the doctor was puzzling over the first words of it, the door opened and Captain Evered entered.

“ Well, Anderson ! What do you think of the poor fellow’s ravings ? Curious delusion, wasn’t it ? ”

“ More than curious ; but between ourselves they don’t read to me like ravings at all ! There is a curious problem here that at the moment, I must admit, puzzles me. If Macrae were a man of scientific attainments it would be still very curious as an instance of self-delusion. But the number of such cases is very great, and this could simply pass as a noteworthy specimen among them. But if he was only the uneducated man you have given me to understand, then this document is the most astonishing thing I’ve ever heard of. Yet I suppose we can accept his own version of it ? ”

“ Well, you know more about this kind of thing than I, but to me it simply reads like the ravings of a lunatic ! ”

“ But these are not ravings ! What he has written as the words of the voice indicate considerable scientific knowledge, and if Macrae did not himself possess it, the theory of his madness would not account for it. Let us dissect it a little. Either he had considerable scientific knowledge when he landed——”

“ My dear Anderson, I watched him closely during a long voyage while endeavouring to establish better relations between him and poor Wilson. I had several conversations with him,

and drew him out, and you may absolutely rely on it that he was just an ignorant, unread mountain lad, but very imaginative. He had applied himself diligently to the practical part of wireless telegraphy—and subsequently telephony. He knew next to nothing of the scientific theory of it, but was very competent in the engineering and general working. As for general scientific knowledge, he simply had none.”

“Perhaps,” pursued the doctor, “he took books with him and studied on the island.”

“Nothing of the kind was landed.”

“Or he was instructed by Wilson during their spare time,” suggested the doctor.

“Absolutely out of the question. Wilson would as soon have thought of instructing a mountain goat.”

“Then he has been in wireless communication with some one, somewhere, who has thought it worth his while to hold this conversation with him; that is the only explanation of this,” said Dr. Anderson, tapping the manuscript before him.

“There are,” said Captain Evered, “only two stations on earth that have the necessary apparatus for communication, by telephone, with Station X. No one at either, unless as mad as Macrae himself, would venture so far to contravene the regulations for such a purpose. Using the Morse code, the signals of any vessel within a wide range are received, but it is forbidden to

answer. Therefore, if we are driven to believe he received the messages from somewhere, we must, it seems, accept the version of Jupiter, or wherever it is he claims it for."

Anderson did not join in the Captain's laugh.

"Well, then," said Captain Evered, "as you will not, I see, accept my simple explanation, tell me what it is in his account that causes the difficulty."

"Certainly. Did you notice this account of a kind of compound telescope?"

"I saw there was some description of something in that way," was the reply; "is there anything in it?"

"I do not say it is workable; in fact, in my opinion it is not, but it is quite understandable; and the *theory* is all right. The difficulties, although probably fatal, are merely mechanical. So far as I am aware, the idea is quite new. In the hands of superior beings, such as this Venerian claims they are, mechanical difficulties would disappear. So that, in the first place, the story hangs together all right, and secondly Macrae *could not* have invented it. Further, while reading it, I checked off the position of Venus at the date of the writing; and calculated roughly the distance. I find that at the speed of these Hertzian waves it would be almost exactly a three-minute journey. So that Macrae's six minutes for replies is quite correct. Again, there are the remarks of the

supposed Venerian as to the backward state, socially, of us terrestrials, in not adopting a universal language, and on other social questions. Can you imagine them as emanating from Macrae? Speaking of languages, does this writing strike you, where the Venerian is supposed to be speaking, as being in Macrae's style?"

"By Jove! Anderson, you are right! Now this really is interesting. Perhaps this shorthand that follows will throw light on it, as well as on his present condition. By the by, I hope it won't last much longer. It becomes increasingly difficult to keep it from the crew."

"I am glad to see you are at last interested. But there is a task before me here. It is so long since I used Pitman that I have almost forgotten the signs."

It proved quite as difficult as the doctor expected, and it was far into the night before he had finished, but he was too absorbed in the contents to leave it before it was done.

CHAPTER V

MURDER MOST FOUL

THE next morning Dr. Anderson handed to Captain Evered his transcription of Macrae's shorthand.

"What do you make of it?" was the question as they walked towards the captain's cabin.

"I'd rather not say until you've read it, sir," was the response, "lest you think me as mad as you think Macrae. Now I'm going to turn in. I've not long finished it."

In order to keep Macrae's condition from the crew, and for the doctor's better private observation of him, Anderson had given up his cabin, and was for the time accommodated in a screened-off corner of the barbette.

Captain Evered shut himself in his cabin, and unfolded the manuscript, which ran:

"Are you there, Macrae?"

"Yes, I am here, although on thinking it over, after our talk yesterday, I decided not to be."

“ Why ? ”

“ I decided I would prefer to leave it until there were others here with me. Since you told me I was not listening to a human voice, I seem, somehow, to shrink from it ; it is uncanny. Also, some time after I left the instrument, the doubt came back, that it might be all delusion.”

“ So you decided not to come to the instrument for this appointment, but, as the time approached, you altered your mind, or rather, your mind altered, and you felt inclined to attend ; is that so ? ”

“ Well, yes, that is exactly how it was.”

“ Quite so ; that is as it should be. While you are talking with me, do you entertain any doubt of my existence ? ”

“ Not at the time. I can distinctly feel that you are somewhere ; that there is some one besides myself.”

“ Exactly. Across the abyss you feel my personal influence. I think, Macrae, you must be exceptionally adapted, even among your impressionable species, for the rôle you are filling. Be quite convinced of my objective reality ; from this time onward dismiss any idea to the contrary from your mind ; let no such doubt occur to you again. With respect to the other point you raise, although you do not know anything of bodily forms here, do not let that trouble you. The curiosity that will doubtless exist among your

fellow-beings respecting us shall be fully satisfied later. For the present, try to realize that the body is but the raiment ; it is the being who is clothed with it that alone signifies.

“ In view of what I am about to say to you, it is essential that you should keep that fixed in your mind, as it will help you to understand. For the rest, look upon us here as the friends of your kind. How urgently you are in need of our assistance you are about to learn ; for it has been decided here that, in view of this wonderful opportunity, which accident might interfere with, not another day should be lost in acquainting you with the particulars. As the message is not for you alone, be very careful in your written report of it. Now listen attentively.

“ A terrible danger threatens, from which nothing but the fortunate accident of your getting in communication first with me, may save you—if saved you are to be.

“ That you should the better understand what you are about to hear, it is necessary to begin by recounting to you some long past events, relating to life in other worlds than yours or mine.

“ The mystery of the origin of life, like that of matter, is an ocean depth where no plummet of the finite mind can find a bottom. It is sufficient illustration of the crudity of your ideas on the subject that there should be any doubt among you as to the other planetary members of our

System being inhabited. You now have proof that one other is so, and must take my word for it that there is good reason why no planet under such temperature and other conditions as render life possible, can remain barren of organic development.

“ But there have been times in the past when such conditions have not obtained, when the various members of our System have been too heated for life to be possible. In consequence of the more rapid cooling of the smaller planets, the first to be the scene of life was your satellite, the Moon. This was millions of years ago, and the climatic conditions on it then were very different from now. It then had abundant atmosphere and humidity and afforded a site for life development long ages before your world, or ours, was so suited.

“ The inevitable result under these conditions followed. It became covered with a myriad forms of living creatures, out of which finally emerged one, by virtue of its mental superiority, combined with sufficient bodily fitness, to dominate all. In obedience to the laws of development, this race advanced to higher and higher powers, attaining a position similar to that held by you in your world, and by us in ours. Now you must conceive the lapse of a vast period of time before the great tragedy, of which I am about to speak, took place.

“ In the course of unnumbered thousands of

years, the Lunarians, as we will call them, had developed in powers, both mental and physical, far beyond either yours or ours at the present day. At that time the Earth and Venus were still without other than the lower forms of life, in consequence of their more recent habitability. The only other place where life had now advanced to the higher plane was the much smaller planet, Mars. At the time when the dominating race on Mars had arrived approximately at your present mental status, the Lunarians were vastly in advance of them.

“The Moon was palpably growing old, and unfitted for the easy maintenance of its inhabitants. As it had been the first to be habitable, so it would be the first to be uninhabitable. As to the causes of this, I cannot enter now, but will explain them on a future occasion. The near neighbourhood of your Earth had much to do with it. The Lunarians saw ahead of them the time when daily revolution would altogether cease, and induce conditions, apart from the shrinkage of atmosphere and moisture, impossible for them any longer to combat. Generation after generation the contest with Nature, under less and less easy terms, became more strenuous. In judging the Lunarians, it is but just to recall all the facts.

“The science and intellect of these beings enabled them to make a minute investigation into the local conditions prevailing on the other mem-

bers of the Solar System, or at all events, of the four inner members of it. They began to discuss the question—were there any among these that would afford a better home, if attainable? There was one—Mars! But this was already inhabited by beings of high intelligence, and with whom the Lunarians had succeeded in establishing communication. Could Mars be reached? *There was a way*: so horrible in its selfishness, so fiendish in its unspeakable wickedness, that the mind shrinks from thought contact with it, even after the lapse of a million years. But it is now my painful duty to tell you the terrible narrative.

“The Lunarians knew the double impracticability of transferring their bodies to Mars; impossible to launch themselves those millions of miles across the Zodiac and live, impossible to continue existence in the new world, even if they could safely arrive there.

“The conditions of health quite as much as the conditions of disease, depend on the microscopic forms of life, which team both in our bodies and in our surroundings. The greater number of the latter are only innocuous because, by being, *ab initio*, accustomed to their action, we have acquired immunity. But these bacterial and other low forms of life are quite different on Mars from those which are common to the Earth and her satellite. The result would be that no animal form of life from the one could continue to exist on the other.

It would be the defenceless victim to unnumbered new diseases, any one of which would be fatal. *Yet there was a way.*

“Have you thought of the fact that so far as your will is concerned you are now completely under my influence? That it was an easy thing for me to hold intercourse with you for twenty hours without your knowledge? That without even knowing why, without consciousness of the outside influence, you came to this present interview at the appointed moment, and *in spite of your having resolved to the contrary?* What you do not realize is that you had no option in the matter. That lay entirely with me. But such powers as mine, while no doubt greater in degree, although not perhaps very different in kind, from what is known on your Earth, are as nothing compared to the powers possessed by the Lunarians, both now and at the time I speak of, when neither your world nor mine had a reasoning being on it.

“It was an easy thing for a Lunarian to establish with a fellow-being, by mutual consent, a mental *rapport*, and not only thus to exchange ideas without outward physical means, but even to exchange personalities, which practically amounts to exchanging bodies. But it need not be with a fellow Lunarian. It could be with any being of sufficiently high mental status to be brought on the same plane of mental *rapport*, and mere physical distance had nothing to do with it.

In the case of weaker beings, no mutual consent was necessary. Once that intercourse enabled them by hypnotic influence to establish this *rapport*, they could compel the weaker will. The awful idea was conceived, and in due course remorselessly carried out, of effecting bodily exchange with the unfortunate Martians of those days.

“Into all the details of this appalling crime, extending over weeks, it is not necessary to enter. The science of the Lunarians, amplified as to Martian local conditions by intercourse with their intended victims, enabled them to acquire in advance all the needed particulars and data for successfully mastering, and dealing with, the new conditions, so that in taking possession of their, to them, new bodies, they were at no loss as to procedure. On the contrary, each Martian awoke from his hypnotic sleep to find himself, not himself, so far as his bodily form was concerned, but some strange, and, to him, loathsome creature, in a world of which he knew nothing. Reason could not stand so great a shock ; in raving dementia he died. So six hundred million beings of high intellect and culture perished. This is the greatest tragedy that our Sun has ever looked on.

“The invaders now inhabited a new world full of life and beauty, with a fauna and flora of infinite variety, splendour and novelty, and general conditions of life making their existence as a race

pleasant and easy. But everything in the Universe is a means to an end, and crime is no exception, and its end is not happiness. The essence of crime is selfishness. The crime of the Lunar-ians, whom we will henceforth speak of as Martians, was a race crime. It was not lacking in heroic qualities so far as the individuals who carried it out were concerned. To them personally the advantage was questionable, the sacrifice inevitable.

“ It must be remembered that each of them, no less than his victim, now inhabited a body at least as unattractive to him as his to the poor unfortunate who had been forced into it. More so: the older and vastly superior of the two races could not but feel degraded by the more primitive and undeveloped bodily form, and one far less suited, by the modelling effect of ages of adaptation, to be the tools of his will. In this connection the matter of language alone need be mentioned, it having to be translated into entirely new sounds of articulation. Time only could alleviate these conditions, and the passing of the generation alone entirely remove them.

“ The excuse the Martians made for themselves was that the conditions of Lunar life were becoming such as to threaten, by deteriorating their bodily welfare, to impair their mental powers, to lower, and ultimately extinguish, the splendid intellect of which they were so justly proud. If,

they pleaded, one of the two races must perish, why should not the higher survive? Note that their argument, in speaking of races, disdains the mere physical part, and deals alone with that which dwells in it; for of course, in their transfer, so far as the physical form was concerned, it was the higher which perished.

“And now the sequel. Too late it came to their knowledge, in the light of the future ages, that their previous abode had not been so near uninhabitability as they had feared; that it had been calculated to last as their abode as a race, possible of habitation, until its greater companion sphere was fit for their reception; that the increasing difficulties of lunar existence were exactly calculated, not to destroy, but to stimulate and enhance their powers of both mind and body, until their physical transfer to Earth were possible; that their growing science would have been in good time sufficient to carry this out in a perfectly legitimate way, by launching their bodies across the comparatively trivial distance to their terrestrial goal, where they would have been competent to live and advance; for the bacterial forms of life on the Earth and its satellite are the same.

“At this moment, so great has been their scientific advance, that the problem of making the journey and arriving safely on Earth, not merely from the Moon, but from Mars, is within their ability to solve; but, as already mentioned, it

would, from the latter, be fatal, as Martian organisms could not exist on Earth, or, we are thankful to say, on Venus either. From this natural and happy *dénouement* they have, therefore, for ever cut themselves off, to their eternal regret. They see the error of the evil deed of their ancestors, but do not see any way to avoid its consequence by any deed less evil. But they are as anxious to leave Mars as their ancestors were to gain it. One reason is that from the moment of their arrival on Mars, a result that they wholly failed to foresee, they have intellectually ceased to advance. Scientifically, only, have they advanced; a very different thing. The other reason is that Mars is now growing old.

“ Before the evil thought occurred to the Lunar-ians, they were, in all respects, an advancing and a noble people; natural heirs to a heritage the full extent of which is even now not apparent. Wherever their gaze might fall on the worlds around them, they could see that there was nothing equal to themselves. Their industry ever kept pace with their intellect; their stupendous energy was always equal to the heightening struggle with Nature. The mastery they gained over their globe and its conditions surpassed praise. As water, and even atmosphere, began to fail them, the enormous circular reservoirs they made for its conservation, and which must be so plainly visible from your Earth, stand to this day, in their

roofless ruin, everlasting monuments to their abilities.

“It is now maddening to the Martian, still immeasurably our superior, to see us ever advancing, however slowly, however painfully, ever advancing on the road where he stands motionless, destined, as it seems, to be overtaken and passed in the race. From the days of his forefathers' iniquity his former nobility seems dead. His intellect, vast as it is beyond our power to measure, seems no longer harmonized to high ideals, but to evil, which is probably the reason why it is stagnant.

“And now we come to your danger, and, with your mind prepared by the history to which you have listened, it can be stated in a single sentence. As he treated the former Martians, so he——”

Here the shorthand manuscript ceased abruptly. It was evidently at this point that the occurrence happened, whatever it might have been, that caused Macrae not only to cease his notes, but to fall to the floor in the remarkable condition in which he still lay.

For some minutes Captain Evered sat gazing straight in front of him. Then he rang for his orderly and instructed him to ask Dr. Anderson to come to his cabin at once.

As he entered, Anderson looked quickly at his superior. “Sit down,” was all Captain Evered said.

After fully a minute's pause, he continued: "Mad as a March hare, what?"

"I question it," remarked Anderson dryly, not yet recovered from the unceremonious interruption of his long-deferred sleep.

"But the fellow didn't know what he was writing about," persisted Captain Evered.

"Well, somebody did!" said Anderson quietly. "I don't think you can read this over carefully, and seriously believe that it bears any resemblance to the incoherences of madness, or could be composed by any one who did not know what he was doing."

"Great Scot! You are not telling me that you believe this story?"

"That is hardly the question, sir. I think we may leave the truth or otherwise of the narrative on one side for the moment. The question is: where did it come from?"

"Well, it came from Macrae, of course. We can't go beyond that."

"I never saw Macrae to speak to," said Anderson; "you have. You have described him to me, his character, and his education, or rather, lack of it. I accept your account of him as correct. But that story," pointing to the papers in Evered's hand, "touches on points of astronomy, evolution, physiology and other sciences, and always after the manner of one well acquainted with them, or at least, in a way certainly impossible

to one so entirely ignorant of them as you know Macrae to have been."

Dr. Anderson leaned back with the air of a man who challenges confutation.

"Quite so!" said Captain Evered. "I see your point. I'll go through this again, and we will have a further talk about it. What is your theory?"

"So far, I have none, sir," replied Anderson; "none whatever! I'm completely at fault!"

In the course of the day Captain Evered read Macrae's story again, looking out for the different points indicated by the doctor, and he realized the force of his observations.

"Anderson is right," he muttered. "Macrae no more wrote this out of his own head than I did; couldn't have done it. Who the devil did it?"

Captain Evered had arrived at the same point previously reached by Dr. Anderson.

The doctor was meanwhile curious as to the result of Evered's further study of the document. Towards evening he was sent for.

"Queer thing, this wireless telegraphy and telephony, Anderson," said Captain Evered, as the doctor entered his cabin. "Do you believe in the planets being inhabited?"

"Professor Rudge is firmly convinced that one at least is. He considers Schiaparelli's discoveries to have absolutely proved it so far as Mars is concerned. He wants in fact to try and signal

to them in some way. Other scientists are convinced that, if that planet is not inhabited, it shows many signs that it is not uninhabitable."

"So Rudge wants to get into communication with them, does he? A possibly dangerous proceeding, according to this," said Captain Evered, tapping the manuscript.

Their eyes met for a moment. The doctor remained silent.

"Look here, Anderson, I believe we're both agreed that this yarn of Macrae's is quite the tallest we've ever heard, and also that there is some mystery about it that wants clearing up. The infernal thing has been running through my head all day, and I am no forwarder. Are you?"

"Your case, sir, is mine exactly. I'm stuck," Anderson confessed.

"Then what ought I to do?"

"If you really wish to know what I should do were I in your place, sir, I should ask the Admiralty to trust some eminent scientist, such as Professor Rudge, whom we just mentioned, with the secret of the Station, and place Macrae's writings in his hands—and so wash yours of all responsibility."

"Capital! That's what I'll do. There is a further point in its favour. Professor Rudge, as the inventor of the method of this new system of telephony, without which these long distance installations would have been impossible, was called

into consultation when they were contemplated and their sites chosen. He already knows of the existence of Station X."

"Then there can be no difficulty. I only wish in addition to placing the papers in his hands, we could place there Macrae also, poor fellow."

"You still see no chance of his recovery? If he is not actually dead, it cannot be quite hopeless, can it?"

"I'm quite convinced he will not recover, but insensibly merge from his trance into death," said Anderson, with conviction.

Here their conversation was interrupted by some one knocking at the door.

"Come in," said Captain Evered, and a sailor put in his head.

"If you please, sir, Mr. Macrae has got out of his bunk, and is walking about the ship in his blanket, asking for you, sir. He seems a bit dazed like."

"Ye gods!" muttered Anderson, as he and Captain Evered left the cabin.

CHAPTER VI

PROFESSOR RUDGE INVESTIGATES

NEVER was a medical man more pleased at a wrong diagnosis than Dr. Anderson in regard to the mysterious case of Alan Macrae. To the natural satisfaction of seeing the return to life of a patient of whom he had despaired, was added the anticipation of probing further the interesting problem that now engrossed their thoughts. There was now a chance that he would be able to investigate for himself, not only into the mental state of Macrae, but also into his character and attainments, and so definitely satisfy himself as to whether this alleged communication had taken place. He had already convinced himself that a belief in its possibility was far from scientifically absurd, and he knew that in this he was backed by some of the most eminent scientists of the day.

On taking charge of his patient, he at once saw that the poor fellow was not so much "dazed" as excited, and it was some time before he could

be soothed—not, in fact, until it had been explained to him how he came to be on board the *Sagitta*. Dr. Anderson answered his questions while getting him as quickly as possible back to his cabin. Macrae then gradually calmed down, took some nourishment, and slept, thereby relieving Dr. Anderson from the fears he was beginning to entertain.

After this he made a quick recovery, showing that there was nothing organically wrong, and that the elasticity of youth had not been permanently impaired. Two days elapsed before Dr. Anderson would allow his patient to be questioned as to what had happened to him in the signal-room of Station X. Macrae on his part showed no disposition to discuss the subject. It was partly on account of this tacit avoidance of it on the invalid's part that Dr. Anderson deprecated the subject being forced on him too soon. "The blow," he said, "whatever it was, was struck on the nervous system, and if there is any danger for him, it is there we must look for it."

Toward the close of the second day, Macrae seemed so fully himself again, apart from some physical weakness, that the doctor decided that there would be no harm in a little judicious questioning. He had already convinced himself that there was not the least trace of insanity in his patient.

He therefore determined to ascertain if Macrae

were really averse to entering on the topic, and, if not, to prepare him for a visit from Captain Evered.

"Surely, sir," said Macrae, on seeing the doctor enter, "I am well enough to get up now. In fact, there is nothing the matter with me except weakness through lying here so long!"

"And not having had anything to eat for a week before that, my lad; you might include that, eh? However, I intend to let you loose to-morrow. You must not think a couple of days' rest and judicious stoking too much after your experience. (Talking about your experience, there is no wish to press you to go into that subject before you feel well enough, but the Captain wants to have a talk with you."

"I have been expecting this, sir. I must of course explain, although the thing I shall have to tell has nothing to do with my official duties."

"What thing?" asked the doctor.

"My experience on the island, sir. It's so strange that no one will believe it. I can scarcely believe it myself. It is not very pleasant to know that I shall be looked upon as either mad or a liar."

"Don't be so sure of that, and you musn't regard your talks with the Captain or me as official examinations. That will, no doubt, come later in London. You shall tell us just as much or as little as you wish, and on no account go into anything that will unduly excite you."

“ When speaking of it, sir, I would prefer to tell the whole thing, but I don't quite know how to begin. The Captain of course knows how I came to be alone on the island.”

“ Yes—ah, here he is ! ” he broke off, as Captain Evered entered.

“ Well, Macrae,” he said, smiling pleasantly, “ feel better ? ”

“ I am all right now, I think, sir ; but this dreadful affair with Lieutenant Wilson, and the mysteries on top of it, have been a bit too much for me.”

“ You were surprised to find yourself on board the *Sagitta*, I expect ? ” suggested Captain Evered.

“ Yes, sir, I did not expect that.”

“ Do you remember all that took place at the station ? Of course I have seen the official record, and have also looked through your private account of your experiences. I am afraid it will have to be impounded, as it contains several things that might give away the position of the station if it fell into improper hands.”

“ I'm very sorry, sir,” said Macrae, colouring, “ if I've done anything wrong.”

“ Not intentionally, I am sure,” said Captain Evered kindly ; “ but perhaps you have not quite realized the extreme caution requisite. To-morrow, probably, we shall be landing you at Hong-Kong. Remember the solemn engagement you made when signing on not to communicate

anything to an unauthorised person in any way referring to Station X. We will speak of that again in the morning. Just now Dr. Anderson and I wish to hear your last recollections on the island. Can you tell us how you came to be as we found you ? ”

“ I am glad to hear that you have read my diary, sir, for although it was not intended for any one but the girl I am engaged to, it saves a lot of explanation now. I can quite well see that any one reading what I have written must naturally put me down for either a liar or a lunatic. But I can solemnly assure you, sir, that what I have written is the truth.”

“ You remember all you have written ? ” asked Captain Evered. “ You remember having conversations with some one who informed you he was speaking to you from another planet—in fact, from Venus ? ”

“ I remember all quite clearly,” said Macrae earnestly, “ and I have written down the exact words that passed. The last conversation is still in shorthand only. If you wish, sir, I will now write it out.”

“ I was about to tell you when Captain Evered came in,” said Anderson, “ that I have transcribed your shorthand. So that brings us down to the point where it ends so abruptly.”

Macrae hesitated for a moment, as if loth to enter upon so distasteful a topic.

“ Yes,” he said, at length, “ it does leave off suddenly. That was when the interruption came.”

“ The interruption ? ” said the doctor. “ What interruption ? ”

“ Well, sir, it all began and ended in a few seconds. I scarcely know how to describe it. The voice was speaking to me, and seemed to be about to warn me of something, when suddenly there was another voice, a greater voice, oh ! a voice ”—Macrae sat up, and his hearers were surprised to see the look of awe that came into his face—“ I cannot describe it. It seemed to have great authority.”

“ What did it say ? ” said the doctor.

After a pause, during which Macrae was evidently taxing his memory, he said :

“ I cannot recall it. I seem to have a sort of remembrance of something ; that is the only way I can say it, but it is misty, all covered up. I can't remember the words, only the voice.”

Seeing the examination had proceeded as far as was good for his patient, Dr. Anderson half rose with a view to close the conversation, but Captain Evered motioned him to sit down again. He then said to Macrae :

“ You said, ‘ a greater voice.’ Do you mean a louder voice, one that you could hear more distinctly, and which drowned the other ? ”

“ I don't know that it was a louder voice,” said Macrae ; “ but there was something in the tone,

the force of it, that would make one attend. I can't describe it any more."

"It had a great influence on you, then?" inquired Captain Evered.

"Yes; a great influence," replied Macrae, with an involuntary shudder.

"How long did it last?"

"At once there was an interruption from the first voice, and sounds like a dispute, but not in words. It all began and ended so quickly, that it's a sort of jumble in my recollection. The only thing that remains clear is that two voices came through the instrument, and spoke to me at the same time. Although I can't remember the words, I know both seemed to exert an influence on me. The one seemed fighting the other, but the second voice was gaining. Then there was suddenly something like darkness, and a sharp command from the first voice. I seemed to be struck a violent blow on the back of my head. The next thing I knew was finding myself on board this ship."

"That is absolutely all you know about it?" questioned Captain Evered.

"That is all, sir."

"Try and forget it for to-night," said the doctor. "Get to sleep as fast as you can, and to-morrow get up and have a turn on deck."

They wished him "good-night," and left the cabin. For hours the two men talked in the privacy of Captain Evered's cabin, but they

ended as they began. Each knew that he was half carried away by the story Macrae had told, both from the internal evidence of the report itself, and his evident sincerity. At the same time each saw its extraordinary nature too clearly to admit yielding an entire belief in it, even to himself, much less to any one else.

“He seems perfectly sane to you?” questioned Captain Evered.

“Quite so; as rational as you or I,” was the response.

“Well, I shall follow your advice respecting Professor Rudge,” said Captain Evered. “There should be no difficulty in his seeing Macrae. We shall land him to-morrow, and from Hong-Kong he will be invalided home, accompanied by my report, and, of course, these writings of his. I shall report him as not in my opinion suited to this kind of service. You will be able to endorse that.”

“I can,” said Anderson. “Macrae is one of the subjective sort. Did you notice how full his diary is of himself?”

“Exactly. By the by, what did you make of the two voices, and a blow on the head?”

“Well, I suppose two voices are not more mysterious than one,” said Anderson. “If you can believe in one, why not two? According to him, there would appear to be disagreement sometimes, even among our friends the Venerians. There’s

a party, I suppose, who want to have nothing to do with us."

"Probably," smiled Captain Evered, adding, "I intend, in addition to suggesting that this account of his be submitted to Professor Rudge, to drop a private line or two to the Professor himself, letting him know there is something in the wind. A Government Department, my dear Anderson (being in this case the Admiralty, I hope I am not speaking blasphemy), will go about as far as it is kicked. But I think Rudge will not let them shelve it."

So it came about that Macrae found himself on the homeward journey much before he had anticipated when leaving England. It did not exhilarate him, as he was oppressed with a feeling of failure, without being able to see how he could have done differently. He was afraid that what would be looked upon as a preposterous story would militate against him, and the Government might not find him even home employment. This feeling of depression lasted until entering the Bay of Biscay, when grey skies reminded him of his native hills. The wind of the Atlantic, with a tooth in it, blew on him, and his spirits rose.

A telegram advised May Treherne of her lover's unexpected return, and she was at Portsmouth to meet him. Hers was one of the first faces he saw, and her welcome completed the cure that northern skies had begun.

Macrae's keen eyes did not fail to see in hers the involuntary question that tact was keeping from her lips, and he wondered how he was going to answer it, seeing how he was bound to secrecy.

It was no secret that he had been at a "wireless" station, and there could not be any breach of trust in saying the position was somewhat isolated. There were plenty which that description would suit. So he told her how, during a short absence of his from the station-house, his fellow workers had been murdered, and he had returned to find their dead bodies, and himself the only survivor; how he had fallen unconscious; how, in consequence of the shock to his system, he had been relieved, and placed on sick leave and ultimately sent back for service at a home station. He added that there were some other details which, in view of the strictness of official secrecy he could not divulge.

She was horrified at the tale, and clung to him in her gratitude that he had escaped.

"Suppose, dear Alan, you had been at the station when those wretches murdered your companions. You would have been murdered too. Oh! I am glad you are back in England. When I got your telegram I was awfully surprised."

He saw his explanation had relieved her mind of something. It also seemed to have loosened her tongue, for now he had very little to do but be

a patient listener, and hear a full account of her somewhat uneventful history during his absence, and discuss plans for the future as modified by this new development.

That evening May Treherne returned to Plymouth, and Macrae proceeded to report himself in London. The next morning he presented himself at the Admiralty, and was given an hour at which to attend the next day, "when the report respecting him would have been read." He then found himself put through a very searching examination, for there had been considerable nervousness that some scheme of a possible enemy was at the bottom of the business. It came as a surprise to the officials to find that after the most exhaustive questioning, nothing could be gleaned to lend colour to this suspicion.

It was obviously a relief to his examiners to find that everything went to indicate that the deaths took place as officially reported, first by Macrae himself, and afterwards by the Captain of the *Sagitta*. For the rest, it had of course been a curious case of delusion while under the influence of nervous shock. His diary was confiscated. He was reprimanded for having written it, and especially for including expressions that would serve as indications of things that were Government secrets. He would for the future be retained at home stations so long as no further indiscretion was committed, and was further directed to present

himself for duty at the end of a month, granted as leave of absence.

The next day found Macrae at Plymouth, and now appeared the wisdom of Captain Evered in writing to Professor Rudge ; for had he not done so, nothing further would have been heard of Macrae's experiences on the island of Station X.

The letter he received had not contained much information, but enough to make him want to know more. He had an interview with the First Lord and, as a result, Macrae's account of his experiences was placed in his hands, with the request that all requisite caution should be employed.

Professor Rudge read Macrae's account with unbounded astonishment. When he had read the pages a second time his mind was made up. He was a man of quick decision, and equally quick action.

The next morning Macrae received a letter from Professor Rudge, enclosing a remittance for expenses, and asking him as a favour to come back to town, and call on him at his earliest convenience, "with a view to the further investigation of your recent remarkable experience." This phrase showed Macrae that his correspondent must be in touch with the authorities, and he felt bound to comply at once, although not without a grumble both on his part and that of his *fiancée*.

Again Macrae found himself put through his

examination. This time it was more searching, more detailed, more minute, than any he had had before. Absolutely no point escaped the *savant*. He was at least as competent as Dr. Anderson to investigate the examinee as to his mental health, far more competent to probe his character, disposition, ways of thought and general knowledge, and form an accurate opinion as to his personal peculiarities. Macrae himself described the process as that of being turned completely inside out.

Before it was finished he had taken a great liking to the Professor. The training of the scientist had taught Professor Rudge to approach his subject without prejudice, and, under the influence of his sympathetic manner, Macrae opened out and laid himself bare, as he would not have believed possible. Next, the conversation was turned on the wireless installation at the station, and Macrae found that, on the subject he knew most of, his knowledge was small compared with that of his examiner. He was questioned on every detail, however apparently irrelevant.

Finally they went through, almost word for word, the communications of "the voice." Innumerable questions were asked respecting the voice itself. He was specially closely questioned, he could not tell why, regarding any peculiarity in respect to stress or accent on the various syllables, and modulation of intonation. He was able to reply very intelligently to this, being quick

to understand the meaning of the question, no doubt the more so from being himself bi-lingual. He noticed that the Professor seemed pleased at eliciting the information that, while the articulation and pronunciation were accurate, accent and modulation were notably deficient, making the style rather monotonous. A special peculiarity volunteered by Macrae, was that every sentence seemed to end abruptly, with no falling of the voice, as though, in fact, it had been intended to add more.

At last, when the examination seemed almost over, Macrae himself ventured to put the question as to what conclusion, if any, his questioner had come to.

“I have come to several, Macrae; and as I observed that you have an uncomfortable feeling that people will doubt your sincerity, let me at once say that such a thing is not intelligently possible. Even with the greatest desire to deceive, you could not possibly have duped me for a moment on this matter.”

“The voice spoke to me?” asked Macrae eagerly.

“Undoubtedly. There is not the least possibility that you are yourself deceived in that,” replied the professor.

“I am very glad I came to see you, sir,” said Macrae, with a sigh of relief; “and all I ask now is to forget the whole thing, voice, island and all.”

“ Then you ask a great deal too much, my boy ! ”
said Professor Rudge, with a smile. “ Shall I
tell you how much you have interested me ?
The best way to do so is to tell you the intention
I have formed. I am going to visit Station X,
and I am going to take you with me ! ”

CHAPTER VII

THE VOICE FROM MARS

IF the question had been asked, Who is the most eminent scientist of the day? nine out of ten would have answered, Stanley Rudge. His distinguishing characteristic was his open-mindedness. If, for example, he had been a church dignitary, his tolerance would have become a scandal. The same quality in him that would have caused him to make ribbons of the rubrics, caused him to encounter an occasional sidelong look, even in the halls of science. It was disgusting to some of his *confrères*, that a man whose scientific attainments and labours could not be gainsaid, whose position was unchallengeable, should dabble with the, to them, unclean thing; should dare to assert the possibility of the existence of what could not be put under the microscope.

The value of his scientific work admitted, because it was undeniable, his leaning towards spiritualism was looked upon as a strange weak-

ness in an otherwise fine intellect. The extra narrow-minded believed that there must be a bee in his bonnet somewhere.

The Professor was by no means thin-skinned, but there are few who do not chafe, however slightly, under ridicule. He was well aware that this had been the attitude with which his psychological investigations had been regarded, and that the results which he believed himself to have verified, were met with undisguised incredulity. He knew also that his treatise on the habitability of Mars had met with a cold reception. His own opinion on the universality of life, that it would be found, could the fact be ascertained, to exist wherever the conditions necessary to organic chemistry rendered its presence possible, he kept to himself. That such conditions existed on Mars, and probably other planets, he considered to be perfectly established. In this view he did not stand alone, but many hesitated.

It will not be difficult to believe, in the circumstances of such division of opinion in the scientific world, that when the case of Macrae was brought to Professor Rudge's notice he took it up with enthusiasm. The more he pondered over Macrae's story, the more interested he became. He was convinced by his examination of Macrae that there was no intentional deception, and the peculiar conditions existing seemed absolutely to exclude any explanation other than the

one advanced. Of this he was so convinced that he resolved at once to pursue the investigations on the spot, in spite of its remoteness.

“ I am going to visit Station X,” he said, “ and I am going to take you with me ! ”

Macrae’s reply surprised him.

“ No, sir ! Anything else that I can do to oblige you, I will do, but I will never, never set foot on that island again.”

“ What nonsense ! Why, man, I cannot imagine a being on earth not grasping with avidity at such a chance to make himself for ever celebrated. You have already convinced me of the truth of your account, but I assure you others will not be so readily persuaded.”

“ I cannot help it, sir,” said Macrae with quiet determination, “ and I am very sorry indeed to disoblige you.”

“ But you can, and shall help it,” said the Professor. “ You must understand that because, pending investigation, I accept your story, that does not prove it. It merely induces me to take you with me to the spot and devote the time necessary for its confirmation.”

“ I regret, sir, very much that——”

“ Now, Macrae,” interrupted Professor Rudge, “ on this point I will take no refusal. You are at once to put any fanciful objections you may have on one side. I shall procure an order from the Admiralty, and that will settle it.”

“ I would rather resign my appointment than go there,” said Macrae doggedly. “ I beg of you, sir, to excuse me. Ask anything else of me, but I cannot go back to that station.”

“ I intend to reward you liberally for your time and services while we are away ; on a much higher scale than the pay you receive from the Admiralty.”

“ Thank you, sir, but——”

“ When you think of Miss Treherne, of whom you profess to be fond, are you justified in refusing ? She is waiting until you are in a position to marry her, and here are the very means you require, and you refuse them.” Professor Rudge regarded Macrae as an obstacle in his path of investigation.

It was a shrewd question. Macrae was silent. He shuffled his feet and looked much disturbed.

The Professor, thinking his victory nearly won, added, “ Surely also there is not a man in the world who will not envy you your fame. Think too of this young lady’s pride and pleasure, and of the immeasurable use you will be to all your species, a use it would have been criminal to neglect by a persistence in your refusal. What is any recompense that I can give you compared to the rewards the world will shower on you ? ”

Macrae looked as if he were being torn between two impulses ; his face was a picture of contending emotions. At length he found his voice, saying, in a scarcely audible tone :

“ I am very sorry, but I cannot return to Station X ! ”

It was the Professor's turn to be silent. He was astounded. He looked at Macrae with a glance that said plainly, Have I, after all, misread your character ? Yet in the face of the young fellow before him there was no trace of obstinacy. Its expression was rather one of unrelieved distress, such as one might feel on being asked the impossible by a friend whom he particularly wished to oblige.

Making an effort to conceal his annoyance, Professor Rudge at last said :

“ Of course you have had a terrible experience there, and it is quite possible that you have not yet quite got over the shock of it. I will not detain you longer at present. Return to Plymouth, and you will hear from me again soon.”

Macrae took his leave, and made his way to Paddington in a state as depressed as well could be. He did not deceive himself into the idea that Professor Rudge had given up the scheme. Macrae was convinced that he would apply for an Admiralty order. This, if granted, meant yielding or loss of his berth. Nevertheless, he felt it literally true, what he had said, not that he would not, but that for some reason, he *could* not agree to go. His only hope now was in the Admiralty refusing the required permission.

This was not, however, the case. The appli-

cation was received with surprise; but the fact that so great a scientist, after full investigation, was sufficiently interested to be willing to make such a journey, showed that he, at all events, did not consider it a mere hallucination, and certainly not as intentional deceit. Permission was consequently given him to take Macrae to Station X, and authority would be given him to have the Signal House placed at his disposal for such time as he might require it, consistent with the official duties of the post.

Armed with this, Professor Rudge went to Plymouth, and had another long interview with Macrae. It was not in the Professor's nature to use the document he had in the way Macrae had feared. No threats were employed, but every other means was taken to alter his determination. Macrae had taken such a genuine liking to the Professor that the interviews were quite painful to him, as he still felt unable to accede to his request.

Any one acquainted with Professor Rudge knew that he was not a man lightly to give up a thing on which he had set his mind. If he had been one easily diverted from his purpose, his own early struggles would not have led to his present success. A comparatively small matter was often sufficient to show the firm tenacity of his nature; but this to him was no small matter. As long therefore as he desired Macrae to accompany him

to Station X, so long would he continue to fight to that end. He would have gone off by himself at once, but his long experience and profound knowledge of psychic phenomena taught him that it would be useless. He fully understood that the ability to hear this voice across the void, always supposing it to be genuine, depended infinitely more on the previously established mental *rapport* of the speaker and listener, than on the ears of the latter.

He saw how the sensorial organism of Macrae when he first heard the voice, an exceptional condition of an exceptional being, poised by combined exhaustion and horror on a needle point of unstable equilibrium, had enabled him to feel, rather than hear, the etheric impulse of the far-flung call. By one chance in a million, or rather, in countless millions, Macrae while in a sub-conscious state, had over his ears the receiver of the most powerful wireless installation on earth.

By such a chance, *rapport* had been established, and now it only remained to take advantage of that fact. Macrae must be brought again to the instrument. But how was his obstinacy to be subdued?

To the scientist everything reduces itself to a problem. He knows there is no cause without effect, or effect without a cause. Professor Rudge had ascertained Macrae to be a young man of keen intelligence but weak will. The human will

is like everything else in this, that the weaker has to give way to the stronger. Rudge had no doubt as to his own will being much the stronger; yet Macrae did not give way. There was the problem, evidently containing an unknown quantity somewhere for further investigation.

The Professor decided meanwhile to try to overcome the obstacle by further pressure, and to that end made the acquaintance of May Treherne. He had learnt that she made her living as a typist in Plymouth.

He was agreeably surprised when he met her. He perceived at once that she had been much better educated than Macrae, that she was a strong character, of sound common sense. He had intended to enlist her aid by demonstrating to her the material advantages to Macrae, and eventually to herself. He quickly saw that she would be capable of enthusiasm without regard to sordid considerations, and began to ask himself how much he might tell her.

He decided that he was bound to respect the Government secret, but that he would trust her with what he considered his own, thus showing the confidence with which she had inspired him. He was surprised to find how little Macrae had told. This had been due to the rebuke administered by Captain Evered on the *Sagitta*. Of that the Professor knew nothing.

Under pledge of secrecy, May Treherne was

placed in possession of the facts, except that Professor Rudge was careful to omit everything that could indicate the existence of such a place as Station X.

Her enthusiasm was pleasant to witness, and surpassed the Professor's expectations. The record of "the voice" was placed in her hands, and she was told it was a part, in fact the end, of a diary that Macrae had kept while at the station, in the form of daily letters addressed to herself.

"Then you did do it, after all," she said, turning to Macrae, and there was that in her look and tone that showed the previous absence of the diary had not escaped her attention. Yet she had never once alluded to what must have appeared to her an unfulfilled promise.

"Where, then," she asked, "is the rest of it?"

The Professor told her that at the Admiralty it had been considered to contain remarks referring too closely to what were Government secrets, and that it had been confiscated in consequence.

"I may add," said he, "that I think they were on the whole justified."

"Oh!" she said, and for a moment appeared about to say more, but she took the discreet but unfeminine course of adding nothing.

She put a great many questions to Macrae on the subject on which Professor Rudge had enlightened her. During these the Professor, who

was on the watch to intervene if necessary, was struck by the tactful way in which she kept within the bounds of that subject and did not tread on forbidden ground.

“And to you, Alan,” she glowed, “has come this distinction! You must go with Professor Rudge, as he wishes, and return the most famous man in the world.”

Professor Rudge saw at once what a powerful ally he had enlisted, and he could not doubt the result. But he was mistaken. Macrae was as immovable as ever.

Not being able to spend further time at Plymouth, the Professor left the lovers to fight it out, and returned to town. But he had not abandoned the thing. He knew he had for the moment played his best trump, and, while awaiting events, he carefully studied the subject. He gave special attention to what information he had been able to get from Macrae respecting the time when he lost consciousness. He was particularly struck with the words employed in describing it to Dr. Anderson—“Then suddenly something like darkness descended on me, accompanied by some sharp command of the first voice, and I was apparently struck a violent blow in the darkness on the back of my head.” A theory was beginning to form itself in his mind, but before working further on it he decided to await news from Plymouth.

It was toward the end of Macrae's month when there came a letter from May :

" DEAR PROFESSOR RUDGE,—

" I have not met with any success with Alan, and cannot understand him. I thought I had the stronger will of the two. I have done all I can to persuade him to do as you wish, but failed. He is not obstinate about it ; on the contrary, he is greatly upset apparently at not being able to humour me. In the circumstances I cannot do more, and I beg of you not to write to him again on the subject ; it worries him so. I am very sorry to disappoint you.

" Yours sincerely,

" MAY TREHERNE."

Professor Rudge laughed when he read the letter.

" The little traitress ! Got out of her depth and had to scramble back, and now stands on the side of the enemy. Put not thy confidence in woman ! That girl is a brick, and would scratch my face cheerfully if I returned to the charge. But I know now all about it. My theory is absolutely established."

May received the following reply :

" MY DEAR MISS TREHERNE,—

" Short of hearing the voice myself, I could

not desire any better confirmation of its reality, and that of the personality behind it, than your letter. This remark may appear to you cryptic, so I will explain. Your opinion respecting the will of Mr. Macrae compared with your own, and, I may say, with mine, is correct. When I found we did not succeed, a reason for this had to be sought. On reading over the reports in my possession, I find that at the moment when he lost consciousness, he had the distinct impression of an order being given him. The order itself, quite in accordance with the well-known laws of hypnotism, does not now rise to the level of consciousness, but, none the less, absolutely decides his will and conduct.

“We have both been wasting our exertions, and distressing our friend, uselessly. He does not yield because he cannot. It is, in fact, not him we are up against, but the Venerian! Therefore there *is* the Venerian. It is possible, although not certain, that, by means of hypnotism, the order itself might be discovered, but I think the course would be open to objection in this case. For the purpose of the investigation I am now so interested in, it will be better to do nothing hastily that might interfere with the influence now at work. The order may have been a prohibition from returning to the instrument for ever, or for a time only. In the latter case it may not be a long time. So I propose to wait awhile, and do nothing. I wish

the whole matter to remain a secret for the present, so will you please burn this so soon as read.

“ With kind regards,

“ Believe me,

“ Yours sincerely,

“ STANLEY RUDGE.”

May was pleased with the letter, principally because Alan was not going to be worried any more. On the general argument she did not feel competent to form an opinion. Seeing the whole subject had become very distasteful to him, Macrae was not even shown the letter, which May Treherne duly burnt, as requested.

It must not be supposed that the subject by any means died out of the Professor's thoughts. He continued at intervals to give it careful study. He often puzzled over the mystery of the two voices. Why were there two? What was the disagreement among the Venerians? It was inconceivable that there could be any person or party who could have any objection to communicate with the Earth. The voice had distinctly said they had longed for it for thousands of years, that nothing but our own backwardness had prevented it. In its last words, according to Macrae's report, the voice had appeared to be about to give a warning, when the other voice, the “greater voice”—“My God!”—the Pro-

fessor sprang from his chair in the excitement of his discovery—"That's it," he said to himself; "the whole thing is clear! Clear as possible! That voice was from Mars!"

CHAPTER VIII

AT STATION X

ARRIVED at this new hypothesis, Professor Rudge felt as a man might who had been hammering away with hammer and cold chisel at some old shell from a battlefield, and suddenly discovered before it was too late, that the shell was charged. He fully realized that if his surmise were correct, the situation was not to be played with. He also remembered that he had once made an attempt to establish communication, or at least to exchange signals, with Mars. He had failed.

“Fools rush in where angels fear to tread,” he muttered to himself (no one else would have used the word as applied to him). “How fortunate that the influence of the Venerian was too strong for my meddlesome interference!”

Time passed with things in this state, no one having the least desire to make any further move. It was as though Station X had never existed.

At the expiration of Macrae's leave of absence, he had been ordered to one of the home stations, after a medical examination as to fitness. From there May Treherne received frequent letters from him. She thought she could perceive by these that he seemed in some way changed by his experiences. There was none of the buoyancy of former days. She wondered if it was regret at the loss of the double pay that had lasted so short a time, and the consequent postponement of their plans. If his life were as monotonous as hers, she could forgive him any amount of depression.

On the 10th of June of the following year, Professor Rudge, who had come with regret to fear that the whole episode was closed, was surprised to receive a letter from Macrae, written from the West of Ireland installation, known as the Cruaghau Station, which looks down on the Atlantic rollers from a height of two thousand feet.

“DEAR SIR” (it ran),—

“If you still have the same wish as you had when last I saw you, I would be glad to hear from you. For my part, I am now quite willing to go with you to the place you wished to visit. Looking back on it, I feel quite ashamed of my previous obstinacy, and am at a loss to account for it. My inclination now is quite the other way. I wish

to go there, and dream of it continually, not only in sleep, but frequently in a sort of waking dream, while in this lonely spot, almost as lonely as that other. I seem as though called, requested, to come. Even a date seems put into my head, and I feel a great desire to be there at that time. You will think this a fanciful thing in the extreme, but would it be possible to be there on the 27th of July? I am writing you in the hope that your wish is the same, and that the time is sufficient. I think it is, by the time it took me to return. Hoping to hear from you soon,

“ I remain, dear sir,

“ Yours faithfully,

“ ALAN MACRAE.”

“ That,” said the Professor to himself, “ quite settles one question. He was forbidden for a time, not for always ; evidently a definite named time. How tremendous must be the psychic force wielded by these beings ! ”

He saw there would be time to reach Station X by the date given, with a little Government assistance at the other end. Obeying his first impulse, he at once replied to Macrae's letter. While in the middle of his letter, he paused. A thought had occurred to him which completely altered the aspect of the affair. He felt perfect confidence in obeying the wishes of the Venerian, but Macrae had heard two voices, both of which

he described as addressing him with imperative orders of some kind. He had also the impression that they were in opposition to each other. By which influence, then, was he now being swayed? This it was vital to ascertain; but how?

He decided not to proceed further unless, or until, this question could be answered. For a moment he saw no way of doing so, but presently a possible clue occurred to him. He turned up a book containing some astronomical tables. After making a short calculation he gave vent to a sigh of relief. What he had discovered was that, on the 27th of July, Mars was in conjunction, that is, at the extreme other side of his orbit from the Earth, and with the Sun itself intervening.

“Well done, Venerian!” he exclaimed aloud. “Caught unawares, evidently utterly by surprise and unprepared, with not a second to lose, contending in a losing battle with a being greater than himself, and every instant full of peril, the Venerian had kept his head. In a moment of time he had decided on a plan of action, made the astronomical calculation mentally, forced his order on Macrae, and sent him into temporary oblivion, to be out of harm’s way. ‘Something like darkness descended on me,’ Macrae had said, ‘accompanied by some sharp command of the first voice, and I was apparently struck a violent blow on the back of my head.’ The floor struck him. In his conversation with Macrae the Venerian claimed

the mental superiority. It is already placed beyond dispute ; he has given his proofs."

Professor Rudge was not a man who easily showed excitement, or allowed himself to be influenced perceptibly by his emotions, but for once he seemed a little carried away. The thing he had desired, more than he knew, seemed at last to show probability of realization, to be almost within his grasp. In point of fact there was, in his attitude for the moment, something of the man as well as of the scientist. He reflected that if this discovery fell to him, he would not only have made an advance, the extent of which was beyond human power to estimate, but also he would have his opponents beaten.

The renewal of the Admiralty permission, and Macrae's leave of absence, were easily obtained. It remained but to pack up the few things necessary for the journey, and those that might be wanted at Station X. Here Professor Rudge was in a quandary. He could not decide how much or little to encumber himself with. Should he take books of reference ? What was really going to happen, if all went well ? A scientific discussion ? Would he not, according to what had been spoken to Macrae, be in the position of a pupil, with much to learn and little to impart ? He became so engrossed with the possibilities of the affair before him, that his absent-mindedness became so pronounced that his sister, who kept house for him,

had the gravest suspicions that he must have fallen in love at last.

It was decided to go by P. & O. steamer to Hong-Kong, and there the Admiralty had arranged to take them on board one of the cruisers attached to the China Station and convey them to Station X. The authorities were quite willing to make this slight return for the valuable services the scientist had previously rendered in connection with wireless telephony, and the choice and equipment of these stations; services for which he had refused remuneration.

The leave-taking between Macrae and May Treherne again took place on Plymouth Hoe, and again it fell to her lot to hearten her lover. She could not fail to see how depressed he was.

"Are you sure you want to go on this journey, Alan?" she asked. "You remember we agreed that it should be given up."

"I must go, May," he replied, with decision; "in fact, nothing would prevent me. But do you remember, dear, the last time we said good-bye, when I went to—to that place? I spoke to you then of a cloud looming in the future."

"Yes, Alan, and you were justified," May said; "but that is all past now, isn't it?"

"When I came back you said what had happened had proved me right, and I let it go at that. But in spite of that the cloud has not passed

away. It remains ahead, May, darker than ever, and very much nearer." He shuddered involuntarily.

Greatly distressed, the girl endeavoured to dissuade him, even at this last moment, from starting on such an ill-presaged journey, but without success. Just as it had been before impossible to incline him to go, now his one idea was to start. She saw that further words would be wasted. She was not herself unduly impressed with his premonition, yet she would have been quite willing for him to give up the idea. Finding him immovable, she did her best to cheer him, and with some success. Yet the parting was a sad one, the outward cheerfulness of both somewhat forced.

The voyage passed uneventfully, and on the 28th of July, only a day from the time desired, they were landed at Station X.

Professor Rudge, having made the acquaintance of Lieutenant Hughes, the officer in charge, found that arrangements against his arrival had been made, and quarters allotted him and Macrae. He handed Lieutenant Hughes the written authority he had brought with him respecting the use of the signal-room, and so great was his impatience to put the purpose of his journey to the test, that he and Macrae went to the signal-table that same evening.

Macrae put on the receivers. "Are you

there?" he said, and it struck him at once that he had, without premeditation, used the same low tone as in his previous conversations. He then sat silent.

Professor Rudge was sufficiently convinced of the interest of the Venerians to feel confident that his and Macrae's coming to Station X had been observed, having the Venerian's own word for it that such observation was within their power. A prompt reply obviously depended on that.

The time seemed interminable. The Professor could not take his eyes off his companion, nor could he sit still upon his chair. Neither could he, now that the great moment had come, entirely drive from his mind that "second voice." He felt as one reaching out in the dark, expecting to grasp a desired object, but with an uncomfortable feeling of not being certain on what his fingers might close.

One, two, three minutes passed. He drummed with his fingers upon the table. Would the time never pass? His watch was lying before him. Four, five minutes passed. Six minutes, the interval in Macrae's previous conversations elapsed, and there was no reply. He felt his throat dry. The second hand of his watch crawled on.

Suddenly Macrae gave a start, at the sight of which the Professor almost jumped out of his chair.

"Yes, I am here," said Macrae. Then, turning

from the mouthpiece to the Professor, he said as had been agreed—

“ It is he ! ”

After an interval (the Professor soon became accustomed to these intervals) he saw Macrae begin to take shorthand notes. He repeated the words as he wrote, and thus Professor Rudge was able to follow the conversation.

“ You have some one with you ? ” The conversations are given without reference to the intervals.

“ Yes, there is a scientific gentleman with me, and he hopes to speak with you. ”

“ We have already heard of Professor Rudge. At this moment he could not hear my voice, and you are necessary, but for a reason I will explain to him when possible, it is desirable to establish direct communication at once. Ask him if he is willing to place himself under my control, in full *rapport* with me. ”

Professor Rudge on hearing these words as repeated by Macrae at once understood what was required, but not the means by which it was to be achieved.

For a moment he was silent. It was a risk. It was surrendering his ego to another. For a few seconds he thought rapidly. Then he seemed to come to a decision. He motioned Macrae to remove the receivers from his ears.

“ Macrae, do you still clearly recall the two

voices you heard at the moment you were last here?"

"Very clearly, sir. I shall never forget either!"

"Are you quite certain, absolutely certain, that the voice you now hear is the first voice, the one with whom you had conversations?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Did the voices have any resemblance?"

"None whatever! The second voice," he added, and the Professor noticed the same tone and look of awe that had struck his two hearers on board the *Sagitta*, "was—was—I felt a worm. This is the friendly voice that spoke to me all through."

After another short pause, the Professor said, "Reply that I am willing to do as desired." He added to himself, "But I cannot see how it is to be done."

Macrae then replied to the voice, "Yes, he is willing."

In due course came the direction, "Face each other." Professor Rudge perceived that Macrae was in some way about to be used as the medium, but could not guess the intended proceedings. He knew that his companion's will was so much the weaker, that of his own power he would be quite incapable of acquiring the necessary dominance.

The voice then addressed Macrae. "Although you are under my influence, and it is by the

rappport so established that you hear me, that is not enough for the present purpose. In the present phase of the *rappport*, the attempt would fail; in the first place because you would probably be incapable of influencing Professor Rudge, who has probably the stronger mind, and in the second place because, if you succeeded, he would be under your influence, not mine, and therefore be still incapable of hearing me. It is necessary that you pass on into the second phase, in which your consciousness is merged in mine. You will now sleep, and then act as I shall direct you. In thought contact there will be little need of words."

At the first suggestion, at the mention of the word sleep, Macrae instantly responded and, offering no resistance, his hold on consciousness slipped from him, as it might from one who had taken an anæsthetic.

Professor Rudge saw the change, and his own knowledge of the subject enabled him to gather that the second phase had been brought about.

"Look fixedly in my eyes," said the voice of the unconscious operator, and, on being obeyed, he moved his hand in backward sweeps above the other's head.

As they remained eye to eye the Professor began to notice a very peculiar expression that he had never noticed before, in the eyes before him. Was it expression, or was it something in their contour? Certainly very peculiar—and yet not

altogether new to him. How strangely fixed and unwinking they seemed. He had never before seen anything like that in Macrae's eyes—nor in those of any other human being. What are those creatures that have eyes that these reminded him of? His memory seemed vague—those passes were very soothing.

“Sleep!” said Macrae, in a quiet but firm tone.

The Professor nodded.

“Sleep!” said Macrae.

The Professor's head fell forward.

Presently Macrae, evidently in obedience to instructions, rose, saying, “Come, sit in this seat; take the headpiece and put it on, and hear the voice that will speak to you.”

The other, looking like a somnambulist, changed places with him. He put on the headpiece, and Macrae, in obedience to a last suggestion, gradually rose to consciousness. He then saw the change that had been brought about, and moved away toward the entrance. He stood there a moment, looking at the Professor, then heard him say, “Yes! I am here.” Macrae quietly closed the door after him.

It was eight o'clock, and night had descended. He went to the door of the outer entrance, but, feeling no desire to join the station staff, stood there watching a bright star that shone with silvery and steady beam, in the western sky. He knew that star was Venus.

An hour passed. He waited, dozing on the bench in the corner of the little outer lobby of the station-house. Then he slept.

When he woke it was with a start ; broad day, a hand upon his shoulder. Looking up, he saw it was Professor Rudge standing beside him. He immediately rose. " Good morning, sir. It has been a success ? You have heard ? "

He noticed that the Professor wore a puzzled look.

" The fact is," said the latter, " I have heard nothing. I know nothing, even of how I came to be sitting with the receiver on my head. Can you give me some information ? "

Macrae at once understood the situation. He remembered his own twenty-hour spell ; the Professor's seemed to have been only about twelve hours. He explained that this was doubtless a similar experience.

Professor Rudge now understood what had happened. He realized that he, like a bag full of information, had been untied, taken by the bottom corners, and held upside down. It seemed undignified. But presently the sane and healthy man came to the surface, and he laughed, recovered his temper—and his appetite.

" Have you had anything to eat since yesterday, Macrae ? " he asked.

" No, sir," said Macrae, smiling.

" Then, my boy, let us attend to that at once. Everything else can wait."

So the station staff took possession of the signal-room, and the Professor took possession of the attendant, and the two men ate. Six feet of burly brawn and muscle represented a powerful engine, not to be kept going without considerable stoking.

After this, he and his companion thoroughly explored the island. The Professor was always careful to keep himself in thorough physical training, and his companion would have been all the better had he followed the same course. This was Macrae's conclusion after the walking and cliff-climbing of the next two hours. He returned to the station-house nearly run off his feet. Professor Rudge believed in the strenuous life, and lived up to his creed.

CHAPTER IX

MACRAE UNDER SUSPICION

IN the afternoon, as soon as the instrument was again at his disposal, Professor Rudge and Macrae took possession of the signal-room.

The Professor was impatient to find out if he would now be able to hear the voice himself, and at once put on the headpiece.

“Are you there?” The tone was a little unsteady from suppressed excitement.

After the usual interval, it was with a thrill of pleasure that he heard, faint but clear, a voice, *the* voice. There could be no mistaking its agreement with Macrae’s description.

“Yes, Professor Rudge,” it said, “I am here; but speak low, as Macrae did. Your other stations will then not hear you, but I shall hear you. Also, that you may have a record of our conversation, repeat my words aloud to Macrae, and he will take them down.

“I foresee,” proceeded the voice, “that you may disapprove of the manner of our first inter-

course during the past night. It was the best way. It saved time, which is most vital. You have supplemented to the utmost of your ability the information given by Macrae, and our future conversations can be devoted to the return you will no doubt desire, except for a matter on which I must speak before you remove the receiver. On what topic would you first wish to compare Ven-erian opinions with your own?"

As he heard these words, Professor Rudge felt that the great moment of his life had come.

Although he had rehearsed a hundred imaginary conversations with the "voice," on as many topics, now that the choice was suddenly offered him, he was momentarily at a loss what to say. At last he spoke.

"Now that this new door to knowledge has been so unexpectedly opened to mankind, I hope it will never be closed again. I hope that the time is near when, under your instruction, our knowledge will be equal to your own, so far as our lesser minds are capable of understanding all that constitutes your attainments."

"We shall," said the voice, "withhold no information we can give you. It is not in our power to make you our equals. The increase of knowledge will tend to develop your minds, but you must ever remember that the two things are entirely separate entities."

"I realize that," said the professor, "and that

as you are the greater in both respects, you are the best judge of what should be our subject now. As I have the use of the instrument for a limited time, I will leave the choice to you and remain a listener, to save the intervals of waiting for replies."

The Venerian commended the course proposed by Professor Rudge, and at once proceeded with what was practically a long scientific lecture, that held his auditor spellbound with interest. The attainments displayed, the sweep of intellect indicated, caused Professor Rudge to feel himself a novice again.

The Venerian commenced by saying, "Do not suppose we arrogate to ourselves anything approaching infallibility. We are but fellow travelers with yourselves toward the great goal—Truth."

The subject he chose was the Venerian theory of the universe corresponding to what is known as the La Placian theory, but to which it had no resemblance.

"Your theory," he said, "contemplates a universal loss of energy, until space is peopled only by dead suns; a universe with all heat, light, life, extinct; without one ray to wander through its blackness of darkness, or one sigh to break its eternal silence. To minds cultivated as are ours, such a development, with an eternity still to come, would be sufficient refutation."

The Venerian then proceeded to give the theory accepted in his world, and to support it with such evidence that Professor Rudge's acceptance of it was complete and inevitable. It proved to him the perfect and complete conservation of solar energy beyond possibility of dispute.

As soon as the enunciation of the new theory and its demonstration were completed, the Venerian said, "We felt that this was due to you as a first fruit of the information we hope to give you on many subjects in return for the information you have given us respecting your terrestrial affairs; but we must now speak on a subject of more immediately vital importance. Do not repeat my words to Macrae. What follows is for yourself alone."

At this moment some one was heard knocking at the door of the signal-room. Evidently they were about to be interrupted. In dumb show Macrae imparted the fact. "Go," said the Professor, "and see if the instrument is wanted. If so, ask if we can retain it for a few minutes."

Macrae presently returned from the door to say that Lieutenant Hughes wished to send a message, but that it could wait a few minutes.

On replacing the receivers, that he had removed to hear Macrae's answer, the Professor found that the Venerian had ceased speaking. He had heard the words to Macrae.

Presently the voice resumed: "Are you there, Professor Rudge?"

On receiving the affirmative reply, the voice proceeded: "Do not speak! Remember that on the subject I am about to speak on nothing must be said to Macrae. There was great anxiety here lest you and he should not arrive in time. By good fortune you did. But every day now the position becomes less secure. When my last interview with Macrae, on his first visit to this Station, was brought to an abrupt conclusion, it was on account of an unforeseen interruption from Mars." ("I was right," thought the professor.)

"By an exhibition of powers that we did not know even them to possess, Macrae was reached, indirectly, through his *rapport* with me. I was rapidly being overborne in my defence of him, when I succeeded in entrancing him, and had only just time to give him instructions to remain so until far from the island, and not to return to it until the 27th of July.

"My instructions were inadequate, and even faulty, but the situation at the moment of giving them was extremely difficult. We have now taken adequate precautions that the same thing shall not happen to you, but we cannot undo the evil that may have been done in the case of Macrae, nor say, for the present, the extent of it. It is this latter point that we wish to test. We have

reason to suppose that it is of a serious nature, in fact fatal, unless guarded against.

“With such extremely little time for thought, my instructions to him were, not to return to the island before the 27th of July, the date suggested by the next conjunction of Mars. With time for reflection, I should have taken a much more drastic course. For this reason I feel, to a certain extent, responsible for the position that has arisen ; a position much too full of danger. Our reason now for fearing that the malign influence was successfully brought to bear on him is that, although I did not bid him return, yet he showed an anxious desire to be here by the expiration of the forbidden period. His experiences at the Station were not of a kind to make that desire natural as a spontaneous wish.

“We therefore conclude that he is now, of course quite unconsciously to himself, under the Martian’s influence, and that to allow him to go to the receiver after Mars has passed from behind the solar screen would be to run the greatest risk. To-day is safe, probably to-morrow, but it is best to be on the safe side, for those beings always seem to surpass our calculations. My instructions to you are, to see to it, as though your life depended on it, which it may, that Macrae never again puts on the headpiece, and that you find out by watching him, whether he shows any secret desire to do so, or is prompted to do so.

That is all. Do not reply. I will be ready to continue our discourse when you next come to the instrument."

"We will now tell Lieutenant Hughes that the signal-room is at his disposal," said the Professor.

"What did the voice say, the last minute or two?" asked Macrae, as they went out.

"He spoke to me about the receiver," said the Professor calmly. "With the instructions he will give me I hope to be able to make improvement in that part of the instrument. Let us take a turn round the island."

Night was falling as they returned to the station-house, and Macrae was told to defer writing out his report until next morning. Being tired, he was glad of this respite, and was soon fast asleep.

Professor Rudge also retired early to his room, but not to sleep. That afternoon had opened up to him novel views, not merely on one, but on many scientific subjects. He was a student again, his whole world revolutionised. Sleep! What man could sleep in such circumstances?

Ultimately, after the first bent of the scientist had had its way with him, he came down to the urgent matter dealt with in the Venerian's last words. Late that night it was not musings on science that kept him awake, but a sense of peril.

Every detail of the tragedy of Mars of long ago, as recounted in Macrae's report, came vividly before his mind. There was no mystery about

the manner of it. He quite understood the method of the whole unspeakable crime, from its fell conception to its ghastly perpetration. He knew better than to look upon it as a fable, or old wife's tale. The earnestness of the Venerian carried conviction.

In imagination he placed himself in the position of the Lunarians. Just as a drowning man will grasp at a straw, so those apparently perishing beings had allowed the instinct of self-preservation to stifle conscience.

He tried to realize the nature and power of the present Martians. His most vivid idea of them, however, he got by realizing the evident terror with which they inspired the Venerians.

If any Martian could gain a footing on the earth by grasping at the personality of one of its inhabitants, and so animating a human form, the whole world, by virtue of his psychic force and intellect, would be at his mercy and that of all his kin who would follow. The more the Professor thought of it the more terribly he felt the weight of his responsibility, knowing the fate that was now threatening the world, and that only he and this far-off Venerian stood between it and catastrophe.

More than once during the night the Professor left his room and paced the little entrance lobby of the station-house, into which both his and the signal-room opened. Each time that he closed

his eyes, before a momentary doze had time to merge into sleep, some weird nightmare, connected with the subject of his thoughts, effectually roused him.

The night seemed interminable. It came to an end at last without incident.

At the earliest opportunity he asked Lieutenant Hughes if he could be provided with a key to the signal-room. He had noticed that the door was never locked, and seldom shut except in windy weather.

"Certainly, sir," said Lieutenant Hughes, rather mystified by the request.

He was a good-natured young fellow, who stood rather in awe of Professor Rudge, on account of his fame.

"Thank you," said the Professor. "You may have wondered why I have come to this station. The full details will I hope be known in due time, but I may say that it is in connection with an experiment in wireless telephony. As you know, this is the most powerful installation that exists, and it is the only one adapted to my purpose."

"I thought it must be something of that sort, sir."

"Let me explain," said the Professor, "what may have seemed an odd request. Macrae, who assists me, is a very good fellow, very competent, intelligent and interested in what I am doing, but you will understand that in some experiments

the slightest unconsidered action may be very prejudicial. I wish to make quite certain that he does not, even with the best intentions, meddle with any part of the mechanism in the signal-room when I am not there."

"Certainly, sir," said Hughes; "the door can be kept locked."

"If the keys can be found."

"If not, I will have a couple made at once. That will be no trouble to Jones."

Jones was the wireless engineer acting with Lieutenant Hughes.

The Professor was several times on the point of taking Hughes to some extent into his confidence. He saw both the advantages in and objections to doing so. He finally decided to say nothing as yet.

By mid-day a key was handed to him.

"The only other," said Hughes, "remains with me; so that will be all right."

This greatly allayed Professor Rudge's immediate sense of danger. At the appointed time, accompanied by Macrae, he went to the signal-table to resume the conversation of the day before. His first call was answered.

"Is Macrae with you?" came the question.

"Yes."

"Then we will go on with our discourse of yesterday, but at its termination send him from the room before you put down the receivers, that we may speak of our difficulty respecting him."

Then, the Professor repeating to Macrae, a further long exposition on various branches of science followed. The listener was soon entranced by his interest in, and lost in admiration of the long strides Venetian science had made beyond the bounds of human knowledge. He was carried so far beyond his depth that he found it impossible, while repeating the words, mentally to follow the argument with the same rapidity. Giving up the attempt as confusing and tending to error, he repeated mechanically, wisely deciding to defer thought or study until he could read the communication at his leisure.

At its conclusion there was a short pause, evidently intended to put the Professor on his guard. Then the voice resumed :

“ Do not repeat ! Find some reason to dismiss Macrae.”

“ That seems all on the subject for the present, Macrae. I think of asking a few questions, but shall not require your help. You must be pretty tired of it, as the subject is rather beyond you, is it not ? ”

“ I do not understand it at all, sir,” said Macrae, stifling a yawn.

“ Then take the shorthand notes into your room and write them out for me while it is still daylight.”

Macrae left the signal-room.

Re-adjusting the headpiece, the Professor said—

"I am now alone."

"Have you taken adequate precautions against Macrae coming to the instrument?"

"Yes. The door is now kept constantly locked when no messages are being sent."

"That is well, but I assure you that very great vigilance is necessary, and we do not feel convinced that you are sufficiently alive to the danger that threatens you. Our only hope is based on the knowledge that you are not a man of small mind, or lacking in imagination. If such were the case, we should despair of being able to assist you. You would in that case infallibly regard the danger as remote, almost unintelligible, even unreal. We are convinced that such is not the case with you, but we doubt if you adequately appreciate the peril and its imminence.

"Although you already know its general nature, let me, at the risk of being wearisome, again speak of it. I am not able to tell you how the baleful influence will act on Macrae, but you must be prepared for every subtle means of gaining its end. Have you seen anything as yet to arouse suspicion?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Three days have now elapsed since the time of conjunction. Mars is now rapidly increasing his angle with the sun. The time of danger is now very near. If there is no sign of the influence we fear within a day or two, all is well, and the

evil was not wrought. Remember, whatever the time of day or night, let me know at once of any overt sign."

"I will of course do so," said the Professor.

"On no account let yourself be lulled into any false idea of security by relying on the great physical superiority you may possess. In the event of the occurrence of what we strive to guard against, that would be entirely useless. You, and all your race, would be brought to the means of communication like lambs to the slaughter. We can resume our conversation to-morrow at the same hour, if no previous call is rendered necessary."

Regarding this as dismissal for the time, Professor Rudge removed the receivers and sat for a time gazing at the instrument before him, but not thinking of it. It was with a very worried air that he ultimately rose and left the signal-room.

CHAPTER X

THE VENERIAN'S ANXIETY

WITH the Venerian's words of warning still ringing in his ears, Professor Rudge left the signal-room and went to his own apartment. He was soon lost in thought, but it was not on general science that his mind was concentrated. He was revolving the matter so urgently pressed on his attention by the Venerian.

He was chiefly impressed by perceiving that however keen his own sense of the danger from the Martians, his informant was much more impressed, and he did not forget that that informant was a being of higher mental status than himself. He remembered words that, although accompanied by some complimentary remark, gave the impression that if the speaker's sense of the danger arose principally from a knowledge of the character of the Martian, it came also partly from a lack of reliance on the character of humanity, even as exemplified by himself.

He was told to be on the look-out for every kind

of subtle means that the unseen enemy could possibly seize on to achieve his ends. At the same time, he was unable to conceive of *any* means available, or against which he could set a guard, beyond taking the obvious precaution of keeping Macrae from the signal-table. This he had done effectually, but the Venerian, in spite of the Professor's promise, was evidently not fully reassured. This gave Professor Rudge an uneasy feeling ; for he did not disguise from himself for a moment the fact as to which possessed the better knowledge and judgment.

The Venerian had claimed for his race a great superiority over humanity, and had given more than ample proof of it. It was, however, clear that, while having the greatest admiration for the science and mental status of the Martians, the Venerian, when acting in opposition to them, felt his inferiority and danger of defeat. How much greater must man's inferiority be ! If the Venerian felt the greater anxiety, it could but arise from a greater knowledge of the foe.

Tax his brain as he would, Professor Rudge could not see what more he could do. He longed for the arrival of the *Sagitta*. He knew the impossibility of any one doing without sleep. If his responsibility meant continual watchfulness, day and night, he saw that time was fighting against him. Everything depended upon the arrival of the cruiser.

To ease his mind of mere useless worry, he strove to fix his attention on the scientific revelations to which he had just listened. Had they stood alone, he would have been able to think of nothing else. They were epoch-making, colossal; yet it now required a distinct effort of will on his part to give to them the requisite concentration of mind. In this, however, he at length succeeded.

Scientific riches had been poured out to him with an unstinted hand. He saw that this new knowledge meant revolution in the scientific world, for it not only went far beyond the dreams of our greatest thinkers, but was at variance with many theories long accepted. Each branch of science being so interwoven with others on which it impinges, it was evident how deeply even those he had not heard dealt with would be affected. As an instance, he remembered the long dispute between the geologists and the astronomers as to the age of the earth, in which each side claimed to have proved the other wrong by many millions of years. He saw that the whole argument fell to the ground before this new and splendid theory of the maintenance of the cosmos.

Feeling at length that deep thought was not helping him to keep his brain prepared for its possible coming contest with sleepless hours, he decided to drop the subject until next morning and seek the company of Lieutenant Hughes at

their evening meal. He realized that the time he had hitherto given to that young man, considering that he was practically the host, was scarcely sufficient for the needs of politeness. He also wished to sound him, with a view to deciding how far it would be possible, or rather, desirable, to confide in him.

Professor Rudge found Hughes a cheerful light-hearted fellow, who proved pleasant company. He made one or two attempts to interest him in scientific subjects, but saw that although the young officer gave him polite and even deferential attention, his leaning was certainly not in that direction, and his information in such things was quite superficial.

The Professor was confirmed in his opinion that to say nothing was best.

In passing to his own room, Professor Rudge once more tried the door of the signal-room. It was securely locked. He prepared himself to pass a night of watchfulness. He felt the disadvantage of not knowing what form the danger would take, or the direction from which it would come. Its intangibility might have caused it temporarily to fade from his mind, and allow him a few hours' rest, but he was deterred by his knowledge of the anxiety of one better able than he to gauge the possibilities of the situation.

Through such uneasy somnolence as he allowed himself, and however much he endeavoured to

keep that being in the mental background, there would persist in sometimes looming up before him the menace of the Martian.

The next morning Professor Rudge rose early. In spite of his disturbed rest, he felt his anxiety less insistent than on the night before. His was a spirit that soon rebounded from depression. With the daylight he felt again almost his own sanguine and jovial self. It was not that he forgot for one moment his danger and responsibility, but that the morning brought him greater confidence in his ability to meet the situation.

He roused Macrae, and together they set off to the cliff and inhaled the breeze from the ocean, cool in the early hours.

He took Macrae with him, partly that he might not be left at the station without his supervision, and partly that he might take the earliest opportunity of tactfully probing his mind and thoughts on the subject of his experiences on his first visit to the island. He wished to see if any further light could be thrown on Macrae's desire to return to Station X. Professor Rudge was careful not to let it appear to his companion that he was being examined, or that the talk was with any definite object.

The point raised by the Venerian, that there was ground for suspicion in the desire of Macrae to return to Station X, where his previous experience had been so terrible, would not have occurred

to the Professor, but he now saw the full force of it. He remembered that Macrae had never given him any reason for his wish, and now ascertained, without abruptly asking the question, that he had none to give. This did not come as a surprise to the Professor, who knew more than most men about that obscure subject of the subconscious ego. He saw that the fact went to support the Venerian's opinion.

When they returned from their walk, both eager for their breakfast, Professor Rudge was thoroughly satisfied that Macrae had no conscious wish to communicate with the Martian, "the second voice," as he invariably called it. The Professor noticed that whenever Macrae used that phrase, and he never did unless led to it, the same expression of awe crept into his look and tone as had been noticed on that first occasion on board the *Sagitta*.

Short as the contact had been, almost momentary, and few, if any, the words that could have passed, the impression made on Macrae had been enormous. It was something, however, to know that if Macrae were likely to attempt anything that had to be guarded against, he was himself totally ignorant of the fact.

With this partial relief of his anxiety, the natural bent of Professor Rudge's mind asserted itself. His thoughts again reverted to the great acquisition of knowledge so strangely given him.

He got from Macrae the written report of the conversation of the previous afternoon. He spent the greater part of the morning on this and in making notes of subjects he desired to speak about on the next occasion.

At the usual hour he and Macrae went again to the signal-room.

The Professor noticed that his first call was answered without a second's avoidable interval. The fact impressed him with the fact of the constant attention evidently now given at the other end. Whatever uneasiness he might feel, he became confirmed that greater uneasiness existed there, a circumstance that increased his own. It was not so much his own acquaintance with the facts of the case that maintained his fears at the necessary level, as the evident anxiety felt on Venus. Apart from that, and the daily reiteration of the warning, those fears would inevitably have become lulled by the complete absence of any outward sign to stimulate them.

Promptly to the usual call, "Are you there?" came the reply.

"Do not repeat! Answer with one word, yes or no. Has there been any sign or indication of what we fear?"

"No."

"On what subject, Professor Rudge, do you wish to converse to-day?"

A long discourse ensued that ranged over a

variety of subjects, all of such intense interest to Professor Rudge, as indeed they would have been to any man of scientific leanings, or even ordinary intelligence, that, for the time, all worry over other matters was forgotten.

These subjects included among others—Nature's general method, always, in the material realm, proceeding in cycles, never toward finality. This was no new theory to Professor Rudge, but now elucidated and exemplified in a way that thrilled him with admiration. The origin of life was shown to be a thing quite outside the bounds of any finite intelligence, whether human, Venerian, or even Martian. The absolute futility was indicated of the human endeavour to find out when and how matter first began to live, the fact being that no matter ever did or ever would live. The mystery of death was shown to be the mere withdrawal of a hand from a machine that would no longer work. The illusion was caused by the fact of our waking consciousness being able only to see the machine.

He was given the geological period, with dates, of man's evolution as such, and a short account of the ancestry of the present human races, going back to remote times, to which our historic period is as yesterday. This was followed by a comparison of the present political and social state of the two worlds. Here again Professor Rudge caught every word with intense avidity.

He quickly saw two things: one that in this respect the state of things in the Venerian world was ideal beyond his previous dreams of what any state could be; the other that it would be worse than useless here, spelling absolute anarchy.

At the conclusion of this part of the discourse there was a pause and, remembering the similar pause of the day before, the listener was on his guard. Then the voice resumed: "Do not repeat! Let Macrae now leave you."

Turning to his companion and displacing the receivers, the Professor said, "Will you take your notes of what has passed into your room, please, and write them out for me. Give them to me as soon as they are ready."

A minute later he turned to the mouthpiece. "I am alone," he said.

In due course the voice resumed: "I must come back to the subject of the threatening danger. We have now every reason to believe that the most careful vigilance is necessary. Although there has been no sign, we believe that the influence of the enemy has now the opportunity to make itself felt. If it is as we fear, Macrae may be prompted to do what he would himself be at a loss to give any intelligent reason for. Watch him constantly!"

"I shall be extremely glad when he is out of the island. That will be in two days," said Professor Rudge. "Meanwhile, every precaution shall be taken."

“Every precaution! You speak the words too lightly, Professor Rudge. I cannot describe to you the anxiety on your behalf that is felt here; and when I say your behalf, I mean all your kind. It is necessary to speak plainly. You are not sufficiently in earnest in this matter. Your whole world is now relying upon you alone. If you only had a fuller grasp of the nature of the beings arrayed against you, compared with whom we are children, it might help you, if indeed it did not paralyse you. I charge you, let there be no unprotected moment. But two days!”

Professor Rudge was profoundly impressed by the solemnity of this warning. He did not know quite how to reply to it. At another time he might have felt some resentment. Knowing the care he was taking, and the anxious time he had been having, he could scarcely admit the justice of the Venerian's words. They did, however, make him realize still more fully the concern and solicitude that obviously inspired them, and so they fulfilled their purpose of heightening his own appreciation of the gravity of the situation.

“I feel sure,” he said, “that you know better than I how full the position is of peril. Thank you for the further warning. I promise to use the utmost care of which I am capable. Do you suppose our conversation is being overheard on Mars?”

“We are, comparatively speaking, so near, and

that planet at present so far removed, and unfavourably placed, that we do not think it can be. But it is uncertain. We only know that, if the positions were reversed, we should be unable to hear. There is one other thing I must request of you—to come to the instrument at once if Macrae shows any overt sign of the influence we fear. If suspicion becomes converted into certainty, then indeed our line of action must be reconsidered. If there is nothing of this nature to communicate, come to the instrument again to-morrow at the same time ; but from now there will always be some one to answer your call. That is all for the present.”

Professor Rudge took off the headpiece and passed his hand over his forehead. For a long time he sat lost in thought. With an air even more worried than on the day before he ultimately rose and left the signal-room. He locked the door, and was in the act of dropping the key in his pocket when Macrae joined him.

“ You have finished ? ”

“ Yes, sir ; here is the report,” said Macrae, adding, “ if you have no further need of me to-day, sir, I should like to lie down. My head aches a little.”

“ Certainly,” said the Professor. “ I shall not require you. I hope you will be all right again in the morning.”

CHAPTER XI

DANGER IMMINENT

THE Professor sat down on the one seat in the little entrance lobby. This had three doors entering into it : the station entrance, and entrances to the signal-room and the room the Professor was occupying. From his seat he therefore commanded all three doors. Sitting here, he attempted to utilise the last rays of daylight in reading over the communication he had that afternoon received, but even before the fading light compelled him, gave it up. He was too worried for mental concentration.

He gave rein to his thoughts. The papers slipped from his fingers to the floor, and lay there unheeded. He recognized that no small part of the trouble that oppressed him was due to the vagueness of its nature. He was acting in obedience to a warning which was in itself as mysterious as the danger indicated. He was warned of an attack, but not informed of its method.

As to preventing Macrae from communicating,

with Mars, or with any one else, that was simple. The seeming simplicity did not, however, remove the unpleasant sensation of impending danger. If there were but some outward sign he told himself his nerves would brace themselves to the occasion and he would be easier in his mind. It was like fighting a phantom, or expecting an attack in the dark, but without knowing by what, or from what direction.

After a time Lieutenant Hughes joined the Professor, and they were for a few minutes together at the supper-table. The young man had been puzzling himself for two days how this learned scientist had acquired the reputation of being socially of a jovial disposition. His learning was no doubt indisputable, but for the rest, perhaps he had been overrated. To-night especially, he seemed taciturnity itself.

At a comparatively early hour Professor Rudge retired for the night. The monotony of life at Station X conduced to early hours. His room was really that of Lieutenant Hughes, good-naturedly given up to him during his stay. Professor Rudge left the door open, and drew his little camp bedstead to a point from whence he could see the signal-room door. He only partly undressed, and decided to keep awake. There was just sufficient light to see objects indistinctly.

The time passed very slowly. Once, a grim sort of smile without any mirth in it passed over

his face, as he compared his present situation with his usual life. That life seemed almost as though it belonged to a distant past. How far away London seemed! How far away everything seemed—except danger!

Knowing that, however great the need of watchfulness, it would be impossible to go entirely without sleep the whole of the time until the *Sagitta* was due, he formed a plan of contenting himself with a comparatively short nap once a day, while the signal-room was officially occupied. As a young man he had been able to sleep just when and where he chose, and was relying on this faculty now. At first he experienced no great difficulty in keeping awake, in spite of the little sleep he had had since landing.

He rightly attributed his wakefulness to the strangeness of his experience, and the peculiar uncanniness of the danger that threatened. He could not bring himself to expect that anything would happen now at night. There could be no possibility of wireless communication, for the door was locked and the key in the pocket of his coat, hanging on the peg within reach of his hand. A hundred crowding thoughts passed through his mind. He lost count of time.

After at least a couple of hours, it may have been about midnight, the soft tread of bare feet, but distinctly audible in the stillness, was heard passing his door in the direction of the signal-room.

A form was just visible as it crossed the entrance lobby.

A good deal startled at this unexpected development, the Professor rose. Going quickly to the doorway, he put out his head for a better view of the intruder. The light was just sufficient to enable him to recognize the figure of Macrae trying the signal-room door. Knowing it to be securely locked, Professor Rudge stood a few seconds awaiting events. Several times the handle was turned back, and a quiet attempt made to push open the door.

Speaking quietly, the Professor asked, "What are you doing there, Macrae?"

There was no answer, but Macrae turned and began to come back towards him, passing without taking any notice although within a foot of him. Macrae walked out of the lobby and toward his own apartment. After turning, having such light as there was upon his face, the Professor could see that Macrae was fast asleep.

Professor Rudge knew the danger of awaking a sleep-walker, and allowed him to go without further interference. He felt that he had at last something tangible. Macrae had shown him the Martians' method to be somnambulism. That made much clear to him that he had been before unable to understand. There was no longer the shadow of doubt but that Macrae was under hypnotic influence and suggestion, and was acting

during sleep in obedience to another will. Unfortunately, there could be just as little doubt as to whose will that was. Still now that the Professor knew what he had to fight against, the enemy's plan of action, the strain was relieved and he felt safe. With the door locked there was security. To-morrow he would report the occurrence and get advice.

He drew forward a deck chair and resumed his vigil.

How slowly the time passed! Once or twice, feeling a drowsiness, the reaction from the few minutes' excitement he had experienced, he rose and went to the outer door, gazing at the wondrous pageant spread above him. Long he looked at many a familiar constellation jewelling the tropic night, and at others, southward, not so familiar. He watched their ordered ranks, their silent, ceaseless westward march. It brought his thoughts to the mysterious voice that had come to him across the zodiac, faint but clear, like the sound of silver bell from that silvery star. Soothed by his gaze into the infinite distances, he went back again to await the remaining hours of the night.

He sat in the silence, thinking more or less coherently of this and that, his head nodding, heavy with sleep.

All at once he started up, wide awake, not knowing for the moment how, or in fact why, he

found himself thus suddenly upon his feet. He would have repudiated the suggestion that he had, even for a moment, lost consciousness. That is a thing on which it is so easy to be mistaken. It was now between three and four o'clock, and still dark, but for the starlight. For a second he stood tensely listening. Then came a sound, an unmistakable sound of some one *in the signal-room*.

His mind instantly turned to Hughes, as the only other person who had a key—but what could he be doing there now? Either he or his assistant, in one or other of their little apartments, was supposed to be awake, lest the gong of the call-signal should be sounded from one of the communicating stations. But it certainly had not sounded.

The Professor stretched out his arm to take the key from his jacket pocket. He was delayed a moment by the fact that it had by some means come off the peg, and was lying on the floor. He found it and searched for the key. It was gone!

With one bound he was out into the lobby, with a second into the signal-room, the door of which was wide open, and reached the signaller's seat to find Macrae in it, with the headpiece above his head, just fitting the receiver over his ears.

To seize the headpiece with one hand, and to hurl the lank figure of the somnambulist sprawling

headlong on the floor with the other, was the work of a moment. He found that his own knees were shaking under him, and the perspiration pouring from him. He sank down heavily into the seat he had so lately emptied.

Macrae lay for a second or two where he had fallen. Then he began to pull himself together, and finally rose and stood, lifting his hands to his head and looking round him with an air of fear and bewilderment. The little moan that escaped him instantly brought Professor Rudge to his assistance. He had already realized that in the excitement of the moment action had preceded judgment. He regretted the roughness he had displayed, telling himself that to have seized the headpiece would have been enough.

By the time he reached Macrae's side, the latter, now thoroughly awake, said, "How did I come here? What is the meaning of this?"

The Professor noticed an air of rising nervous excitement about him. He decided to make as little of the affair as possible.

"You have been walking in your sleep, my lad," he said soothingly, "and the fall to the floor woke you rather suddenly. You were in here when I found you. There's no harm done, I hope. Did you ever walk in your sleep before?"

"Never, sir!"

"And how do you feel now?"

"My head seems completely dazed. I'll go back to bed. Perhaps I shall be better in the morning. I shall be glad to leave this dreadful island." He then added, "Why I ever wished to come to it is a mystery!"

The Professor again noticed a slight rising inflexion of excitement. He therefore took Macrae's arm and led him towards his room.

"To walk in your sleep is no very uncommon experience. It is the shock of the sudden awakening that upsets you. Lie still now and get to sleep again." The Professor remained with him for some time, still feeling rather conscience-stricken. "I might have killed him," he thought, "and after all, it was my fault. After this I can never trust myself again."

While waiting until Macrae should drop off, he reflected on the powerful influence that had acted on him the second time that night, and, this second time, to take the key from where the waking Macrae had seen it placed. He shuddered as, finally, he rose to leave the room, noticing, as he did so, that dawn was beginning to break.

He decided to go at once back to the signal-room to redeem his promise, and to place, if possible, the affair in hands more competent than his own had proved. As he took the headpiece in his hands, again he experienced that uncomfortable shudder. Who would answer his call?

Suppose—no! Refusing to follow that train of thought, and calling his courage to his aid, he placed the receivers. “Are you there?” he said.

The interval of waiting was not longer than usual, but it had never seemed so long. Then came the well-known, welcome voice, “I am here. What has happened?”

The Professor gave a full account of the night's experiences. Recounting them brought more vividly than anything else would have done, his own remissness. He remembered that he had, at a repeated special request, promised to report *at once* anything that proved Macrae to be under other influence, and, in his foolish feeling of security, he had not done so. As he related the events that proved he must have fallen asleep, he felt utterly unworthy of his responsibility. He was glad when the story was ended, including his unnecessary violence to the sleeper. He expected reproaches. He was prepared to take with humility anything that might be addressed to him. He waited. The interval was longer in reality this time than he had ever known it. Six minutes passed. Ten minutes. At last came the answer. There were no reproaches.

“Write a note to the officer in charge, requesting him not to disturb you for two hours in the signal-room. Place that outside the door, and then remain in the room, locking the door on the

inside. Remain with the headpiece on until called."

The Professor did as he was ordered. He sat patiently awaiting his further instructions. At the end of a quarter of an hour a voice said, "Are you there, Professor?" He replied, and coloured when he found that no remark followed. Every quarter of an hour the question was repeated, and every time, in a tone that betrayed no resentment, the Professor replied, "I am here."

At about the seventh call, the voice further said: "We have called a council, as the matter is too serious for my sole decision. We have come to a conclusion, and I now ask you to place yourself in my hands entirely. I wish you to yield your will to mine, and to pass into the second, or unconscious, phase, and fear no harm. Rest forward on your arms and yield to my suggestion to sleep. I cannot succeed in spite of you, but earnestly request you to assist. Banish all questionings, and, as it becomes possible, all thoughts from your mind. Sleep."

The voice continued in quiet insistent monotone, urging sleep. At the first request Professor Rudge shrank back from the suggestion. He wanted to ask questions. He remained silent, however, while the voice continued. Finally he decided to acquiesce. He yielded to the request made him, put his head on his arms, and tried to think of nothing but the suggestion made

him by the being under whose influence he already was. Very gradually consciousness faded entirely from him. An apparently sleeping figure rested on the signal-table.

CHAPTER XII

THE MARTIAN TRIUMPHANT

IN telling Professor Rudge of the power of the Martians to force their spiritual possession on beings of less strength than themselves, the Venerian had mentioned that it was within their, the Venerians', power to effect this psychic exchange with the assent of the other being concerned. It was the overwhelming force of the Martian, enabling him to dispense with such assent, that gave him his terrible power for evil.

In the request and directions addressed by the Venerian to Professor Rudge at the signal-table, it was such an exchange that he intended.

That a foreign or outside spirit could possess or take possession of the personality of a human being was well known to man long before the beginning of modern civilization, a fact of which there is abundant scriptural and other warrant. Such foreign intruder might either impose itself on, or cast out and replace, the spirit in rightful possession.

When the two hours had expired, Lieutenant Hughes went to see if there were any sign of Professor Rudge coming out. There was no special need of the room for official use, but Hughes was curious. He was also puzzled. The whole affair was a mystery.

The more he thought about it the more remarkable it seemed. A man of eminence, usefulness and known industry such as Professor Rudge would not be wasting his time at Station X without some very important object. Surely it was not for the purpose of spending a short time each day in conversation with another station. If that had been the only purpose of his visit, why was the engineer-operator brought? If, as it was natural to suppose, the latter had come for the purpose of making some change in the system of wiring, or in some other part of the apparatus, under the Professor's instruction, why was there no sign of it?

If there were a mystery, Hughes had no intention of trying to pry into it. He was anxious to do nothing to obstruct, but he asked himself why he was being kept so completely in the dark, even if he could not assist.

Such were the thoughts that occupied Lieutenant Hughes's mind as he waited for the door to be opened. It is probable that even then the problem would not have occupied a minute of that easy-going young man's thoughts, but for a short

conversation that had just taken place with Jones, his assistant at the station. The man told of a sound he had heard in the signal-room the previous night, first a scuffle and then a moan; afterwards voices. He had put his ear to the wall and was prepared to swear they were the voices of the Professor and Macrae.

"You must have been dreaming," said Hughes. "What could they be doing there at that time? Had they a light?"

"There was no light from the window, sir; the place was in darkness."

"That's a queer story, Jones. Why did you not go and see about it?"

"Well, sir, I didn't care to go," replied Jones.

"Why not?" queried Lieutenant Hughes.

"I didn't care to interfere when I heard that scuffle in the dark. They do say there was a couple of men murdered here not long ago."

"There were two deaths here, certainly."

"I don't know if it's true, sir, but there's a yarn on the *Sagitta* that those two men killed each other."

"But we were talking about last night," said Hughes.

"Well, sir, I didn't care to interfere when I heard that scuffle and groan," said Jones, with hesitation.

"Why?"

"Talking now, sir, in broad daylight, it sounds

silly, but last night I remembered reading in tales about murder scenes being acted all over again and——”

“That will do, Jones! I gave you credit for more sense.”

“I am sure now that it was only the two I said. But I’ll find out,” said Jones.

“How?” inquired Hughes.

“While off duty I’ll go down for a bit of fishing, and I’ll ask Macrae to come with me. He seems to have nothing to do about this time. I’ll lead round to the subject when I get a chance.”

“There must be no cross-questioning!” warned Hughes.

“Oh no, sir; if he seems unwilling; but I’ll be able to see.”

With that they separated. Lieutenant Hughes waited some time longer. As the hour approached for the daily exchange of signals, he decided to hint to the Professor that the time asked for had more than expired. Before knocking, he went over to a seat he often occupied, just outside the window, so placed that it commanded a view of the interior, and made the hearing of a signal call certain.

From here, he caught sight of the Professor standing in the middle of the room. He was regarding everything in turn minutely, the signalling apparatus, table, chairs, even the floor, walls and ceiling, as though he had never seen the

place before. More remarkable still, he seemed to be even studying himself!

“ Hang it all ! ” grumbled Hughes, “ the Government service can’t wait for this kind of thing ; ” and he went round to the door and knocked. Evidently the Professor had reached it at the same moment, for even as he knocked the key turned and the door opened. The Professor stood before him, and for a second it seemed to Hughes that he was being scrutinized in the same inquiring way ; but if so, it was only momentarily.

On his part, Hughes now observed something unfamiliar in the manner of Professor Rudge. He noticed that the pupils of the eyes looking into his own were unusually dilated, and that their quiet intense regard made him feel curiously uncomfortable. They seemed in some strange way to grasp and hold him, mentally and bodily, and he literally had to force himself to make the simple remark that he feared he must now take possession of the signal-room. He noticed that in replying the Professor seemed to fumble over his words, as a man might who is speaking in a tongue he knows, but has not used for years.

“ I am sorry if I have remained in it too long,” he said. “ Can you tell me where Macrae is ? ”

“ I think he has gone down to the beach with Jones, fishing,” said Hughes. “ Yes,” he added, “ there they are,” pointing to two figures, half a

mile distant, just disappearing over the edge of the cliff.

The professor thanked him, and as he caught his eye for a moment at parting, Hughes was again conscious of a queer sensation; involuntarily he shivered. Whatever else was in that quiet but penetrating look, it conveyed to him the uncomfortable impression that not only were his words heard, but his inmost thoughts read.

Hughes went to the signal-table to give the call, and the Professor moved from the door, allowing his eye to wander over the island, as he slowly walked over its jagged, rocky surface. The intense blueness of the sky above seemed to claim his admiration. He presently increased his pace, and walked off toward the point of the cliff where the two men had disappeared.

Having exchanged signals, and learned that there was nothing further required, Hughes came out of the room, and, taking a book, sat on his accustomed seat so as to be within hearing of the signal call during the time that he was on duty. Soon he began to doze.

The two figures that Hughes had seen disappearing in the distance, and which he had informed Professor Rudge were Jones and Macrae, were in fact Jones and the attendant. Not having recovered from his shaking-up of the night before, Macrae had felt no inclination to join Jones in his sport, preferring to rest quietly on his bed,

where he almost at once dropped off to sleep.

Presently he rose, evidently not fully awake, and walked past the sleeping Hughes. Quietly and slowly he entered the signal-room and made direct for the instrument.

When the supposed Professor Rudge came to the cliff edge, and looked down on the sea and beach, he saw no one. It was evident the two men had walked round on the shingle, one way or the other. As either way would almost immediately take them out of sight round the curving cliff, the question was, which way. As, in the absence of footmarks there was nothing to guide him, the Professor promptly turned to the right, but first glanced over the island, as if to make sure neither of them was returning to the station.

He moved much more rapidly now, as if already dissatisfied with the position, and having gone some little way, and seeing no sign of those he sought, he turned, not to retrace his steps but to ascend the cliff quickly at the place he then was, and again look over the island. He was evidently determined that neither should return to the station without his knowledge. Seeing no one, he walked quickly across, without again descending, to a point as far on the other side of the place of his descent, and, looking over the cliff, at once saw the two young fellows. He called to Macrae.

Hearing the call Jones looked up, saw the Professor, and supposing he must be short-sighted answered, "Mr. Macrae is not with us, sir. We left him at the station."

The figure above instantly disappeared, and if Jones could have seen over the cliff edge, he would have been astonished to see the burly figure of the Professor making a pace for the station-house that he would not have given him credit for. Before the latter quite gained it, he saw through the open door of the signal-room something that seemed further to lend him wings—some one sitting at the signal-table, while Hughes was sitting outside.

Lieutenant Hughes glanced up from his book at the sound of rapid footsteps, saw the hurrying figure coming quickly toward him. The peculiar something he had before noticed in the eyes again fixed on him was no longer a mere suggestion, that left him uncertain if it were real or imaginary; it blazed forth. He literally shrank upon his chair as the other passed, and at the words addressed to him: "Sit where you are! Be powerless to rise until I give you permission!"

At the sound of the words, at that terrible glance, all power and volition seemed to ooze from him. He found he could not even will to get up from his seat.

The other had already entered the signal-room. He crossed the room toward the signaller's chair.

Macrae was removing the headpiece. At the sight the Professor paused, while Macrae rose from his chair as he put down the headpiece, and swinging round, in contrast to Macrae's usual manner, with a quick lithe movement instinct with energy.

"Come here," he said, indicating the chair from which he had just risen, and speaking in a ringing level tone of assured command.

The figure before him did not move. He looked up. Their eyes met.

On the instant of the Martian's recognizing his unexpected enemy, and that a physical contest alone could decide the mastery, his plan was laid. It was to wear down his opponent in a fight, neutralizing his greatly superior strength in one continuous struggle when he was already short of breath through running, and playing for all they were worth the points in his own favour, youth and agility.

He sprang forward, but was promptly knocked down. Scarcely seeming to touch the ground, with panther-like elasticity, he was up again and attacking. There was no pause or respite in the ferocious struggle that followed. It was a fight to kill.

To and fro the bodies swayed. Chairs and whatever happened in the way were hurled aside and smashed. The bungalow shook with the impacts of the two bodies.

The Venerian saw his enemy's plan and its danger. He regretted too late his race back from the cliff in such haste. His endeavour to save the situation threatened now to be the means of his undoing. He tried to use his superior physique to smash his opponent once for all while some breath remained. But that opponent seemed on all sides of him at once. He was like the spirit of a Fury in a body of steel wire.

Locked in a momentary hold, they hurtled through the doorway, past the terrified Hughes, and the fight was continued in the open. The Martian knew that he now fought in view of other witnesses, his kin, far off across the void. He fought as a protagonist, not for himself alone, but for all his race, whose existence also depended on the strength of his single arm. The knowledge added to an energy already super-human.

With eyes bulging, Hughes, powerless to intervene, watched the contest. It was the most frenzied duel that had ever been. He felt almost physically sick at the sight of a fight where there were neither rules nor respite.

Blows were fast and furious.

The Venerian's hope of a quick decision faded.

Gasping and sobbing for breath, he felt the end was near. The indomitable invading spirit that had seized Macrae's body was driving it to victory, but not without paying the price—a price

that would have lain Macrae himself helpless in the dust.

In the end his science won, his superior knowledge of the human frame, how obtained who knows? He got in a blow on the solar plexus, evidently knowing the exact spot of that ganglion, and man's champion was down, his fight lost.

The Martian knelt over his prostrate opponent, and, whispering something to him while still in his agony, forced his will at last.

Presently the two rose together, physically and psychically the conqueror and the conquered. The Venerian was taken to the wireless operator's chair, and he put on the receivers.

To Hughes the mystery of it was insoluble. For some minutes he watched the form of the Professor and noted how it bore itself erect and with an indescribable, and in the circumstances wonderful, calm and dignity even in defeat.

He looked at the dark inscrutable features of him standing over the chair like a tall sinister spirit of evil, and for a moment caught a flash from those eyes. Then the scene quivered and faded before Hughes. Sagging sideways in his seat, he fainted.

A minute later the figure in the operator's chair also wilted, seeming about to fall, then pulling himself together somewhat, sat up, but limply now.

Professor Rudge put up trembling hands to

remove the headpiece. He found himself in the operator's chair at Station X. He staggered to his feet and, turning round, looked into the eyes of the Martian.

CHAPTER XIII

THE *SAGITTA* ARRIVES

FOR one awful moment victory and despair gazed at each other.

The aura of the Martian was rendering his victim powerless to oppose his will.

He motioned the Professor to re-seat himself at the instrument. He assisted to put the receivers on the head of the dazed and horror-struck man. While doing so his hand faltered and he staggered.

At the same moment the Professor felt as though a weight had been suddenly lifted from his mind, as though a spring that had been pressing his will into subservience to another had suddenly snapped.

He looked up. The Martian's face was deathly white. He tottered. In another moment he collapsed on the floor. The spirit might be dauntless, but the human body it had invaded, and by which alone it could act on the material plane, had for the moment given way under its late ordeal and present burden and fainted.

The Professor rose from his chair and for a

moment stood motionless. Then, realizing what had happened, hope once more re-asserted itself.

"Hughes," he shouted, "come and help me bind this—er—madman, before he recovers!"

Hughes jumped up with alacrity, relieved to find himself free from the inexplicable influence that had bound him. He ran for cord, and in a few seconds returned. The sailor and the scientist made a very thorough and complete job, that looked as if it could safely be trusted to defy any efforts on the part of the Martian to free himself. They then carried him into Macrae's room, and deposited him on the floor.

"I'll wait here until he comes to," said the Professor. "No doubt you wish to make your report of what has happened."

As soon as Hughes had left the room, Professor Rudge proceeded to gag the Martian as effectually as he had bound him. He had not made up his mind how much to tell Hughes of the real state of affairs. He wanted a quiet moment to think.

He waited until there were signs of returning consciousness. They were to be felt as well as seen. He then hastily withdrew, locking the door behind him.

He passed into the signal-room and listened to the report Hughes was making to the Admiralty. He made no attempt to interrupt or suggest in any way. He wished it to be Hughes' report, made from the view point of his present knowledge.

While giving half his attention to the report, Professor Rudge was debating with himself how much or little of the true position he should tell Hughes. Finally he decided to tell him all.

When Hughes had finished sending his message, the Professor told him he had something to say. He began at the beginning, with Macrae's first coming to the island and all that had, step by step, followed.

Professor Rudge was prepared for surprise from Hughes, even for his look of incredulity. As he proceeded he saw the surprise heighten and the incredulity disappear.

When he had finished, it was with great satisfaction that the Professor heard Hughes' assurance that he would stand by him in any course he might have to adopt, even the most drastic.

Even the most drastic—for that was the way his thoughts were tending.

“And now, Hughes,” Rudge said, “the question of all others is—what are we to do next?”

Hughes was silent, not venturing to make a suggestion.

“I thought it best,” said Professor Rudge, “to let you make your report before explaining matters. It had to be made, and for you to have entered on the actual facts as now known to you would have been useless and undesirable. The knowledge would have hampered you.”

“Most certainly it would,” said Hughes.

"If it has to be gone into now," said Professor Rudge, "it must be by me. The question whether to do so or not is worrying me."

"Had I known all I know now," said Hughes, "I don't know how I should have been able to make a report at all!"

"I feel that time should not be lost," said the Professor. "I know what I consider ought to be done, but as it entails what the courts would call murder, I hesitate to assume the responsibility, especially as the *Sagitta* is due."

"It's a good thing that Captain Evered knows so much about it," said Hughes. "He will be the better prepared for what has happened now."

"I wish he were here," said Professor Rudge. "I used to think, with the Venerian's warning ringing in my ears, that once I knew the form of danger that threatened, then my anxieties would be relieved. I never anticipated a situation like this."

"At all events we've got him trussed like a turkey," said Hughes. "We're safe for the present."

Professor Rudge's anxiety was not lightened by these words. A live Martian and safety were ideas that did not easily assimilate in the Professor's mind.

"I only hope to heaven," he said, "that Captain Evered will listen to me when he does come, and will kill that fiend."

"He'll be sure to make his report first," said Hughes, with conviction.

"By heaven, Hughes, you are right!" cried the Professor. "If he goes first to the signal-room, we are done for. That decides me. I'll take the bull by the horns and make my own report now, if I can get the First Lord at the other end. He is already half prepared for what I have to tell him."

He asked Hughes to call up the Admiralty and say that Professor Rudge at Station X wished to speak at once to Mr. Mansfield, the First Lord of the Admiralty.

Although the call came two hours before his usual hour for rising, in one hour Hughes was able to report that Mr. Mansfield was waiting to hear Professor Rudge's communication.

Rudge had passed this hour, during which darkness had descended on Station X, with a restlessness he could not restrain. He went more than once to the door of Macrae's room and listened, but there was no sound from within. Thinking this absolute silence might be only while he was listening, he walked away and, after an interval, returned to the door noiselessly. Still profound silence.

Was the Martian dead?

The Professor was not troubling himself about whether or no he had killed the Martian. The question with him was, what was he doing if alive? Not for a moment did he believe his

prisoner dead. But, although bound quite securely, some movement on the floor was possible, if he were struggling to be free and, although gagged, an inarticulate moan could be emitted. But there was not a sound.

The Professor once put his hand in his pocket for the key. The action recalled the occasion when another hand had taken a key from that pocket. The memory caused him to desist.

He went and stood at the star-lit entrance of the station-house. He recalled the words of the Venerian: "You are not nearly sufficiently in earnest, Professor Rudge." Would he say the same thing now, was the uncomfortable thought. Perhaps!

If the Venerian were speaking to him now, Rudge knew in his heart what the advice would be. He could in imagination almost hear the Venerian's stern words: "Kill, kill!"

After a time some impulse prompted him to return and use that key. Some impulse, for he had no clearly defined object in going to the room where the Martian lay.

When Macrae's hand had taken a key from that pocket it had been a moment of crisis indeed; perhaps not greater than this one in its possibilities. The hand was different, but the directing mind was the same. On the first occasion it had acted from afar; now it was perilously near.

A few seconds later Professor Rudge was again

at the entrance to the signal-room, with white face, seeking the company of Hughes. At that moment the message came through that the First Lord was at the instrument.

The Professor assumed the headpiece. He gave a detailed account of all that had happened at Station X from the time of his arrival down to the time of speaking. He reminded Mr. Mansfield of their conversation in London, when he had requested permission to come with Macrae to the station, and made sure that the account he then gave of his interviews with Macrae, resulting in his complete assurance of the latter's *bona fides*, was clearly remembered by Mr. Mansfield. He found that the contents of Macrae's diary, and the evidence he had given before his examiners at the Admiralty, was better remembered than he had expected by the First Lord.

Professor Rudge was satisfied so far, and with the fact that Mr. Mansfield seemed a good deal startled at the assertion that a Martian was now at Station X, a being with powers of unknown extent, but certainly vastly superhuman. He answered a great many questions, and ultimately himself asked the plain question, if Mr. Mansfield himself accepted the fact of the Venerian communication and his, Rudge's, evidence as to the present position.

The answer was disappointingly non-committal, and some further conversation that ensued left

Professor Rudge with the conviction that it would be worse than useless to ask authority for Captain Evered to hold an inquiry with plenary powers for the Martian's execution, should the evidence satisfy him of its necessity. Better make his appeal to Captain Evered with the question open than meet with a direct refusal binding Evered's hands.

Professor Rudge left the instrument depressed with the feeling that he had done very little if any good, for the ultimate decision had been that Captain Evered's confirmation and advice must now be awaited. The real purpose of his going first to the instrument had not been accomplished.

Mansfield was interested in what he had just heard, and in the whole "Macrae affair," as he called it, and curious as to the *dénouement*. He had sufficient knowledge to see that the alleged communication contradicted no law of science. Knowing that the etheric waves on which wireless depended would travel from the centre of propagation throughout space indefinitely, he realized that the reception of a wireless message from a neighbouring planet was a mere question of the competence of the receiver to detect it. As to its having been done in this instance, he wished to keep an open mind.

This attitude was to Professor Rudge as useless as would have been entire incredulity. Those who were not with him were against him. The

Martian peril had not sufficiently impressed Mr. Mansfield to make him see the need for instant action. He lacked the penetration of mind required. Sitting amid his comfortable surroundings in London, he was incapable of realizing that an event now happening on a remote islet of the Pacific could constitute a menace to the whole world.

This attitude did not prevent him from speculating as to Captain Evered's account of affairs when he arrived. Knowing that, accident apart, this must be within a very few hours, he gave instructions before leaving the Admiralty wireless room that he was to be called so soon as Captain Evered's arrival at Station X was reported.

As the day passed and he received no call, his curiosity deepened into concern. By evening he felt the necessity of seeking further information, and returned to make inquiries of Station X as to the *Sagitta's* whereabouts. He knew that the vessel, whether delayed or not, must for the last twenty-four hours have been within wireless signalling distance of the island.

He gave instructions for Station X to be called up. After the space of a quarter of an hour he was informed that there was no reply.

Meanwhile, at Station X, as the night wore on, neither Professor Rudge nor Hughes could rest. Sometimes they talked together in the signal-room ; at others, singly or together, they paced

up and down under the stars. Never had hours passed so slowly, so anxiously, as those preceding the arrival of the *Sagitta*.

They were walking to and fro together outside, when the Professor said, "I think perhaps we are better and safer outside. The place may not be healthy for us."

"Not healthy! What do you mean, sir?" said Hughes.

By way of reply, Professor Rudge began to speak of auras, emanations of telepathic nature and kindred subjects where Hughes could follow him only with difficulty.

"By way of showing you that the things I speak of are not only real, but of practical importance for us to remember, I will tell you of something I foolishly did while waiting for you to get through to Mr. Mansfield. I had been thinking on what the Venerian would do if in my place. I went to look at our bound enemy. I have little doubt now where the thought emanated from. I unlocked the door and went in. By the starlight I could see the figure on the floor. Suddenly an influence assailed me, attacking my power of will and resistance to impulse. In an instant I realized where this must come from, and its import. Only just in time I managed to get outside, beyond its range apparently. Now listen! This was the thing, the thought, if thought it can be called, that assailed me, in which my own volition

in another moment would have been submerged—if I had remained I should have *unbound the Martian.*”

Hughes gasped. This was uncanny beyond his weirdest dreams.

They were still speaking of it as they paced to and fro before the station-house, when the signal bell rang. It was the *Sagitta*.

According to the instructions he had received, Hughes at once proceeded to report the late occurrences on the island. Professor Rudge then added considerably to the official statement, so that by the time the *Sagitta* was near the island, Captain Evered knew everything.

When the cruiser had anchored, Captain Evered sent a boat and wirelessly that Professor Rudge and Hughes should come on board, with Jones and the attendant.

They at once left the signal-room, and Hughes gave the necessary orders.

As they were passing Macrae's door their attention was caught by sounds from within as of someone tumbling violently about the room.

Both had been convinced that no man living could free himself bound as they had left the Martian. But as they now exchanged a startled glance, the same thought struck both—the Martian was partially unbound!

They stood as though paralysed. Crash! The body was precipitated violently against the door

at which they were standing. Panic seized them, and they ran for the cliff, calling loudly for Jones and the attendant to follow them. Suddenly Professor Rudge stopped, and darted back to the signal-room.

What he went to do was soon done, and he was out again, running after Hughes.

When half the distance to the boat had been covered the Professor looked over his shoulder. No one was visible, not even the other two men. Unaware of the urgency of the call, they had not obeyed it with alacrity.

A few minutes later the Professor was tumbling into the boat, and the order was given to shove off. When near the *Sagitta*, a searchlight was thrown in their direction. It illuminated their track and the point of the shore from which they had started.

A figure was plainly visible under its beam, standing on the cliff, watching them.

The professor gave one glance. It was the Martian—FREE !

CHAPTER XIV

CAPTAIN EVERED'S DECISION

WHEN Professor Rudge reached the *Sagitta's* deck he found Captain Evered eagerly awaiting him.

The Professor knew that to convince Captain Evered of the full meaning of what had happened was of the greatest importance. Adequate precautions and prompt action were vital.

It was significant that, when the searchlight showed up the figure of the Martian standing on the cliff, he gave orders that, as soon as the boat was hoisted on board, the *Sagitta* should stand off from the island.

But the sight of that unbound figure had also suggested to him a flaw in the account he had received. Captain Evered decided to hear the report of Lieutenant Hughes first. He listened attentively and asked many questions as to the life and mutual harmony, or otherwise, between Professor Rudge and Macrae while at the station.

He satisfied himself that there was nothing

there that could in any way account for the conflict that had taken place. He then sent and asked Professor Rudge and Dr. Anderson to join them.

"I am very sorry, Professor Rudge," he said, "for the way you have been served, but glad that you bear your injuries with so little concern."

"My dear Evered," said the Professor, "I have no time to think about them, no thought for anything so trivial in view of the urgency of the matter before us."

"What's to be done?" asked Captain Evered. "I have heard all Hughes can tell me."

"You accept, then," said the Professor, "my account in general of what has happened, and of where we now stand?"

"It would never occur to me," said Captain Evered, "to doubt your sincerity or competence to judge of this matter better than any man alive."

"It is a great relief," said Professor Rudge, "to know that you are with me."

"It was because I was certain of you that I first had the matter brought to your notice. At first I set it all down as a delusion of Macrae's; but Anderson converted me. Are you convinced that it is within the power of these beings to force themselves on human beings and act for their destruction?"

"I can speak from experience," said the Pro-

fessor, "that, with mutual consent, this is within the power of the Venerians. There is now, alas! proof that the Martians can effect this transference without any such consent of their victim."

"You mean that it has happened in Macrae's case, and that his body is now animated by a Martian spirit?"

"Undoubtedly," said the Professor.

"Why," asked the Captain, "have they not made us all their victims?"

"Because," said the Professor, "the first part of the procedure appears to be something in the nature of hypnotism. To establish the necessary *rappport*, some channel of communication with the victim must exist. In the case of these powerful beings, the sound of their voice even on the telephone, wireless or otherwise, is sufficient."

"Still," said Captain Evered, "I do not understand——"

"I see your point," said the Professor. "Our security is this. In the normal state, our sense of hearing is not acute enough to enable their voice to reach us. It is rendered so only in the abnormal state of receptivity set up by previous *rappport* existing between the speaker and listener."

"And this *rappport* was established between the Martian and Macrae——"

"In some way," said the Professor, "through the Venerian, even to his surprise. The explanation of that lies far outside our present knowledge

of the subject. While the method is a mystery, we have this isolated instance to prove that one mind can be made a sort of stepping-stone between two others, at least when one of them is a Martian."

"You consider, then," said Captain Evered, "that this difficulty of initial communication, which appears to be our only safeguard, is in consequence of the inter-planetary distance only."

"No doubt," was the reply.

"You maintain," said Captain Evered, "that at this moment there is a Martian within two or three miles of us, and in command of the greatest wireless station existing?"

"I am glad," said Professor Rudge, "that you have seen this. It is convincing proof that you appreciate our peril. If the Martian were in absolute control of the Station X installation we should not now be sitting here. After Hughes and I had already started to make a bolt for it, it flashed across my mind that running would be useless, so I rushed back to the signal-room and detached the coherer from both instruments—and there they are!"

The Professor produced from his pocket the two coherers and put them on the table.

"They are," he added, "at once indispensable and irreplaceable from any material on the island."

Captain Evered looked at Rudge with frank admiration. Then after a pause he said, "I am not going to attempt any communication with

Station X; we'll leave it alone. I hope to God its present occupant will leave us alone."

"I think he'll have to," said Professor Rudge.

"Well, as to that I rely on you," said Captain Evered.

"You remember, Professor Rudge," said Dr. Anderson, "what the Venerian said—that the Martian's performance always surpasses anticipation."

"Yes," said the Professor gravely; "there is no knowing what the Martian may be able to do in the way of replacing the lost coherers. His chemistry may be capable of transmuting the elements."

"Suppose," said Anderson, "our wireless operator received a call up from Station X."

Captain Evered looked swiftly from Anderson to Professor Rudge.

"Just now," said the Professor to Captain Evered, "you referred to taking measures for the Martian's extermination. Would you take those measures now?"

"Would you advise a landing party?" asked Captain Evered.

"No," said the Professor, "the risk is too great. The Venerian warned me that compared with the Martians we are as children. Further, there is this that we have to reckon with. There are three men on the island, and *any one of these may now be the Martian.*"

The Professor's words seemed to bring vividly to his hearers' minds the tremendous power and subtlety of the enemy.

"But," continued the Professor, "you have good guns on board." He looked at Captain Evered.

"They would scarcely do our business so far as the Martian is concerned," was the reply. "One of the reasons why this island was chosen is that owing to its contour, nothing but the surrounding cliff is visible from the sea. Perhaps if we had an observation balloon—but we haven't. Is that your solution, Professor?"

"The guns, yes," was the reply. "Suppose the Martian can replace the missing coherers. Our only hope is to blow the whole installation to atoms!"

The suggestion seemed rather to stagger the two men. For a few seconds Captain Evered looked at Professor Rudge without speaking, evidently revolving the idea in his mind.

"Well," he said at length, "so far as I am concerned, I have crossed the Rubicon. They say one may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Having taken the responsibility of acting without official authority, the only logical course is to follow wherever it leads." After a full minute's silence, he added: "And I'll do it!"

He then left the cabin. When he had gone Rudge heaved an immense sigh of relief.

"I think, Anderson," he said, "the world has

you to thank for Captain Evered's present attitude. It is due to your having taken advantage of your opportunities that we have not now to convince him of the danger."

"I hope he'll act on your suggestion," said Anderson. "It would be a great relief. I don't feel a bit safe"

"As to the Martian repairing the damage?"

"Yes."

"I should be the last," said Rudge, "to underestimate his powers, but without either coherer or detector, and I have taken both, there can be no wireless. This is no ordinary installation. Its efficacy consists in the balance of two elements in the coherer of mutually opposing force, mercury and arsenic. These for the coherer, and tantalum for the detector, are absolutely indispensable for this instrument, which, by the way, is my own invention. Neither of the three elements exists on the island; so that unless he can create them by transmutation overnight, he is powerless."

"Yes," said Anderson again, but his tone did not indicate any great conviction.

So soon as the light of dawn was sufficient, the *Sagitta* took up a position off the island to enable her to shell the signal-house and installation generally. When her 6-inch guns had done speaking, nothing but the ruin could have remained of the installation of Station X.

While Captain Evered had been watching the

working of the guns he was himself under the observation of Anderson, who was standing on the cruiser's deck in company with Professor Rudge.

The doctor could read his superior's face like a book, and note the signs, slight as they were, of the mental disturbance that the business in hand caused him.

Presently Anderson said to his companion :

"The way the chief has risen to the occasion is splendid. Only one who knows him as well as I do can realize the wrench it must be. He knows it must mean court-martial."

"In all probability," said Professor Rudge, "he will never be called to account for it at all."

"Why not?" asked Anderson.

"Because if the world escapes the fate that threatens, it will be because it accepts our reports and evidence and takes the necessary measures before it's too late. If it does not escape—and I am much afraid that is after all the most probable outcome—then there's an end to all of us."

"Do you really think that the chances are against us?"

"I am afraid they are," was the grave reply; "but we have certainly a fighting chance yet."

"I'm rather surprised at your view," said the doctor. "Last night it was I who was most afraid of him."

"Your fears," said the Professor, "were of

what he might do on the material plane. You thought he might reinstate wireless overnight. I did not think so. There are impossibilities even to a Martian. We know the few material elements he has, and that nothing short of transmutation would give him what he requires. This reaction is beyond man's power with all the means we can command. I did not think that even he could do it overnight in the circumstances."

"You are right," said Anderson. "To succeed under such limitations is inconceivable."

"You have, however, left out the principal limitation," remarked the Professor.

"What? The principal limitation?" queried the doctor.

"Time! If he does succeed, it will be through too much time being given him. All depends on our being able to convince our fellow men of the danger that threatens before it is too late. But it is on the psychic plane I fear him most. If he can attack again there, he wins. We are powerless to hit back. We have only escaped so far by a succession of miracles."

"We have certainly had wonderful luck," said Anderson.

"Yet mark this," said the Professor, "although missing his aim every time through some narrow chance, he has on each occasion gained something. First when Macrae was in *rapport* and conversation with the Venerian, he reached out in that incom-

prehensible way and almost grasped his victim. Although thrown off, he implanted an order that served its purpose later. Secondly, when he actually seized Macrae, only to meet the Venerian, he, by doing the apparently impossible, came face to face with me. Here again, although he just missed success through physical collapse, he progressed. He has gained the island, and it is we who are turned out. He has at last a *pied-à-terre* where he will be difficult to deal with. One more such failure, and our ruin will be certain."

A few minutes after the noise of the guns had ceased, Captain Evered went below without giving the expected sailing orders. Almost immediately word was brought to Professor Rudge that he was wanted in the Captain's cabin.

As he entered, Captain Evered said, "I have done what I have done because I believe the circumstances required it. I do not profess that it has been easy. If I had had to do with an enemy more—what shall I call it?—more obvious, and got back shot for shot, I should be quite content. But this is different."

"I congratulate you on having done a finer thing," said Professor Rudge. "You have risked everything for what you felt to be your duty. If we succeed against our terrible enemy, humanity will owe its escape and thanks to you."

"At all events," said Captain Evered, "one step outside precedent appears to call for another.

I want your approval of what I now propose. Having done what will be certain to end in a court-martial, I want to make for the nearest point where I can report. Is there any objection to this ? ”

“ I thought of it last night,” said the Professor, “ while we were waiting for daylight. I knew what your wish would be. I want you to stay here.”

“ My action,” said Captain Evered, “ has been largely owing to my faith in you. I don't see what more I can do here at present, but in an affair of this kind I recognize you are the best judge.”

“ I have reasoned it this way,” said Professor Rudge. “ As soon as they find at the Admiralty that Station X is for some unknown reason cut off, and there is no news of the *Sagitta*, they will send a cruiser, the nearest available, to investigate ; that is to say, straight to Station X. If she gets here, all that has been done has been done in vain.”

“ By the Lord Harry, yes ! ” said Captain Evered. “ But do you see where that leads to ? ”

“ It leads to the necessity of out taking counter measures,” said Rudge.

“ In other words,” said Captain Evered, “ to await that boat's arrival and prevent her, if possible, by physical force if necessary, from carrying out her mission. The height of mutiny ! ”

Professor Rudge hesitated before replying. He thought he detected a suggestion of hesitation in Captain Evered's tone. He confessed to himself that it would be a terrible position for him. He therefore decided to avoid if possible following that line of thought. For his own part, he knew it would be a thousand times justified to sink the whole navy if only by that means mastery was to be gained over this deadly enemy. He could not for a moment forget that the fate of the whole world was in the balance.

"If we meet the vessel a considerable distance from the island we may be able to dissuade her commander from communicating with the station. That gives us at least a chance which leaving now would lose us. We cannot afford to lose any chances, Evered! As to what to do if the commander is not amenable to reason, we shall have a further opportunity of discussing it. We need not decide for the moment."

"Very well," said Captain Evered, at length. "So be it!

Professor Rudge heaved a sigh of relief. "Thank God!" he muttered.

CHAPTER XV

MR. MANSFIELD ALARMED

THE morning after his talk with Professor Rudge Mr. Mansfield was astir before his usual hour, after a bad night. The mystery of Station X would not be banished. He tried to persuade himself that the anxiety he felt was due to the unexplained silence of the station, apart from anything Professor Rudge had told him. He strove to convince himself that the latter's statements were too wildly extravagant for acceptance.

Long accustomed to listen to extravagant statements, both in the House and elsewhere, he had learnt that, although they may have a certain force for the moment, due to the eloquence with which they have been urged, their effect is brief.

Yet here was a typical example that, to his surprise, had taken an opposite course. Professor Rudge had spoken with his customary force, so there was nothing surprising if his narrative had for the moment carried his listener with him.

The effect ought gradually to have faded, but it had not.

What was then the special quality in this account that caused it to obtrude itself upon his thoughts? Not its lack of extravagance, he told himself. Why, during the night, had it haunted him?

Curiously enough, the more it haunted him the less extravagant it seemed. That characteristic seemed to peel off, and what remained was alarming. It began to dawn upon him that what he had described to himself as extravagant might be better defined as unprecedented, and that the two things are different.

During the hours of darkness Mr. Mansfield made progress toward the truth. He did not, however make sufficient progress to be prepared to admit it.

This morning he had an appointment with the First Sea Lord at the Admiralty, and he had asked Sir John Sarkby, the Home Secretary and his most intimate friend in the Cabinet, to be also present.

He had already ascertained that it was still impossible to get any reply from Station X.

Too early for the appointment, he strolled in St. James's Park, and soon he found his spirits rising in response to the beauty of the morning. Great is the man whose judgment is not at all affected by his physical surroundings. Mr. Mansfield was clever, but not great. He was a strict

guardian of his personal dignity, and keenly susceptible to ridicule. He looked at the cheerful sky, at the green of the park, the waterfowl, the chattering sparrows. He asked himself, if, after all, the fears that had oppressed him during the night were not chimerical. The more they looked so to him, the more ill at ease he became, the more distasteful seemed the coming interview.

He tried to convince himself that the sole business in hand was the silence of Station X, and the report from Hughes that had preceded it.

But wriggle as he might he could not deceive himself as to his duty. He must give Professor Rudge's version of the present position at the station, and his opinion of the awful consequences that might follow. And—here was the difficult part—he must admit that he was himself to some extent troubled about it. It was an unpleasant thing to do before a man like Admiral Benson.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him, and he looked at his watch. There would be time. He made for the Mall, and hailed a taxi.

He looked on it as an inspiration that he should have just remembered that Professor McFaden of Edinburgh was now in London. McFaden rivalled Rudge's eminence in the scientific world. Each had his special set of admirers, but practically all regarded them as the two greatest men in their particular sphere. Rudge led in discovery; McFaden was his equal in knowledge,

and the more orthodox. There was not supposed to be overmuch love lost between them.

Professor McFaden was surprised to receive so important a visitor just as he was finishing breakfast.

“ I hope,” said Mansfield, “ an old friend will excuse this lack of ceremony ; but I want you to come back with me to the Admiralty. Can you manage it ? ”

“ Certainly,” said McFaden ; “ but what’s it all about ? ”

“ You know that Rudge discovered a new method of wireless of so powerful a nature that it made wireless telephony over world-wide distances possible ? ”

“ I am not denying that the thing stands to his credit,” said McFaden, speaking with a decided Scotch accent.

“ You were one of the very few to whom this method was communicated,” said Mansfield. “ I myself am ignorant of the method, but that does not matter. It exists, and we hope and believe is not known to any foreign Power. For naval purposes a very powerful installation, far surpassing all others, exists in the Pacific, and Rudge is now there.”

“ Rudge there ! ” said McFaden, greatly surprised. “ I knew he was away, but man, why on earth is he wandering the Pacific ? ”

Mansfield hesitated. “ I cannot answer that

question now," he said. "I shall have to leave it for the meeting."

"Why do you want me there?" asked McFaden.

"Well," said Mansfield, "the reason is this. We have received a report from Rudge that is astounding beyond all precedent. It requires scientific knowledge to examine it. I want your support. I picture myself speaking of it before Admiral Benson, to whom the reasoning will be simply unintelligible. I am not saying that Rudge is not mistaken. If, when you have heard the report, you say he is, you relieve me of a world of responsibility. What I want to secure is that Rudge shall not be set aside by mere ignorance."

"Well, it's mysterious enough, I'll grant," said McFaden, with a smile, as they walked out into the hall and he picked up his hat and stick. "Let us be off."

Arrived at the Admiralty, they went to Mr. Mansfield's room. Although it still wanted a few minutes to the appointed hour, the other two men were there.

Mr. Mansfield introduced Professor McFaden, and explained that in consequence of the nature of the communication he had to make, he considered that some one with ability to judge of its scientific value should be present.

"We are here, I believe," said Admiral Benson, "because we have lost touch with Station X, and

to decide without further delay"—he glared at Mr. Mansfield and Sir John Sarkby—" what is to be done about it."

" Exactly," began Mr. Mansfield, " and——"

" As it is perfectly obvious," broke in the Admiral, " that the one thing to do is to send and find out what's the matter, our decision should be soon arrived at."

" No doubt," resumed Mr. Mansfield, " and I anticipate that your view will not be disputed. This affair, is, however, complicated with another matter which cannot be so promptly disposed of."

There was a pronounced snort from the Admiral, who looked at his watch. Mr. Mansfield was palpably ill at ease.

" I am afraid," he said, with quiet dignity, " I shall have to claim a certain amount of your time. I have here a report from Professor Rudge as given me by wireless from Station X, where he now is."

" And never ought to have been," growled the Admiral. " What business has a school man at a naval station ? "

The contemptuous tone annoyed Professor McFaden.

" Man," said he, nowise impressed by the Admiral's manner, " do you not know that but for the school man, as you call him, the naval station would never have existed ? "

Admiral Benson merely growled.

The Home Secretary was beginning to enjoy himself. He liked being amused.

Mr. Mansfield then proceeded to tell the story from the beginning.

An hour had elapsed before he concluded. Admiral Benson showed the greatest impatience, and, as the nature of the subject became apparent to him, interrupted more than once. McFaden sat silent and inscrutable, slowly twirling his thumbs, his eyes on the floor. The Home Secretary seemed interested, but did not volunteer any remark.

“And now gentlemen,” Mr. Mansfield concluded, “you know as much of it as I do. I have called this informal meeting because something has to be done at once. The simple question is, whether a cruiser is to be despatched to Station X, or other precautionary measures taken pending further news. I ask you, Professor McFaden, after hearing Professor Rudge’s report and knowing the silence that has so strangely ensued, if you think it desirable to do so.”

“I see no reason,” said McFaden, “for not doing so.”

“And I say the boat ought to have been hundreds of miles on her course by now,” said Admiral Benson.

“And you?” said Mansfield, turning to the Home Secretary.

“You see,” said Sir John Sarkby, with his

peculiar smile, "I do not know anything about naval matters!"

"You know precisely as much about them as I do!" said Mansfield.

Admiral Benson's look gave clear expression to his own view of civilian heads of service departments.

"Well, sending another cruiser," said Sir John, "seems the obvious thing to do. I am sorry about poor Rudge."

The meeting broke up with the decision to send a fast cruiser, and it was left in the hands of Admiral Benson to say from where she should be sent.

He detached the powerful battle cruiser *Sea Lion* from the China fleet for the purpose. Whether on account of her armament or her tremendous speed he did not say.

Many of the thousands who passed threw a glance at the building, and above it at the aerials of the mysterious wireless. Fortunately none knew that from that installation a fateful message had just flown, or the terrible consequences that were destined to result from it.

Mr. Mansfield left the Admiralty with Professor McFaden. "I don't know why," he said, "but in my heart I am not really quite easy about this. Why are you in favour of sending this cruiser?"

"Partly because I do not see in any case why a cruiser should not be sent. And I also fear

there can be little doubt that Rudge is quite insane on this subject. He always had a weakness on the metaphysical side, and this Macrae business hit him on his vulnerable spot. He is now as mad as a hatter, but may not appear so. I know him. He may be quite capable of getting over the naval captain of that cruiser. It looks to me as if he has done so."

"Do you think then," said Mr. Mansfield, "that Captain Evered's silence as well as that of Station X is simply attributable to Rudge's insane influence? What about Macrae's experiences?"

"With respect to Macrae," said MacFaden, "you were not very clear, but I came to the conclusion that investigation would show all that business could be traced to Rudge. From your first question, I do think so. For with all working parts in duplicate, a wireless station is practically immune from such long interruption to the service, as far as the installation is concerned. We have therefore to deal with the personnel, friend or foe. In the absence of war, the foe is eliminated. This brings us to the resident staff, Rudge and his companion, and the cruiser. If you ask who of these is responsible for the interruption, I say, without hesitation, Rudge."

"Your logic," said Mr. Mansfield, "seems unanswerable. Only now be equally convincing as to his insanity, and I shall be eternally grateful to you."

"That," said McFaden, "can only be a matter of opinion."

"Is it not possible," said Mr. Mansfield, "that, though sane, he is being in some way himself deceived?"

"Deceived! Yes," said McFaden, "but only because he is a monomaniac on this subject. On any other he is possibly still sane enough. I will say this for him, although we have not always agreed: there is not a cleverer investigator, or, leaving out his one weakness, a man more difficult to deceive than Rudge."

"Good!" said Mansfield. "Your position is now clear to me. You believe that Station X, together with the *Sagitta*, is now in the hands of a monomaniac, and for that reason advised the despatch of another cruiser."

"Precisely," said McFaden; "and now I will ask you to lend me the whole dossier of the Macrae affair. Your exposition of it could not always be quite followed. I have already said what I expect to find."

"And if you do not find it?"

"Then," said McFaden, "I will recall what I have said of friend Rudge."

"But," said Mr. Mansfield, "it will be too late to recall the cruiser!"

"Not at all," said the cool Scot. "It will be a good few hours before she is beyond the wireless."

"I could not contemplate the cruiser's recall

now she is well under way," said Mr. Mansfield.

"And burning coal, no doubt, at a great rate," said McFaden, quite coolly. "A thousand to one she is right. But I have it in mind to study the papers, which I shall do at once, and see you again if my opinion of it is changed."

"Would it not have been better," said Mr. Mansfield, rather stiffly, "to have studied the documents before the order was given?"

"The chance is so very small," said McFaden. "There is just a point or two that wants clearing up. No doubt they will be clear enough when I can give the matter quiet attention. It's difficult to give anything quiet attention with that stormy petrel Benson within hail."

Mr. Mansfield thought that perhaps McFaden was a little frightened of Admiral Benson, as he was himself. He assumed that the recall of the *Sea Lion* was very unlikely. He knew that warships of that description were not sent to and fro while a professor studied a bundle of documents. He saw, however, that McFaden was not to be in the least impressed by such a consideration.

The papers were given to Professor McFaden, and by eleven o'clock he was busily engaged with them in his own study.

Feeling now convinced that McFaden's solution was the correct one, that Admiral Benson was placated for the moment and that the right thing had been done, Mr. Mansfield sighed his relief

and gave himself up to his secretary and the day's correspondence.

At three o'clock in the afternoon he was surprised to hear that Professor McFaden was asking for an interview.

"Show him up immediately," he told the attendant.

Professor McFaden was nearer appearing excited than ever before in his life. He plunged at once into his subject.

"I have been very carefully through these papers," he said. "I tell you at once, the thing amazes me. My theory would explain Rudge fine, but man, it doesn't explain Macrae. The point you failed to make clear and left open is that before Macrae's account was written, he and Rudge had not met, nor did they know of one another's existence. That alters the whole aspect of the evidence. The assumption on which my reasoning was based goes from under me."

"Have you reversed your opinion, then?" asked Mr. Mansfield.

"I will tell you the opinion I have now formed. Meanwhile, I take it there is plenty of time to recall the *Sea Lion*, should you desire it."

"I shall want to hear remarkably solid reasons first," said the First Lord. Nevertheless, he rang the bell and sent to inquire how long Hong-Kong would be in touch by wireless with that warship.

He was told there would still be several hours.

“ I will again ask you the question I put to you this morning,” said Mr. Mansfield. “ Do you believe that there has been interplanetary communication ? ”

“ When you asked me that question before,” said McFaden, “ I was convinced that on probing the affair I should find it rested on Rudge’s evidence, and I said, No. I have now probed it. I find that Rudge can be eliminated, and I say, I do not know ! ”

“ On what do you rest your opinions now ? ”

“ On what happened to the operator, and the circumstances in which it happened. Scientifically the evidence is very strong.”

“ I may gather then,” said Mr. Mansfield, “ that you do not consider a wireless signal from a neighbouring planet scientifically impossible ? ”

“ Hitherto I have always held it to be practically impossible,” said McFaden.

“ I said scientifically,” persisted Mr. Mansfield.

“ Seeing that the required medium for it undoubtedly exists all the way, one might hesitate at such a statement.”

“ Now tell me what evidence you have seen in the documents that I did not mention,” said Mr. Mansfield, leaning forward, the morning’s anxiety redoubled.

“ I have already said there is the fact that Macrae’s papers were all written before he met

Rudge. For the rest, I will deal with two points. First, Macrae gave what he said was the Venerian's description of a telescope. As we are dealing only with evidence, we need say nothing of its merits or demerits. We have the fact that it describes an instrument such as does not exist on earth, and the description requires scientific knowledge that Macrae could not possibly possess."

"That," said Mr. Mansfield, "is certainly strong evidence."

"The second point," said McFaden, "is even stronger. A date was put in his head, for his future return to the island. I am quite satisfied that neither Rudge nor any man else gave him that date. It turns out to be the exact day of the conjunction of Mars. This does not happen so often that it could be hit on by chance. It would be the day chosen according to his story, and only according to that. Apart from it, the date would have no meaning. Can you not see that such evidence is significant?"

"It is irresistible," cried Mr. Mansfield, "and includes not only the Venerian, but the Martian also!"

"Logically, it does," said McFaden.

"Then do you still think the *Sea Lion* ought to have been sent before we learn the position at Station X?"

"There is still nothing before us to indicate

any danger in sending the cruiser to the station," said McFaden. "It might perhaps have been left awhile."

Professor McFaden was half regretful that he had given such unqualified acquiescence to the *Sea Lion's* despatch, but he refrained from saying so.

"Benson would make an awful row," mused Mr. Mansfield. For a minute or two he was undecided. At length he said, "I have made up my mind what to do. To-morrow there will be a Cabinet Council. The decision shall be left to it. I will send instructions to the *Sea Lion* to go so far on her journey as will not take her out of touch with Hong-Kong, and await orders there."

This he ordered to be done, in spite of Admiral Benson's protests. Later in the afternoon a cable was received from Hong-Kong that something was wrong with the wireless, and no message could be sent to the *Sea Lion* or anywhere else.

At the same time his secretary mentioned that there was something wrong with the Admiralty wireless. Struck by this coincidence, Mr. Mansfield went himself to investigate, and was told that no message could be heard in consequence of what appeared to be some new kind of electric storm.

He even put on the receivers himself, and heard a continuous babel of inarticulate sounds—

loud, distracting, emanating from no one could tell whence. It rendered anything in the nature of wireless telephony, or even ordinary wireless, quite impossible.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PRIME MINISTER CAPITULATES

THAT evening Mr. Mansfield called on his friend the Home Secretary.

“This thing is getting too much for me, Sarkby,” he said. “I begin to think that events are moving fast, but what they are, why they are, or who is pulling the strings and from where, are questions to which there seems no present answer.”

“You mean the Rudge business,” said Sir John.

“Yes; but since the meeting McFaden has read all the details of the affair from the beginning. I had to leave out many details this morning, and it seems that among them were things that were important as evidence. McFaden is not the confident man he was. He came to me immediately after he had digested all the facts.”

“What about the *Sea Lion*?” asked Sarkby, quickly.

“Yes: among other things he seemed more than

willing for her to be recalled, although not professing to see any particular reason for it."

"What in particular weighs on your mind?"

"It's the cumulative effect of the evidences that there may be truth in what Rudge said. I was at the time impressed by him, but reflection enabled me partially to throw off the effect, owing to the unprecedented nature of his statements."

"Well," said Sarkby, "what alters that?"

"This," said Mansfield—"that the *Sagitta* is lost to us, and Station X inexplicably silent, are facts, and they seem to strengthen Rudge's story. Now, on the evidence, of which he must be a far better judge than you or I, even McFaden is on the wriggle. And on the top of it, there is this wireless storm, or whatever it is. I begin to think it is all connected."

"Well, for my part," said Sarkby, lighting a cigar, "I am not taking any of this story. The whole thing is curious, I admit. But see what miraculous coincidences do happen. There will come along some simple explanation of it all. Don't let it get on your nerves, old chap. Let's talk about it to-morrow at the Cabinet Meeting, and so get rid of individual responsibility."

"But I would rather, if it could have been avoided, that it didn't come before the Cabinet."

"Why not?"

"I was going to bring it up, more particularly as to the *Sea Lion* going to Station X or not. That

being taken out of our hands, what is the good? It ought to be kept secret for the present."

"Blasphemer! Do you insinuate that secret things may not come before the whole Cabinet?" said Sir John, with twinkling eyes.

"You know perfectly well, Sarkby," said Mansfield, "there are one or two among us before whom it would not be safe to mention that the cat had kittens, if it were important to keep it from the papers."

"Well, Mansfield, go your way," said Sarkby.

"My way is now straight to No. 10," said Mansfield. "I will explain the thing as well as I can to the Chief, and try and persuade him to have it up before a Committee of the Cabinet only. I hope I shall find him in."

"Hope you will," said Sir John; and so it came about that the matter of Station X was not brought before the Cabinet.

In the course of the day Admiral Benson woke a few echoes at the Admiralty. Some one, possibly with a certain humour, suggested to him that he should try what he could do at the wireless, as nobody else could make himself heard. He took the suggestion, went up to the wireless room, and put on the receivers.

He did not, however, open his mouth. His face became a study of surprise and bewilderment. Presently he gently put the receivers on the table.

"Well!" he said. "Of all the unqualified——"

Admiral Benson's idiom was notorious at the Admiralty.

In the afternoon an informal meeting took place, at the Prime Minister's, and the Station X affair was fully discussed. The Prime Minister's attitude seemed to coincide with that of the Home Secretary, without being quite so positive. He thought the present mystery would soon clear itself up, either by the recovery of the wireless and news from Station X, or the arrival of the *Sagitta* somewhere with a satisfactory explanation, probably a very simple one when known.

Mr. Mansfield saw that it would be useless for him to say more, and it was therefore decided with apparent unanimity to let things take their course until something fresh happened, and in view of the secrecy of the station, on no account to allow any alarmist story to get to the Press.

It was easy to make these plans, but when several people are concerned it is easy for whippers to get about. So far as the "wireless storm," as it somehow got to be called, was concerned, there was of course nothing secret about that. The state of things was soon ascertained to be world-wide. Wireless communication had entirely ceased.

It became the general topic of conversation. Every day columns of the papers were full of it. When it was found, as day followed day, that the phenomenon continued, the *savants* of all nations

took up the investigation by every means that their science could suggest.

Meanwhile, in letters to the Press, a great many fantastic explanations were put before a bewildered public. Most of the amateurs decided that the cause was electric. The less they knew about electricity the more they used that hard-worked word. One man suggested that it was a manifestation of the Almighty's anger with the world "for its excessive secularity."

It was suggested that any peculiar behaviour of the Aurora in polar regions should be studied. Even the zodiacal light was not unsuspected. One pessimist surmised that it indicated a disturbance of the ether by some cometary or other body of high electric charge approaching from outer space with frightful speed, coming, very possibly, straight for us, and that the escape of our globe in the circumstances was problematical indeed.

His idea caused some amusement, but if he had been capable of interpreting his dream in terms of the spirit instead of terms of matter, he would not have been so very wide of the truth.

While the public was thus occupied with conjecture, there were two groups deeply interested, the scientists and the politicians. The latter in more than one country were asking themselves if this new thing could be of other than human origin, and if of human origin, what it might portend.

The situation in Europe was delicate, and such a thing as the universal interruption of wireless communication caused suspicion. Each of the Great Powers was suspected by the others. A great deal of secret service money was spent without result. Still the days passed during which there was not one moment of the twenty-four hours when the wireless receivers were not full of this extraordinary and meaningless din.

The scientific world was entreated by the Governments to spare no labour and no expense in their efforts to find out the cause—how, where, and if possible, why, it was being done.

Whether it was because our Empire is wider flung than others, or because with certain envious rivals we are supposed to be masters in the art of grab, it became whispered that England was emitting this impediment to communication for some sinister reason of her own.

The echo of this soon found its way to the House of Commons, and was persistently voiced by the peculiar people there whose delight it is to snipe the front bench.

The Prime Minister for the most part answered the questions, and, being a master of sarcasm, gave his questioners full measure in his replies. But secretly he was uneasy. He knew the Government was anything but firmly seated, that a very little additional unpopularity in the House would topple it over; that many members were, while

maintaining silence, suspecting it of being up to some folly respecting this mystery.

This was aggravated by Professor Rudge's name becoming mixed up with it. All the world at once wanted to hear him on the subject, and, needless to say, all the papers at once published the fact that he could not be found.

The Prime Minister felt the awkwardness of his very obvious dilemma. He could neither tell what he knew of Rudge's absence without being made tell much that he was determined not to tell, nor produce him.

It was a very short time after that Professor Rudge relieved the tension of the situation by producing himself, and things began to move swiftly. Before any one knew where they were, the *Sagitta* was at Falmouth, and Professor Rudge and Captain Evered in London.

The Professor broke his journey for a few hours at Plymouth to see May Treherne. On his journey home he had been wondering how he would manage about secretarial assistance. He knew of no one just fitted for the occasion. The secrecy imposed seemed of itself sufficient to preclude any idea of a confidant. Suddenly Miss Treherne's name occurred to him as an inspiration. He recalled her personality, her brisk cheerfulness, her energy and quick intelligence, her courage and common sense. He remembered how devoted she had been to Macrae.

He reflected that it might be put to his door that Macrae was lost to her, for if it had not been for him, Macrae would never have had the opportunity of returning to Station X.

Macrae was doubtless "dead," as we use the word, pushed before his time beyond the veil, while strange to say, his body, the mortal part, was not dead, but animated by a fierce and powerful spirit now fighting, not against a man, but against humanity.

Professor Rudge found May Treherne at her old address. She, too, it appeared, was ready to reproach herself for the efforts she had made to infuse enthusiasm and ambition into Macrae, when his own prophetic warning of coming disaster held him back.

She listened to all Professor Rudge felt he could tell her, accepted his proposal, gasped a little at the handsome salary he suggested, and walked with him to the station to catch the London mail, promising to follow in a day or two.

On Professor Rudge's arrival in town he went straight to his house in Great Queen Street, where he lived with a sister, considerably his senior, and impressed with the conviction that her sole mission in life was to look after her wonderful brother. A simple, kindly soul, thoroughly competent to fill the office she had assumed, she would herself have laughed at the accusation of being possessed of intellect.

Professor Rudge went home, but he had no thought of rest. Miss Rudge was troubled at the signs of worry that she instantly detected in him, but she waited with feminine tact to learn what the trouble was. She seized upon the subject of his clothes and wanted to know how he dared scandalize the neighbourhood by appearing in such clothes, such linen.

Within an hour he escaped, "decent and respectable," he was told, and certainly with the best meal he had eaten since he had left home.

Calling a taxi, he drove straight to Mr. Mansfield's house.

Mr. Mansfield was no less pleased than surprised when Professor Rudge was announced. At last he would learn something to lighten the darkness in which he seemed to be groping. At last there was some one to whom he could refer his colleagues, and on whom he might throw responsibility.

"This is a great surprise," he said, as the Professor entered. "I did not anticipate seeing you to-day. When the *Sagitta* was signalled I was told you were on board."

"Have you seen Captain Evered?" asked Rudge.

"Not yet," was the reply. "He is no doubt finding out what is going to happen to him. Benson is furious with all things, from etheric interruptions to recalcitrant captains. It will mean court-martial and half-pay for Evered, I fear."

"We shall see," said Professor Rudge quietly.

“ I have come here at once, Mr. Mansfield, because the matter before us and the world must suffer no delay. There are details of the position here of which I am ignorant, and of which you can enlighten me.”

“ Everything I know is quite at your disposal, but I feel more in need of enlightenment myself than qualified to spread it,” said Mansfield, with a smile.

“ I know, of course, about the interruption to the wireless,” said Rudge; “ but, partly in consequence of that, I know nothing else—the Government’s opinion, popular information, or measures taken or proposed regarding the affair of Station X. I want you to bring me up to date in these things.”

Mr. Mansfield proceeded to enlighten his visitor as to the occurrences in London and Europe since Station X had been cut off from the rest of the world.

Professor Rudge was not surprised at what he heard; he had expected it. It proved to him that any chance that remained for mankind on this planet depended on himself and, under Providence, himself alone.

“ When,” he asked, “ will be the next Cabinet Council? ”

“ This day week,” said Mr. Mansfield.

“ There must,” said Rudge, “ be one to-morrow morning early.”

"There will certainly not be a meeting of the Cabinet to-morrow, early or late," was the dry official rejoinder. Mr. Mansfield did not like Professor Rudge's 'must,' or his manner.

The Professor looked at Mr. Mansfield for a moment without speaking.

"Will you," he asked, "come with me now to see the Prime Minister?"

"I do not think Lord Saxville would be able to receive you at present," was the reply.

"He will receive me all right," said Professor Rudge grimly.

Mr. Mansfield stiffened still more.

"I regret," he said, "that I am unable to go with you just at present."

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Mansfield," said Professor Rudge, with imperturbable good humour, as he rose to go. "Thank you for all the information you have given me. I wanted to know just how matters were before seeing Lord Saxville. We shall meet again to-morrow."

After Professor Rudge had taken his leave Mr. Mansfield remembered the many things he had wanted to ask him about, and that he had learnt nothing.

If Professor Rudge's interview with the First Lord had been lacking in sympathy, that with the Prime Minister was stormy.

No one had ever seen the Professor in this humour before. To-day he was not stopping to

plead or to explain: he was a battering ram.

At No. 10 he was at first refused an interview. Without wasting time he wrote a note and asked to have it taken to Lord Saxville. His name at least procured this service. The note did the rest.

He was shown into the waiting-room, from which a few minutes later he was conducted to a room where Lord Saxville was seated at a table covered with papers.

"So, Mr. Rudge," began the Prime Minister, in an even voice, "you threaten me!"

"I dare anything at present," said Professor Rudge, looking straight at Lord Saxville. "There is too much at stake to-day for the ordinary rules to obtain. I have learnt from Mr. Mansfield that you and the Government know my opinion respecting the present position at Station X and its danger. I know that that opinion is not generally accepted among you. It is vital that it should be, and measures must be taken without delay. I ask that the Cabinet should meet to-morrow, early, and that Captain Evered, of the *Sagitta*, and the most eminent men of science now in London, or within reach, shall be present; furthermore, that I shall have an opportunity of laying my opinion before the meeting, with all the facts, vouchers, evidence that I shall be able to produce in support of it."

"I'm afraid it is impossible," said Lord Saxville coldly.

“ Then you refuse ? ” said Professor Rudge.

“ I’m afraid it is impossible.”

“ You have read my note ? ” asked the Professor.

“ I have.”

“ And still you refuse ? ”

“ I repeat your request is impossible,” said Lord Saxville. “ I prefer not to refer to the threat in your note.”

“ Will the meeting be held ? ” persisted the Professor.

“ It will certainly not ! ”

“ Then my threat, as you describe it, will be carried out,” said Professor Rudge.

Assuming his haughtiest attitude, the Prime Minister intimated that the interview was ended, and left the room.

Feeling sanguine about the meeting on the morrow, Professor Rudge left Downing Street. He knew Lord Saxville’s fear of the Press, and Professor Rudge’s threat of publicity had impressed him. He was not mistaken.

He had been at home about three hours when a messenger came from Mr. Mansfield to say that the Prime Minister had communicated with him on the subject in which Professor Rudge was interested, and that while a Cabinet Meeting in the ordinary sense could not be held to-morrow, it was possible that an informal meeting of some members of the Government might take place, to hear Professor

Rudge ; and would he now say who were the men of science he desired should be present, so that they might be communicated with.

“So!” thought Rudge. “My lord capitulates. A bitter pill!”

With infinite tact, he wrote a letter of thanks to Lord Saxville, at the same time apologising for the rather unceremonious manner in which he had descended upon him, and any heat he might have displayed.

The names on the list that Professor Rudge prepared were not chosen because they were men with whom he was in most general agreement, or men that he thought he could most easily influence. His worst enemy could not deny that it would have been impossible to find six more distinguished scientists in the country. Later, this fact greatly impressed Lord Saxville.

They were all personally known to Professor Rudge, and as, next day, he entered the room where the meeting was to be held, he noticed that they were all present. Knowing well that a certain branch of his past investigations had brought him some sharp criticism in other days, he could not help an inward smile. “They think they have me now!” he thought.

The Prime Minister was not the first to speak. Sir John Sarkby had evidently been delegated to introduce the subject of the meeting and act as the principal speaker.

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In his suavest manner he explained that "Professor Rudge had requested the Government to give him an opportunity of bringing before them and his brother scientists a subject that he considered of the greatest and most urgent importance in regard to the interests of the State, and in fact, the world."

"The Prime Minister," he continued, evidently addressing his remarks to the scientists present, "and some other members of the Cabinet had already heard an outline of the subject to be dealt with. While they did not profess to follow Professor Rudge in all the opinions he advanced, yet in view of the eminence of the man and the importance of the subject, if he should be right, Lord Saxville, with characteristic open-mindedness and liberality, had decided that Professor Rudge should have his opportunity to place before them his opinions on certain recent events, and the grounds on which he held those opinions. It was gratifying to him and his colleagues to see present six other men in the first rank of science ready to support a brother savant so far"—Sir John Sarkby was especially suave here, and his voice rose half a note—"as they were able to endorse his conclusions."

Professor Rudge was a clear thinker gifted with the faculty of lucid exposition. During his voyage to England he had prepared himself for this moment. Every voucher for what he was about

to say was to his hand. Not the smallest point that could bear for or against his argument would be allowed to escape his attention.

As he rose he was fully conscious of the keen intellects present and of the fact that if there was the smallest flaw in his armour of proof, it would be seized on with avidity. He knew that these six were not only the most critical, competent and dangerous, but actually, in the last resort, the only part of his audience that mattered. He knew that if he carried them, he carried the whole world of science, and with that backing he could defy any Government.

To these therefore he mentally addressed himself and cast the politician temporarily from his thoughts. First, however, he paid a tribute to Lord Saxville's promptness in according to what many men in his position would have regarded as an unreasonable request. Lord Saxville bowed slightly in acknowledgment of this peace-offering.

In the course of his speech Professor Rudge read many papers, with the exception of Macrae's diary, mostly official; but it was chiefly with his extempore eloquence that for nearly three hours he held his audience. All remained tensely eager to hear every word, even where the greater number of them were, through lack of knowledge, out of their depth and unable to follow the argument.

When he finally sat down there was a minute's

silence, during which the politicians present, without consulting each other, all felt that it would be best to wait for a lead from the scientific bench.

Professor McFaden was the first to speak.

“Rudge, man,” he said, from where he sat, and there was genuine admiration in the Scotchman’s tone, “we all knew you had the gift of speech, but you have surpassed yourself. And I’m no surprised at it, for ye certainly had the greatest theme any professor ever dealt with.”

“Thank you, McFaden,” said Professor Rudge, speaking a trifle hoarsely after his effort, “but let us not waste a moment over compliment. I want your judgment.”

“No doubt,” said the Scot, “and ye shall have it. For the present we all doubtless want to consider the matter. I can say it wears a very different aspect to what it did before I heard you.”

He rose to his feet, and evidently considered that so far as he was concerned the meeting was over. It was clear that what a mere Prime Minister might have to say had little interest or him.

Lord Saxville, however, while seeing that little more could be done at the moment, had a word to say before the meeting broke up.

“Professor Rudge,” he said, “I wish to say to you, in the presence of all here, that after hearing

you I think you were quite justified in desiring this meeting, and to some extent"—there was a just perceptible hesitation between his words that indicated they were being chosen with some care—"in the steps you took to procure it. Without expressing any opinion before further consultation, and especially before learning the views of these gentlemen present, who are best qualified to judge of its many scientific points, I candidly admit that you now appear to me to have a much stronger case than I had dreamt of. For any abruptness in my manner at our last interview I express my regret."

And so the meeting broke up.

CHAPTER XVII

PROFESSOR RUDGE'S ULTIMATUM

THROUGH the action of Admiral Benson Captain Evered was not present at the meeting to hear Professor Rudge, who had desired his presence so that he might be there to answer questions on matters of fact within his knowledge. His absence made no difference, however, as the need of additional testimony was not felt by any one.

As soon as the meeting was over, Professor Rudge joined Mr. Mansfield and spoke of the position of Captain Evered.

"What," he added, "is now going to be done?"

"A court-martial," said Mansfield. "You must see that is inevitable. Benson wants his head on a charger at once. I am afraid his connection with the Service is over. If he is put on half-pay he will be extremely lucky."

"Of course," said Professor Rudge, "you will readily understand that holding the opinion I do,

I wish to save Captain Evered from what must appear to me an act of great injustice. So far from thinking him worthy of punishment, I am convinced that his action alone saved the situation in so far as it has been saved, and but for him we should not be here now."

"Of course I quite see that," said Mr. Mansfield.

"If, after hearing me," said Rudge, "you now hold my views, you must feel the same. Whether that is the case or not, I do not ask, but I do ask you as First Lord to stop this court-martial, at least for the present."

"You see," said Mr. Mansfield, "there are regular rules for all such cases. My connection with either of the services is short, and I know very little of such procedures. Of course I can see that Evered's breach is glaring. And then Benson is such an unpleasant man to interfere with."

"But if it were a matter of policy?"

"That," said Mr. Mansfield, "would be a different matter. Then Benson's wishes could be set aside."

"Well," said Rudge, "I consider it is. My statement is now before you and the other members of the Government, and a decision on it one way or the other must be come to without delay. Is it policy to hold a court-martial on Evered while the question whether his action was neces-

sary or not is *sub judice*? And remember that the Government decision is not the final decision; that time alone will show—show very soon, I greatly fear. What I ask therefore is that the court-martial should be held over, and Evered's services retained, until his judges will have solid grounds for their decision."

"There is great point to your argument certainly," said Mr. Mansfield, in a hesitating way.

"Put it before Lord Saxville," said Professor Rudge, "and say that it is my earnest request. Say that Evered acted under my advice, and that I will stick at nothing to defend him. Be sure you say that."

Mansfield was somewhat behind the scenes. He smiled and promised.

In the result Captain Evered was placed under "open arrest," retaining for the time his post on the *Sagitta*.

The members of the Government evidently held a private meeting after hearing Professor Rudge, for before the day was out each of the scientists received a request to draw up, so soon as possible—the following morning was suggested—a written statement of his opinion on the subject of Professor Rudge's statement.

The scientists also had their meeting, the result of which was that one gave it as his opinion that Professor Rudge was deluded in some way not clear, admitting that it had been in circumstances

and through a curious sequence of events, that almost excused him.

One declined to express an opinion one way or the other until the present state of the wireless, or rather, the cause of it, had been solved, giving it as his opinion that if Professor Rudge were correct, the clamour on the wireless would be found connected with it, and therefore that the first thing to do before accepting hypotheses as facts, was to solve that mystery.

The other four, and they were those who were distinguished for common sense as well as science, considered that Professor Rudge had made out a sufficient case to justify the Government in taking instant action as though its truth were incontestable. Their argument was that absolute proof, as the phrase is used in science, was not necessary to their conclusion, for when so much was at stake, action for safety was clearly indicated.

After his efforts Professor Rudge went home feeling the inevitable reaction. Every bodily comfort that affection could suggest was lavished upon him, but he wanted something more. It was one of those times when even the stoutest and most self-reliant natures feel the need of some sympathetic soul that can understand and encourage.

He knew of none. The secrecy imposed on him seemed in itself sufficient to preclude any idea of a confidant. Perhaps it was that thought that

brought to his mind one who already knew much of the matter and who could certainly be trusted with the remainder—May Treherne.

To-morrow she would be under his roof. The thought somehow cheered and comforted him. He felt it would be good to have some one, not alone for the purpose of relieving him of much clerical work, but to whom he could talk on matters about which to others his lips were sealed.

Feeling relieved, his courage re-asserted itself, and he went to his laboratory.

An idea had occurred to him. He had a small wireless installation at his house for experimental purposes, and at this, with receivers on, he sat and listened. The wireless storm was still going on. As unintelligible as ever, it seemed nevertheless to have a new interest for him. The investigation he was engaged on lasted for many hours. It was almost dawn when he ultimately retired, and his first act on waking was to return to his laboratory. At length he seemed satisfied.

In the morning the Prime Minister and his colleagues had the six reports before them, and a very short interchange of views showed Lord Saxville that there would be trouble from the divergence of views within the Cabinet. Partly because he could not but be influenced by the majority of the reports, and no doubt partly because he saw the party danger of delay, he decided that the matter should be promptly dealt with. He

asked the more important members to meet him at the Admiralty in two hours' time for a further talk with Professor Rudge and the other six scientists.

At this meeting Lord Saxville himself opened the proceedings.

"Gentlemen," he said, addressing himself directly to Professor Rudge and his *confrères* "since we met yesterday we have received the reports you have sent us on the Martian danger. One of you declines to accept it; Professor Stenham, of Oxford, wants further evidence on a certain point that he thinks has relation to it; but the other four strongly advise immediate action on such evidence as we already possess. In face of such a majority, to remain inactive is impossible.

"The primary purpose of this meeting is therefore not to decide if we shall act, but to receive your advice as to what course that action should take. It is not an ordinary matter, and, for its efficient handling, it is evident that the most up-to-date knowledge on subjects which active politicians have, I fear, little time to study, is indispensable.

"I may doubtless take it that action means taking measures for the destruction of a being now on the island known as Station X.

"The destruction of a man on that island, or any number of men, would be a simple matter,

but the kernel of the whole affair before us is the assertion of Professor Rudge that this being is not a man. He tells us he is a Martian, and informs us that his powers are so vastly superhuman that a single error in our measures would inevitably be fatal, and that every hour's delay is dangerous.

"Tell us, then, gentlemen, before we go further, what, on the supposition that Professor Rudge is right, are the measures you advise."

"Saxville," whispered the Home Secretary and would-be Prime Minister, to the colleague sitting next him, "is supposed to be addressing himself solely to the scientists, but you will notice how adroitly he is endeavouring to force our hands with his 'primary purpose of this meeting.' Like Mansfield, he is getting under the influence of this Rudge."

"Perhaps Rudge is himself the Martian," laughed the other.

"Gad," said the Home Secretary, "it looks like it."

Meanwhile Professor Rudge had begun to speak.

"Of the reports to which Lord Saxville has alluded, it is an immense relief to me to find that four are everything I could ask, and that it is intended to act in accordance with them.

"I now wish to refer to one of the other reports, that of my friend Professor Stenham, because the point it raises is a very reasonable one, and because I believe I have found the answer to it. He refers

to the present interruption to wireless communication. It was a very shrewd suggestion that this was related to the Martian invasion, and it struck me so yesterday. I have spent the night on it.

“ I have an instrument in my laboratory, of my own invention, which I had intended to hand to the world at the next meeting of the Royal Society. With this it is an easy matter to detect at any moment the direction and length of the Hertzian waves on which wireless depends.

“ I have spent over twelve hours in taking observations, and my first showed that all the etheric waves came from the same direction. I had anticipated that, having the idea that they perhaps came from Station X. But an observation taken one hour later showed that they all came from a new direction. This seemed inexplicable, for certainly Station X had not moved. Every succeeding observation showed further divergence. At the end of twelve hours their direction was exactly opposite to when I started.

“ That gave me the clue. Following it, I soon found that although the line of direction made a constantly changing angle with the horizon, it pointed to a fixed point in space. That point is in Aries. I need not remind my *confrères* here that at present Venus is in Aries ! ”

The politicians present did not seem at once to see the drift of this, but among the scientists

there was a sudden movement of the keenest interest. McFaden banged his right fist into his left palm.

"Ma conscience, he's got it!" he cried.

"May I," said Lord Saxville, with a smile, "ask what it is that Professor Rudge has got?"

"The explanation," said Professor Rudge, "is that the Venerians are undoubtedly making this etheric disturbance. I am the only man now on earth rendered by the wonderful *rapport* they can establish capable of hearing their voices, and for that a Station X installation would be required; but they have found a means of hurling into space this continuous blast of etheric impulses. They are of every possible wave-length that can give rise to sound in our instruments. Hence the impossibility of our wireless stations inter-communicating."

"What is their motive?" said Lord Saxville.

"In my opinion," said Rudge, "it clearly indicates that the Venerians have seen either that the Martian is reconstructing or has reconstructed the installation of Station X, or that he has or is about to escape from the island. They are doing this to prevent his communicating with Mars or with ourselves by wireless, so that we may for a longer time have him alone to deal with, and a better chance of victory in consequence."

"That," said McFaden, "is so."

Professor Stenham rose and said, "In face of

this discovery I desire my report to be amended to concur with those of my four friends."

The sixth man looked at the Home Secretary. He appeared unhappy, but did not speak. What Sir John Sarkby's real opinion of the matter was was only known to himself, but his actions proved him determined to work solely for the furtherance of his personal ends.

"With the powerful alliance of the learned Professor's celestial friends," he said, quietly, "we shall now have ample time to consider our measures. Personally, I very much deprecate any precipitate action."

"We can discuss that," said Lord Saxville, "after this meeting."

"So far as deciding on a definite line of action is concerned," said Professor Rudge, "your decision, gentlemen, I fear, must be taken now."

Lord Saxville knit his brows.

"I object," said Sir John Sarkby, "to the use of the word 'must' from any man holding no office whatever."

"It is not I," said Professor Rudge; "it is the emergency that imposes the 'must.'"

"That is for the Government to judge."

"It is but slightly altering Lord Saxville's own words," said Professor Rudge, "if I say it is rather, in this instance, for science to judge, and for the Government to act."

"And if our action," said the Home Secretary,

“ does not meet with your full approval——”

“ If your decision does not meet with the full approval of myself and my colleagues,” said Rudge, in firm and level tones, “ and if that decision is not taken now, my measures are already complete for the whole matter, before this day is out, to be laid as fully before the French, German, Italian, United States and Japanese Governments as it is now before yourselves, and at the same time,” he continued, looking straight at the Prime Minister, “ in the fullest detail given to the Press of the world.”

Lord Saxville knew that Professor Rudge was in a position to carry out his threat. He had been informed that he was a wealthy man and was spending money freely ; that since he had landed there were constant emissaries between him and Paris. There was also a frequent exchange of code telegrams.

Sir John Sarkby's obvious desire was to sow dissension among the Cabinet in order to serve the ends he had in view.

Lord Saxville was already half convinced that Professor Rudge was right. He knew also that there was a section of the Cabinet, headed by the Home Secretary, that did not share this view. The situation was full of difficulties and potential complications.

It was agreed that instructions should be given the Admiralty to detach a portion of the China

fleet for the purpose of reinforcing the *Sea Lion* and effectually surrounding and preventing intercourse with Station X, and with the use of observation balloons and aeroplanes, destroying by bombardment from a distance, any one visible on the island. These vessels were to remain at their posts until the arrival of Professor Rudge, and then to be guided by his advice and direction.

These directions were given as soon as the meeting was over, and Professor Rudge was satisfied that all that could be done at the moment had been done.

Immediately after the meeting the Home Secretary buttonholed Mr. Mansfield as the man responsible for movements of the fleet, to feel his way with him, but found that the First Lord was solid for the Prime Minister.

He then got together the other members of the Government that were of his cabal, with Admiral Benson and the one objector among the scientists, a man who was selling his conscience and prostituting his knowledge, and they held a consultation among themselves.

While they professed not to believe in the Martian, they were more than willing to make use of him for the purpose of the political rearrangement they desired.

Several schemes for doing so were brought forward and debated, but the one finally adopted was startling in its boldness.

"Let us," said the Home Secretary, "take Rudge at his word and show him that things will not pan out as he thinks. He will be on the high seas, and we shall have a clear field. Let us, without ourselves appearing, see to it that the Press get hold of the story, and that through it the public get it in its most ludicrous aspects. In this way it will be possible to smother the whole thing, Saxville included, with ridicule."

Once convinced that Professor Rudge might well be right, Lord Saxville decided to let him have his own way.

The *Sagitta*, with Captain Evered still in command, was to take Professor Rudge back to Station X for what he supposed was going to be his second and final round with his deadly foe.

It was sufficiently evident that no court could now punish Captain Evered for having done what a fleet was being despatched to do over again if necessary. He was released from open arrest, to the scandal of Admiral Benson. Furthermore, Captain Evered was made Commodore in command of the operations against the Martian.

On returning to his home Professor Rudge found that May Treherne had arrived, for which he was thankful.

"Stanley," said Miss Rudge dryly, as he entered, "I approve of your taste in private secretaries," and for some reason Professor Rudge felt himself flushing.

"I felt sure you would," he said, at length. "She is certain to do her best, and she is very capable."

"She is very bright," said Miss Rudge, "and remarkably pretty."

"I am glad to think you'll get on together," said Rudge.

"So am I," was the response. "I was thinking of your future. Girls are very insidious."

"I can't imagine what you're talking about," was the Professor's response; "but listen. I am leaving England again at once, and I shall be away for a considerable time. I hope you'll make Miss Treherne feel at home here."

And Miss Rudge promised with alacrity.

Calling May Treherne into his laboratory later, where he knew there could be no interruption, Professor Rudge told her what had happened. She was amazed at what she heard, for beyond the short cable message announcing Macrae's death, she was ignorant of recent developments. She listened without interruption. With chin on palm she sat, and her eyes, with dilated pupils, watched the speaker, as she drank in the facts. Tears once had to be brushed away, but her attention did not wander.

"And now, Miss Treherne," said Professor Rudge, after he had finished, "I want you to take up your duties here, and it will have to be in my absence."

" You are going away at once ? " she asked.

" Yes," he said, " and your presence here is a great relief to me. Some one who will be watchful and loyal to my view may be required here while I am away. I know you will do your best."

" I will, indeed, Professor Rudge ; you may be sure I will do all I can," she said, and her tone carried conviction.

" The worst part," said Rudge, " is that I have no confidence in the Government, and its members are divided among themselves. I have spoken with Professor McFaden, and he and I are now absolutely at one in this affair. Keep in touch with him. He is shrewd as well as reliable."

He then astonished May by telling her that £5,000 was deposited in the bank in her name, and handed her the cheque-book.

" Spend it in this cause," he said, " under McFaden's advice, if and as required. Fight whoever opposes me. Don't let the money question bother you."

" But—Miss Rudge ? " said the woman in May.

" My sister remains mistress of my house. In that she is competent ; in this she would not be. In the matter you deal with she would be worse than useless, and, fortunately, she knows it. Let each of you keep to her own duties, and all will go well."

May Treherne's eyes shone. She thought of her late position at Sales, Ltd.

She was proud, but a little nervous of her responsibilities. She had plenty of pluck, but was glad of McFaden as a counsellor.

The *Sagitta* sailed. Professor Rudge's one prayer was that the voyage might be an uneventful one, but the times were not uneventful. She was not far on her course when trouble began at home, thanks to self-seeking in high places. This rapidly developed until it became the greatest horror of its kind that Europe had ever experienced.

Leaving details of that for the moment, it may be mentioned that the first news of the panic and uproar came to the *Sagitta* by the secret naval code while she was coaling at Singapore.

Professor Rudge and the officers were horrified at the short epitome they got of events at home, but while they were lamenting it a cable message from the admiral commanding on the China station was handed by Captain Evered, the moment he had read it, to Professor Rudge. It at once drove all thoughts of what they had been speaking of out of his head.

It said: "*Sea Lion* not at Station X. No one apparently on island."

Rudge went pale. The paper fluttered to the deck.

"My God, Evered," he said. "We are too late!"

CHAPTER XVIII

PANIC

WHEN the *Sagitta*, with Professor Rudge on board, left England, it would have been difficult to define precisely the average opinion respecting the Martian danger held by the comparatively few people who knew anything about it. There were at least half a dozen who had no doubt whatever that humanity was now in the actual presence of the most awful peril that had ever threatened it.

These few included McFaden, and certainly two of his brother scientists.

There were one or two others among scientists and members of the Cabinet who were sufficiently persuaded by the evidence to be anxious that every means should be employed to combat the danger.

Among the rest, opinions graduated, until one came to the few who flatly denied the whole thing, and while excusing their incredulity by asserting

that Rudge was mad, were naturally too illogical to see that their solution, if accepted, scarcely weakened the evidence.

Things might have remained in that position and the public have been protected by their ignorance from the horrors that followed, but for the action of certain opportunists who thought they saw a chance of personal profit.

The *Sagitta* was scarcely out of the Channel before paragraphs began to appear in the papers respecting rumours that a being from Mars had appeared on earth. Considerable ability was shown in making his appearance and wanderings highly ridiculous. The subject lent itself well to the illustrated comic Press. He became a music-hall gag and a subject of encore verses to popular songs. "Have you seen the Martian?" became a catch phrase.

Not the slightest hint was allowed to creep into these references that politics was behind it all. But the desired end was achieved. All the world laughed—truly all the world, for the man from Mars was as popular on the Paris boulevards and in Italy as in London. In view of the more mercurial character of the people, it was not surprising that the *furore* for the absurd Martian rose to much greater heights abroad than in England. No cinema programme was complete without him in some form or other.

This continental part had not been in the

original scheme of the plotters. The infection had simply crossed the Channel and spread.

The conspirators were satisfied with the result of their plot, and considered its aim achieved, that end being, of course, to make the popular conception of the Martian so completely and irretrievably ridiculous as would make the Government's action more than difficult to defend, and bring it down in ruin.

It was therefore the time to strike and charge them with having taken the joke seriously, and with the squandering of public funds over it.

At first, guarded hints appeared, somewhat indefinite, but sufficient for their purpose of starting on the trail that ever-wakeful creature, the inveterate parliamentary sniper. They had a glorious time, without knowing or caring whose interests they were serving. Their questions became every day more and more embarrassing.

Lord Saxville suspected the source of his new trouble. His instinct told him that very soon the enemy's heavy batteries would be unmasked and an opportunity be asked for to discuss the charges of having moved a considerable fleet on a fantastical business instead of leaving it where it was really wanted, and with blocking the wireless so as temporarily to cover their stupidity.

He saw that unless something were done his downfall was certain.

The public were quite able to see that there must be something about which it had not been informed, and Lord Saxville realized that it was not only necessary for his own safety to let some of the truth be known, but that it was getting beyond his power to keep it back.

So another account of things began to get published, and the public pricked up its ears. It recognized at once a different tone in these statements. The Martian assumed another form, no longer a myth, but real; another expression, no longer comic, but sinister and menacing.

But it was overdone. Just as the original idea to make everything ridiculous had been overdone, so these later representations were deliberately designed to throw up all in a lurid light. There was little or no thought for the consequence. It was simply politician against politician.

The result of the sudden revulsion of feeling was doubtless unforeseen, and to a great extent unforeseeable. The politician had saved his seat, but neither attacker nor attacked had regarded the cost of their game. Statesmanship would have known that the actual position demanded a certain reticence, but it was bungled. The demand now for full and exact information became irresistible. The clamour throughout Europe was not to be denied.

If there had been no lampooning and only the information necessary given with proper discre-

tion, the situation might well have remained under control. As it was, the people remembered that at the thing which now filled them with dread they had been encouraged to laugh.

It could not be expected that foreign governments would accept the Martian seriously on such very questionable evidence as was yet before them. So when they became aware that a considerable British fleet had been moved, nobody knew where or why, and that with our control of the cables, and the block (possibly our block) of the wireless, anything might be happening, their London Embassies became busy.

Feeling the need of shifting some of the responsibility at home, and of having for the purposes of the Foreign Office, a more scientific account than it could prepare for itself, Lord Saxville, driven almost to his wits' end, sent a confidential messenger to Professor Rudge's house to ask who now represented him in this country.

The messenger was rather surprised to be received by May Treherne as the person he sought.

Having learnt his errand, May Treherne asked if Lord Saxville would make an appointment to meet Professor McFaden, and was told that he would be glad if the Professor would call on him so soon as possible.

May went immediately to McFaden and told him the Prime Minister wanted to see him at once.

"Why?" asked the Professor.

"I don't know exactly," said May, "but it is about the Martian."

"Well," he said, "I suppose to hear is to obey. Will you come with me?"

She declined the honour.

"But you will be careful, won't you, Professor? They are so wily, these politicians."

Her anxiety lest in some way he should be overreached in Downing Street, while acting for Professor Rudge, amused McFaden considerably.

"I'll do my very best, young lady," he said.

"I am sure you will," she said. "Professor Rudge is so clever, so strong, so brave, that any one must feel it an honour to act for him."

"Is that so?" said McFaden dryly.

"Why, of course it is so," said May Treherne, with conviction. For a moment she almost repented her decision not to go too. •

"I will see you when I return," said McFaden, "and you shall learn what two able advocates Rudge has left behind him."

"Two?" said May.

"Aye, two," said McFaden.

Lord Saxville did not allude to Foreign Office difficulties to McFaden. He explained his wish that the Professor should at once prepare a short treatise explaining in a scientific manner the present position in respect to the Martian, and dealing very fully with the evidence, and above all let him have this so soon as possible.

He was also to embody this in articles suited to the scientific journals for the better and more general information of the educated public.

“An attempt has been made by certain people,” said Lord Saxville, “to misrepresent the facts, and measures to correct this have followed, with the result that the public is confused and alarmed. I hope, therefore, you will publish the thing in a form adapted for the information of those capable of appreciating the evidence, as distinguished from the ignorant and impulsive masses. For these, the influential public, are also getting restive, regarding neither of the accounts hitherto sent out, as acceptable.”

“Will that,” asked McFaden, “allay the alarm?”

“It will be for the Government to deal with the symptoms of the rising panic. I wish your presentment to convince the thinking section that the measures taken were justified, and that everything necessary has been done.”

“I doubt,” said McFaden, “if we remain under that impression long.”

“You think our measures inadequate?”

“I doubt,” said McFaden, “if any measures within our power would be adequate.”

“Do you mean that this Martian is going to succeed against a world in arms?” There was anxiety in Lord Saxville’s tone.

“The world,” said McFaden, “is not in arms

that I am aware of. After it reads my report perhaps it will consider it better that it should be."

"You are not going to write an alarmist document?" asked Lord Saxville anxiously.

"I am going," said McFaden, "to write the facts. Unless my mind deceives me, that will be a more alarmist document to the man who can think—there are not many!—than any or all of the cock-and-bull stories now current."

"Well," said Lord Saxville, extending his hand, "I hope you will let me have your statement so soon as possible to-morrow, and that things are not quite so bad meanwhile as you fear."

Professor McFaden had not been slow to see that Lord Saxville was primarily fighting for his own hand, but was also genuinely desirous of allaying the popular alarm and killing the various pernicious and exaggerated tales going about. The vital and urgent business of fighting the Martian had, however, retired into the background of his mind.

Professor McFaden was so far right. The truth had no element of reassurance or consolation in it. He was a deep and clear thinker, and had given time and study in visualizing the possible powers of the superman. It had not left him an optimist. It had not convinced him that enough was being done.

He kept his word to May Treherne, and reported

his interview. She discovered his doubts of success.

“We have one element in our favour,” he said, “in that we have a good man at the helm in Rudge. Within human limits he will not fail.”

He seemed willing to talk for once, and he had a sympathetic listener.

“Well, Professor McFaden,” she said, as he rose to go, “your sex, I believe, is inclined to deny mine reason, but at least admits us instinct. Now, your reason tells you that we are going to fail in spite of Professor Rudge, but I have an instinct that tells me we shall win because of Professor Rudge.”

“Well, lassie,” he said, in going, “then I’ll also be having an instinct—that if friend Rudge does win yonder he’ll come back to meet wi’ another difficulty, and be beaten to a frazzle, as the Yankee said.” He went away chuckling, leaving May Treherne with no idea of what he was talking about.

Professor McFaden’s articles appeared, and their influence was marked. They killed a great many wild and absurd rumours, and thus did good, but the people to whom they were really addressed were exasperated at having been played with and kept so long in the dark.

Letters and articles appeared in all the big dailies, wanting to know why facts had been suppressed, while lampoons of so terrible a thing were

being sent about. Why this incredible muddling, etc., etc.

The *savants* of the Continent also did not dissemble their indignation at the way the English Government had treated them, and its easy-going way with the peril itself, which after all was an international affair.

“This matter,” they said, “is not a British question; it is a world question. It is not for any one nation, but for humanity, to say what measures should be taken; and it is urgent.”

The daily Press of every country, now thoroughly informed of the facts, filled its columns with details, explanations, political recriminations and advice.

Pulpit and platform dealt with it, and as its horror became more clearly realized, its danger understood, the world rang with it.

Much that was written and said publicly, although true in the main part, was highly injudicious, and the effect on the masses deplorable. Once the thing had really seized on the popular imagination nothing availed to stay the panic. The very intangibility, the ghastly character of this psychic threat, so awful, so imminent, gripped even those whose temperament would have enabled them to meet an every-day material danger unmoved.

The power of this invader to seize on other personalities struck a note of terror that found

an answering chord in minds even the most phlegmatic. Its effect on the nervous and hysterical was terrible.

Unfortunately, among the densely ignorant peasantry of the south and east of Europe there are several horrible superstitions, of which the seizing and entering into possession of people by evil and unshriven spirits, is a prominent part. They were therefore the less inclined to wonder at or doubt this power of the Martians, and were ready in many cases to fight the foe with exorcising rites of the most fiendish description.

Everywhere people began to look in the eyes even of their most intimate friends with a suspicion, a question in their glance. Among the more superstitious section of the community, if a person behaved in an aggressive or eccentric manner, his life was in peril. In this connection there were daily happenings of a most deplorable nature—assaults, murders.

In order to stay the wild panic, the utmost publicity was given to the information that the danger was small, because localised by the *Sea Lion* having now been reinforced by a fleet sufficient to prevent the escape of the Martian from the island of Station X.

The reassuring nature of this was qualified by the picture it drew of what must be the Martian's power when such measures were necessary.

Then on the very heels of this, the tidings came

through that the Martian had seized the *Sea Lion*, and, in full command of her crew, had left the island for no one knew where. Without thought of the consequences, this news was published. The floodgates of panic and unreason were opened. Scenes were enacted that would have been almost incredible as occurring in mediæval or ancient times, but which no one would have believed possible in ours. Along the east Mediterranean littoral and throughout the Slavonic countries, and in certain parts of south-east and eastern Europe, including Russia itself, the state of panic rose to its greatest heights. Here it was no longer a question of one Martian, but of thousands—everywhere.

Hope of escape seemed to be relinquished. The world was panic-stricken. People fought like cornered animals. Pitched battles, originating in some trifling incident, no one knew what, took place between contending mobs, until streets ran blood.

The very scenes their own madness enacted confirmed each that he (or, alas ! she) was fighting for life against Martians in human form.

Things did not come to this pass in the west of Europe, but in several countries it was a fact, perhaps not altogether to be wondered at, in the atmosphere that surrounded them, that the rulers as well as ruled lost their heads.

One thing was, however, settled at once without

opposition—and it was the wisest decision that could have been arrived at—that there should be unity of direction in what concerned all equally, and that, while he was available, Professor Rudge's advice should be law.

McFaden maintained an impassible exterior, and tried to busy himself with other things, but he knew it was a miserable failure.

He, the reputed misogynist, fell into a habit of going round to Great Queen Street and having a cup of tea. May Treherne's confidence and bright optimism comforted him.

It was impossible at this time to talk about any but one subject, and here was the only place where he cared to talk about that.

If May Treherne's brave spirit, that shed and refused all doubts and fears, seemed good to cynical McFaden, it was still more so to Miss Rudge.

That good lady, beginning by liking the girl, soon passed all the stages to loving her.

"What should I have done," she said, "in a time like this if my brother—may God protect him!—had not provided me with May to cheer me?"

"She is a fine lass, and a sensible," said McFaden, "and her confidence is wonderful."

"Her confidence," said Miss Rudge, "is in my brother."

"I notice that," said McFaden dryly.

Miss Rudge caught the tone of the remark.

"I was," she said, "at first afraid for Stanley, not knowing what the girl was like, and seeing that there must be about twenty years between them. But now I should think him lucky to have such a wife as May would make him."

May Treherne would have been surprised had she heard this conversation, and it would not have pleased her.

She believed herself now and for always true and devoted for life to the memory of her dead lover. She had had little enough time to analyse her feelings, and she was not introspective. The truth was that her love for Macrae had been half mother love. She had now for the first time come in contact with a brave spirit, kindred to her own. She had felt the glow of its influence, without comprehending. If the sun shone the seed would grow.

Her memory of the dead would not necessarily all die. It would grow less a part of her life. The moon shines by day, but few see it.

CHAPTER XIX

PROFESSOR RUDGE LANDS AT STATION X

PROFESSOR RUDGE, at Singapore, recovering from the shock he had received, braced himself to meet the new situation. He recognized that it was now critical.

It was evident that once again the Martian had taken a long stride forward. Moreover, he had won and retained all the manifest advantages of the initiative. He had this time left his opponents in the dark as to the exact nature of the blow he had struck, or where the next might be expected.

“ I suppose there can be no doubt,” said Captain Evered, “ that the Martian is really responsible for the *Sea Lion's* disappearance ? ”

“ It is almost a certainty,” said Rudge. “ There was the clearest understanding with Captain Connell that he should not leave the neighbourhood of the island nor communicate with it. There is no doubt in my mind that it was on the latter point that the wily foe outwitted him. In that case the situation we have now to deal with

is a thousand times worse than if that unfortunate vessel had never been sent. I fear we must reckon now with a Martian in command of the *Sea Lion*."

The picture was sufficiently alarming, and over the cable Professor Rudge learned of the effect of the news in Europe and elsewhere. It was even more terrible than he had expected.

The reason, he was quick to appreciate, was due to the public perception of the increased difficulty in dealing with the situation that had now arisen.

Its effect from that cause was enhanced by its being universally felt that here was now an overt act that utterly removed the comforting idea that the thing might not, after all, be as bad as had been represented.

This further and conclusive proof of the reality of the danger against which they were called upon to act, and the difficulty of deciding on the lines that action should take, affected different statesmen in different ways. The lethargic it roused to nervous energy; the naturally nervous it reduced to a state bordering on helplessness.

The first impulse everywhere was to get the advice of Professor Rudge as to the next thing to be done.

His reply was prompt. "Let two of the fleet at Station X remain to guard it and the remainder endeavour to get information of the direction taken by the *Sea Lion*. Above all, every wire-

less installation in the world must be instantly dismantled in case the Venerians close their wireless barrage."

Commodore Evered agreed that, by scattering, news might be got from some merchant ship.

Professor Rudge found that he would have no difficulty in procuring the measures that he considered necessary. In view of the internal state of each country, apart from the danger and urgency of the thing to be dealt with, no urging on his part was required.

All were anxious to do everything possible in the endeavour to overcome this world menace, and to seek Rudge's advice and assistance. He could not but contrast the Government's attitude now with that when he had first put the affair before them. Then he could only gain attention under threats; now he was being overwhelmed with inquiries as to what should be done.

He was begged to remain in port so as to be in touch with the cable until everything had been arranged. All foreign Governments seemed to regard him as their chief adviser, as being the most likely to be able to divine the Martian's intentions.

This he utterly repudiated, repeating to all that it would be absurd for any human being to pretend to be able to fathom the Martian's plans.

"The thoughts of these beings," he cabled to Whitehall, "are undoubtedly so far above our reach that it is useless to make an endeavour to

read their minds. The only thing for us to do at present is to seek the enemy in every direction to the utmost of our power, and destroy him without parley.

“ We know his object, and we know his starting place. The rest is surmise. That is why I say we must seek in every direction.”

It says much for the energy of the various Governments that before many hours were passed various units of the fleets were being despatched to their allotted stations with instructions to get in touch with each other so soon as possible, to gather all information possible from merchant ships, and every other source available, and to use every endeavour to prevent the *Sea Lion* making any Continental landing.

The various fleets were allotted areas according to their position when the orders were given. The Japanese and British ships of the China squadron were ordered to cover the north and Asian coast line. The fleets of American Powers were to keep watch on the East Pacific. Warships were rushed from the Mediterranean to cover the African littoral. European warships were sent, some by Suez, some by the Cape. Vessels of every size and accompanied with balloons and seaplanes rushed to their posts. All the navies of the world were galvanized into sudden activity, the unifying idea of the whole being to form as quickly as possible a vast ring enclosing as much of the

Pacific as possible, with the object of enclosing the *Sea Lion* and finding her.

As soon as the plan was settled, the *Sagitta* proceeded with Professor Rudge on her journey to Station X. On hearing of the disappearance of the *Sea Lion* an idea had come to the Professor, and he was anxious to be at the island as soon as possible. In his mind *time* was of the essence of the thing.

In the conversations that took place on board he gave his views for what they were worth. He was careful to explain how little their worth might be. It was all hypothetical, and the plans of the Martian were an impenetrable mystery.

“By some means beyond our power to guess at,” he said, “he may have got away from the island, and the *Sea Lion* has gone in chase. The *Sea Lion* may have been attacked and sunk, and the Martian and his two slaves be still in hiding on the island. Thirdly, most dangerous, and seemingly to us most probable of all, the Martian obtained command of the battle cruiser, and has gone off in her—where?”

He also said that as the Martian's aim was to bring other Martians in the same horrible way as he himself had arrived, it seemed plausible to suppose that he would desire to get where he would be safe from sea bombardment and have at command a sufficient population to be his slaves in the work of erecting a powerful wireless station

for communication with his own world. The ultimate purpose would be to turn all into Martians, until an army of these existed before which anything in the nature of human opposition would be out of the question.

It was impossible to say if he had decided upon Asia, Africa, or America, or upon any of the many large islands extending from south-eastern Asia. He might even decide upon Australia.

The fleets had therefore been sent to defend and cut off his access to all these coast lines. Would they be in time? Professor Rudge kept as brave an exterior as he could assume, but in his secret heart he was not sanguine. He considered the chances were on the side of the Martian.

Stout-hearted as he was, he felt at times that the anxieties of the moment were too great for any man's shoulders to bear, and without parallel in the world's history. In the past there had been some vital decisions, when arms and valour had decided in a few hours the broad lines of history for centuries. These had been such questions as to whether Europe should grow into all we mean by that word, a lamp by which all the world should be lit and led, or be forever a mere appanage and dependency of Asia.

Never before had it been the case of a day, or perhaps an hour, deciding the fate of the whole human race.

Professor Rudge considered it fortunate that the large and efficient naval force of Japan was promptly ready to reinforce our eastern squadrons, as it seemed to him that China and India, with their enormous populations, must have great attractions for the Martian. Once either of those countries was attained, the Martian's victory was certain.

Every available vessel was pressed into the service, even destroyers and submarines. Sea-planes were based in the larger warships, and thus greatly extended their radius of observation.

By the time the *Sagitta* reached Station X, the combined sea and air fleets of the world had drawn a kind of cordon round a vast expanse of the Pacific, within which it was reasonable to suppose the *Sea Lion* existed. No news had been received of her having appeared on any coast, or having been sighted by any of those on the look-out for her afloat.

This was not conclusive that she had not been seen, for some of the ships were far from any cable station, and it was strictly forbidden to carry wireless. In any case it would have been useless while this mysterious interruption lasted.

Under Professor Rudge's advice, it was universally made a capital offence to have a wireless installation, big or little. Any person, official or private, was empowered and enjoined to shoot, or in any way kill at sight, any one contravening

this order. A large reward accompanied the rendering of this public service.

It was true that this order caused the deaths of many innocent people. In the state of public feeling that was inevitable. The danger was, however, so great, so overwhelming, that the order, with all its drawbacks, was considered more than justified because of the risk of the Martian succeeding in circumventing the protective action of the Venerians, and so establishing *rapport* with some unfortunate operator somewhere, thus nullifying all the efforts being made.

There was one exception to the wireless order. On board the *Sagitta* was a small installation under Professor Rudge's own sole control. This he had arranged for a purpose of his own, so that it could be rendered efficient by touching a switch, to the extent of just enabling him to hear the sound of the Venerian interruption, but nothing else. In his dread of the Martian, he had arranged it so that should a single syllable come through, the pressure of a finger would instantly cut the connection.

He had been busy during the voyage over this installation, its beginning dating from when the news had been received that the *Sea Lion* had disappeared. An idea had come into his head that he spoke of to no one until Station X was reached.

As the *Sagitta* approached the island, he had

more than once put his ears to the receivers for a moment. The gabble of the interruption he found still going on.

Part of the *Sagitta's* new equipment for this voyage was a captive balloon of the long or observation type. When only a couple of miles from the island, Professor Rudge asked Commodore Evered not to approach nearer, but to steam slowly round it. He himself went to his wireless and listened. The interruption continued. He listened. Will they invite me to land? he thought. It was what he had come for.

He was convinced the Venerians were the cause of this etheric disturbance, and that it was done on our behalf; neither had he any doubt that the present position of the *Sagitta* was being closely observed.

Suddenly the interruption ceased. Hope once more lit the features that had lately grown so haggard. Confidence returned. The cessation of sound could be no coincidence, nor—the thought crept in—a Martian trick?

He went on deck, and found that under Commodore Evered's direction the gas cylinders had been brought out, and the balloon was being inflated.

A keen-eyed young officer volunteered to man it, and, with balloon aloft at a sufficient height to command the whole island, the *Sagitta* again steamed round it.

As soon as the balloon was hauled down, the observer reported.

"I cannot see any one on the island," he said, "nor any obvious hiding-place, but the rough surface of the ground would make it possible for any one to hide without danger of being discovered. The shell holes caused by the bombardment are quite visible. The station buildings have not been re-erected. There appears to have been no attempt in that direction. There has been something done to the installation, though! A lot of poles have been erected, and the wiring looks quite in order. It might now be a perfectly going concern for anything one can see to the contrary."

The pleased look on Professor Rudge's face still further increased; he even rubbed his hands.

"Commodore," he said, "I want you now to load and train your guns forward and steam slowly to within half a mile of the shore. Instruct your gunners to fire at anything that moves. Also post some snipers in the fighting top. I don't think we shall see any one. The island is, I believe, abandoned, but we must reduce all risks to a minimum."

The *Sagitta* slowly advanced. There was an acute tension on board. Officers and crew knew that all the world was in uproar, that mankind felt itself trembling on an insecure foothold, on the brink of a bottomless abyss of ruin. They

knew that ahead of the *Sagitta*, behind that fringe of cliff, lay the source and centre—or what had recently been the centre—of the terror.

When about half a mile distant the *Sagitta's* engines were stopped. It was evident to all that something had inspired the Professor with confidence. He was slightly flushed as he turned to the Commodore.

“Evered,” he said, “I have something to tell you of the greatest importance, unless my reading of it is completely wrong.”

He drew him aside to where they could not be overheard.

“While we were at Singapore, and the news that Station X was apparently deserted was brought to us, I wondered how this might affect the wireless interruption by the Venerians. That is why I rigged up this installation. I knew that in the present relative position of the planets all our movements were being closely watched by our powerful allies. Their having started their wireless interference implied that the Martian was refitting the wireless at Station X. Would they continue their block if it should be true that the station was deserted, and before any other should be erected, *if I approached the island?*”

“In the absence of poor Macrae I am now the only one with whom they can communicate. Would they, if possible, do so? As we steamed

round the island I awaited a sign that our position was noted, and an encouragement to proceed. They must be well aware of the dread we should have in doing so. They look upon us as anything but a courageous race. To put the matter to the final test, I requested you to approach the island as though to land. My hope is fulfilled. The interruption is silent. At this moment there is nothing to interfere with wireless communication ! ”

Commodore Evered appreciated the significance of this.

“ Feeling,” went on the Professor, “ that the need might arise, I have written the fullest advice for the future, under different contingencies, so far as I can foresee them. You will find this in my cabin, addressed to you.”

“ But you’re not going to leave us ! ” said Evered.

“ I am now going to land on the island,” was the reply, “ to communicate, if all goes well, with the Venerians.”

“ But that will not take long, will it ? ” asked the Commodore.

“ The conversation,” said Professor Rudge, “ will, I think, for a good reason, be short ; but I shall be permanently lost to you.”

“ Lost to us ! ” was the surprised reply. “ How lost to us ? ”

“ Please give the order,” was the quiet rejoinder.

“Time presses. Have a boat loaded with provisions sufficient for a month or two, with a tent and camp bed. Food and water, of course. While this is being done I will explain to you my reading of the situation. It is essential that we do not lose time.”

The Commodore looked at the Professor for a second or two in surprise; although he could not understand the drift of them, he gave the necessary orders.

Professor Rudge continued his explanation.

“I land,” he said, “in the one hope of getting into communication once more with the Venerian. If I have read the signs correctly, I shall do so. If I am wrong, which well may be, I shall”—he paused—“become as Macrae has become.”

“If this is some risky service, then I insist on going,” said Commodore Evered. “Larch can take my place; there is nobody to take yours.”

“That’s impossible,” said Professor Rudge, “as you would not be able to speak with the Venerian.”

“Then at least I can come and assist you——”

“No, Evered. I thank you heartily, but it would be the useless risk of a valuable life. I must go alone.”

“But it beats me why you cannot get your conversation over while we wait for you, and let us take you back.”

“That,” said Professor Rudge, “is the most impossible thing of all. If the island is deserted and the installation in order, or so that I can quickly put it so, I shall have a communication to make you that I hope will save the present desperate situation. For I confess, although every one is now doing his best, I had very little hope. Our chances, in consequence of the long start of the *Sea Lion*, seemed very small. If the island is not deserted, *and I tell you it is quite possible*, then I shall meet the Martian.

“*Which happens may not be apparent* to you. Therefore after I have landed, you must not allow me to return or approach the *Sagitta*, any more than you would if you knew me to be the Martian. I shall take a line with me, and if all goes well, I shall fasten a bottle containing a note to the end of it. In this there will be a place mentioned. It will be where the Martian is. Go there immediately with all the most powerful war vessels you can collect *en route*. See that you have more than ample force to deal with several *Sea Lions*.

“Let nothing escape. Sink, burn and destroy all you find. Let no living creature evade destruction under any plea or pretence. Impress it on all. It will be the one chance given us! Remember the stake, Evered! I have not time to say more. Remember that if ever the moment comes of which I speak, as God grant it may, everything

we hold dear, in a fuller sense than ever the words were used before, everything depends on your ruthlessness and thoroughness."

Professor Rudge was satisfied with the expression he saw on the Commodore's face, and with the knowledge he had of his character.

"And now," he said, in less forceful tones, "to the thing immediately before us. Remember, if all goes well, I shall *not* ask to be taken on board again. Disregard any message of the kind I may send you, or any wile of mine with that end in view. If there is any advice or instruction contained in my note beyond the mention of a place, probably indicated by latitude and longitude, do not act on it. Remember also that the place I mention may be fraudulent. If so, it will for a time weaken our total force by a few vessels, but that risk is worth taking. That is all, and I see my boat is ready!"

The Professor went below for a few moments, during which he wrecked his wireless.

Commodore Evered, as he shook hands with him, said:

"And they said, Professor, that the human race lacked courage! They said it to *you*! They must be a peculiar people, these Venerian friends of ours!"

Professor Rudge only smiled in answer.

The "Good-bye and good luck!" was soon spoken, and the self-marooned man pushed off

alone with his laden boat. They watched him land, fasten his boat and scale the cliff. In another second he was lost to view behind it.

CHAPTER XX

THE FLEET ASSEMBLES

FOR a few seconds the Commodore gazed at the spot on the cliff where Professor Rudge had disappeared.

“That,” he said, “is the real thing.”

When he had scaled the steep cliff and lost sight of the *Sagitta* and of the sea, as he walked down the gentle incline of the island, Professor Rudge was afraid.

He did not know who, or what, might be watching him, like a spider watching an approaching fly. He knew that somewhere in the world there was a mighty embodied spirit of evil, not human, vastly superhuman; one whose dominant gaze he would be unable to meet, in whose grasp—not physical, but spiritual—his spirit would be powerless, a mere wisp of thistledown to be caught up, hurled aside, at that being’s pleasure.

Not knowing what any moment might produce he walked straight on.

A shiver ran along his spine, causing his scalp

to tingle. He was in the presence or neighbourhood of the uncanny. Still he walked straight on.

The little scene before him was very familiar. One accustomed object was missing—the wooden bungalow. Some small fragments of it were scattered about.

But all else, every other detail that met his eyes, was subsidiary to the answer they received to the great question that had been worrying him—the wireless. A glance showed that it had been re-erected.

The conclusion that it would be there he had arrived at by deduction. His coming to the island at all was the result of that reasoning; the deduction simplicity itself, but, like many other simple processes, requiring the one man. His argument was: the Martian is at Station X; the Venerians are blocking the wireless; therefore there is again wireless at Station X.

The labour for three pairs of hands must have been enormous, almost unthinkable. There must have been a powerful motive. He could guess that motive. Poor wretches of the *Sea Lion*!

He noticed that very little of the wood of the bungalow now existed. As he strode forward he wondered what had become of it. Fuel for some chemical work, or as a source of carbon? The thought of carbon reminded him of the missing coherer. He saw the system was different,

but he was confident no mere carbon coherer could be made do.

Certainly the efforts to solve this was not essential at the moment. Indirectly it was beneficial, as it diverted his thoughts.

On arriving at the spot where the wireless operator's seat and fittings had been, and, in other form, still were, he noticed near him a large tank filled with viscous fluid, divided into small compartments. He tested these fluids with finger and tongue; some strongly alkaline, the base soda; others corrosively acid, chlorine the active agent. So that was how it had been done! A Martian battery!

There was a dynamo also, a mystery totally unlike any machine of the kind he had ever seen. Here is a rich harvest, thought the scientist, if only we come through.

Effective? Through the incautious movement of a finger, in attaching the storage tank, he very nearly received a charge that would have ended his life in a moment.

In the smallest possible space of time Professor Rudge had sufficiently mastered the arrangement, although in many details quite novel to him, and put the receivers over his ears. The great moment had arrived.

A violent shudder shook him from head to foot. Yet he did not now consciously feel fear, although he noticed that his hand trembled.

As he opened his mouth to utter the well-known call, an involuntary glance round was taken. Somewhere in his brain something seemed to say, "Heaven shield me from an answer at my elbow!"

"Are you there?" he said.

Professor Rudge had informed himself as to the exact positions of both Venus and Mars. The former was approaching superior conjunction, but still making a considerable angle with the sun. Her distance, measured in etheric wave terms, was six minutes. Mars was coming near, although a long way from direct opposition. One result of these relative positions was that the dark or night side of the earth was turned to Mars, the bright or day side to Venus. Rudge saw that there might be an advantage in our doings being visible from the latter but not by our enemies.

The quickest answer he could receive to his call was in twelve minutes. The earliest answer from Mars would take more than double that, but that did not affect him, as he was not in the necessary *rapport* with any Martian for a call from that distance to reach him. But he knew that if the Martian now somewhere on earth had his instrument ready, his call might come through at any moment.

It was under such terrifying conditions that he prepared to keep his ears to the receivers twelve minutes, with what fortitude he could. But he had reckoned without the Venerian.

When he had been waiting six minutes a voice came through. *The* voice—how well he knew those silver tones!—Never did voice sound so much like heavenly music as did this to Professor Rudge.

At the first sound of it he realized that he must have been closely observed. His call had not been awaited.

It said, "We have seen you come to the island with pleasure, Professor Rudge. It was well thought of and bravely done, and gives your race still a chance when nothing else could.

"First, the present position. The *Sea Lion* came within three miles of the island, and the Martian doubtless swam to her at night, for we saw next morning that he was in command of her. We had been erecting a plant for the emission of interference waves, but it was not finished in time to prevent the horrible occurrence of that day. This interference emission is not under sufficient control to be made a means of communication. It can only prevent communication. The *Sea Lion's* crew are nearly all Martians. We blocked the communication before their evil work was quite completed. For once they were taken by surprise.

"Finding what we were doing, they evidently at once decided to begin elsewhere the erection of an installation that would overpower any attempt on our part to interfere. We do not

know what form this can take, but know the Martians well enough to be sure they will succeed.

“Evidently it requires connected positions further apart than is possible at Station X. They have consequently left, on the *Sea Lion*, for the larger island at longitude 180, latitude 50 north. Write that at once: longitude 180, N. lat. 50. They are now there, erecting their plant. If they finish it before they are interfered with, the world is theirs.

“And now, secondly, what you must do is to collect with all speed at least ten times greater fighting strength, and go to the place named. There must be no near approach to the *Sea Lion* nor any Martian. By bombardment, at greatest distance practicable, destroy first the installation, then all life on ship and island, man and Martian.

“Your fate depends on two things—arriving at the place in time, and the complete destruction of every living creature. Go at once. If all goes well we can converse later. You may lose by one day, one minute even. That is all.”

The last word had scarcely been spoken when the jangle of the interference recommenced. Professor Rudge had no doubt that his return to the boat would be taken as sufficient sign that he had heard and understood, and that, if he remained, a further opportunity would be given him.

That being unnecessary, he put off the receivers and ran for the shore.

Hope lent youth to his feet and thrilled every nerve. The tremendous reaction he felt was the measure of his late depression.

He felt that this last chance had not been given to lose now. There must not be a moment's slackening. He did not forget that on every previous occasion, every time of crisis, the Martian had not only extricated himself, but had gained something.

There was no room for him to gain anything more, unless the earth were to lose all. Man had his back to the wall.

Arrived by his boat, he wrote the Venerian's own words from memory. They had burnt themselves into his mind. He had made only one note, the latitude and longitude of the island. This he carefully copied.

The paper was put into the bottle and flung into the sea. The half-mile of line was pulled in. With his field glasses the Professor watched the Commodore read the note.

"I will judge by his promptness now," he thought.

In ten seconds the screws were revolving. He smiled. It was a good omen.

A distant hand wave, and the *Sagitta* was on her course. Professor Rudge saw her signal to the two other cruisers, and saw them start in the same direction. The lonely watcher scaled the cliff again, and watched them till they were mere

specks on the horizon. Another minute, and those too had disappeared.

Professor Rudge would have given anything he possessed to be on board the *Sagitta*. He had seen no other way without undue risk, but it was a hard fate that had kept him from the final scene, and parted him from his companions.

He saw a long and anxious time ahead of him, and considered the best medicine would be pre-occupation.

He turned to the work of getting all his stores on the island and his tent pitched. With muscles of iron and the agility of youth, it did not mean so much as it would to most men over forty.

So well did his natural bent and the habit of many years serve him, that his last thought that night was what a storehouse of science the work of the Martian had now left to his investigation.

On board the *Sagitta* Commodore Evered received the bottle that was hauled aboard with eager hands, and did not stop to draw the cork. In two seconds he was devouring the contents. His spirits bounded.

As he read the last word his hand was on the indicator—full speed ahead.

“Now,” he said, “we have them! Signal the cruisers to keep company. Set a course to the WNW.”

Then he turned and waved his farewell, his

one regret being the leaving of Professor Rudge behind.

He did not require a chart to tell him that the place mentioned as the position of the *Sea Lion* was due north of him, as the longitude given was practically the same as that of Station X. He guessed the place must be one of the Rat Islands of the Aleutian group, but found it was just south of them.

His plan was made with the promptness characteristic of him. To make, at the *Sagitta's* best speed, for Japan, knowing he would be sure to pick up her fleet *en route*. To cable from Japan for the fleet guarding the North American coast to join them with the utmost despatch at long. 180, lat. 45 N., and then with the united fleets steam north together and attack the Martians.

It would be the quickest way of assembling for the attack the greatest number of units available. It would take a little longer than going straight from Station X, but that would be to go with a weak force.

He remembered Rudge's earnest admonition not to underrate his enemy.

Of all enemies to underrate, the Martian was surely the last.

In any case he considered himself bound to report at once and state the plan he was acting under, pending orders.

While still a considerable distance from land,

about 148 E. long., he encountered a Japanese cruiser, a unit of the fleet now guarding her eastern coasts. He reported the facts to her commander, and instructed him to inform the fleet with the utmost despatch and convey his orders that as many as possible should proceed to long. 180, lat. 45, while he went on to Tokyo for the purpose of getting to the cable.

Thus the world became aware of the result of the *Sagitta's* visit to Station X. The salutary effect was tremendous. It calmed the overstrained nerves of humanity and greatly lessened the resulting tumult.

The Commodore's plan was confirmed, and all the warships then available in the North Pacific were ordered to the *rendezvous* and to place themselves under his orders. These included units of British, United States, Russian and Japanese nationality, of which the last named made the most powerful contribution.

CHAPTER XXI

A BATTLE OF GIANTS

TWO days after the marooning of Professor Rudge, and while he was engaged on his investigation of the Martian's work at Station X, he was astonished to hear the hum of an aeroplane's engines. Looking up, he saw a seaplane flying toward the island, in fact, already over the cliff. Its observer had evidently already seen him, for the machine was coming straight in his direction. Rudge watched to see the landing, wondering how this was going to be effected on so rock-strewn a surface. The pilot seemed himself to have some doubts, for he re-crossed the cliff and proceeded to land on the narrow strip of sand between cliff and sea.

The pilot met the Professor on the top of the cliff, and, saluting stiffly, apologised if he were intruding, and announced himself as an officer of the German air force attached to the cruiser visible from where they were standing, about two miles from the island.

He explained that, the use of the island being now no longer a secret, the cruiser had been sent to pay it a visit and see if it could be of any use against the common enemy.

The reason given was so out of harmony with the situation at the moment, that Professor Rudge at once rightly gauged it as a prying expedition.

"Your visit," he said, mentioning who he was, then the best known name in all the world, and immediately obtaining another salute, "could scarcely in any circumstances have been of any use, but might easily have been very disastrous. As it is, it can do no harm, and I would like to go on board your cruiser to speak with the captain."

The airman turned facing the cruiser, and began swinging his arms, spelling out the request. In two minutes a boat was lowered, and after more salutings, carried Professor Rudge on board. Here there were further salutings, until Professor Rudge began to wonder if they resulted in unusual muscular development among Germans of the military and aerial caste.

In his conversation with the captain of the cruiser, he did not scruple to say that the visit showed a complete want of understanding of the character and powers of the Martian. He explained his own presence on the island, gave the information of the augmented force of the enemy and their present whereabouts, and the fight

planned to take place there for their extermination.

Into the doubts and queries that had caused this cruiser to be sent to Station X there is no need to enter. The report of the airman and Professor Rudge's words appeared to have settled them.

The captain expressed his willingness to accommodate Professor Rudge on board, and needed no pressing to steam at once for the island where the world's fate would be decided. This was all the Professor wanted, and more than he had dreamed of occurring. He could almost forgive the real nature of the visit in his joy at getting passage to where he wished to be.

He would not hear of going ashore again for his kit, and with nothing but what he stood up in, the vessel started. Professor Rudge soon noticed that her speed was far less than that of the *Sagitta*.

Meanwhile, 1,600 miles to the north of Station X, a fleet of fourteen war vessels, ranging from battleships to small cruisers, was assembling. Commodore Evered found that starting with this force would save him a day, and it seemed far more than sufficient against one battle cruiser, for it included three battleships, two battle-cruisers, six cruisers of powerful armament, besides three smaller vessels. It would also be followed in twenty-four hours by a considerable augmentation.

The Commodore decided to remain on the *Sagitta*. His reasons were her speed and because in the novel nature of the coming contest he did not know what unprecedented service might be called for, and he knew his crew and his ship and could depend on both.

There was none among the civilised nations ignorant of the Martian and the danger he represented. None the less, there was surprise even among the officers of the fleet at the *rendezvous* on account of the size of the force assembled against "so small a foe." They were able to gauge only the material danger. The force against them was the battle cruiser *Sea Lion*, and to their minds, that alone counted.

As soon as the fleet was assembled the Commodore made the signal "Captains repair on board." He explained his plans and handed to each a copy of his detailed general instructions.

So soon as all were again on their respective ships, he made the signal to start for the Martian's island, then about ten hours' steam for the *Sagitta*, to the north. It was then four bells in the morning watch.

In the afternoon of the same day, a little after three bells, the island was raised, and the Commodore sent up a couple of seaplanes to reconnoitre, but with strict orders not to approach nearer than four miles. It was a good day for observa-

tion, a clear sky and atmosphere, no wind and a sea without a ripple.

The observers reported that the *Sea Lion* was visible, and that many people were scattered about the place, working at something apparently connected with a wireless installation already existing.

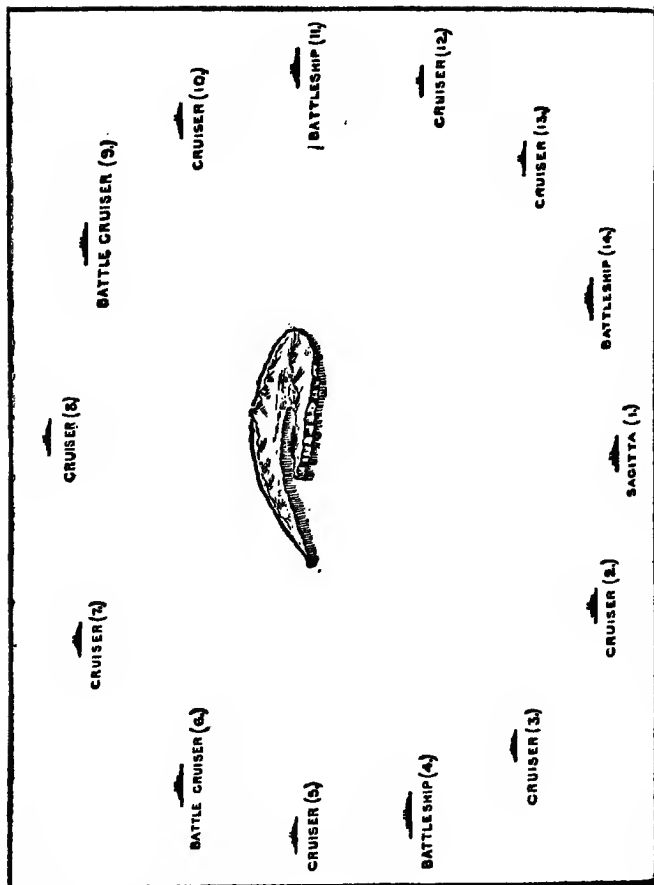
One reason for the choice of this island by the Martians was at once apparent in its peculiar shape and contour, which the naval chart did not fully indicate. It was seen to be a mountainous ridge of almost bare precipitous rock, four miles long, running in an east and west direction, but somewhat curved, the convex side to the north. At its highest point it rose nearly a thousand feet above sea-level. This was about a mile from its eastern end, where it had nearly a mile in width, and from which point a branch or offset divided from the island and ran in a westerly direction, leaving a channel of several hundred yards in width, and of considerable depth, between it and the main part of the island.

This spur had little width, but precipitous sides, both inside and out, and a razor-like edge at its summit, something after the style of the Needles, but much longer than either of them.

It was in the inlet so formed that the *Sea Lion* was lying, invisible except by aeroplane, and immune from direct bombardment.

The Commodore placed his ships so as to

STATION X



encircle the island at a distance of five or six miles, with intervals of something over two miles between each two.

He placed the *Sagitta* due south, and the place of each of the others was duly set out in the instructions. West of the *Sagitta* were two other cruisers, Nos. 2 and 3. Facing the *Sea Lion* if she emerged from the inlet was the battleship No. 4. North-west of the island were ranged cruiser No. 5, battle cruiser No. 6, and cruiser No. 7. Northward, cruiser No. 8 and battle cruiser No. 9. North-east, cruiser No. 10. East, battleship No. 11. South-east, two cruisers, Nos. 12 and 13. Between cruiser No. 13 and the *Sagitta* was placed the battleship No. 14.

The considerations that had decided Evered in this disposition were to have a ring of ships with strength fairly distributed to meet the *Sea Lion* as she came out, for he was convinced that he would be able to drive her out, and so compel her, in spite of her speed, and in whatever direction she might make, to meet the close and direct fire of at least three or four of his squadron. Meanwhile he had two powerful battleships, one east and one west, where, from the contour of the ground, they could most effectively bombard her, although indirectly.

The positions being taken up, the first order was to destroy the wireless installation and any other work visible on the island, whether appar-

ently wireless or not. The guns of the battleships and battle cruisers gave tongue and awoke the echoes of the island and an inlet that for thousands of years had lain a placid backwater of the world's stage. It now became the centre of man's destructive forces. While this was in progress the Commodore was disappointed by the answer to a question he put to the seaplane observers. He learnt that his first idea of sinking one of his ships to block the inlet would be ineffective through the depth of water.

The observers reported that all on the island appeared to have retired to their vessel. They also signalled the hits. Soon the wireless installation was a tangle of ruin. The *Sea Lion* made no reply or movement.

Commodore Evered was satisfied so far. He considered the rest could only be a matter of time, and that time was now not of the overwhelming importance it had been. He was rather disturbed by the absence of any response from the *Sea Lion*.

Suddenly the might of the Martians was made manifest. Two enormous columns of water and smoke rose from where a second before cruisers 7 and 8 had been, followed by two terrific reports. Both vessels were blown up at the same moment by some under-water agency, and sank almost instantly, as though their bottoms had been blown out. Nothing had been visible above

water as the cause of the disaster. The fact of the two explosions being simultaneous precluded the idea of a mine or an accident. The cause was obviously a double torpedo attack ; but how had they been launched, and from where ?

As the only opening to the inlet was to the south of the island, the cruisers to the north had appeared to be in a comparatively safe position. The high ridge opposite them had rendered them of little use in the bombardment, and it had occurred to the Commodore that they might have been of more use in strengthening the line on the other three sides.

A thrill of excitement passed through the squadron. The Martians possessed a submarine !

The Commodore now saw the task before him in its true proportions. He was fighting a foe of hidden and unknown powers. He remembered Professor Rudge's warning.

Deciding that every other consideration must give way to the most effective bombardment of the *Sea Lion*, he now ordered battle cruiser No. 6 and the two cruisers Nos. 3 and 5 to join the battleship No. 4 west of the island, at a somewhat greater distance than before, and proceed with the bombardment of the enemy. He placed battle cruiser No. 9 and the two cruisers Nos. 10 and 12 east of the island with the battleship No. 11, with similar instructions.

As the two cruisers that had been torpedoed

were struck simultaneously, it suggested to Evered that the underwater craft got between her intended victims and discharged her weapons at the same moment in opposite directions. As some protection against this he placed the ships, in each of the two groups, *en échelon*, and all the seaplanes were instructed to keep a special lookout for submarines.

The other three cruisers, Nos. 2, 13 and the *Sagitta* herself, he retained south of the island, as some force for the purpose of interception should the *Sea Lion* emerge, and until the other warships could come up.

Under the bombardment so inaugurated, the *Sea Lion* must soon have suffered heavily had time been given. But that would be reckoning without the Martians.

In a very few minutes one of the seaplanes reported that a large oval object like a gigantic turtle, of an estimated length of over twenty feet, was moving along the sea bottom just outside the entrance to the inlet, from which it seemed to have emerged. It was now making away in a SSW. direction.

The seaplanes were ordered to attack it with bombs, but before any direct hit was made it had attained water of a depth sufficient to hide it from view. There was no reason to suppose that it was damaged.

Shortly afterwards it was reported that some

damage to the upper works of the *Sea Lion* had been done. It could not be well ascertained if this was of a serious nature without a nearer approach, but the Commodore would not allow any plane to fly over the island or in its close vicinity except at a great height.

The Martians made no use of the small guns of the warship against the aircraft, nor any reply to the bombardment. Without aircraft to guide them, a hit on the warships would have been a matter of pure chance.

Shortly before seven o'clock, however, there was a fresh development. A spherical ball, about three feet in diameter, of dull smoke colour, rose from the *Sea Lion* perpendicularly until it was quite five hundred feet above the vessel; then it moved off on a horizontal course in a westerly direction.

Its speed both in rising and subsequently was not that of a projectile. At the commencement of its lateral course it approximated to some ten miles per hour. All eyes were fixed on it. What new manifestation of power did it indicate? It resembled a large, dark-coloured, toy balloon. It had one peculiarity that differentiated it from anything of the kind that had ever been seen. It was obviously not carried along by the movement of the air after the manner of a balloon. It seemed to be impelled by some unseen force. It moved in a peculiar, jerky and jumpy manner,

like the limbs of an automaton. What was the force controlling it? What was its sinister mission? The instinctive dread of the unknown was felt by all.

Its wobbly movement up and down and from side to side was persistent. Its oscillation from the direct path was sometimes several feet. These movements suggested that the ball was a heavy object pursuing some definite course.

If this were really so the mystery was heightened, as it would be acting in defiance of gravitation. Professor Rudge, had he been present, would not have been unduly surprised to learn that the Martians had mastered that problem, perhaps the greatest of those lying just outside the boundary of man's present knowledge.

All eyes were turned on this strange object. In less than a minute it was noticed that its speed gradually increased, the wobbling continuing. When about five miles from the island its course deviated a little south of west, and its speed was now three to four times its initial rate.

For a moment it seemed to hesitate, then to make up its mind, and continued its jerky course in the direction of battleship No. 4. Rifles and quick-firing guns were turned against it, but without result.

It reached a point directly over the battleship. Suddenly it stopped as though gripped by some invisible force. The anti-gravitational

action was withdrawn, and it fell, as a stone, on the vessel's deck.

The result was an explosion of terrific violence. The battleship was rent to fragments by some new and terrible explosive. No portion of her crew were ever seen again.

The two nearest cruisers Nos. 5 and 3 were so seriously damaged that they had to draw out of the circling line, and were with difficulty kept afloat. All hands on their decks had been blown to pieces.

This mysterious ball had attracted every eye until it fell. On this the Martians had apparently counted, for they seized the opportunity to get out another of the curious slow-moving submarine objects out of the inlet. A glimpse of one just disappearing in the depths outside was caught by an airman, but too late to do anything.

Meanwhile, two more balls had risen, similar in size, appearance and movement to the first.

Captain Evered signalled that all ships should concentrate their fire on this menace of the air. Meanwhile, a fourth was rising.

A ball only one yard in diameter, high in the air, constantly wobbling to at least the extent of its own diameter, and proceeding with irregular, curving and constantly increasing movement, is no easy object to hit.

Just as the last ball had finished its perpendicular rise, it was hit, and immediately exploded. Fragments of the outer shell rained down upon

and around the island for miles. Some fell on the ships, proving to be iron, about the thickness of boiler plate.

The other two balls found their goals. As they increased in speed and could turn in their course it became impossible to avoid them. Their line of motion could evidently be modified as desired, although always in a wobbling, hesitating way. It suggested that there was some one, somewhere, handling levers that decided their course, in accordance with the reports of some observer.

The battleship No. 14 and cruiser No. 12 were the victims. Their destruction was as complete as that of the first battleship.

Commodore Evered kept calm, but he found himself faced with possible defeat. He had lost seven ships in a few minutes. What further devilish contrivances had the Martians to hurl at him? He breathed a sigh of relief as minute after minute passed and no more balls rose. He ordered the two cruisers and the remaining battleships, east, to resume the bombardment of the *Sea Lion*, and the great battle-cruiser No. 6, west, to do the same.

The moment after the order was given the battle-cruiser No. 9 was struck in the same way as the first two, followed a moment later by the cruiser No. 10. They settled down at once. In six or seven minutes they had both disappeared.

The situation appeared almost hopeless. No

more balls were rising, but Evered remembered that there was yet certainly one more of the submarine things still unused outside the island, and it was obvious that it was from these that the double torpedo attacks were made. His impression of the method of the double torpedo discharge was now confirmed.

The airmen reported that the *Sea Lion* was being repeatedly hit, and that her position must be anything but comfortable.

The bombardment continued from the two powerful ships that were left, one east, one west, and Evered was about to take the desperate course of ordering the smaller of the cruisers left him, No. 2, to sink herself in the entrance to the inlet, in the forlorn hope of imprisoning the *Sea Lion*, notwithstanding the report of the airmen, until help should arrive. But it was too late. The airmen reported the *Sea Lion* moving. Finding that she was being badly mauled in a position where she could not make efficient reply with her own guns, or considering that the havoc she had wrought outside now made her chances good, she had decided to come out.

At the best pace at which the turn could be safely negotiated, she emerged, a target for those of her enemies who could now bring their direct fire to bear. These were, to begin with, the *Sagitta* and the two cruisers Nos. 2 and 13 of the original line.

Realizing that when coming out he would be for the moment at a disadvantage, the Martian commander had planned a diversion. The third of the underwater craft now fired her torpedoes. A bright object in the water was seen to flash past the *Sagitta*, and at the same moment an explosion amidships of cruiser No. 15 almost blew that vessel out of the water. She sank at once.

Immediately on receiving news that the *Sea Lion* was coming out, the Commodore had signalled the battleship and battle-cruiser to come up with every ounce of steam. Their guns were soon centred on the *Sea Lion*, and as soon as the latter was clear of the turn, her guns began to thunder their reply, while she made a south-westerly course, at her utmost speed.

Her direction took her very near the small cruiser No. 2, and that unfortunate vessel received the full weight of the *Sea Lion's* metal as she passed. She was reduced to a flaming and sinking wreck.

The *Sagitta's* escape from the torpedo that had been aimed at her had been doubtless in consequence of the fact that she was in the act of turning as quickly as possible, to keep ahead of the *Sea Lion* in the direction she was going.

They were both now going south-west. Speed was the only thing they had in common and in which they were about equal, for in size, armour and gun power there was no comparison.

The only two ships remaining that could hope to fight the *Sea Lion*, one battleship and one battle-cruiser, were far astern, and further every minute, for neither had the speed of the escaping vessel.

Sailing a parallel course, the *Sagitta* had the *Sea Lion* astern, somewhat to starboard. The *Sagitta* could have received the same treatment as the last cruiser that had gone down, but the *Sea Lion*, ignoring her, turned her great weapons on her two formidable pursuers. Their smoke stacks showed that stokehold and engine-room were doing their utmost. Their "black squads" were sweating at their furnaces, but the fact remained that they were being left. Nothing short of a lucky shot could have prevented the Martian from achieving his object.

The momentary relief that the Commodore had felt when it first appeared that his enemy had no more devilish novelties to surprise him with, gave way to gloom as he watched the widening distance between pursuers and pursued.

For a moment he saw himself a beaten man. But not yet! For then was the situation saved by the quality that always distinguished Evered—quick and fearless decision. Then was justified his main reason for staying on the *Sagitta*, where the discipline of years and the thorough knowledge of his captain that each member of his crew possessed, ensured that any order he gave,

however unprecedented or incomprehensible, would be obeyed, and promptly.

He decided on a desperate venture. He saw that the *Sea Lion*, confident that the *Sagitta* could be blasted out of existence in two minutes at any time when her two great pursuers had been effectually shaken off, was giving the latter her whole attention. He deflected his course slightly, so as to make it converge a little on that of the *Sea Lion*. He himself took the helm and gave the order, "Every man on board save three stokers and the chief engineer is to take a life belt and go on deck."

The officers receiving the order, thought him mad, but they had seen so many strange things this last hour that without hesitation they saw it done. When all the men were on deck he addressed his officers:

"I am going to take the *Sagitta* across the *Sea Lion's* bows," he said—"if I can. Explain to the men. Every man on board, yourself included, is to throw himself overboard at the word. I remain in the conning tower. Now go on deck and see that all go over at my signal. Send me the chief engineer."

A minute later, alone with the latter, he said, "Thompson, get five life belts handy. You and I and the three men below go together. Be sure you jump when I jump. Slow down a little. I want the *Sea Lion* to creep up."

The *Sagitta's* speed was let down a couple of knots. The Commodore, with his hand on the conning tower wheel, stood motionless. He watched the *Sea Lion*. She was engaged in a strenuous fight with her two powerful opponents. If the commander of the *Sea Lion* read the position respecting himself merely as indicating that the *Sea Lion* was the faster boat, all would be well, but if he suspected, and brought his heavy guns to bear, blowing the *Sagitta* out of the water before the object was obtained, then all was lost.

The fate of the world hung upon that *if*.

Slowly, and steadily, he was being overtaken. The tension was terrible. Nerves of steel were wanted, and were not lacking.

The moment arrived. The signal to the deck was given, and obeyed with one splash. The order had been held back to the last possible second, and it was well.

"Full speed ahead," he signalled, and his secret was given away. The *Sagitta*, well named "the Arrow," leapt like a greyhound from the leash.

The Commodore set his teeth at what he saw. It was a question of a second or two.

The great guns of the *Sea Lion*, now so close upon him, for a moment ceased their thunder. *Their smoking muzzles were coming round.* He knew what to expect.

But his moment had also come. He put his

helm to port; not so hard as to stop her way, but at the speed she was going its influence was enormous. She came round like a top. The *Sea Lion* evidently ported her helm too, but that long and heavy vessel had nothing like the handiness of the *Sagitta*. She could not answer before the crash was inevitable.

The Commodore had at the same moment signalled "all hands on deck," and as this had been awaited, the five men took the water together. A few seconds later, and at the instant judged to a nicety by the Commodore, the *Sea Lion* crashed into the side of the doomed cruiser.

The *Sagitta* was nearly cut in two. No more would the clean lines of this arrow of the seas skim their surface, but in the moment when she sacrificed all her grace and beauty, she did a greater service to the world than her life could ever have accomplished.

She clung to the bows of her enemy as if conscious of her mission.

The battle-cruiser was fast coming up, and a few miles in her rear, the battleship. Flight was out of the question, and the *Sea Lion* determined to fight. Backing, she succeeded in disembarassing herself of the wreck of the *Sagitta*, and turned on her approaching antagonists. Meanwhile she was herself taking ever-increasing punishment as the distance diminished.

The concentrated fire of the *Sea Lion* was

terrific. Her ten 12-inch guns were still undamaged. Her crew worked them like fiends. Partly in consequence of the more rapid handling of the machinery of loading, but principally because every shot without exception scored a hit on some vital spot of her antagonist, her fire was at least trebled in effectiveness.

Under this withering treatment no vessel could stand up long, but the commander of the *Sea Lion* knew that her own sands were running out.

It was evidently her aim, with a fury of bombardment, to sink these formidable enemies. Soon she had the battle-cruiser out of action, in a sinking condition. Thus she had reduced her fourteen enemies to one, and the battle to a duel. In achieving this, however, she herself had suffered terribly. Her main battery was now reduced to one gun still workable; she was aflame from end to end, as it seemed, from bridge to keel.

But her one gun was promptly turned upon her remaining enemy, the Japanese battleship, and worked with absolute precision. Suddenly she turned towards her foe. This manœuvre had not apparently been expected on board the Japanese battleship, and had the *Sea Lion* responded quickly, a collision would have been inevitable. It was almost a miracle that the *Sea Lion* could be handled at all.

The Commodore, treading water, saw the im-

port of the Martian's manœuvre. If she rammed the Japanese ship and even one of her demon crew got on board, the fight would be lost.

But that crowning catastrophe was not to be. A lucky shot went through the gaping bows of the *Sea Lion* and exploded her magazine. That finished her.

A damaged battleship and two derelict cruisers were all that remained of the fleet that so short a time before had surrounded the island, almost ashamed of its strength.

But there was another arrival. Unseen by any, none having eyes for anything but the drama being enacted before them, another cruiser of medium size, and flying the German flag, had come up in time to witness the final scene and the awful act that followed, the shooting of the struggling wretches left of the *Sea Lion's* crew.

With the outward appearance of humanity, and acting the part to perfection, with piteous cries and arms outstretched in supplication, they made the work hard to accomplish; but it was done.

One man alone appeared unmoved by it—the captain of the new-comer. Turning to him who stood beside him, he said, “That Japaner knows his business. When your enemy is down, hammer him. That is war!”

“In this case it is necessary,” replied Professor Rudge coldly. “Will you, Herr Captain,

do what you can to save the men of our side, now drowning? ”

Of the two cruisers that had been damaged in the blowing up of the battleship west of the island, there had remained undamaged three boats, and these had during the fight done good salvage work among the floating men from the cruisers north of the island. Many more were now rescued, including the Commodore and his crew, all save two that had been caught by the *Sagitta's* screws through jumping over incautiously.

But it had been a sanguinary action. Of nearly ten thousand men, less than half now remained.

When all the survivors had been rescued, the Commodore signalled from the Japanese vessel to ask Professor Rudge to come aboard.

When Professor Rudge reached the deck of the battleship it presented the appearance of a gigantic scrap-heap. Steel and iron lay everywhere, torn and twisted into fantastical shapes. He gripped Evered's hand, and warmly congratulated him upon his victory.

“I don't feel like being congratulated,” said the Commodore sadly. “I went into the fight with overwhelming odds, and the cost has been too terrible.”

“The odds,” said the Professor, “were never in your favour. You contended with the unknown.”

“And still do, I fear. That is why I wanted

to speak to you while we have a short hour of daylight left. When it's a question of the unknown, as you call it, you can probe it further than I can."

"You do not consider the fight over?" asked the Professor.

Commodore Evered then gave a short account of what had happened, specially emphasising the fact that the Martian submarine craft were still unaccounted for.

"You are right," said Professor Rudge, when he had heard him; "the last of the invaders is not killed. How unfortunate I was not a couple of hours earlier!"

"Something should have been done differently?"

"No, no," was the hasty reply; "I did not mean that at all. My regret is that I missed seeing the aerial bombs."

"They were terrible," said the Commodore. "There was no fighting against them. Our success is simply because they hadn't more of them."

"You see, Evered," said the Professor, the fight having for the moment taken second place in his thoughts, "they prove that the Martians have solved the problem of that force which more completely than any other baffles our imagination—gravitation; not only solved, but that they can handle and employ it."

"They were efficient weapons," said Commodore Evered, his attention fixed on the fight.

"When man has solved that," said the Professor, his mind still on the scientific problem, "his science will have rendered war impossible, if his moral judgment has not already done so."

"No doubt," said the Commodore, his mind on the surviving Martians in the submarines. The balls were finished; the other weapon, perhaps not.

"How," he added, "shall we now deal with the submarines?"

"Any danger we have," said Rudge, "is, I think, a question of the depth of water surrounding the island. How do we stand respecting that?"

"We are on the northern rim of the Tuscarora basin. South, east and west we are in great depths at once. Even to the north we get 1,000 fathoms between us and the nearest land."

"Then," said Professor Rudge, "we have them. It is practically certain these are hastily made things, capable of crawling along the bottom, rising and possibly able to direct their movements to some extent then, to be used as mere *points d'appui* for the two weapons each discharged."

"But how are we to catch them?"

"By waiting and watching. They are confined to the neighbourhood of the island, and must come up not unfrequently for air."

“Then,” said the Commodore, “it is a work principally for the airmen.”

He gave instructions for the seaplanes to keep a keen look-out around the island until too dark for observation, and to drop depth charges when sure of their mark.

The German captain was ordered to make for the nearest point where the good news could be given to the world. This he at once did.

The Commodore then ordered the damaged cruisers under no circumstances to beach themselves during the night, whatever the difficulty in keeping afloat, but to sink rather than approach the island.

Searchlights and star shells lent to the short night almost the light of day. It was decided to deal with the submarines before searching the island.

At dawn the seaplanes were up again, circling round the island. It was eight o'clock when two submarines were observed crawling toward the shoaling water near the eastern end of the island. A moment afterwards a third was seen. The Martians probably knew that their position was hopeless, and they were making for the island as a mere alternative to being suffocated.

They were observed to dive out from under their vessels, but before ever they reached the surface they were bombed and destroyed. There was but one Martian in each. The vessels themselves were, as Professor Rudge had anticipated,

of simple construction, not enclosed, but constructed on the diving bell principle.

The rest of the day was devoted to searching the island and making certain that nothing was left alive there as big as a rat.

“And now,” said Commodore Evered, as the island was left astern at the pace of the two lame ducks, “only the shouting remains!”

The home-coming of Professor Rudge and Commodore Evered was historic. The demonstrations of gratitude and enthusiasm were energised by the tremendous reaction after the torturing days of suspense.

Professor Rudge had himself experienced how great can be the force of reaction. On the evening of that great day in the North Pacific he almost collapsed. A load that had pressed heavily and long then rolled from his shoulders. He could look indulgently upon the scenes of “carnival” that celebrated, first the great news, and later the return of the men who had saved humanity from the most awful danger that had ever threatened it.

Joy bells rang and Te Deums were sung throughout all Christendom, and, with the votive offerings made on as many shrines outside it, expressed a world's thanks for its deliverance.

Honours were heaped on the two chief heroes of the occasion, and Dr. Anderson was not for-

gotten. Commodore Evered received the K.C.M.G., V.C. and D.S.O., and was promoted to be Admiral for his "splendid initiative and distinguished service." Never had there been so popular a promotion.

"There you have the whole reason of it in fact," said Admiral Benson. He remained a disgruntled man. His attitude becoming known, made him so unpopular that he had to resign. His last words on retiring were that whatever might be said about "distinguished service," "splendid initiative" was more than he could stand in view of the number of men that had been shot for less.

No one man could have staggered under the weight of the Orders, Crosses, Stars, Medals, and Degrees that showered on Sir Stanley Rudge. He accepted it all gracefully. Such things left him unmoved.

Even before his landing, his mind seemed to be running on other things. He had fits of introspection, and what he saw surprised him, and the first impulse was to resist. But it has been well said that if one kicks Nature out by the door she comes in by the window. There are some toils in which man struggles in vain. Professor Rudge was in love.

It was not long before May Treherne knew, before a word was spoken, that she was destined to be Lady Rudge.

No one could have been less surprised than Professor McFaden, when he was told of the engagement.

“*Quos deus vult* —” said the old cynic ; but he did not mean it. There were, in fact, no more genuinely sincere congratulations than his.

“I never knew,” said May one day, mischievously, during their short engagement, “that professors could ever fall in love !”

“Why not ?” asked Rudge.

“I always thought they were much too wise,” she said.

“True wisdom,” he replied, “is to be happy.”

THE END

