



JULES VERNE'S TOMBSTONE AT AMIENS  
PORTRAYING HIS IMMORTALITY

# AMAZING STORIES

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## Our Cover

This month illustrates a scene in the story entitled, "Lakh-Dal, Destroyer of Souls," by W. F. Hammond, in which Lakh-Dal flashes his concentrated rays of isolated moonbeams, or "Lunacy Rays," straight in the face of the unfortunate Chinese victim.

In five minutes, the man became a hopeless lunatic, whose vacuous and grotesque mouthings were fearful to behold.

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## In Our Next Issue:

**THE STORY OF THE DAYS TO COME**, by H. G. Wells. We are always interested when we read a story of the far future, and of the wonders that might be in store for our descendants. But when such a story is written by H. G. Wells, it becomes all the more realistic and the more absorbing. What will the world look like several hundred years hence? Read this excellent story in the next issue.

**THE MIRACLE OF THE LILY**, by Clare Winger Harris. Insects are and were man's greatest enemy. What if they should gain ascendancy over human beings once more? Such a thing is not nearly as impossible as it appears at first glance. At any rate, the author, who is also the third prize winner of our \$500.00 contest, weaves a fascinating story around this idea.

**THE RETURN OF THE MARTIANS**, by Cecil B. White. Being an astronomer, our author is well informed on the subject and in this sequel to "THE RETREAT OF MARS," he gives us a most unusual, as well as powerfully written, story, which is not too technical to hold the interest of any reader, no matter what his inclinations might be.

**BARON MUENCHHAUSEN'S SCIENTIFIC ADVENTURES**, by Hugo Gernsback. In the next instalments, we find our resourceful Baron, in his quest for further first-hand information about the universe, moving through interstellar space again. This time he lands on Mars.

**THE ANCIENT HORROR**, by Hal Grant. Pre-historic monsters are no novelty in literature, but here is one so totally different and the story is so well written that by the time you are through reading the story, you will not be at all sure that it is not entirely truth that you have read. This is an excellent tale that is sure to give you a half-hour's interesting reading.

And Others.

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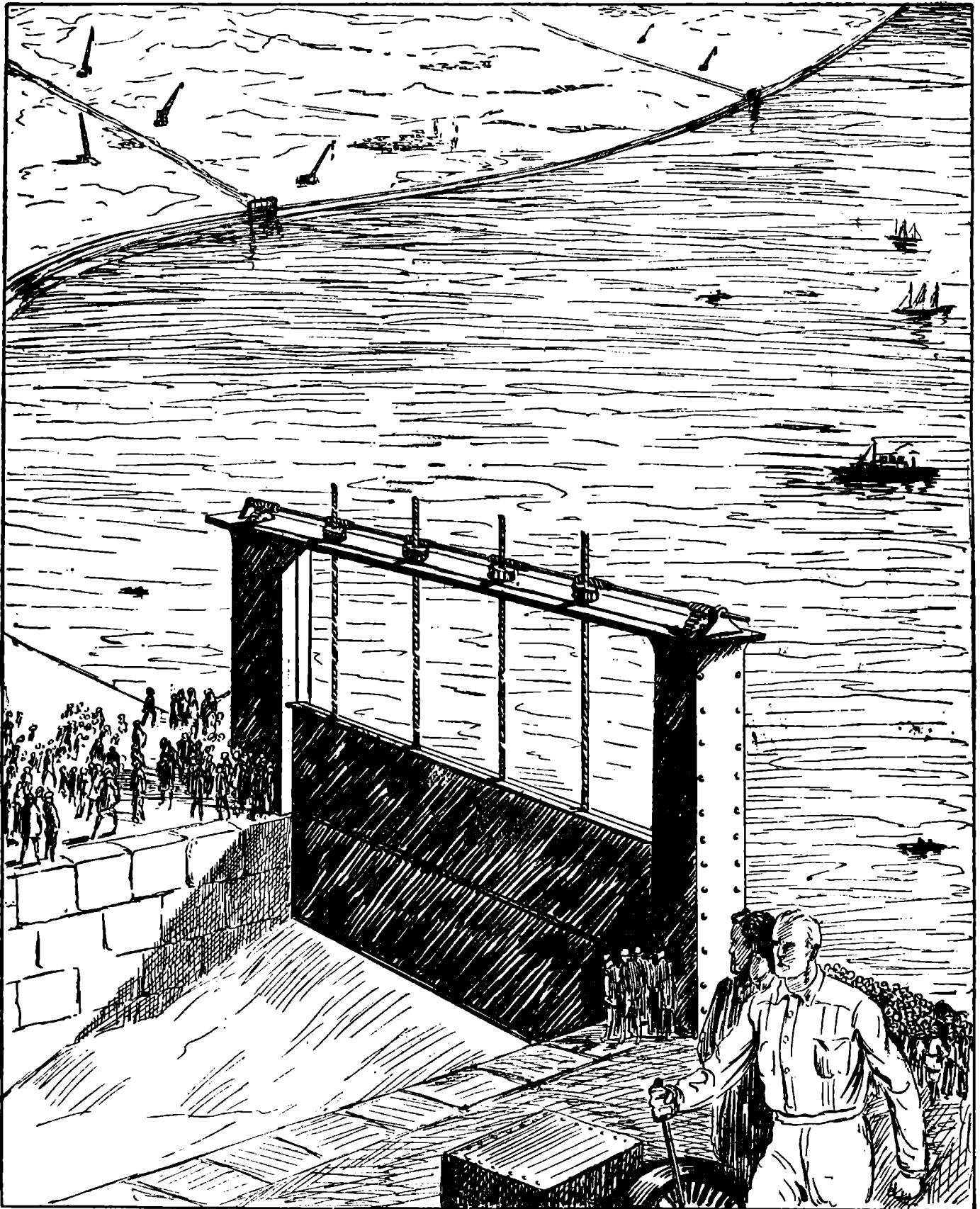
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# TEN MILLION MILES SUNWARD

by *Geoffrey Hewelcke*



Farintosh, with a sudden stiffening of his body, pulled down the black bar. A soft whirring of machinery filled the air. Steel cables creaked and began to move, then slowly and ponderously the giant shutters rose.

CHAPTER I  
The Celestial Enemy



HERE have been many histories of the extraordinary happenings of the last four years—some substantially correct, but more of a luridly fantastic type that aimed to catch the pennies of the people rather than to give a true story of the narrow escape of the earth from a danger that threatened to destroy it. Therefore, for some time past, I have been thinking of writing a short but historically accurate account of the momentous times we have just passed through. Indeed, only the pressure of work in our recent period of reconstruction has prevented my doing so. Judge, therefore, my pleasure when I received a letter from the Secretary for Education, asking me to do this very thing, and to put the narrative into the form of a story so that the school children may more easily assimilate it.

On the twenty-fourth of September, 1933, Professor Arnheim of the Astronomical Observatory of Berlin discovered a new star of the fourteenth magnitude in the constellation of Casseiopeia. This was nothing very extraordinary, as new stars are being discovered continually, and, after Professor Arnheim had received the congratulations of his colleagues, the star was promptly forgotten.

It was not until June of next year that Dr. Lanning of Greenwich Observatory, London, found that the new star had increased in size to the twelfth magnitude and that it had changed its position. Promptly, Dr. Lanning announced to the world that it was a new comet and not a star, and that he would determine its orbit later. Unfortunately, other work intervened.

On the evening of January the fourth, 1935, I was in the office, having just returned to New York from Europe, when the telephone rang and a strained voice, that I barely recognised as Farintosh's, asked me to come over and see him immediately. Before I could ask a question, he violently slammed the receiver on the hook, and, when I tried to get his number, the exchange calmly informed me that his line was out of order and that, therefore, he could not have called me up.

I was naturally a little out of temper when I took a taxi to the suburb where Farintosh lived, but, by the time I got to the house, my irritation had evaporated and left instead an ardent curiosity as to what the thing was that had disturbed my friend out of his customary phlegm.

Farintosh was nervously pacing his study when I entered. "Martin," he cried, and gripped me warmly by the hand. "You're a good fellow to come so quickly. I need your help more than I've ever needed any man's."

I stared at him in horrified amaze. Before me I saw Farintosh indeed, but a Farintosh who was shockingly changed.

The man looked absolutely worn out with fatigue. His face was seamed with lines that aged him by

twenty years, while his eyes wore the inexpressibly weary look of a man who has not slept for weeks. Even as I stared at him he swayed and had to steady himself against the wall.

"Rob, you're sick," I exclaimed.

Immediately my friend straightened up. "No," he said. "Not bodily, anyway," and strode over to his working table, which was littered with sheets of paper, closely covered with mathematical calculations. He motioned me to a chair.

"Look here, old man," he began earnestly. "You have no doubts as to my sanity, have you?"

The question startled me, but he was obviously so much in earnest, that the flippant reply died on my lips.

"You're as sane as any man in New York," I assured him.

For a moment Farintosh looked a trifle relieved, but almost immediately the strained look reappeared. He twitched his hand in a gesture eloquent of hopelessness. "I'm half sorry you think so," he said with a crooked smile. "It means that I cannot have imagined it."

"Imagined what?" I broke out.

"Martin," my friend replied, "for the last forty-eight hours I have hoped that I had made a mistake in my calculations, or that I am mad and have imagined the whole thing. But you say that I am sane, and I have sufficient faith in myself to know that I could not have made the same mistake ten times over, for that is the number of times I've checked my workings."

"You know darn well you've not made any mistake ten times over," I cried. "I've been long enough in college with you to know that. But what's this all about? Tell me before I burst!"

My friend smiled for a moment at my indignation, then rose and beckoned me to follow him out into the garden.

It was a cold and frosty night with the moon, a bright half sphere, just over the roofs. The stars seemed near, like tiny fairy lamps hanging from a velvet canopy of the deepest indigo. I wondered

for what purpose Farintosh had brought me out here, when, suddenly he stopped and with a dramatic gesture flung his arm up to the skies above the house.

"Do you see Casseiopeia?" he asked and pointed to the constellation of that name. "You see that small star a little to the left?"

I craned my neck backwards and managed to

catch a glimpse of the pin-point of light.

"I see it," I said.

Farintosh gripped me savagely by the arm. "Man," he said huskily. "You see the approaching destroyer of the world."

I started back. Farintosh was not given to making foolish jokes. A beam of light, from a window, fell across his face and showed me his mouth working with emotion. His eyes stared. Could it be that—

A grim laugh interrupted my thoughts. "Martin," said my friend. "I can read your mind as plainly as a book. No. I'm not mad. You your-

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*HERE is one of the cleverest stories and one of the most absorbing ones that we have seen for some time. The story advances the novel point as to whether it is possible, by human means, to change the center of rotation of the earth and the position of its axis by human energy. It is known, for instance, that the action of the tides caused by the moon, tends to slow up the motion of the earth, and our scientists tell us that this phenomenon will lengthen the day considerably throughout the ages. Frankly, though, there is something wrong with the story. See if you can find out just what that "something" is.*

---

self told me that not five minutes ago. And my imagination has not played me a trick—though, God knows, I only wish it were a trick.”

I was thunderstruck; but after the first moment I never doubted the truth of what Farintosh was saying. Again I looked at the fiery little spark in the sky. “That little thing?” I protested, unwilling to admit it, yet knowing that it must be true.

“That little thing is several hundred times larger than the earth,” retorted Farintosh.

“But, Good Lord, how can it destroy the earth?” I gasped.

“Let’s get indoors again,” suggested my companion. “I’ll explain to you there what is going to happen.”

In his study I took a seat, but Farintosh was too excited to keep still. I don’t think I yet quite realized the full meaning of what my friend had foretold. It seemed such an abstract thing to me. I remember thinking that it was rather a pity that this good old world should be doomed to destruction. It did not strike me that I would be affected personally.

Farintosh stopped his pacing and stood directly in front of me. He was meditatively pulling the lobe of his left ear.

“Martin,” he said. “Three days ago, when at the observatory, I noticed that the new star in the constellation of Casseiopeia had increased in size until it is now of the sixth magnitude, and has changed its position considerably. I examined it carefully with our new Burr-Simpson reflector and discovered that it is not a star at all, but a comet, and one that is rapidly whirling through space in our direction.”

“You mean that this comet will collide with the earth, and that everybody will be killed?”

Farintosh laughed shortly. “My dear Martin,” he said, “there won’t be any earth left. The comet, you know, is a thing composed of flaming gases, the heat from which will kill everything on earth, weeks before it hits it, and when that happens, the earth will simply dissolve into its component solids and gases and will be incorporated into the comet.”

The immensity of the catastrophe smote me like a blow, and I sat half-stunned for a minute.

“But Rob,” I cried. “Are you sure of this?”

“As sure as I am that I am standing here,” replied my friend. A weary little smile played around his lips and he waved his hand at the litter of papers on his desk. “Man,” he said. “For the last forty-eight hours I’ve been trying to prove to myself that I am mistaken, but—I’m afraid I’m not. I’ve sat at my desk till I could not see the figures I was writing. And then I got your note saying that you had returned.” He passed a trembling hand over his brow. “Martin, you have no idea how that note revived me. I wanted more than anything else to discuss this calmly with someone, and there is no one that I would rather talk it over with than you. Can you suggest anything that ought to be done?”

I pondered for a moment. “Have you informed your colleagues at the observatory?” I ventured.

“An hour ago I sent them notes to come here at once,” he replied. “They should be here soon. What I wanted chiefly to ask you about is whether it would be advisable to inform the newspapers. Might it not create a panic?”

The journalist in me rose at this. “It would be the greatest scoop there ever has been or ever will

be,” I exclaimed; “a marvelous bit of luck for me.”

“Yes, but what effect will it have on the people?” persisted Farintosh. “It might be better to keep them in ignorance until their fate can no longer be concealed, than to let them know what’s going to happen so long before it does come off.”

“Why—why,” I stammered. “I have not yet asked you when it is going to happen.”

“In about twenty-nine months time. On the third of June 1937,” answered Farintosh gravely.

I breathed a sigh of relief. “Why, there is quite a lot of time yet! I exclaimed. “I had an idea that it was going to be in the next few days. But, Rob, you won’t be able to keep this a secret for so long. Some other astronomer will soon find out what is going to happen, and will probably blow it off to the press.”

“I know,” replied Farintosh and again resumed his pacing, “I know I won’t be able to keep it quiet all the time, especially after all the observatories start working to check my calculations. But as long as I can I would like to spare the people the misery of knowing that death is approaching. And that is where I counted on you to help me.”

“On me!” I exclaimed. “How can I help you?”

Farintosh turned to me. “You, as a newspaper man, live with your finger on the pulse of the people. You, better than any man, I know, can guess what effect this will have on them. Tell me honestly, what you think would be the most humane thing to do. Shall I or shall I not inform the newspapers?” His dilemma was acute, for he knew that whatever course he finally decided upon, he was sure to be blamed by some people.

Meanwhile, I myself found it hard to arrive at a decision. All the journalist within me protested against keeping such vital news a secret, but every time I opened my mouth to advise against it, some inner force paralysed my tongue and dispassionately urged me to consider the many scenes of mob violence which I had witnessed on the publication of some all important tidings. Visions flashed into my mind of the hate-crazed mobs of Berlin besieging the French Embassy, when the war of 1914 was declared—pictures of the joy-frenzied crowds of London, making giant bon-fires of hundreds of captured German gun-carriages, when the news of the armistice came through.

“What effect will it have?” the question echoed in my ears. The mute eyes of my friend kept on asking it. The very clock on the mantelpiece was ticking it. “What effect will it have?” The words were dancing on the wall in front of my eyes. Again and again I opened my mouth to say: “It would be best to let people know.” But each time I could not. It is not easily that the journalistic instinct dies.

At last, however, I saw my clear duty, and in that moment I stifled the news-gathering passion that had been my driving force for twenty years. I threw my hands up, in surrender. “All right, Rob,” I cried. “Have it your own way. I think you’re right in wanting to keep it a secret. There is no knowing what horrible things might happen, if once the mob gets to know that it has only two and a half years to live.”

Farintosh nodded slowly. “That was my opinion,” he said. “But how are we going to do it?”

Now that it was all settled to keep the news a

secret, my brain seemed to come out of its stupor.

"Why not leave it to the editors of the New York papers?" I cried. "They are all men of sense and honor, and, if you put it to them, the way you have to me, I think they will all agree that it is best to keep the world in ignorance for as long as possible."

"Do you really think so?" exclaimed my friend. "But how about the other papers in the states?"

"That too can be arranged," I replied. "Once your colleagues at the observatory have checked your calculations, and there is not even the least shadow of a doubt, then you'll have to take the Government into your confidence. 'It'll know how to muzzle the press and will communicate with the Governments of the other countries, that they might do the same with their newspapers.'"

## CHAPTER II

### The Caspian Canals

FOR three months we kept the world in ignorance of its fate; while Farintosh's calculations were being checked by the astronomers. Yet much as they tried they could find no flaws in his work, and at last were regretfully compelled to admit its truth.

Meanwhile, of course, tremendous secret activity was going on in all the nations. Delegates from all countries met quietly in New York and discussed what could be done. Representative astronomers came with them, hurled long strings of figures at each other and quibbled over trifling differences in their calculations. All, however, were gloomily agreed that the earth was doomed, and that there was no help for it.

During all this time the papers made no mention of the comet. Indeed the newspaper editors had not only agreed to keep quiet about it, but had also promised to denounce, as a sensation monger, any rag that dared to print the story.

It was amazing how well the secret was kept during those three months. Thousands upon thousands of people knew all about it, and anxiously watched the star grow bigger and bigger every night—yet not even a rumor was heard of the imminent cataclysm. With so many people in the know, however, a leak was bound to come eventually—and it was in the second week of the conference that it happened.

I was walking down lower Broadway in the noon hour, when, suddenly, a placard-decked van pulled up by the sidewalk long enough to let half a dozen yelling newsboys tumble out. For a moment I could hardly believe my senses, for those boys were loudly proclaiming that the end of the world was nigh. The glaring posters on the van corroborated them.

One of the boys bore down upon me. "Speshul!" He yelled. "End of the World. Speshul!" I hurriedly handed over the quarter the young bandit demanded and got in return a flimsy sheet that, in a flaming six-inch headline, clarified forth the news of the impending destruction of the Earth.

It was an obscure paper, which I shall call the *Manhattan Searchlight*, whose editor had broken his word to the Government, and published the whole story of Farintosh's discovery of the danger that threatened the world, together with pictures of my friend, of the telescope with which he examined the comet and a chart purporting to show the routes that

the earth and the comet were to follow with a cross and a date to mark the spot of the intersection and ensuing collision. Oh, it was cleverly done, all right, and showed evidence of much painstaking work on the part of the reportorial staff.

I looked up from my reading to see how the other buyers of the paper were behaving. Some, I saw, were staring at the sheet in open-mouthed amazement, as they devoured the luridly worded news. Others read with a half cynical smile, as if accustomed to the sensational outbursts that some of the New York papers occasionally indulge in. The majority, however, looked doubtful whether to believe or not, and were surreptitiously eyeing each other in order to judge from some one else's conduct, how they themselves should behave.

I crumpled my paper into a ball and threw it into the gutter. "Damned nonsense!" I exclaimed and strode off down the street, but not before I had the pleasure of seeing several other men also drop their papers in disgust.

Around the corner, though, I bought another copy and continued reading it on my way home in the Subway. The whole of that issue was devoted to the absorbing topic of the destruction of the world. There were even supposed interviews with Farintosh and other men of science—all of whom took a very gloomy view.

No explanations were given as to why the editor had decided to divulge the news, nor were any excuses made. It was only too obvious that the coup had been long premeditated. This irritated me all the more, since I believed the scoop belonged by rights to *The Echo*, my paper.

I was therefore fuming with anger by the time I came to my house and immediately telephoned my friend.

"I have already heard of it," Farintosh replied when I had finished speaking. "The police have raided the place and stopped the printing-presses, but I'm afraid the damage is done. They sold a million and a half copies of their paper. All New York knows about it now, and no amount of denying by the other papers will help things, especially if the people learn that the *Searchlight* has been suppressed."

"What do you intend to do then?" I asked.

"Admit the whole story."

"What?" I cried. "After all the trouble we took to keep it a secret."

"It is not a secret any longer," Farintosh pointed out, "and besides, I've just got a telegram from Europe saying that the news has leaked out there. It will be a matter of only a few days until it crosses the Atlantic."

"Good Lord!" I groaned. "There will be trouble in the foreign quarters for sure."

"I am afraid so," admitted my friend. "But we have to act openly now, so I am going to allow reporters in at tomorrow's meeting of the conference. It might calm the people, to some extent, to know that everything possible is going to be done."

"I will be there," I fervently promised.

NEXT morning, all the papers, now that they were allowed free rein, printed accounts of the discovery of the comet, counselled prudence and spoke hopefully of the conference, which, they said, might find a way out. This, however, was merely

a sop to the people. For at the conference, the delegates had already given up all hope of finding an error in Farintosh's calculations. Indeed, at the moment when I entered the hall, an angular lady representative was proposing that every man, woman and child should be provided with sufficient poison to commit a painless suicide before he or she was tortured to death by the heat of the star. A fierce discussion started over this and lasted a full hour.

I, meanwhile, was anxiously waiting for Farintosh, who was scheduled to speak at eleven o'clock. The appointed time was near, but my friend had not yet come. I telephoned his house and found out that he had left for the hall. There was nothing I could do but return to my seat and wait as patiently as I could.

Eleven o'clock came and went, and still no Farintosh. The delegates murmured at the delay, for time was at a premium, and the chairman was just about to assign the chair to another speaker, when a commotion was heard outside, and in burst my friend with his grizzled hair all standing up in a mop. He dashed up to his seat and dumbly waved a sheaf of papers over his head.

The buzz of conversation tapered off into silence as the delegates gradually became aware of my friend's strange behaviour. For some seconds more, until he had found his voice, my friend continued to grope wildly in the air above his head, as if for the words that would not come. At length he seemed to find what he wanted, for his arm dropped to his side and he commenced to speak. "Gentlemen," he cried. "I have found it!"

The conference was electrified. "A mistake?" Half-a-dozen voices cried.

Farintosh drew himself up and glared icily. "Certainly not. I do not make mistakes." He turned and appealed to the chairman. "Sir," he cried. "I have news of the utmost importance. May I speak?"

The chairman nodded and my friend again turned to the members of the conference. I could see that his chest was heaving painfully and he had to keep silent for a minute to catch his breath.

The attention which he had drawn upon himself when he entered, so abruptly, was as nothing compared to that which was centered on him now. There was scarcely a man in the room who was not staring at him in mute and wide-eyed expectation. The faint noises of the street suddenly seemed to become an uproar.

Twenty reporters sat, still as wooden figures, with their pencils poised over their notebooks, ready. The whole meeting, indeed, appeared to be frozen into immobility.

At last Farintosh seemed to be ready. He slowly smoothed out the crushed papers in his hand, and held them up for every one to see.

"Gentlemen," he said, speaking calmly, but with a strong undercurrent of excitement vibrating in his voice. He licked his dry lips. "Gentlemen, I am sorry that I arrived late, but I was so absorbed in the scheme, which I shall put before you, that I quite forgot to get out of the car at the proper station." He took a deep breath and leaned impressively on the table. "So far you have been concentrating your energy in trying to pick flaws in my calculations. I said from the first that that was pure waste of time, and at last you have admitted

it. Since you are all agreed now that a collision is inevitable, if the earth and the comet retain their present courses, why should we not try to change the orbit of the earth and thus get it out of the track of the comet?"

Farintosh, I am afraid, has many of the characteristics of an actor, for, having uttered this sentence, he stopped short and glanced dramatically around at the amazed assembly. If he expected to create a sensation, he certainly succeeded. A deep gasp came from the delegates as they realized the daring of the proposal.

"Impossible!" snorted the guttural voice of Herr Schreiner, one of the German astronomers.

"Farintosh bowed to him sardonically. "No, Mein Herr," he said. "Not impossible. In fact, I am sure that by means of my plans we can save the world."

Pandemonium broke loose in the great hall. Staid astronomers and politicians, who in the last three months had forgotten how to smile, suddenly rose to their feet and cheered long and loudly. Tables and chairs were smashed in the excitement that ensued, as everybody tried to shake Farintosh by the hand. Indeed, he was very nearly mobbed and only with difficulty escaped from his too enthusiastic friends to take refuge behind the reporters' gallery.

The only delegate to remain seated was the chairman, and he was only adding to the uproar by pounding on the table with his gavel, in a desperate attempt to establish order.

Farintosh stood behind me, with his hand on my shoulder, and gazed down upon the amazing sight of two-hundred of the most learned men in the world, dancing about like a lot of overgrown school-boys. Of course it was the sudden relief from the last three months' terrible strain. Yet I think that it rather tickled Farintosh's vanity to see that all these men implicitly believed that their troubles were ended, without even asking him to explain his plan. Truly it was a remarkable tribute.

At last a semblance of order was restored, and Farintosh returned to his seat to continue his speech. But the moment he reappeared, a thunderstorm of handclapping made it quite impossible for him to be heard. Farintosh, however, was not in a mood to wait and, after a few preliminary clearings of the throat, began to speak. Instantly the handclapping subsided and every man leaned forward to catch his words.

"In short, my idea is this," he continued. "We must find some way of changing the earth's course, so that it will no longer be in the track of the comet. For several days I have thought of how we could accomplish that" (he raised the mangled scraps of paper to which he had tenaciously clung), "and this morning I discovered a way." He looked around triumphantly, and turned to Dr. Gant, the noted mathematician. "Sir," he said. "I would like you to give your opinion to the conference on a simple problem in mathematics."

Gant looked surprised but nodded assent.

"Very good," exclaimed my friend. "This is the problem; Let us imagine a spinning ball flying through space in a roughly circular track; if suddenly a portion of its weight were shifted to one spot, would it affect the movement of the sphere?"

Dr. Gant looked surprised for a moment. "Am

I to understand," he asked, "that the sphere you refer to is the Earth?"

"Yes," said my friend.

"Well then, judging offhand, I should say that if a sufficiently large quantity of matter were displaced, it would affect the revolutions of the earth, and probably also the course of its flight." He looked at Farintosh doubtfully. "But it would have to be a tremendous weight," he ventured, "more than could be moved by human agency, I'm afraid. Also the distance the matter is to be moved would be a great factor."

Farintosh smiled cheerfully. "If during the twelve months, or so, before the 3d of June 1937, we move about thirty million million tons of matter for at least three hundred miles, do you think that that might suffice?"

"Impossible!" again blurted out Herr Professor Schreiner. My friend looked a trifle annoyed, but took no other notice of him.

The whole meeting was now waiting for Gant, who was gravely considering the problem.

"It might—it might be enough," he said doubtfully. "It is hard to calculate what exactly would be the result if this were done—especially as the operation would be spread over a whole year." He gradually lifted his head, while speaking, as if gaining confidence with the uttered words, and at last looked Farintosh straight in the eyes. "Yes," he said resolutely. "I give it as my opinion that the weight you have mentioned, transferred as you state, would be enough to alter the orbit of the earth."

A storm of cheering broke out, even the reporters joining in.

Gant looked at my friend curiously. "May I ask?" he enquired, "how you propose to carry out such a stupendous task as the shifting for miles of thirty million million tons of matters?"

A hush fell over the assembly again.

"Why! I'm going to flood the Caspian Sea," explained Farintosh.

"Flood a sea?" exclaimed Gant. "This is no time for foolish joking."

"I'm not joking," firmly declared my friend. "I mean exactly what I say. The Caspian is eighty-six feet below the level of the Mediterranean or the Black Sea. A gigantic canal cut for three hundred miles, from the Black Sea to the Caspian, would raise the latter to its former level and submerge, in addition, a very large area of land, surrounding it."

"Nonsense," exclaimed the familiar voice of Herr Schreiner.

Farintosh turned in exasperation upon his tormentor. "Sir," he rasped, "kindly be so good as to tell me what you mean by that."

The German lumbered to his feet. "I mean," said he, "that, in the first place, I hold it impossible for you to divert the earth from its course and, secondly, even if, against my opinion, you do succeed in doing so, you will only cause another cataclysm, for the earth will simply fall into the sun, and thirdly, and finally, I consider it an impossible engineering feat to dig a canal as big as the one required in little over a year." Herr Schreiner produced a gigantic silk handkerchief, blew a trumpet like blast of defiance, and then, still glaring pugnaciously, resumed his seat.

My friend returned glare for glare. The whole

scene reminded me irresistibly of two game cocks sizing each other up before the battle.

Farintosh opened his offensive. "Your first two suppositions are fallacious," he said icily. "I will maintain on my reputation as an astronomer, that it is possible to divert the earth from its present course, and that it will not fall into the sun, but simply take up a new orbit. As for your third contention that the canal cannot be dug in the limited time left, to that I will reply that the engineers are the best judges of that, and that it must be and will be dug, if we wish to save the earth from destruction." He turned to the delegates once more. "Gentlemen," he cried, "this is our one chance of escaping annihilation. I don't deny that we may be committing suicide, by diverting the earth, but, in my opinion we will live through it. Therefore I appeal to you to give me a vote of confidence, so that we may take immediate steps to start the construction of the canal."

An answering roar of assent came from the representatives, and my friend once more turned to Herr Schreiner. "Sir," said he, exceedingly polite, "Have you any alternative plan to offer? Surely from a person of your erudition, we may expect something besides purely destructive criticism." He bowed again to the fuming Professor, but the latter saw that he was without support and decided that discretion was the better part of valor. He rose and walked to the exit, loudly remarking as he went; "I game here do give advice, nod do lisen do a lod of damned foolishness."

Someone giggled, and in a second the whole meeting was rocking with almost hysterical laughter. Then, light-heartedly, the delegates began discussing ways and means of performing the gigantic task they had set themselves.

### CHAPTER III

#### The Earth Adrift

SPECIAL editions of all the New York papers were issued that afternoon, in which the glorious news was proclaimed far and wide; that after all there was a good chance of saving the world from destruction. The panic, which we had so much feared, did not even have time to start, for most people had scoffed at the sensational disclosures of the *Searchlight*, and only with the morning papers were they at all alarmed. But only seven hours later, the afternoon papers already announced that a way out had been found, and that it was all due to Robert Farintosh, their brilliant fellow citizen, who had been the first man to warn the world of its danger, and the first man to suggest a way of escaping it.

The New Yorkers preened themselves not a little at the thought. "Speed," they boasted was their middle name—while other people deliberated, the New Yorker acted.

Farintosh was the man of the moment. Radiophone and telephotograph had flashed around the globe the news of the discovery and the features of the man who was going to save the earth. Chinese, Russians, Germans, Frenchmen, all marveled at the strange barbarity of the name, and yet struggled to pronounce it. In every shop window hung newly printed photogravures of Farintosh, while crowds assembled outside to gaze at his face.



Map of the Region of the Great Achievement.

Meanwhile, through the whole night, a conference was going on between the world's leading engineers, astronomers and politicians, a conference, in which many of the speakers were thousands of miles separated, and gave their opinions by means of the radiotelevisionphone.

The Russian government proved willing to have the experiment tried, although it would undoubtedly render homeless the millions of peasants who lived on the low lying lands surrounding the Caspian. Not only were they willing to lose that much territory, they also promised to give all the aid they could to forward the project, and immediately made good their word by digging up the forty-year old report of an engineer, who had carefully surveyed the country between Astrakhan, on the Caspian Sea, and Rostov, on the Sea of Azof, a continuation of the Black Sea, with a view to digging a commercial canal between these two cities. Much to the joy of the engineers, at the conference, this man had done his work so thoroughly, that the preliminary survey, which would have wasted so much time, was found to be unnecessary.

In addition, it was seen that their task was much simplified by the fortunate existence of the two hundred mile long ribbon of the Great Liman Lake, which lay in the very track of the projected canal, and which was the dried up remnant of the once mighty stretch of sea, that long ago had joined the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea.

Every country in the world offered a contribution to the great work. Some promised ships for transportation, others offered machinery, others again labor and raw materials. A levy was made on the rolling stock of the world's railways. Ten per cent of the locomotives, and nearly all the flat cars were to be shipped down to the site, chosen for the canals. For the world's authorities on engineering had decided that a single canal to fill the Caspian would be impracticable, as it would have to be something like ten miles wide and have a water depth of seventy-five feet. It was therefore decided that twenty canals, each one half mile wide, would have to be dug at half mile intervals and that the intervening spaces should be used as dumping grounds for the excavated earth.

These decisions were not arrived at without much argument, but fortune was with us in that the report of the long dead Russian Engineer was available,

and, according to him, the country through which the canals were to run, was flat in the extreme, the elevation of the highest point of land being only eighty-two feet above sea level.

For the first time in human history the nations of the world began to work together harmoniously and without jealousy. All the national feuds and dislikes were sunk in the common endeavour to overcome the danger that threatened mankind with extinction.

The newspapers, of course, had been connected with the radio hall, and in the morning printed a full account of what

had been said. But, in addition, most of them also featured a statement by Professor Arnold Schreiner, which I can do no better than reproduce from the columns of my paper.

#### Calamity Predicted if Caspian is Flooded

Below we print the remarkable letter received from Professor Arnold Schreiner of the Spandau Astronomical Observatory. Professor Schreiner is one of the German delegates at the conference, and was the one man there, who objected to Dr. Farintosh's plan to divert the earth from its present path. He is one of the most noted astronomers of Europe, and one whose condemnation of the project carries much weight.

NEW YORK ECHO

April 5, 1935.

Sirs:

I wish to draw the attention of the world's press to the faults of the mad scheme, to flood the Caspian Sea, proposed at yesterday's conference by Dr. Robert Farintosh, of the Astronomical Observatory of New York.

I see that my arguments of yesterday against this plan were repeated in the evening papers, so I do not need to dwell on them any more. I will content myself with giving just one more reason why this plan should be abandoned as an unnecessary waste of time and labor.

I will, for the sake of argument, grant that all that Dr. Farintosh expects will happen. We will suppose that he is successful in building the canal or canals, necessary, in the next year. We will suppose that a great enough weight of water to influence the flight of the earth, does trickle through. We will suppose that the earth will actually deviate from its course, and not fall into the sun, as I confidently expect it would. What will happen then? Has Dr. Farintosh given any thought to the probable catastrophic consequences of such an action on the earth's part? Does he realize that if the earth deviates but a few degrees from its flight about the sun, the change in temperature would be, to us, enormous? If the earth nears the sun, life will become unbearable, because of the heat.



If, on the other hand, it moves away, then the ice caps of the North and South Poles will move down and we shall have a second ice age. In either event tremendous seismic disturbances will have to be expected. Earthquakes, tidal waves and eruptions of both new and old volcanoes will be bound to come. Whole continents may disappear and vast ranges of new mountains may be formed in the buckling of the earth's crust, as this planet accommodates itself to the changed temperature. And I particularly wish to stress this fact; that no one in the world can be sure as to what will be the extent of the deviation and in what direction it will be.

Does then Dr. Farintosh propose that the earth be cast adrift in interplanetary space?

No, say I. Since the earth's destruction is unavoidable, why should man labor unnecessarily in the digging of useless ditches, that cannot in the least help to preserve his life?

Yours,

ARNOLD SCHREINER

The contents of this letter were amazing enough, but what was still more astonishing to me was a brief note below, saying that a copy of this extraordinary epistle had been sent to Dr. Farintosh, who had replied that as far as he could see, all the things mentioned by Dr. Schreiner were possibilities; some even probabilities, but that it was by no means certain that any or all of these catastrophes would take place.

In any event, he wished to remind the people, if nothing was done, there would be no hope whatever for the earth, while if the planet were successfully diverted from its present course, there still was a bare chance that humanity might survive.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Task

**T**HE next few weeks saw an ant-like activity in all the steel mills of the world. Every machine that could by any chance be converted for the manufacture of some part of a steam shovel, was so converted. All the iron foundries were going full blast to supply the enormous demand for raw material. Every coal mine was running four six-hour shifts in the twenty-four hours and on seven days in the week. Every man who could handle a pick and shovel was recruited. For this was no time for half measures. A stupendous task had to be carried out. Twenty canals, each over a hundred miles long, half a mile wide and seventy-five feet deep, had to be constructed in little over a year.

The nations of the world were fully aware of the almost insurmountable difficulties attendant on such a task, and, to facilitate its carrying out, had handed over the supreme power of government to a Central Extraordinary Council, which had the power to seize any property or material and to order the performance of any work that might help the all important task.

All unmarried men, between the ages of twenty and thirty, were conscripted—from the States alone two million workers were to be sent down to the Black Sea.

Within a week of Farintosh's speech, at the con-

ference, the work began. Russia, at the request of the Council, had mobilised her army and had torn up ten thousand miles of branch railways. These the Russian sappers proceeded to relay along the routes marked out by engineers, who had been sent by airplane from all over the world. But this was an all too insufficient quantity, and immediately the cry went up for another fifty thousand miles of railway track. Thereupon the European countries stripped themselves bare of all the railways, not absolutely essential, and shipped them entire to the Black Sea; sleepers, rails and signal plants.

Of course tremendous blunders were made. No provision whatever was made for the food supply of the fifty thousand American laborers who landed within the first three weeks. They came as unexpectedly as lightning out of a clear sky. No one had heard that they were coming. No one had imagined that any men could be sent so soon. Therefore no one was prepared for them.

The Americans were disembarked and marched out of the Port of Rostov into the open country, where they were told to camp, until some sort of shelter could be found for them. They had no tents, no ground sheets, and only one blanket apiece. They had no food, no cooks, no field kitchens; and on the first day lived on some pickled herrings that their commander had been fortunate enough to buy in Rostov. Fortunately it was warm spring weather, pleasant to camp in, and on the next day the hard-pressed Russian Commissariat was able to supply the American's needs.

But accidents, as the officials said with a shrug of the shoulders, will happen in the best regulated families, and this undertaking was, as yet, by no means well regulated—as any one could see.

Then, one day, out of the blue sky and from an airplane, descended a dapper little man with hair and beard of a bright red hue and a very neat taste in ties. He was Sir Alexander Murchison, the famous British civil engineer. Straight up to the General Superintendent's Office he marched, and there presented a letter from the Supreme Council, authorizing him to take charge of the whole affair.

Half an hour later Murchison was in full control, and was already making himself felt. Up to this time all the shipments had been consigned to the Port of Rostov, on the Don, but the new chief altered this, as soon as he heard of it.

"Ridiculous!" he fumed and stumped up the room. "Absurd! Fancy having a base of operations eighty miles distant from our field of work. We must find another place."

The fiery little man looked so indignant that his subordinates almost openly smiled at each other. Was this, indeed, the greatest engineer on earth? The man who was said to have accomplished miracles in India and Peru? He must have been sadly overrated.

One of them cleared his throat. "Rostov is the only port on the Sea of Azof that's anywhere near the necessary size," he ventured.

"What of it?" barked Murchison. "Can't I build one that's nearer and is the right size?"

The assembled engineers looked their surprise. The man was mad, they decided. It was impossible to start building a port now. It was too late.

But Murchison had made his name, just by doing things that were impossible, and, within four days,

he had discovered a magnificent natural harbour, not three miles away from where he had planned the mouths of his canals to open on the Sea of Azof.

A month later Port Farintosh was completed and running in full swing. But already a thousand acre dump of supplies had accumulated at Rostov, and vast quantities of food, clothing and invaluable machinery were lying unsheltered in the open—on one day drenched by the torrential rains and baked, on the next day, by the torrid heat of the sun.

The railways had not been laid where they were wanted. Not enough rolling stock was available, and, even for what he had, Murchison found it hard to get expert train crews. Yet in spite of these almost insuperable difficulties, in some miraculous way, he evolved order out of a chaos that had seemed hopeless.

The laborers were formed into regiments of two thousand, and officered by construction engineers. Each body of men was appointed to a certain section of canal, which it was expected to finish by a certain time, while, as more men continually arrived, new regiments were all the time being formed and sent out.

One hundred thousand steam shovels, which, with their crews, had been gathered from all over the world, were divided among the working parties, and an urgent call was sent for more. Dredges to deepen the Liman Lake arrived by the score and were immediately transshipped to the assembling shops on the banks of that water, and soon the clangor of pneumatic riveters set to wheeling the flocks of scared wild fowl that had nested for ages on the shores of the lonely lake.

I, in my position as special correspondent of the *New York Echo*, was sent down to report on the progress of the great task, in whose successful termination the whole world, to put it mildly, was deeply interested.

When I arrived at Port Farintosh, the work of actually digging the canals had already commenced, and all the labor battalions were encamped along the chosen routes. Indeed, so close to one another were the camps that, as I motored down one of the excellent roads beside a half excavated channel, it seemed to me that I was driving down the hundred-mile long main street of a city of tents.

An air of almost hysterical activity hung over the whole undertaking. Even the lowliest wielder of a pick seemed to have been infected with the dynamic spirit of the superintendent. Every laborer held himself with an air of pride and dignity, as if fully and proudly aware of the fact, that on him partially depended the responsibility of saving the earth from its celestial enemy.

Night and day the shrieking whistles ripped to shreds the silence, that for unnumbered years had hung over the steppe. The clanging hammers of a thousand forges, the roar of countless freight trains, the polyglot yells of the sweating workmen, the insistent clamor of the steam shovels, the shrill metallic whinings, the hiss of escaping steam, all, to my ears, wove themselves together into a strident song of conquest—a harsh paen of triumph of man's victory over nature.

Before me and behind stretched on interminably the wide gash that, like a raw red sore on the bosom of the earth, seemed to reproach me with its bleak hideousness. Great mounds and hills of new dug

clay lay heaped along the banks and humped their backs on the far distant horizon.

Brick red, in an infinity of shades, seemed to be the dominant note in that harsh symphony of color. Brick-red dust settled on the face of my chauffeur, lay heavily upon his shoulders and filled the folds in his livery. Brick-red mules shambled slowly up the road, their loads of produce disguised by the same mantle of dust that hid their own original color, and red little dust devils whirled lazily ahead of us, waiting to half smother us, when we tore through them.

Crude, grim, repellent, the scene unrolled in front of my car. It looked as if man had started out to remake the world with his hands—and was not making any too good a job of it.

With night, however, the spectacle gained mystery. The unsightly dumps of rubbish were then hidden by the merciful dark, or else their ugliness was veiled by the soft light of the moon.

But always, night or day, the work went on. Sputtering arc lights near the busy steam shovels, silhouetted the thousand black devils, who scurried about to tend the puffing monsters. It looked like a scene from Dante's *Inferno*.

A new shift was working now, but still the men yelled and swore at each other with all the lurid proficiency that the daylight gang had been capable of. Near me one of the hungry excavators lunged down at the earth, tore out a three ton mouthful of soil, ponderously turned and with a clang and a thunderous roar dropped its burden into a truck. Ruddy sparks showered from its smoke stack and, suddenly, a pale plume of steam puffed up from the whistle. Again and again the monster bellowed for a new tender, and then greedily returned for another bite at Mother Earth.

Eyes, green, yellow, red and blue, malevolent looking, glowered angrily through the dark, winked, flashed, changed color and disappeared. Then came a rattling roar and a string of empty coal flats rocketed down the crazy track, on the way to Port Farintosh.

Presently a pale light stole over the eastern heavens and star by star dimmed and faded. Then a band of vivid pink appeared and rapidly swamped the remaining lights. A ray of golden light shot high into the air, quivered and slowly sank to earth. A gleam of molten brass from the horizon and—the grumbling morning shift slouched by to relieve their weary brethren.

## CHAPTER V

### The Stars in Their Courses

**F**OURTEEN months from the spring morning, when Farintosh had proposed his extraordinary plan, the news came from Murchison that in another week he expected the canals to be entirely completed and ready for the formal opening of the flood gates.

On the appointed day most of the dignitaries of the world, plus a few hundred reporters were present at the ceremony. Among the latter was I, while chief among the former was Farintosh, the man to whom, it was unanimously decided that the honor of opening the canal gates should go. For this purpose he had flown over from New York with me; and he was then standing high up on the plat-

form, reserved for the important speakers of the day.

I, as I remember, was standing on top of the huge dam, that kept the water from rushing into the canals before the floodgates were opened. Beside me Philip Mallory, a young engineer with whom I had struck up a friendship on my previous visit, was pointing out to me some noteworthy features in the construction of the gigantic wall of concrete. He was talking in a technical jargon, which only a brother engineer could hope to understand, and at last I interrupted him.

"But why have a dam at all?" I exclaimed. "It seems to me that far more water would flow into the canal if it was not there."

Mallory laughed. "It's easy to see that you're no engineer," he rallied. "Why if the sea wall was not here the water would rush in so quickly that it would eat away the banks of the canal, and before long choke it up altogether. Look!" he exclaimed, "they've finished spouting at last." Farintosh, who, by reason of his extreme bulk and height, towered over the surrounding group of politicians in much the same manner as a Great Dane would overtop a street corner gathering of dogs.

Slowly he raised his arm and gripped the lever that was to open the gates of the twenty greatest canals that the world had ever seen. He hesitated for a moment and glanced up and down the sea coast. Below him was the mildly heaving water of the Sea of Azof. On either side he could see ten great canals stretching east into the horizon, while dimly visible in the north were the misty outlines of the city, which bore his name, and mushroom-like had sprung up within the year, had reached the half-million mark in population and was already withering away again.

Farintosh, with a sudden stiffening of his body, pulled down the black bar.

A soft whirring of machinery filled the air. Steel cables creaked and began to move, then slowly and ponderously the giant shutters rose.

A gasp of awe came from the assembled spectators. Out of each of the one hundred openings in the half mile dam sprang forth a crystal clear column of water, that shivered itself to pieces against the hard, clay bottom of the canal, formed muddy looking pools that grew with amazing speed, joined and crept east—on their way to the Caspian. Gradually the streams of water thickened, until each was a moderately sized cataract, whose thunderous descent made it impossible to hear a spoken word. Great clouds of spray flew up to drench the gaily dressed crowd on top of the wall, yet, such was the fascination of the sight, that not one person budged to seek a more sheltered spot. They stared, as if under a spell, at the turbid yellow flood, which now rushed headlong down the canal, to lose itself in the distance.

Slowly, slowly, ever so slowly the water level on the eastern face heightened. Inch by inch it mounted up the face of the dam, until it was only just below the openings in the wall. Here it seemed to be stayed for a moment, but not for long, for, suddenly gaining speed, the water rose to the bottoms of the gates, higher and higher yet, until, presently, the waterfalls had disappeared.

A long drawn sigh rose from the crowd. My young friend Mallory was much moved.

"It is done," I heard him mutter. "The water is

at sea level. The impossible had become a fact!"

The realization seemed to come to every one at the same instant. They had succeeded. The impossible had been accomplished. They had united the Caspian with the Black Sea, or, at least, would have, by the time the boiling flood had traversed the many long leagues of canal. If the earth still persisted in colliding with the comet, mankind at least had the satisfaction of knowing that it had done its utmost to prevent the catastrophe.

Hats and canes suddenly appeared over the heads of the multitude. Cheer after cheer broke out and continued until the crowd had cheered itself into exhaustion. But, while many gave vent to their spirits by shouting, many others felt too deeply to express themselves in that manner.

I stood silent for a few minutes, until the mist had cleared from my eyes, and then turned to my companion. "Come," I said. "Let's get out of this crush. I've got to see Farintosh."

A short, stout gentleman, with his back to me, turned around at the sound of my voice. "Ach," he exclaimed. "So id is you!" He sniffled suspiciously, but determinedly blinked the moisture away from his eyes and transfixed Mallory with a glare of indignation.

"Young man," said Professor Schreiner. "You don't appear to appreciate the fact that this is the greatest moment in human history. Up to this time man has been a mere, helless parasite, infesting the crust of the earth, easily gilled by drifting changes in temperature and wiped out by the preyings of parasites still more infinitesimal than himself." He sternly shook his finger in Mallory's astonished face. "But now—now the earth is merely the domicile of man. Who knows whither man will spread from id? My boy, remember this: nature has been conquered. Man is the new ruler of the Universe." The Professor turned abruptly away and was swallowed up in the throng.

My young friend looked after him in amazement. "Say," he exclaimed, "who's that old guy, anyway?" He seemed to know you."

"Yes, I met him last year," I replied. "He is none other than Professor Schreiner, the only man at the conference, who denied the practicability of Farintosh's scheme to save the earth."

"He's changed his views a bit, hasn't he?" remarked Mallory.

"I'm surprised," I admitted. "He was most virulently antagonistic to the whole business last year."

The crowd was now filing off from the top of the great dam and heading for the trains. I tried to get my promised interview with Farintosh, but found that he had already been hustled off to some dinner. He did, however, leave me a message, asking me to call at his hotel later in the evening. I therefore was glad to accept Mallory's offer to take me to Port Farintosh in his little runabout, and so escape the crush in the trains.

For some miles we drove in silence, and then Mallory turned to me. "Do you know, Martin," he said. "I've been thinking of what you said about that old German fellow who gave me that lecture. You said he used to hate the idea of saving the world."

I nodded.

"Well," my friend resumed. "There are quite a lot of people who still hate the idea, and would do almost anything to prevent its being carried out."

"What?" I exclaimed. "Who are they?"

"Have you ever heard of Hadji Hassan Agha? No? I don't suppose that many of us have yet. But we soon will. I believe that he is conspiring to destroy the canals."

I jumped bolt upright and nearly knocked the steering wheel out of Mallory's hands.

"Sorry," I apologized, "but you know that I'm a journalist and news of any sort has a frightful attraction for me. Can you tell me anything more about this man?" What fortunate chance, thought I, had made me run up against Mallory today.

"We-e-el," drawled my friend, "I don't know what news value you'll find in what I can tell you, but, anyway, here goes.

"The Hadji first came to my notice about three months ago, when he arrived in my camp among a bunch of recruits. I remember seeing his green turban and thinking it rather strange that a man as old as he, and rich enough to have made the pilgrimage to Mecca, as the color of his turban indicated, should have been conscripted into the labor battalion. But I had other, more important, things to think about, and so I soon forgot Hassan Agha.

"You remember that I had charge of a couple of thousand Mohammedans? They were Kurds from near the Russian border, and pretty devout Moslems too. Part of the Turkish contingent, you know.

"Well, they were a rough crowd to handle, but they did their work well enough, and I had nothing to complain about, until shortly after the Hadji arrived. Within a fortnight the whole crew began loafing on their jobs, and some were even insolent. In fact I had to knock down a few of them for spitting at my shadow, because I was an unbeliever. That's how I got these knuckles," laughed Mallory, and showed a bandaged hand.

"However, this could not go on, and so I started looking round to see who or what was stirring up the trouble. I did not have to look very long before I noticed that the Hadji, nearly every evening, was making speeches to the men, which he stopped as soon as I came within hearing distance. Also, he seemed to have a violent dislike for me, for whenever I came near him he would scowl and mutter as if I had borrowed money from him and wouldn't pay up.

"Well I had sense enough to put two and two together and the result was that I sent for the Hadji, to ask him why he had to talk to the men so much. But I had barely started questioning him, when he suddenly seemed to lose all control over himself and burst out in a wild denunciation of all unbelievers in general, and of me in particular."

Mallory lit a fresh cigarette. "You know there is a sort of fascination about that man. Personality, that's what the magazine advertisements call it. If you ever see him you'll feel it. He stands well over six feet in height and is extraordinarily thin. That might seem laughable in another man, but in him it is impressive. He seems to sort of radiate fanaticism. Then there are his flashing eyes and smashing gestures. They all seem somehow to impress you with the truth of his arguments. Not that they are true, of course—personally I've never heard such nonsense as he told me—but I don't wonder that he has such a following, because he has the magazine advertisements beaten to a frazzle.

"Oh, he bawled us all out perfectly. Why did we

persist in running counter to the will of God? Did we not know that it was useless? If it was written in the books of fate that the earth should be destroyed by the comet, then it would be so destroyed, and it was not only useless, but extremely sinful as well, to struggle against the preordained things. Besides, he said, it had been revealed to him in a dream that the comet was a missile from the hand of Allah, sent to wipe out the earth for the sins of its people. He said that he knew we Christians were doomed to Tophet anyway, but the Mohammedans had souls which he still could save, and he deemed it his duty to warn the laborers not to risk their loss by fighting against Kismet.

"You should have seen him, Martin. Gad, he was a sight to make you sit up. He worked himself up into a frightful passion and cursed the builders of the canal up and down and roundabout for pitting themselves against God Almighty. His beard simply sparkled with rage when he did that.

"He wound up by saying that what he, with his puny strength could do, he would do, towards undoing the mischief caused by us infidels, in putting the souls of the Mohammedan world in danger, by deluding the true believers into thinking that this devil-inspired scheme of meddling with the stars in their courses would save them from death."

"What did you do?" I asked.

Mallory lit yet another cigarette and shrugged his shoulders. "I did not know what on earth to do," he frankly confessed. "but the man was evidently a maniac, so I ordered him to be placed in the guard tent until I could communicate with the chief." He sucked in a great lung full of smoke. "But the next morning I found he had escaped, and with him had gone the two guards. That shows you what a persuasive tongue the fellow has, for although the guards were also Kurds, I took care that they should be from a tribe that had a feud with the one to which Hassan Agha belonged. What's more, during the last two months, almost a quarter of the Turkish labor contingent has deserted, and the evidence points to religious agitation against the building of the canal."

The car drew up in front of my quarters, and I reluctantly got out.

"Have you heard any more about the Hadji?" I asked.

"Nothing definite," replied Mallory. "Of course the camp is full of rumors. He has got the sanction of the Divine Porte to destroy the canals. He has formed a secret society of a million members, all pledged to sacrifice their lives, if by doing so they can prevent the flooding of the Caspian Sea. His men have hailed him as the second prophet of Islam, and are begging him to lead a holy war against the Christians. All kinds of stories are floating around. You can't tell how much of them is true. But—" he looked at me seriously—"you don't get smoke without fire. Well, do you think that you'll find any use for what I've just told you?"

"Will I?" I cried. "You may just bet I will, and may I be in a position some day to do you as great a favor as you've just done me."

I rushed upstairs to get at my typewriter. If only I could get some corroboration of this astounding news, thought I. If only I was acquainted with some Turkish Official, who might know something. Wait! What was that name Farintosh mentioned

in his note? I hurriedly ran my fingers through my pockets until I found the chit.

Dear Martin:

I am sorry that I cannot give you that interview just now, as the Supreme Council is giving a dinner and they absolutely insist that I shall be present. I will, however, leave as soon as I can, and will return to my hotel, where I hope to see you. I know you won't mind, but I shall have another visitor in the person of Abdul Pasha, Turkish Minister for the Interior.

Abdul Pasha, that was the name. I looked at my watch. Farintosh could not possibly be free for another hour and a half. I decided that I would write a preliminary account of what Mallory had told me. Then, if I received any confirmation, or further news from Abdul Pasha, I would make what additions were necessary and telephone the whole story to New York.

The report of the opening of the canal gates would have to wait. Anyway the *Echo* had three other correspondents at Port Farintosh.

What a scoop this would be, I gleefully reflected. I hoped that the other newspaper reporters had not got wind of the news.

In a moment I again turned serious, for, if the tale was true, and the Mohammedan world, or at least the fanatical part of it was inflamed against the project to flood the Caspian, then there was grave danger that some of the wild men might do such irreparable damage to the canals that the destruction of the earth would be unavoidable.

I sat down at my desk and determined to do my best to warn the people of the world of the peril they were running into.

## CHAPTER VI

### By Order of the Hadji

**F**ARINTOSH greeted me warmly, when I arrived, and introduced me to his Turkish acquaintance, who seemed to regret having to shake hands with me, as soon as he heard that I was a newspaper reporter, and suddenly remembered that he had an appointment elsewhere. But I did not intend to let him escape so easily and intercepted him on the way to the door.

"Excuse me," I cried. "But I wonder whether you could give me some information?"

The Turk frowned impatiently, but halted, nevertheless.

"I don't give interviews to newspaper reporters," he returned brusquely.

"That's quite all right," I replied. "I don't expect one, but I am on the trail of something important, and if you could answer me just one question, I shall be more than satisfied."

Abdul Pasha eyed me coldly, and I could see that he was weighing in his mind the advisability of refusing my request. He was evidently one of that school of politicians, who distrust the press because of the often unwelcome publicity that they get. But, after all, it was useless to antagonize so great a paper as the *New York Echo*, by refusing to answer something that might prove to be quite harmless. The balance was swaying in my favor.

"Well," said he. "One question cannot do much

harm; but mind, I will answer only one question."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "That's all I want. Can you tell me whether you have ever heard of a certain Hadji Hassan Agha and his activities?"

The Turk started, and for an instant I was permitted to see through the habitual mask of Asiatic stoicism that he wore. Surprise at the question, and fear, was there. Instinctively, he glanced around the room to see if any one else had heard me and then—the mask of apathy slipped over his face again.

He looked at me dispassionately and seemed to be turning the question over in his mind. After a few seconds of seeming ponderance he blankly shook his head. "No," said he. "The name is quite unfamiliar to me. I've never heard of the man." Then, as if fearing another question, he quickly turned on his heel and left the room.

"The liar!" I breathed softly, and stared after the Turk. It seemed incredible that the Hadji, in so little time, had already gained enough power to make a seasoned Anatolian politician tremble at the mere mention of his name. That one instant when I had caught the Pasha off his guard had been sufficient to convince me of the truth of every word that Mallory had said.

Farintosh looked at me with a droll eye. "I thought you came to see me," he remarked drily. "It seems I was mistaken."

"You were, old man," I assured him, and left him standing, while I rushed away to dispatch what I had written.

"A telegram for you, Sir," cried the hotel clerk, as I passed him on the way to my room. I impatiently seized the envelope and tore it open.

"Return at once. Barnes, Morrison and Hughes can cover canal assignment. Must be here Monday. Madden."

I could not help letting a groan escape me.

"Not bad news, I hope," remarked the sympathetic clerk.

"Worst I've ever had," I exclaimed bitterly and viciously crushed the telegram up into a little ball. Just when I had discovered a story that would stir the earth to its smallest village, I was called back to New York and had to trust my wonderful story to others' hands.

It was no use wiring Madden either, for this was Saturday and there was barely enough time to catch the ten o'clock plane for London, let alone to wait for an answer from New York.

I sent a rush call for my three colleagues, booked a seat in the night's air express, and savagely set about packing my belongings. Just as I was strapping my last suitcase, Hughes burst into my room, and was shortly followed by Barnes and Morrison.

"What's up?" cried the first. "Why are you leaving?"

"Orders from Madden to come home," I curtly replied. "Here!" I thrust a sheaf of papers into his hands. "Read what I have written there, and dispatch it the moment you've finished. Then the three of you had better get to work to discover as much as you can about the conspiracy to destroy the canals. I've got to go now. Good-by." I snatched up my bags and opened the door, but turned for a final word. "Remember, boys," I said. "As far as I know, no other newspaper has as yet got wind of this. So keep it under your hats."

"But what is this?" cried Hughes, turning the papers over in a puzzled sort of way. "Conspiracy to destroy the canals?" he read.

"Yes," I snapped. "I've got no time to explain now. Read the papers and then act quickly." I bolted out of the room and was lucky enough to just catch a taxi outside the hotel.

Once aboard the airplane, I began to feel calmer. After all, I reflected, the fellows were really capital reporters, and would undoubtedly ferret out as much news about the Hadji Hassan Agha as I could, if not more, for there were three of them. I would have taken them into my confidence this very evening anyway.

I decided that it was no use worrying; although it was annoying to be so rudely torn away from the scent of the biggest story in my career, yet, after all, I had already discovered the most important details. So consoling myself, I tried to get what rest I could on the journey through the air.

London was reached without mishap, after sixteen hours of steady flying. And there I immediately changed into a Trans-Atlantic seaplane and started for New York.

I knew that the *Echo* had printed my dispatch from Port Farintosh by this time, and perhaps the London newspaper offices were humming with it already. As yet, the afternoon editions had not been issued.

Twenty hours' more flying, and in the distance I saw the smoke cloud that overhung New York. Within thirty minutes I stepped ashore on the landing stage of the Trans-Atlantic Transportation Company.

On the street I bought a copy of the *Echo*, expecting to see at least a part of the follow-up that the boys should have sent in during my voyage. To my surprise, however, there was not even a mention of the conspiracy. There were columns about the opening of the canal, telephotographs of the water spouting into the channels from the openings in the sea walls, reports of long-winded speeches, the stuff that Hughes, Barnes and Morrison had sent in earlier on Saturday afternoon.

I examined every page, and nearly tore the paper to pieces in my search. But in vain. Only too evidently the *Echo* had not received my dispatch, for I knew that if Madden had seen it, nothing on earth could have kept it off the front page of the paper.

The fault, therefore, apparently lay at Port Farintosh, but for the life of me, I could not imagine how my fellow reporters could have neglected to wire my account of the conspiracy. All were good men and true, and more than once had had difficult cases to report. And yet, trustworthy as they were, they had failed to dispatch my story. I did not know what to make of it, but it was evident that somewhere, something was very much wrong.

The taxi drew up, with a jerk, in front of the *Echo* building. I hastily jumped out, paid my fare, and rushed into the building, bent on getting a satisfactory explanation from Madden about the omission of my article from the morning paper.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw the doorkeeper start violently as I scurried past him, but at the moment I attached no especial significance to the fact; I merely put it down to my having startled him by my sudden entrance.

The elevator boy was new, and was inclined to

doubt my right to see the Editor, but at length, though under protest, he deposited me at the proper floor.

I hesitated for a moment outside Madden's door. As usual, a card, bearing the interesting legend: "Engaged. Not to be disturbed," was displayed on the panel. This, however, was chiefly for the benefit of cranks, would-be society ladies, and people who solicited free advertising space for their pet charities, and I had long since learned to ignore it. No, what halted me were the sounds that floated out of the room through the open transom. It seemed as if, for once in his life, Madden was living up to that card outside, for he seemed most decidedly engaged.

Half-a-dozen voices were raised in vehement argument, and all were apparently talking at once. I could hear the Chief pounding heavily on his table as he delivered himself of his sentiments.

"No, sir," he bellowed to make himself heard above the din. "I won't believe that it was an accident. Those boys knew too much to do a fool thing like that. Besides, doesn't it say that their bodies were covered with bruises? That alone is proof of foul play."

"Nothing of the sort," retorted the voice of the Night Editor, who ought to have been in bed. "It says that their boat was caught in the current, and that the boys were drawn under and through the tunnel in the sea wall. That's where they got their bruises—in being battered against the walls of the tunnel."

This was getting interesting, I decided. I wondered what they were talking about, but the next second enlightened me in a manner quite startling.

"Rubbish!" boomed the Chief. "That battering would not have been enough to completely obliterate the features of Martin Ross."

I jumped. This was becoming interesting. Apparently they were discussing my death. I promptly decided that this was the proper psychological moment for my entrance, and so, opening the door, I calmly stepped into the room.

Five very astonished faces stared at me with all the pained surprise of those who believe that they are seeing a ghost.

It was Madden who first recovered himself. "Martin!" he shouted, and rushed at me. "You old rogue. Here we sit talking of your death, and you calmly walk in on us. I suppose it is actually you in the flesh?" He poked me in the ribs with a stubby finger.

"Ouch!" I exclaimed. "Yes, it's me all right." I backed precipitately to the wall. But too late. My friends had already surrounded me and continued to cordially pound my shrinking back, at the same time endeavoring to shake me by the hand.

At last, however, I managed to retreat into a corner and there ward off their exuberantly hearty greetings.

"What's this all about?" I gasped. "And what's this stuff about me being drowned?"

The Chief suddenly became very grave again. "There's bad news, I'm afraid," he said sadly, while he took off his horn-rimmed glasses, wiped them and put them on again. "How were the boys, when you left them?" he asked, and peered keenly into my face.

A sudden foreboding smote me. I knew now the meaning of what I had heard.

"Why—why, they were all right," I faltered. "Is there anything wrong?"

"Listen, Martin," said the Chief, and picked up a yellow cablegram. He glanced warningly at his co-editors and cleared his throat softly. "This is from the Chief of Police at Port Farintosh," he said, "and is dated Sunday noon":

*Regret to report the finding of the four bodies of your four special correspondents at Port Farintosh. Three have been identified as Morrison, Hughes and Barnes. The fourth body is too badly battered for positive identification, but is supposed to be that of your other correspondent, Martin Ross. It is thought that the men met their deaths by rowing in front of the sea wall of canal two, getting caught in the rip and drowning by being drawn through one of the tunnels in the dam. Further investigations are being made and any fresh discoveries will be at once communicated to you.*

(Signed) ALLEN,  
Chief of Police,  
Port Farintosh.

Madden's voice abruptly died and an odd silence hung over the little group. I saw that they were looking at me expectantly. But a new thought had crept into my head, a thought that filled my soul with horror. It was I who was responsible for their deaths, for it was I who had entrusted them with the dangerous mission of exposing the Mohammedan plot to destroy the canals.

Some one stirred restlessly, and Madden again cleared his throat.

"My boy," he said kindly, "can you tell us anything about this?"

A sudden cold rage filled me. "Can I?" I choked. "I can tell you who murdered those poor devils. For murdered they were. This is no accident."

"Who is the man?" broke in the Chief.

"The Hadji Hassan Agha," I replied without further ado, and launched into the tale of my discovery.

"My God!" spluttered the Chief at the end of my narrative. "Then you believe that this fanatic has had those poor fellows murdered?"

"I could swear to it," I answered with conviction.

"But who do you suppose the fourth man is—the one who was taken for you?" asked the Night Editor.

"I think it must have been Mallory, the chap who gave me this information. I know that I mentioned him several times in my notes. I suppose that Hughes and the others went to him for some additional facts, and the Hadji's assassins must have trailed them there and murdered the lot."

"That sounds plausible," nodded Madden. "And then they threw their bodies into the canal? Eh?"

I agreed. "But what shall we do now?" I asked. "It is evident that there is a conspiracy to destroy the canals, and a very powerful one, too, for you can see that even the highest members of the Turkish Government are under its influence. No one but Abdul Pasha could have informed the agents of the society that I knew the secret. Why, for all we know, he might be one of the leaders—"

"What shall we do?" said the Chief, and nearly shattered the table top with a blow of his fist. "What shall we do? Why, we shall do exactly as we would have done before. We'll expose the whole

scheme and kill it with publicity. We'll have it in the afternoon edition. Martin, you had better sit down and immediately rewrite your dispatch. I'll have it in the front page, with any photographs that we may have of Barnes, Hughes, Morrison and Abdul Pasha. Have you any idea what this Hadji looks like?" he asked me.

From Mallory's description, he is a very impressive looking man," I replied. "Tall and cadaverous—looks as if he's burned up inside with the fires of his own fanaticism. Long beard stained with henna and very queer and piercing eyes that sort of stare at you—. A green Hadji's turban, of course, and I suppose, ordinary Kurdish costume."

"Very good," snapped the Chief. "Get one of the black and white artists to draw him from that description. Now then clear out of here, every one of you. I've got to write a new editorial." He herded us out of the door and slammed it to behind us.

## CHAPTER VII.

### Mr. Banner's Goat

THIS is how we made known to the world the plot of a madman to destroy the Caspian canals; to demolish the only hope the people of the earth had, of averting complete destruction from both themselves and from their planet. And yet, did the world believe it? No, indeed, it did not. It laughed at us. Such a thing was impossible, the other papers said. It was doubtful if even a single man existed who did not approve of the experiment to save his life. As for a secret society of a million members, all of whom had pledged their lives to the cause of destroying the earth's one chance of escaping destruction—thus practically murdering all the other people of the world, besides committing suicide themselves—why, such an idea was as ridiculous as it was impossible. No such number of men could have kept their aspirations a secret, and the Turkish Government had been approached and had declared that it had heard nothing whatever about such a plan. Indeed, it had said that the whole story was a fabrication that contained not a grain of truth.

The other papers asked us sardonically, in their editorials, whether besides the word of a sensation-hunting journalist, we had any proof of what we were exposing, and if so, what it was.

The end came three days after my return from Port Farintosh. The dread rumor came flitting round the office that the Old Man was intending to pay us a visit this morning. It was a rare thing indeed for the multimillionaire owner of the paper to call on us; it was only in moments of violent disagreement with some feature of the *Echo's* editorial policy. This time, however, there was little doubt as to what had angered Banner. It was, undoubtedly, the roasting we had received from the rest of the press about our exposure of the Hassan Agha conspiracy.

It was well known that the *Echo* was a weak place in Banner's armor of complacency. It was the heel of this Achilles, his one vulnerable spot, and the New York papers knew it, and loved to prod it. Banner had nursed the *Echo* with care and immense sums of money until it became the greatest paper in the world. But Banner had not yet got used to this, and still regarded it as a puny infant that stood in need of his protection. Therefore, the slightest dispar-

agement of it was still sufficient to bring him fuming up the stairs, to demand the instant dismissal of the luckless reporter who had made a blunder big enough to attract the attention of the other papers.

My expected call did not come until nearly noon, and then, to my relief, I found that Banner had already left, but from the wilted looks of the assembled editors, it had evidently been a fiery session indeed.

"Phew!" exclaimed the Chief, as I entered. "You don't know what we've been through, just because of that confounded discovery of yours."

"What's going to happen?" I asked anxiously. "Are you going to drop the exposure?"

"We have to," explained Madden. "He says that he won't have the *Echo* made the laughing stock of New York. You know how sensitive he is."

"Yes," I cried, "I know that. But in a case like this it ought not to count. Didn't you convince him that what you printed was the truth?"

"I did," said the Chief, "and he says that he firmly believes it now, but just the same he has forbidden me to print another word about it until he gives me leave. Someone, you see, has told him that this story is all faked up, because the *Echo* wants to make some capital out of the accidental death of three of its men in Port Farintosh."

"What a dirty—"

"Of course, he doesn't believe it," hastened Madden. "He swears by the *Echo* anyhow. Anything we print is Gospel Truth to him. But it hurts him to have these things said about us, and he is going to do a little private investigating, before he allows us to say anything more about it. You know what he means by a little private investigating, don't you? He is going to swamp Port Farintosh with quantities of the best paid detectives that he can lay his hands on, and we will get duplicates of their reports. Then, when in Banner's estimation we have sufficient proof, why, we'll open up again. Does that suit you?"

"It will have to," I replied. "I only hope that the detectives will get the proof before the Hadji has time to do any damage."

Next morning the *Echo* printed nothing whatever about the Mohammedan plot. Nor did it the next morning, nor for many a morning after. After a few more sarcastic comments, the New York papers completely forgot about it, and devoted themselves to waging war against the Anti-Tobacco League.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### Towards The Sun

**M**EANWHILE the canals had been completed and, now, began the truly formidable task of demobilizing the millions of men who had been used in their construction. In addition, hundreds of thousands of pieces of valuable machinery had to be sorted out and returned to their owners. The mushroom cities of tents that had sprung up alongside the canals, were to be dismantled and shipped away. Innumerable miles of railway track were torn up and sent back to their country of origin. But all this took time, took many weary months indeed, during which the star was approaching the earth.

Gradually, too, alarmist reports leaked out, that something was the matter with Farintosh's theory.

Already the canals had been running three months, and the Caspian had risen twenty feet, but the observatories reported not the slightest deviation of the earth from its orbit. The rumors gradually grew in numbers, until everyone had heard them, and all kinds of wild conjectures were made.

Some people had already begun to be doubtful if Farintosh's plan would prove successful, and numbers of shady dancing places and cabarets sprang up in all the large cities, which catered to the continually increasing number of people whose motto became: "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

At last the Council decided that extreme measures were necessary to check the rapidly spreading moral degeneration. These resolved themselves into the strict supervision of all places of amusement, and the conscription of still more forced labor.

The Council also instituted a daily bulletin service, which reported chiefly the more cheerful news of the campaign, such as the daily rise in the water-level of the Caspian Sea, the progress made in the returning of the labor battalions and things of that sort. But still the agitation grew, and finally got beyond ignoring. The popular voice demanded, with growing indignation, whether the rumors were true that all their work had been for nothing; that the movement of the earth had not yet been even a little affected by the immense quantity of water that had already passed through the canals.

The Council was forced to confess that no deviation had been noted as yet, but that the astronomers were of the opinion that it was too early to know whether the plan had failed. In fact, many of them thought that the change in the earth's balance would come—not gradually, as had at first been expected, but abruptly, when a sufficiently great amount of water would be displaced to make a new center of rotation absolutely imperative. The earth, they contended, would continue to spin for awhile with a misplaced center of gravity, but in time so much water would flow into the Caspian, that a new axis would be necessary.

This answer, though rather involved, sufficed to pacify the people to some extent. Most of them thought that there still was a good chance of saving themselves. Nevertheless, there was a party openly agnostic, who scoffed at the Supreme Council, and more and more gave themselves over to excess.

Then came the news of famine in China, India and parts of Turkey, where the natives, with Oriental fatalism, decided that they were going to die, and had therefore neglected to put in their crops. Relief measures had to be undertaken, and grain was gathered from all parts of the world, to feed the apathetic masses of the East.

Next the dreaded black plague broke out among the undernourished and non-resisting Chinese, and with amazing speed, spread through the entire Orient. Thus to the horrors of famine were added the still more ghastly sights of the black death.

The physicians of China could not cope with their work, and again a cry went out for help, a cry which did not go unheeded. Thousands of heroic doctors volunteered to brave the terrors of the one disease to which no cure had yet been found, and went to nurse the Chinese. The latter, however, made no effort to resist the plague, but, once in its loathsome grip, seemed to resign themselves to death.

In the face of this apathy, the physicians stood



helpless. They could and did establish hospitals, segregated the stricken, and disinfested the homes and clothes of the people; but save them, once they were touched, they could not. For not even the best skill in the world can save a person, who has made up his mind to die.

China, then, was carefully blockaded by the anxious nations, who sent her foodstuffs, but permitted no one to leave the quarantined country. The disease, however, continued to spread to the west, passed through the lines of the Russian army, which had been impressed to guard the eastern frontier of the Empire and made its appearance in Siberia.

Countless hordes of refugees thronged the roads, leading away from the infected areas, and in their vain endeavor to escape the plague, carried the disease germs with them. Doggedly they trudged down the long dusty roads on their aimless march to anywhere, to any place that the plague had not yet reached. But even as they plodded along many of them already felt the disease gnawing at their vitals. Yet they struggled on, hiding, as best they could, their horrible secret, until their wornout bodies collapsed and were rudely tossed to the roadside, while the ceaselessly moving horde rolled on.

Straight through Russia the plague mowed a wide swath, into Poland and up to the German frontier. Here, fortunately, its progress was stayed, and Europe breathed again."

Six months had passed since the opening of the canal gates—almost half the time allotted to the diverting of the earth and still there was not the slightest promise that Farintosh's plan would be crowned with success. Daily the ranks of the doubters were increased in numbers.

Sinister rumblings of discontent now began to be heard from the working masses. It seemed as if we were living on the top of a volcano, which any moment, might burst out into the scarlet explosion of revolution.

Wildly gesticulating orators stood at the street corners and impassionately asked their fellow workmen why they continued to labor for the cursed capitalists, when the end of the world was nigh. What was the use of slaving, when so little life was left to man? He should enjoy it, they urged, and once and for all, get even with the bloated plutocrats who had ground them down into the dust for so many years.

Ugly disturbances broke out in Fifth Avenue, when several mobs invaded the sacred precincts of fashion and looted some of the big stores. The country was keyed up to such a pitch that every householder kept his shotgun loaded, and took it to bed with him.

Anarchy was turbulently seething in the cauldron of the East Side of New York. At any moment, almost, the frenzied masses of foreigners might break the shackles of restraint and start a Saturnalia of unbridled license.

Suddenly, and with absolutely no warning, a terrific windstorm screeched down upon New York. Awnings, over the shop windows, bellied just once, and then, with the report of a cannon, split and parted from their fastening. The air grew thick with dust and flying debris. So laden, in fact, did it become, that from any point of vantage at the office window, I could barely discern the scurrying crowds below. I heard faint, indistinguishable cries from the street, the smash of bursting window glass and

the agonized hooting of motor cars whose drivers could not see the road, so dusty and congested had the air become. Strange, flapping things soared past my window, and flitted, like gigantic bats, into the murk above the housetops.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the storm, if storm it was, disappeared, and once more the sun shone brightly down upon New York. But now a new murmur was heard—a noise that, quite unaccountably, seemed to be like that of an angry sea. Gradually it grew louder and louder until I could almost have sworn that it was the roaring of storm-tossed waves against a rocky shore. Then the noise receded, died away to a faint murmur and finally subsided entirely.

The telephone rang sharply, and I jumped to the receiver.

"Is that the *Echo* office?" chattered an excited voice. "This is Simmons speaking. A tidal wave has just wrecked most of the shipping in the docks, and has flooded the warehouse district. Millions of dollars worth of damage done to shipping and houses. Hundreds of men killed and thousands injured. A fifty-foot wall of water—" the babbling voice ceased. I tried to get reconnected, but the arrow on the dial of the automatic phone swung round to "Line out of order."

The instant I got up, the phone rang again. I picked it up, thinking it might be Simmons again, but I was mistaken.

"Martin," cried a familiar voice, "is that you? It's happened! It's happened!"

"What's happened? That's you, Farintosh, isn't it?"

"Why, man, have you no senses? Didn't you see what just happened?"

"I've seen the worst windstorm I've ever been in, and I hear that a tidal wave has flooded part of New York. Is that what you mean?"

"No," thundered Farintosh. "Those are merely incidental to the earth's change of axis and to the altered rate of rotation."

"Do you mean to say—"

"Yes, I do. We've succeeded. We've changed the earth's course, though, to what extent, we won't know for some time. But the chief thing is that we've diverted it from its orbit, and—you can put that in your paper."

The following twenty-four hours never once heard a falling off in the crash and roar of our gigantic printing presses. Yet, fast as we issued copies of the *Echo*, we could not keep pace with the demand. All New York and his wife seemed to be buying papers, reading the scant extra information, and then buying another edition—ten minutes later.

And certainly the news that came through fully warranted their excitement. First came the accounts of the terrible toll taken, all over the world, by the tidal wave. Few ships indeed had been able to weather the combined forces of the sudden blast of wind and the contending sea currents. Appalling stories came of damage done inland, for the sea had invaded not only New York, but all the cities on the Atlantic coastline of the two Americas. China, by some perversity of fortune, had once more to bear more than her share of the cataclysm. Vast areas of her fruitful, but low-lying lands were inundated by the westward rushing floods.

Then messages arrived from various astronomical

observatories, saying that their instruments had recorded a distinct change in the movement of the earth, that it was thought to have slowed up in its revolutions to the extent of about half an hour a day—that it had also changed its course—slightly towards the sun.

After this came more news of disaster on land and sea, but appalling as was the price paid for the slight deviation of the earth from its orbit, the Supreme Council, and the governments of the world considered it well worth while. For now that the plan had proved possible, and, indeed, already in part successful, the much feared bogey of anarchy would vanish before the reawakened confidence of the people.

Thus, in truth, it turned out to be, and also, with the people's new faith in his project, Farintosh's popularity was suddenly restored. Once more his face appeared in the shop windows, and enthusiastic crowds gathered outside his house, waiting for a chance to cheer him. Hope was the dominant note of the world again.

Fuller reports from astronomical sources arrived in due course to give fuller particulars as to the earth's altered orbit. It appeared that while our planet had slightly approached the sun, yet the deviation was not nearly great enough to carry the earth clear of the track of the comet, most of the twisting force of the overbalancing weight of water in the Caspian having been used up in retarding the spinning of the earth by twenty-nine minutes.

The astronomers, however, held out the hope that, as more water flowed through the canals, the deviation would become more pronounced and finally suffice to bring the earth out of the road of the comet. On the other hand, the scientists were particularly careful to make clear the fact that if our planet continued to deviate from its course at the same ratio to the weight of water passed through the canals, then, though it might pass beyond the orbit of the comet, it would still be close enough for the laws of gravitation—mutual attraction—to apply. Thus, they explained, our planet might yet be drawn to its doom—engulfed in the sphere of flaming gases that rocketed through the skies. They demonstrated this law by quoting the well-known example of two ships lying becalmed on a motionless sea. The vessels would be mutually attracted, would near each other and, finally, if undisturbed, would gently collide.

Another thing that had been the object of much anxiety to the astronomers was the probable conduct of the moon, when the earth should change its course. All fears proved groundless, however, when this event happened, for so strong was the gravitational bond between our planet and the moon, that the latter moved with the earth, and rigidly maintained its former distance.

But these hopes and speculations did not seem to interest the mass of the people much. They had seen, and indeed, felt the earth change its orbit, and that, to them, was sufficient.

They were firmly convinced by this time that our planet would, somehow, depart enough from its course, to easily evade the clumsy charge of its celestial antagonist.

And, what good, after all, would the complicated speculations indulged in by scientists, do the great mass of the people?

## CHAPTER IX

## The Glorious Fiasco

**B**UT, while many people were satisfied with the prevailing state of affairs, some were not, and among the latter were numbered the editorial and reportorial staffs of the *Echo*. For six months now we had been waiting for a satisfactory explanation of the deaths of our colleagues, Morrison, Hughes, Barnes and my friend and informant, Mallory, and still no credible story was given. Now, a fortnight after the sudden correction of the earth's center of gravity, an informal meeting in Madden's room was for the twentieth time debating whether it would be wise for us to take the matter into our own hands and again print as much as we knew about Hadji Hassan Agha. And, for the twentieth time, the proposal was overruled, for, after all, we had no additional information whatever about the Hadji and his supposed activities.

The reports from the detectives employed by Banner were singularly lacking in news; indeed, one would judge from them that there was no such person as the Hadji. It is true that two of the more zealous investigators had sent us one or two rather promising letters, but these men had disappeared mysteriously, apparently on the trail of some important clue. And their colleagues seemed to find nothing suspicious in their disappearance and apparently never considered making any inquiry about their missing confrères. Yet we, in the office, had absolutely no doubt as to the fate of the unfortunate investigator, who might stumble across any information that the Hadji and his associates would wish to be kept secret.

What chiefly puzzled us, however, was that the madman had made no obvious move for the destruction of the canals. It seemed impossible that any religious fanatic, at the head of a million impatient followers, could restrain himself for so long a period without making any sign that could be detected by our more or less vigilant staff of watchers. We should have known better, for patience is the greatest virtue of the Asiatic. Time, of all things, he has enough of, and to spare.

On the other hand, there was a certain time limit within which the Hadji knew that he must act. Already the earth had been diverted some little way from its path—and this in direct defiance of the Hadji's prophesy that Allah would not permit such an impious thing to happen. If he delayed much longer, he would risk losing the faith of his men and, therefore, we argued, if he was going to start any trouble, it would be soon. But, though we were all morally certain of the plot to destroy the Caspian canals, we were not permitted to print a single word without the sanction of Banner, the owner of the paper, who was still waiting for corroboration from his precious detectives.

It was a maddening situation. Here we were, absolutely dependent upon the words of a few men, whose errand in Port Farintosh was well known, and for whom the stage in that city had been carefully set. I protested. "But this is impossible," I cried. "We cannot keep on waiting indefinitely for those investigators of Banner's to find out something. There isn't time enough. Why, before they ever notice anything, the Hadji will be able to blow up

every sea wall that the canals boast of, and set Port Farintosh on fire as well."

"I know," soothed Madden. "They are a pretty hopeless bunch since their leading lights have been weeded out, but, as you say, this has gone far enough." A flame of resolution suddenly lit his face. "And by G——," he exclaimed, pounding the table top, "it shall go no further." He seized the telephone attached to Banner's private wire, and called for the owner of the paper.

"Is that you, Banner?" He boomed a moment later. "This is Madden. Now I'm going to talk again about that Mohammedan conspiracy—"

"No, there have been no new developments, but just the same, I'm going to print the story to-morrow."

"I don't care if you do. I've neglected my duty long enough because of your sensitiveness. The story will go."

The Chief slammed the receiver back on the hook and wheeled triumphantly around in his chair. "Well, that's that," he said in a satisfied tone. "We'll feature the story on the front page again and keep on dinning it into the heads of the public, until they—"

The phone rang and drowned the rest of his words.

"Yes," he said. "Hadden speaking."

"No, I will not reconsider it."

"What?"

A prolonged silence.

"Very well, I'll put it to them," and again the receiver was slammed back on its hook.

"Banner says that it would be ridiculous to print the same story we printed six months ago, without any extra information. He says that since we do not trust his investigators, why don't we send down three or four reporters secretly, let them ferret out some news, if they can, and then reprint the exposure. What do you fellows think of it?" He looked at us inquiringly.

"We-e-ell," drawled the City Editor at last. "It seems to me that there isn't time enough for that sort of thing, but perhaps Banner is right. We ought to have some additional news. Otherwise the other papers will roast us like anything, for springing the same old stuff on the public."

"If we did so, it would go to show, anyway, that we were serious," said the Sporting Editor. "Just the same, I agree with old Smith." He nodded at the City Editor.

The rest of us agreed, and it was settled then and there, that I should return to Port Farintosh, on the morrow, by airplane, and take with me any three reporters I wanted.

But it was fated that all our preparations for uncovering the Hadji's plot should prove useless, for on the next day came news calculated to rouse every man to a white heat of anger. The calamity, long foreshadowed by me, but scoffed at by most people, had happened.

Taking advantage of the completed withdrawal of all the labor battalions, the Hadji, with his men, had attacked and overpowered the guards and engine house crews, left in charge of the colossal sea walls. Then, at his leisure, he had destroyed those magnificent structures.

I can do no better than to quote the *Echo* of that

morning, and are therefore printing the following:

### CASPIAN CANALS DESTROYED— MOSLEMS DYNAMITE GATES— PORT FARINTOSH BOMBARDED

#### Secret Society Resents Attempt to Save the Earth and so Damages Canals that Engineers Despair of Reconstruction

The *Echo* learns from the Associated press correspondent at Port Farintosh that yesterday afternoon a dastardly attempt was made to destroy the Caspian canals, on whose safety the future of the whole earth hinges.

It will be remembered that some six months ago this paper printed a number of articles, exposing the plot of some fanatical Mohammedans to destroy the canals, because it seemed impious to their leader to meddle with the stars in their courses. At that time it was our fate to be scoffed at, and our warnings went unheeded. Consequently, the conspirators were left unhindered to work out their nefarious plans; today we hear the fruits of this neglect to take us seriously.

PORT FARINTOSH, December 20, 1936. At three o'clock this afternoon, the Turkish fleet in the Black Sea, consisting of ten cruisers and twenty destroyers, accompanied by a fleet of airplanes, appeared off Port Farintosh and without notice of any kind, bombarded the city for thirty minutes, then sailed on. One hour later they disembarked ten thousand men at the landing stages, between the sea walls of the canals. The watchmen and the engine house crews offered as much resistance as could be expected from unarmed men, but they were finally driven back and shot down. The raiders then proceeded to systematically plant charges of high explosives in all vulnerable spots, apparently being directed in their work by skilled engineers. Vast quantities of explosives were used, for the surviving watchmen state that the boats were kept going continually, to and fro, between the battleships and the piers, bringing off load after load of rexite.

At seven o'clock all the preparations were completed and one after the other the sea-walls were blown up. The ruin is complete. Not a vestige of the gigantic dams is to be seen above the sea water, which is now rushing turbulently into the open canals. The Turkish vessels, after making sure that the damage was complete, are now steaming back across the Black Sea.

A later dispatch gave the same news, with a few additional facts. It appeared that no danger had been suspected when the Turkish ships entered the Sea of Azof, for the Sultan had expressed a wish to see the canals; indeed, preparations had been made for his welcome. The bombardment of Port Farintosh was, therefore, as unexpected as it was senseless. The Sultan, too, must have been cognizant of the conspiracy, for it was he who obtained permission to visit the canals, and he sailed into

the Sea of Azof at the head of his fleet, in the Royal yacht.

Rumors, it was said, were current in Port Farintosh and Rostov that the deed lay at the door of a certain Hadji Hassan Agha, a fanatical leader of certain Moslems, who believed that the plan to divert the earth was against the will of Allah and would bring eternal damnation upon the souls of all who aided it. It was whispered that during the last six months, the whole Turkish fleet had been secretly manned by these conspirators, who were sworn to prevent interference with the earth's course—the very same stuff that was refused credence when it was printed in the *Echo*. Engineers, who had examined the sites of the sea walls, declared that their reconstruction was impossible. They feared that the plan of the conspirators to let the canals get choked up by the sand would prove successful. The sea was already pouring in at a tremendous rate, and signs of erosion were becoming visible in many parts of the canal banks.

This was the news that greeted me in the *Echo* on the morning of my proposed flight to Europe. Of course there was no necessity for me to go to Port Farintosh anymore, so I cancelled the seats of my three companions and myself in that day's plane, and rushed to the office. There was nothing more to be done there however, and I returned to my diggings.

The *Echo* had the barren satisfaction of saying, "I told you so," but that didn't help matters much. A frightful howl went up from the other papers for the blood of whoever was responsible for not heeding the warning, so plainly given by us six months before. The *Echo* itself came in for a considerable roasting from the New York press because it had not continued giving the warning in spite of what the other papers said. Banner, in particular, was severely censured for having muzzled the one organ of the press that knew what it was talking about.

Oddly enough the actions of the conspirators received little comment, for the deed was done now and could not be undone. Moreover, the Hadji and his followers came to be looked upon as irresponsible lunatics, and therefore, more worthy of pity than of censure.

The responsibility for the catastrophe was quickly laid upon the Supreme Council for neglecting to take heed of the *Echo's* warning. But this was not enough. It was almost impossible, for the public to blame or punish a disembodied council of two hundred members.

The people wanted a real scapegoat—they wanted one man.

Again a marvelous change in the temper of the people had taken place. A day or two ago, they had been raised to the heights of rejoicing, because, after months of doubt, they were told that there still was a good chance of being saved themselves. Now they were suddenly plunged into the depths of despair, because that one chance had been taken away from them.

There was an undercurrent of vengeful feeling running through their emotions. Somebody should suffer for this, they were resolved. But who? Suddenly the answer came to them, and a mob of several thousand people gathered in Fifth Avenue, in front

of the house of Banner, who, it seemed to their crazed imaginations, was directly responsible for the destruction of the canals—their only chance of salvation.

In vain did patrol wagon after patrol wagon bring its load of blue-clad policemen to overawe the constantly growing mob. The crowd bayed for its man, and steadily, step by step, the expostulating guardians of the law were forced back to the very door of the house. Then, in desperation, one of the hard-pressed policemen drew a club, and used it. He was pulled down. Forthwith the voice of the crowd took a new note. It had smelled blood, and immediately the blood lust was aroused. The crowd turned instantly into a mob of raving beasts, whose appetite would be appeased only by the death of Banner.

There was a sudden forward surge, and the blue line of policemen vanished, as if by magic. A sickening crash followed and the splintered door swung open—smashed by the impact of twenty maddened men with the weight of hundreds more behind them. The horde poured into the splendidly appointed mansion.

Their quarry, however, had disappeared. So had all the servants, and the disappointed rabble vented its anger by smashing all the furniture and priceless works of art in the house. Then they piled all the wreckage in the road and made a gigantic bonfire of it.

New York, moreover, was not the only city in which such acts of violence occurred. In London, several Turkish subjects, wearing fezzes, were set upon and badly beaten by a crowd of infuriated Englishmen, who saw in them representatives of that blind, unreasoning "religion," that had fostered the insane conspiracy.

Paris and Berlin too had their cases of mob fury, for in both cities the Turkish embassies were sacked and destroyed. Indeed it was only with the utmost effort that the police of those countries were able to save the lives of the Anatolian diplomatic representatives.

In addition, the beautiful Mohammedan mosque in the French capital was set aflame by an army of workmen and students, who marched down upon it in a great column, with much singing of patriotic songs and wavings of the tricolor.

The British Cruiser Squadron in the Eastern Mediterranean, which had been revictualling at Cyprus, on hearing of the infamous deed, immediately steamed off for the Dardanelles, hoping to catch its perpetrators before they could block the entrance of the Black Sea. But their search was useless, for the Turkish battle fleet was never again seen.

And when it reached the centre of the Black Sea, every ship of the fleet was scuttled by its own crew. The men, with a fanatical frenzy, preferred to go at once to the assured joys of Paradise, rather than risk the possibility of suffering terrestrial punishment at the hands of the enraged infidels.

Thus went the degenerate, known to history as the last Sultan of Turkey, and with him perished Hadji Hassan Agha, the insane leader of a fanatical multitude, who for fear of eternal punishment, had tried to carry out their perverted notion of the will of Allah.

## CHAPTER X

## Trial by Fire and Water

**D**AYS passed, while we expected hourly to hear that the flow of one or another of the canals had ceased. But, though reports kept coming, stating that erosion continued on a gigantic scale all along the banks of the canals, nothing, as yet, indicated that the daily quantity of water entering the Caspian had in the least been diminished. In fact, all the evidence pointed to the contrary. The water was now flowing through the canals at a much greater speed than it had done before the destruction of the sea walls, and though it was possible that the canals were becoming shallower, because of the vast amount of silt washed from their sides, yet this shallowness was compensated by the added width of the channels.

In addition, engineers reported that the nature of the soil was such that a great part of it could be carried in suspension by the swiftly moving water, and either deposited in the wide Liman Lake, or else discharged into the Caspian sea.

Things seemed not so dark as they had been thought. Then, too, came cheering messages from various astronomical observatories, which announced a greatly accelerated deviation of the earth, from its old path about the sun. This, the scientist said, was due to an increased weight of water entering the Caspian every day. Let this keep up, they said, for another four months and the earth will be in a fair way to easily escape the dangerous proximity of the comet.

Unconsciously, perhaps, but genuinely, nevertheless, the average man began to hearten up again. "It would be odd," he mused, "if those crazy nuts have gone and increased the earth's chances of being saved, instead of destroying them." And then he would slap his knee with enjoyment at the idea and would go and tell it to his friends.

And as he thought, so it proved to be. For instead of choking up, the canals continued to flow and even grew several feet wider every day, while the washed-out soil was carried away on the swift moving currents, to stain the fast rising Caspian a strange earthen hue.

Five more months separated us from the date on which the comet was to have met the earth. And five months of weary anguished waiting they proved to be. Night after night the blazing sphere seemed to be swelling bigger and bigger and morning after morning it grew more and more reluctant to sink its bloated bulk below the horizon. Already it exceeded in size the biggest of our planets and outshone Mars' ruddy glow with a fiery brightness, the like of which had never before been seen.

Day by day, too, the earth edged towards the sun. Soon we were four hundred thousand miles nearer, and gradually passed the five, six and eight hundred marks, but the margin of safety was not yet great enough.

Slowly, as we approached the sun, the weather changed. Thunderstorms grew to be more frequent and increased in intensity. Torrential rains suddenly began to fall in spots, not at all noted for their humidity. The days were getting warmer. Although it was the middle of winter in New York, the snow never once stayed on the ground, but melted at the

moment of contact with the wet pavements. This surprising mildness was prevailing all over the world. The Sea of Azof, whence started the Caspian canals, did not freeze solid, as was its wont, did not even show the least trace of ice, and the much feared freeze-up of the canals failed to materialize. A green winter was the rule over the greater part of the temperate zone.

All these phenomena were explained to be due entirely to the earth's approach to the sun, and to the greater heat absorbed by our planet.

In the Southern Hemisphere, also, people were experiencing a great change in temperature. Such a hot summer was absolutely unprecedented; indeed it was almost unbearable. Fortunately, however, the sun's rays beat down so hotly upon the Southern Seas that unusually great evaporation took place, and the parched lands were cooled, to some extent, by the frequent rains. Towering cumuli of snowy clouds, shaped like giant castles on fairy mountain ranges, sailed majestically into the central Australian desert, to shower the startled prospector, who for unnumbered years had never felt a drop of rain upon his leathery skin.

Whalers reported that even the Southern Ice Cap was rapidly shrinking and disclosing to human eyes, for the first time, the outlines of the Antarctic Continent.

Then came the series of startling orders from the Supreme Council that proved that body's admirable foresight. First, the Council decreed that the nations of the world should remove all the available food supplies from the low-lying coastal cities, and store it on land that was more than a thousand feet above sea level. Secondly, the Council demanded the construction of camps around these bases of supply to house the population of the coastal cities, which the Council ordered to be gradually evacuated.

These measures were necessary, the Council declared, because of the gigantic tides that would be bound to circle the earth, on the close approach of the comet. For, said they, as the moon in revolving around the earth causes the tides, so would the gravitational pull of the wandering asteroid cause floods far greater than those caused by the moon.

There was a great outcry at the statement that the destruction of the great cities was assured, but the people of the earth had learned their lesson, and no longer doubted the word of the Supreme Council. They remembered, only too well, the tidal waves of three months ago, when the earth had first corrected its centre of gravity, and the terrible toll it took of human lives.

Eighty-seven days' grace the astronomers promised us, before the comet should be at its nearest point to the earth, and either, with its inconceivable heat, entirely disintegrate our planet into its component gases, or else, leave it to stagger on in its new course. In these last few days, a flurry of frenzied preparation for the forced evacuation of the world's greatest cities began. From the Atlantic seaboard of North America alone, thirty million people had to be removed to the safer highlands, and with them went their luggage and as many of their household effects as could be transported. Enormous herds of cattle were collected from the sea-threatened farms, and driven into the interior, there to be held as an emergency reserve, in case the

food supply of the houseless city refugees gave out.

All was managed in our own country with an order and efficiency that spoke of marvellous organization. Some nations, however, were less fortunate. The peasantry of the Asiatic nations, even under compulsion, refused to leave their ancestral lands.

That year spring came very early, and merged into summer heat with startling rapidity. The vegetation would soon have become parched, if it had not been for the very frequent rains. But we soon had more than enough of rain, too, for drenching downpour succeeded thundering cloudburst with a regularity that first grew monotonous, and then became hateful. I began to loathe the sound of water swishing on the pavements.

It rained incessantly, with the exception of a few brief spells, when the sun shone between the dark-edged clouds and burned us, as with a magnifying glass.

Only thirty days were left now, and the canals were running more and more sluggishly, because the Caspian Sea was fast filling.

The comet was now half the size of the sun and quite as brilliant. There was no longer any night, for the hours of sleep were now lit by the crimson splendour of the flaming ball of gas. Indeed, night was now the brighter half of the day and it was only because of the unbearably lurid light of the comet, that the hours of sleep and work were not reversed.

In any event, sleep was a thing much desired, but not to be had. The hot-house heat made it impossible. Men tossed restlessly all through the sweltering night, to get up next morning unrefreshed, red-eyed and haggard-featured to start another day's weary toil. Is there any wonder that, during those days of terrible sleepless stress, so many men went mad and destroyed themselves.

Still the heat increased, and with it came a greater rainfall. The heavens were screened from sight by an inky pall that seemed to hang just a few feet over the roofs and ever vomited forth a ceaseless deluge. The roll of nearby thunder was continually in our ears and drowned out practically all other sounds. Vivid lightning flashes rent the sky, and through the cracked bowl of heaven showed us the flames of hell.

The two Americas were isolated from the rest of the world because of the eternal storms that rendered the seas impassable. The sailors reported that enormous evaporation was going on. So much steam was rising from the surface of the water that it was as thick as a North Sea fog. Navigation, except by dead reckoning, was impossible and no one was foolhardy enough to attempt that, because it was known that the sea currents had altered.

Small brooks grew into mighty torrents that thundered into immense bodies of swiftly moving waters that once had been mere rivers. Vast areas of low-lying ground were turned either into marshes, or else into large lakes. A wireless report came from Germany to the effect that the city of Berlin was showing signs of subsiding into a morass that had crept up around it.

Luxurious herbage was springing up everywhere, because of the humidity! semi-tropical vegetation was reported even in Scandinavia. Certain scien-

tists predicted a return of the earth to a state comparable to the Jurassic Age, when gigantic reptilian monsters wallowed in the ooze, and browsed off the lush herbage that covered the earth then.

A week before *the day* the gravitational pull was seen to affect the ocean visibly. A great tide surged up against the Atlantic Coast—a tide greater than any yet known in the history of man. It rolled across the Pacific and dashed against the Japanese and Chinese coasts. Then was seen the wisdom of the Supreme Council's command, that all people should be moved out of reach of the floods. This time too the Celestial Empire suffered, through disregard of the Council's warning. Millions of people were caught and drowned, like rats in a trap, in the crowded warrens of their cities. Unnumbered tens of thousands of Chinese peasants, who had refused to leave their farms, were likewise drowned, and a vast area of country was inundated.

This flood, however, was nothing compared to the second day's tide, that with the comet's nearer approach, and therefore increased gravitational action, was almost twice as great as that of the day before.

For many days now we had not seen the sun or the stars, because of the pall of clouds that hid the firmament from sight. Most of the astronomical observatories were thus put out of commission, leaving only a few in the higher altitudes, that continued to send out reports. But, as the comet drew nearer, it gave off so much heat that even the mountain observatories complained of being wreathed in fogs. At last only two lookouts at the thirteen thousand-foot level were free from nebular interference. These reported the comet to be much larger than the moon; they reported that it filled a whole quarter of the sky's bowl and was unbearably bright to look upon. The asteroid's tail, without which no comet is popularly supposed to be complete, never had been visible with our celestial visitor, and now had completely disappeared behind the body of the comet.

Even to us, who lay panting upon the rocks of the Catskills, the brightness of the comet was evident. The whole sky, at night time, was like the inside of a glowing cauldron. The very clouds seemed charged with crimson fire, and writhed and bellied over our heads, like some celestial monsters in deadly combat. Lightning continually criss-crossed the sky in a lurid mosaic, and yet seemed insignificant beside the awful grandeur of the firmament aflame.

Day by day the floods rolled higher and higher against the mountains, and, at ebb, strewed their lower slopes with more and more wreckage of the cities. Here lay the ruined half of a house, and there a wooden garage deposited upright upon a piece of level ground. Further away, among the tangle of boards, lay the wreck of a fishing schooner that had been picked up by the tide and carried inland. Here and there too, lay the bloated bodies of live stock that had been caught by the water, and yet further apart were found the occasional bodies of some unfortunate mortals who had been overtaken by the flood, perhaps while in search of some dear one, from whom they had become separated in the final wild rush for the hills.

But the troubles of strangers did not much engage us at the time. We were too much absorbed in our

own misery to take much thought of anybody else. The torment we endured there is still so deeply graven on my mind, that I am reluctant to speak of it. It was the hardest test of the temper of a people that could be imagined. All weaklings, all those mentally imperfect were ruthlessly searched out by the ordeal of fire and water. Only the fit survived. The others perished.

Daily, with inexpressible anxiety, we watched the floods and listened to the occasional reports from the observatories. We were too wrought up, even to hazard guesses with one another, as to what the final outcome would be. Some, I think, were too spent to care.

However, my misery was not so great as to deprive me of thought. Will we be successful? Will we be successful? The question rang in my head. During those days it seemed to become an integral part of my mind. It was impossible for me to think of anything else. In my fancy, I saw it written on the flaming heavens. Huge question marks danced before my eyes, wove themselves into intricate designs and grotesque figures. I remember how I once startled my friends by insisting that an aged man, whose bent figure I saw shuffling along in the distance, was the incarnation of the question mark. My friends thought that I had gone mad. Perhaps I had—I cannot tell you now.

After aeons of infernal torture, after having been baked, steamed and stewed, it seemed since the beginning of time—news came that the morrow was the deciding day. At ten minutes past three—old time—either the earth would fall into the comet—in which case we should all be mercifully incinerated in a very few seconds—or the earth would get a new lease on life.

Higher and higher raged the baffled tide that day. Great clouds of salt spray were borne on the hot wind and drenched us where we lay.

The time was nearing three o'clock and, with a great deal of mental, as well as physical effort, I staggered to my feet and made my way to the nearest news booth, whence the latest information was megaphoned to the surrounding crowd. A large number of the most energetic people of the neighborhood were gathered there, yet, never in my life had I beheld a more washed out gathering. They hung over the benches in a manner that suggested nothing so much as limp sea weeds, draped over a rock. There was no talking; no movement. Each new arrival limped up in weary silence, slumped into a seat and stayed dumbly in the position he had fallen into.

The telephone operator sat humped in his chair, as if his spine had melted with the heat. A soggy cigarette hung from his lips, and his eyes stared sightlessly at the horizon. Now and again, as a message came through, he croaked hoarsely into the voice amplifier, and we heard the news of the world.

"Three o'clock," he said, and the big trumpet reproduced his voice in a gigantic whisper.

"The comet is now only eighteen million miles distant and is still approaching at the rate of about thirty thousand miles per second. The next ten minutes will tell whether the earth is going to continue as a separate entity, or not."

A drowsy murmur rose in the crowd, but the effort proved too much for them, and soon their voices died away. The thunder rolled more loudly

than ever. Jagged sheets of flame swept around the sky, and the rain descended so thickly as to hide from view all objects more than five yards distant. We sat in the open, but nobody minded the rain any more. It was the heat, which seemed to be increasing with every moment, that we found objectionable. Heavy white vapours rose up from the sodden ground.

Suddenly, I felt the earth pitch with a wavelike motion. It knocked me off my seat. I got up and was promptly knocked down again by a second wave. The news kiosk swayed drunkenly and remained leaning far out of the perpendicular. The telephone operator, however, did not seem to be much concerned.

"Earthquake," said the horn laconically.

It seems odd to me, now, how in all that crashing war of elements, the whispering voice could penetrate to our ears. Shocks came regularly after that, and I gave up getting up.

A puff of wind, hot as from the nether regions, suddenly whipped mud into my face, and before I could move, a gale was roaring over my head. Fortunately for me, I was lying in a little hollow, and most of the wind swept over me.

For an amazed moment I saw the news booth bounding away over the country side, like a startled kangaroo, and shedding boards at every jump. I never saw what happened to the telephone operator, but the hut disintegrated in six leaps; only the conical roof continued to skim on into the grey distance.

This, though it takes long to read, actually happened in the fraction of a second that elapsed, before I was forced to close my eyes because of the force of the wind. I lay flat on my face and pillowed my head on my arms. During the minutes that followed I was not aware of either rain or thunder. I knew only the raving fury that just skimmed over my back and seemed to be trying to tear me out of my little haven. I dug my fingers into the mud, and hugged the earth still closer.

Twirling fragments of buildings hurtled over my head or bounded over my sheltering hollow. A large plank, it seemed, slapped me mightily across the back, and knocked all the wind out of me. For some minutes I lay gasping, at the same time realizing how lucky I was that the plank had not hit edge on.

The wind had gathered up all the mud and water off the ground and was choking me by degrees. It was almost impossible to breathe the semi-liquid stuff, and I had to try to filter it through my teeth.

Though it seemed as though I had lain there several hours, I learned later that it could not have been more than several minutes. I was beginning to wonder dully how much longer I would have to remain when I suddenly heard an earsplitting thunderclap. I continued to cower in my hollow for a few more seconds, for I did not realize its significance at first. After a moment I began to notice that, although the wind was still roaring madly overhead, it seemed to have lessened slightly in intensity.

I sat up boldly, and for my venturesomeness was immediately blown over on my back; I rolled like a tumbleweed for several yards, and then dropped into the pit, over which the kiosk had stood.

Here I was more sheltered than I had been in

my previous resting place, and could take a little more stock of what was happening.

There was no doubt about it. The wind was lessening. Above its roar I could now hear the rumbling thunder quite distinctly. As far as I could see—I did not dare to stick my head out of my sheltering hole—there was not so much debris flying through the air. But there was something else. Something that seemed at first glance to be snow. When one of the grayish flakes settled on my hand and burned me however, I knew differently. This grey blizzard flitting over my head was composed of scoriae—volcanic ashes.

The knowledge stunned me for a moment. An active volcano in this part of the North American continent! It seemed impossible. Then I noticed that the earth-tremors that had disturbed me, seemingly hours ago, had not yet subsided. I had only gotten used to them. Even as I sat there, cracks appeared in the opposite side of the pit, and the whole wall gently slithered down burying me up to my knees. I decided that anything was possible.

The wind was dropping decidedly. Many more of the hot scoriae were being blown into my pit, whereas, previously, they had travelled almost horizontally over my head. I was kept busy, slapping them off my clothes, for I knew from experience that they would burn through even wet cloth. It was then, that I made the discovery, that I had somehow or other, in my recent adventures lost both my raincoat and cap. This was all the more odd since my coat had been closely buttoned up and belted around me. I had not the least idea as to when the disrobing had taken place and the surprise of it took me so unexpectedly that I doubled up with laughter.

After a while I determined to see how many hours had elapsed since I came to the kiosk. My watch said it was twenty minutes past three. I looked at it uncomprehendingly and then held the timepiece to my ear. It was ticking vigorously. But my every sense protested against its mute testimony. Only twenty minutes. Ridiculous! The watch must have stopped, and then started running again when I pulled it out of my pocket.

Then some constricting band seemed to snap in my head. Why, the telephone operator had said that at ten past three the earth would be at its closest to the comet. Even if my watch had stopped some time, it registered that the danger point had passed!

I suddenly was delirious with joy and leaped and danced around my narrow shelter like a mad man.

"Victory! Victory!" I yelled, and waved my arms above my head, so that the watch, dangling at the end of a torn chain, swooped round and banged against my forehead. This brought me back to my senses. But I did not care for the pain. I knew, I knew that we had won. Nature had been conquered. I recalled the prophetic words that Dr. Schreiner had spoken so long ago to poor old Mallory. "Man, that microscopic mite, that mere parasite that infests the earth, man, is now the master of the Universe. Now the earth is the mere domicile of man. Who knows whither he will spread from it."

I looked aloft. The grey sleet had gone. The wind was still furious, but no worse than a very bad storm. A big raindrop splashed into my up-

turned face, and, an instant later, a solid wall of water roared down upon me.

With rain, however, I was by now familiar. I buttoned up my coat, turned up its collar, and clambered out of the pit, to seek my friends.

## CHAPTER XI

### The New Order

**S**LOWLY, as the comet receded, the tides and the heat grew less. And slowly the people crept down from the hills. Weary, and much lessened in numbers, they followed the retreating tides. And yet, they went joyously, and filled with pride at their achievement. Their weary march was in reality a triumphal procession; the return of the victorious warriors—to a land of desolation.

People had been prepared for "the worst." But their conception of it was immeasurably less than it turned out to be. Cries of consternation took the place of vainglory when they saw what damage had been done.

Fruitful farms had been turned into desert seas of salt mud; their boundaries had been destroyed. Whole orchards were either uprooted or smashed to kindling, where they stood. Heaps of mud coated rubble, or gaping, brine-filled pits marked the places where comfortable homes had once stood. The country was unrecognisable.

The worst scenes of destruction, however, were to be found in the big cities. Vast mounds of stone and brick lay about in indescribable confusion. It looked as though some giant had maliciously kicked down the works of man, and then trampled on the ruins. Enormous skeletons of steel that had been considered indestructible, had been twisted up, like bundles of piano wire, while the masonry, that had once covered their bare ribs, lay heaped about their bases.

Here and there, it is true, stood some buildings wholly or partially intact, as monuments to their architects. But these were few and far between, and generally were the smaller buildings. The larger buildings had suffered most from the force of the gigantic tides.

Streets, avenues and public squares had been obliterated by the shower of debris. All the familiar landmarks had gone and nothing was left to guide the homeseeker through the barren waste of bricks.

It was terrible. It was pitiful to see the ruin of so many hopes, so much hard work, so many little fortunes that men had slaved for through the best years of their lives. But this, as the people well realized, was no time for lamentation, and the world plunged grimly into the toil of reconstruction.

The earth was now ten million miles nearer the sun than it had been two years ago. Four-fifths of this astonishing distance was covered in the twenty minutes while the comet was passing it. The asteroid, being so much greater than our own planet, the latter had been attracted to it, like a nail is to a horseshoe magnet. The comet, however, was traveling sunward at the rate of thirty thousand miles per second—too fast for the earth to catch up with it, and our planet was gradually left behind, until it was out of range of the comet's gravitational attraction.

Fortunately for the earth, our planet was travel-



ing—not directly towards the sun, but obliquely in regard to it, when this happened—else it would very likely have continued its flight straight into that body. As it is, when the comet's attraction was no longer felt, the earth continued to circle the sun, though in a new and contracted orbit. Thus it is that the new year is only 314 days long, each day being equivalent in length, to twenty-five of the old hours.

It was during these terrible minutes, when the earth was being attracted to its fiery room, that the internal stress of our planet was so great that large cracks and fissures opened in the earth's crust, and volcanoes pushed their way up in the most unexpected places. Indeed, it was only by great good luck that the earth escaped bursting like a bomb, such was the magnitude of the forces of attraction.

Professor Schreiner, who had been laughed at for his warnings, was completely vindicated.

The comet, by the way, never fell into the sun, as was thought possible. Its speed was so great, that, although it actually passed through some of the sun's gaseous emanations, it never swerved aside from its course and continued on, and out of the solar system, unregretted by the world.

Our closer proximity to the sun has not been found as unbearable, as we expected. Nature has provided a remedy that in its effectiveness is better than anything man could ever have devised. A blanket of fleecy clouds a mile thick now screens the earth from the sun's excessive heat, and at the same time gives an ample supply of moisture to all areas of the planet, so that even the desert wastes have been turned into lands of plenty.

*NOW that you have read the story, you will want to know, of course, just what is wrong. There are some exquisite bits of science involved in this story, but we are going to keep you guessing until next month, when the full solution will be printed. The solution, by the way, will be by no less an authority than Prof. W. J. Luyten, of the Harvard Observatory. Watch for it next month.*

In addition, this nebular screen acts as a wonderful climatic regulator. The Polar regions are no longer subjected to extremes of cold, while the equatorial no longer suffer from excess of heat. All in all, the even temperature makes the earth a pleasanter place to live in than before.

It is true that, on account of the clouds, we can not see the sun, or admire the beauties of the starry nights, except from the high mountain peaks that pierce our fleecy shield, and that we live in a subdued light that is not the equal of that of the old days. But that is a small price to pay for the saving of the earth.

Astronomers tell us that the color of the earth, as viewed from the other planets, is no longer yellow, as it used to be, but blue—like Venus, which is also wreathed in clouds.

Our satellite, the moon, is now more than three times the distance from us that it used to be. And we are lucky not to have lost it entirely. It exerts so little gravitational action upon the earth now, that the tides

are almost negligible.

Navigation would be altogether at a standstill, if the commanders were still dependent upon sight of the sun or the stars, for their position. But since none of the stellar bodies are seen any more, the radio direction-finding apparatus has come into its own, and it is by means of it, that maritime transportation is carried on.

The last, and, in my opinion, the chief benefit derived from the earth's adventure, is that the world's armaments have been destroyed and have never been replaced, as the jealousies of the nations have given way to friendship and cooperation under the new permanent Supreme Council.

THE END.