

# THE BLUE DEATH.

BY MASTERS B. STEVENS.

An account of the world tragedy in 1907, which linked the nations of the earth in common cause against a foe millions of miles beyond their reach.

## I.

MY name is James Allan. Some people may have heard it, for during some time I was assistant chief of the United States Secret Service, with headquarters at New York.

Although I do not possess literary skill, my intimate knowledge regarding the strange events of August, 1907, perhaps qualifies me better to write of them than any one else.

Why write of them at all? Because I have been asked to do so, and because now, when we live in one year more than our forbears did in ten, even the strangest things with the lapse of a few twelvemonths become obscure and half-forgotten.

Besides, there are details which have never been made known to the public.

I wish that my talent for writing were greater. What a weird and mystic tale could a practised story-maker draw from the facts that I am about to put, coldly, I fear, on paper!

How, with cunning arrangement here and subtle coloring there, could he grip and thrill the reader! But the bare facts alone should do something of this; and I will give them, plainly it may be, but truthfully it is certain.

## II.

THE first intimation came from a little town in upper New York, in a despatch which was published in the *Planet* of August 4, 1907. I have preserved the clipping and will quote it word for word:

### A MYSTERIOUS DEATH.

CAHILL, N. Y., AUGUST 4, 1907.

(By wire to *Planet*).

A body, which proved to be that of Patrick Mulvaney, a mechanic, was found this morning at daybreak, lying in the public square of the town. It happened that Mulvaney had been accepted

yesterday for life insurance, and it is reasonably certain therefore that he was in good health.

Just under the right ear a peculiar mark, blue in color and slightly elliptical in shape, was found, but the physicians say that this could not have caused death. It is believed to be a case of poisoning. An inquest will be held.

At the inquest it was found that the blue mark was the only sign of violence, and the physicians pointed out that it could not have been the result of a blow, because there was no rupture of the smaller blood vessels; nor of electrocution, because there was no incineration of the flesh.

An autopsy was then held. Absolutely no trace of poison could be found. A verdict of "death from unknown cause" was rendered, and a hobo who had been held in the town calaboose on general principles was released.

The papers next morning announced two deaths in other parts of the country under similar circumstances, the only difference being that on one body the blue mark had been found on the temple, and on the other just over the heart.

Various and wild were the surmises of the New York papers.

"A New Pestilence," one of them announced—and attempted to prove that the victims had become infected with a disease similar to the "black death" of India.

But if this was true, how had the infection so quickly become general, and why had the deaths occurred at places so far from seaports? The thing did not seem reasonable.

These three cases were the mere tricklings—the seeping of water in drops through the levee before it is borne down by the full flood.

The papers on the memorable morning of August 6, 1907, looked as they do

after Presidential elections, when returns are coming in from doubtful States.

There were despatches from nearly every State in the Union—from cities, from towns, from villages, and from the country: “Found Dead in Bed,” “Dropped Dead As He Reached His Home,” “Engineer Dead at His Post,” “Strange Death of a Prominent Citizen”—but no matter the date line, no matter the heading, there was always one gruesome, significant statement: “A strange blue mark was found—”

After August 6 the papers no longer attempted to print even a few lines in regard to each death, except in the cases of prominent men. Merely the names of the States were given, and then followed the names of the victims.

Business halted, and then stopped—all except the publishing of papers, the running of empty trains, and the burying of the dead.

Every paper had its bulletin board with mobs around it. The excitement resembled that of the previous year, when we found it necessary to oust Germany by force of arms from South American territory—but there was no marching of troops, full panoplied, to the beating of drums and the cheers of the people.

Here was death to be faced, but death alone and in the silence—death from whence no one knew.

No class escaped—the good nor the bad, the rich nor the poor.

To those who did not wish to leave life because it was to them one long round of high living and riotous indulgence, the call came, and it came also to those wretched miserables who would have gone half way to meet it. Even jail birds, behind steel bars, made their escape when the blue death beckoned.

In the cities funerals never attract more than passing notice, but they are usually conducted with stately decorum.

No more of the quiet dignity, even for the better sort. Ministers gave short shrift; undertakers trotted to the cemeteries and galloped back.

Yet the theaters in New York had unprecedented patronage. They were nightly jammed.

At almost every house only comedies were played; there was enough of tragedy. But the comedies were laughed at, not healthfully, but hysterically, and very often from them a woman would be borne shrieking frantically.

The rich sought relief from the terror amidst blazing gaiety, but it sought and found them there as certainly as it did the ragged beggar in his garret.

In the South the negroes, peculiarly susceptible, were smitten with an unreasoning terror. They could not be induced to work; crops were abandoned.

The darkies gathered in immense meetings, and to the weird light of pine torches, led by their “exhorters,” they made the nights resound with their wild cries and their prayers for deliverance.

The North fared as badly.

The lower element flung itself into a carnival of wild debauchery. Criminals saw their opportunity and accepted it. Socialists frenziedly spread their propaganda, and often gathered about them such mobs of the unemployed, desperate and starving, that the opulent trembled and martial law became necessary.

What a mere gloss is that which we wear so proudly during times of calm tranquillity! On what a very fragile framework does civilization stand!

The American republic, which had reached the proudest place attained in the history of the world, was succumbing to a slow, but certain, and ghastly tragedy.

It became apparent that official, concerted action should be taken, and the President called a special meeting of his Cabinet for August 10. He invited to confer with them the most famous scientists, pathologists, and criminologists of the nation.

The President spoke first:

“We will waive all formality. I have little to say. The nation is in the midst of a terrible calamity which we cannot meet with brave and determined hearts, as we would any other, because we are attacked in the dark.

“As the disaster is confined entirely to the United States, it has been suggested from high sources that we are the victims of the attack of some other

nation, or nations—that, taking advantage of some new discovery in science or medicine, they are determined to annihilate us. It is true that in material progress we have passed them with giant strides, but is it conceivable that, if they could, they would bring such devilish enginery as this against us? We shall be glad to hear from any one present."

Dr. Jacques Eldridge, the famous scientist, arose. He was an old man, and I remember that his legs shook under him as he stood up. He spoke slowly and with great dignity and emphasis: "I think that most of you must have read in the June number of *Science* my article entitled 'The Finity of Electricity.' For fear that some of you may not have done so, I will say in brief, it set forth the theory that electricity is not an inexhaustible quality, which may be generated to an indefinite extent, but is limited, just as water and air is limited, but that, unlike those elements, the supply of electricity available to us is possessed in common by the sun and by the planets which form the solar system; and that it is unlike water and air in that the quantity does not so much exceed our needs as do the quantities of those two elements.

"I assumed that electricity being finite, possessed in common by the earth and all the other planets of our system, our vastly increased use of it might infringe upon the supply of other planets. If the other planets are uninhabited, this would be immaterial; but, as every one present is aware, scientists have during the last few years obtained practically positive proof that at least one of them—Mars—is inhabited, and that material progress has been made toward communication.

"Is it not distinctly possible that by our prodigal use of electricity we are reducing the Martians to commercial distress? Perhaps for years they have felt and patiently borne our inroads. At last may not a cataclysm have confronted them, and may not some desperate remedy have been necessary? May not the Blue Death—shot in quivering waves across space by some means unknown to us—be this remedy?

"Suppose they had displayed a light

signal instead? Could we have seen it? If we had seen it, could we have interpreted it? If we had interpreted, would we have heeded?

"Gentlemen, I believe that we are receiving the first message from Mars!

"If my brothers do not accept my views, I believe I can present arguments that will force them to do so. I ask for a conference with them, with a view to making representations to this government.

"These representations will be to the effect that the generation of electricity, for any purpose, shall cease for two days. At the end of that period we should have learned whether my theory is correct.

"As to the future? My theory proved, generation may be commenced again in a limited way at the end of the two days, and gradually increased. I anticipate that when a certain point is reached we will be unmistakably informed that so far may we go and no farther.

"Our industries will suffer? You forget, gentlemen, that we are helpless!"

Dr. Eldridge sat down, and Dr. Adolph Lorimer, the famous physician, took his place.

"I wish to ask Dr. Eldridge a question. How does he account for the fact that the United States, of all the nations, is the only sufferer? This one fact seems to me to render his theory invalid.

"I have a theory (based upon the assumption that the Blue Death is a new and terrible disease) and a remedy to offer; and I believe that when I have finished, every one present will agree that my position is much more within the bounds of common sense than that of Dr. Eldridge, and—"

A fierce professional clash was imminent, but it was interrupted by the appearance of a messenger who announced:

"Important despatches for the President."

He handed the President two papers, which I could see were official cablegrams.

The President glanced over them hurriedly—evidently anticipating that

they were of slight import as compared with the business in hand.

But his eyes lingered on them after he had read them. His face was pale, and I could see that he was making a mighty effort for self-control.

Finally he roused himself and spoke:

"Gentlemen, our conference must end at once. I have terrible news. Russia, angered by our representations in the Manchurian matter, and for a long while seeking opportunity to attack us, thinks she has found it in our present state of demoralization.

"Practically her entire naval force will arrive off New York to-morrow. The message comes from England; it is authentic, and I have confirmation. We cannot mobilize a naval force equal to half of theirs. Our coast defenses are inadequate. To make terms with the enemy cannot be considered.

"I fear that the destruction of New York cannot be prevented."

Night had fallen during the conference, and no one had thought to light the room in which it had been held. Now white faces stared out of the semi-darkness—and the more appalling darkness of black despair filled the hearts of all. They passed out, one by one, without speaking.

### III.

THERE was no exodus from New York. Indeed, there was not much excitement. The people had been so stirred by emotions that it seemed the very fount of feeling had been torn from them. They were held by a dull apathy.

But there was no apathy in the preparations for the defense of the metropolis. The War Department assumed control of the trunk railway lines, and over them was preparing to throw into New York a tremendous force of regulars and hastily mobilized States' guards. But not much else could be done.

No new mines could be placed in the harbor. No new guns could be mounted in the batteries.

If it had only been in the old days of screw propellers! But the Russians were using the new turbine motors to

slip upon us like an assassin in the night; and in the early hours of the morning of August 11 one of our scout cruisers announced the near approach of the Russian fleet.

I have said that there was no exodus from New York. There was a stranger manifestation. Pleasure craft, crowded to the rails, with flags flying and bands playing, steamed out into the harbor.

It was another phase of the all-pervading dementia.

I went to battery No. 14. It was the new one in the coast defense, in which had been mounted the great gun, the invention of Jacobson, the Swede.

Before the Russian fleet appeared the tension of the men of the battery was something to remember; when the ships came within vision—like specks on the blue crescent of the ocean, each with its tiny pennant of black smoke—the gunners were like wild, lean hounds held in leash.

I, too, must have been crazed.

I was not watching the Russian ships. I was fascinated by one of the gunners—a lithe human tiger who stood beside his huge death-engine, his waist entirely bare and glistening in the early morning sunlight. I remember that I could see the heave of his breast, the contraction of his mighty muscles.

But why did I turn my eyes from this world drama? I do not know.

Out of my mental haze I heard a man with binoculars exclaim:

"They have lost their formation; two have stopped!"

Could their purpose be peaceful, after all?

A tiny puff of white from the nearest Russian ship, and a moment later the crooning of a shell answered.

It was the only shot fired by the Russian ships.

Some of them rolled idly in the sea. Others that we had seen rushing in with mighty revolutions of their turbines suddenly lost way and drifted—curiously like a colt which, with a mighty kicking of heels, has dashed to the end of its pasture and then has commenced quietly to nibble the grass.

But four of the ships and one destroyer came on. They did not maneuver; they did not fire a shot.

The first intimation that they were running without control came when the battleship Katherine I swerved in her course and was rammed amidships by the destroyer. The destroyer quickly disappeared. The battleship merely shivered, and then came careering on.

The few American cruisers which had been hastily mobilized, and which had been resting under the protection of the shore batteries, darted out.

It had been intended that they should be a sacrifice, but a lithe and tearing one, which might inflict a gaping wound before the Bear could hug the city.

So they flung themselves into the jaws of death—and the jaws did not close!

As Gulliver gathered in the vessels of the Blefuscudians, so did the American vessels bring into harbor the Russian ships—but not toy ships, for their value equaled the half of our national debt.

Pleasure craft, like gnats, gathered around the incoming vessels. Eager, excited questionings were flung across the waters. Was it true, or was it merely a mirage of the disordered times?

The bodies found on the Russian ships answered them. Not a living man was found, only corpses—windrows of corpses.

And on each the Blue Death had set its mark!

During the preceding night not a single death had occurred from the plague in the United States, nor did one occur during that day.

Could Dr. Eldridge's theory be the correct one? Were the Martians determined to control us, but had they thus fearfully resented the Russian intrusion?

The Martian theory came to be generally accepted. Since Dr. Eldridge had stated his conclusions, every telescope in the United States had been pointed at Mars.

Now the astronomers reported the discovery on that planet of a new light—a light strangely intense, brilliant, scintillating.

Dr. Eldridge claimed that his theory was completely sustained. He contend- ed that the light was a signal which

might be read; and this did seem probable, because there were graduated intervals between the flashes.

Dr. Eldridge insisted—demanded—that all electrical generation in the United States should cease for two days. It was agreed that if the deaths persisted, this would be seriously considered.

The deaths did persist. There was the usual number on the night of August 12 and on the day following. The same blue mark appeared.

Something else appeared, which caused excited comment. It was an advertisement which it was learned had been placed through an advertising agency in nearly every daily paper of the nation. It was simply worded:

#### LIFE SUITS!

ABSOLUTE PROTECTION FROM THE BLUE DEATH  
MAY BE SECURED!

A scientist has discovered a pliable material which may be sewn into a suit and worn without inconvenience, which will absolutely safeguard against the Blue Death.

These suits may be obtained by citizens of New York City at the head-quarters of

THE PROTECTION COMPANY,  
Corner of State and Larkin Streets.

Those not residents of New York may obtain suits by sending measurements and certified remittance for cost.

The following scale of prices will be charged:

Persons worth five million dollars, or over, five per cent of their total worth.

Persons worth one million dollars, but not five million dollars, three per cent of their total worth.

Persons worth five hundred thousand dollars, but not one million dollars, two per cent of their total worth.

Persons worth less than five hundred thousand dollars, but who are able to pay for suits, one per cent of their total worth.

As many persons as possible, who will make oath that they are without means, will be supplied with suits free of cost except for transportation charge. The management reserves absolutely the right to decide whether such oaths are true. It also reserves absolutely the right to estimate the worth according

to the scale printed above of other persons who apply for suits. An absolute and satisfactory guarantee will be given.

A rush was at once made for the suits by the poor, and by the people of the middle class.

A cry of "socialism" came from the possessors of great wealth, and as they controlled practically all the concerns in the country which generated electricity, it seemed that they would readily agree to give Dr. Eldridge's idea a trial; but they were "practical" men, who regarded the scientist's theory as chimerical.

I received a telegram from my chief at Washington:

You are one of five hundred men specially detailed connection Blue Death. Report and follow every clue, no matter how slight. Consult Chief of Detectives New York.

I knew of no step to take; there was no clue to follow. Madness had become very common—often no attention was paid to maniacs, and they were allowed to roam the streets at will, staggering along the sidewalks and gibbering foolishly. Only the violent were locked up.

But it was impossible that so awful a state of affairs should continue when even a slight hope was held out that relief might be secured. So firm was Dr. Eldridge in his conviction, and so clamorous were the press and people in support of his position, that after a multitude of telegrams a national agreement was reached, and from midnight of August 16th to midnight of August 18th was the period selected for the test.

At one minute after midnight of August 16th generation ceased in the United States.

The telegraph and telephone services were not interfered with, but cars were to stop, the myriads of lights in the streets and buildings of New York were snuffed out, and from one end of the country to the other cities which had been electrically lighted were thrown into darkness.

Every newspaper in New York announced that it would display bulletins to show the result of this singular, crucial test; and, soon after midnight, in the darkness and in the drizzling rain

then falling, the crowds began to gather.

They stood in groups before the sheets—white, but hardly distinguishable in the gloom—upon which the bulletins were to be flashed. And they waited, the men—and the women, for in this crisis some women showed that they possessed the stern hearts of men.

Three o'clock came. Not a death had been announced. The dull, damp gloom of night was succeeded by the murky light of early morning, and still not one of the multitude of wires streaming out over the country had brought the announcement of a single victim.

But the people could not believe.

Were the horrible days over at last? Had the intellect of one man been able to stretch out through space to a distant planet, and, grasping the situation there, been keen enough to suggest to earth dwellers the only possible way to relief from the inferno of past days?

It did not seem possible. They therefore clamored to know if the telegraph lines were working, if reports had been received from all parts of the country.

When assured that all lines were working perfectly—that there was indeed a surcease from The Death, jubilation succeeded gloomy despondency, and many of those who had patiently waited during the night turned to take the cars for their homes, forgetting for the moment that no cars were being run—overlooking the price that was being paid for immunity.

When August 18th had passed and The Death had not anywhere left its mark, it seemed that the correctness of Dr. Eldridge's conclusions had been established beyond doubt, and his was the greatest name in our nation.

But only for a few days. In their eagerness to escape slow, but seemingly sure, annihilation the people had not stopped to count the cost.

They began to question. How long were cities to remain in darkness? How long were manufactories to remain in idleness? Were cars to remain always in their barns unmanned? Were we to remain permanently at the mercy of a people millions of miles away?

In the face of our much-lauded

genius and scientific achievement, were we indeed but babes to the inhabitants of Mars, to be controlled as a father would control his child?

Not until that time did people realize how fully electricity had become a part of modern life; and when no answer was made as to how long the condition would continue; when Dr. Eldridge stated that, so far as he could tell, it would be permanent, the second storm arose, the sweep of which may be imagined by one small incident:

Within forty-eight hours the stock of the Amalgamated Electrical Co. fell from eighty-six to seventeen. All securities based upon electrical enterprises decreased correspondingly in value.

Suburban property (which had steadily increased in worth from the advent of the trolley system) became in a few days of little more value than the old fields of which it had been made.

The whole world of commerce was sympathetically affected, and a financial panic, of a magnitude never before known to the nation, seemed to be imminent. People appeared to be entirely bereft of sober judgment, and to be instead under the domination of a wild, unreasoning hysteria.

The situation could hardly have been worse if some morning the sun had failed to come up, and it had been found that it would never rise again. Indeed, so thoroughly had electricity become a part of the home and commercial life of the people that it was comparable in its importance to the light of the sun.

And, strange to say—and yet not so strange either, in that strange time—the adulation of Dr. Eldridge was changed to vituperation.

Physicians were especially severe in denouncing him, mainly because of pique that their theory of the Blue Death being a disease had been so completely overthrown—though they themselves still clung to it with a fatuous tenacity.

I knew how entirely without reason and how unjust to Dr. Eldridge was this change of sentiment, and how keenly it was felt by him; and one night as I walked the dark and deserted streets—

streets that had formerly teemed with light and life—I suddenly determined to visit him in his laboratory on Twelfth Street.

Wrapped in a faded dressing gown, and by the light of a smoking kerosene lamp, he was poring over an old leather-bound volume that seemed as if it might have been one of the first productions of Guttenberg.

The doctor inquired anxiously if I had heard whether an answer had been made by the European governments to the representations of the United States that they should share with us the burden of decreased generation.

I told him what I had just learned a few hours before that, while their reply had been couched in the language of diplomacy, they had absolutely refused to consider our request.

The doctor took an apple from a basket at his side and began to demolish it with vigorous crunchings.

"That is no more than I expected," he said. "It is but natural that the old-world countries should view our plight with some degree of satisfaction, inhuman as that may seem. But, unfortunately for them, I fear their serenity will not long continue, and, when the moment comes, I imagine they will capitulate as speedily as we have done."

"You mean?"

"That commencing with August 25th Europe will be devastated as we have been."

"But why not before—why have we suffered alone? It is true that we have led the world in the application of electricity, but surely that is not sufficient reason—"

"That is not the reason"—and the doctor's gaze wandered around the room, as if he were looking for some apparatus to demonstrate a theory.

Finally, his eyes rested on the basket of apples at his side.

"Take one of those apples," he said—and I selected one free from blemish and handed it to him, but he refused it, picked out one himself that had begun to decay, and held it up.

"Let this decayed spot be America, and this other Europe. Now, see, to represent Mars I take another apple. On the 4th of August, at the beginning

of our calamity, the relative positions of the planets were so"—and he held the apples, somewhat inclined to the planes of their ecliptics, in his two hands.

"Considering that the speck on this apple representing Mars is their 'power station,' from which the death rays come, do you not see that while America is in the line of their direction, Europe is not? Now, since the 4th of August the planets have been revolving this way"—and the doctor carefully twirled the apples in his fingers.

"Now see," he continued, "here are the relative positions at present, but beginning with midnight of August 25th, the positions will be like this."

And he gave the apples a little twist that caused the Martian speck to frown directly down on the blemish representing Europe on the other apple.

"But why have you said nothing of this—the papers this afternoon were filled with denunciations of Europe because—"

The doctor smiled and pointed to a row of chairs against the wall.

"In each of them this afternoon," he said, "sat a young representative of the press, and, while they did not seem fully to grasp the technical points, I believe they caught the central idea."

They had caught the central idea.

The next morning Dr. Eldridge's prediction was blazoned forth not only by the papers of America, but by those of Europe as well.

It cannot be denied that our people were mildly jubilant at the prospect that they would have company in their fearful misery.

The press of Europe professed to believe that the prediction had been inspired by our government with a view to inducing them to share with us the burden of decreased generation. The London papers declared, in their ponderous way, that so small a "trick" was unworthy of us; from the German press came a rumble of sarcastic abuse; and in Paris the thing was a joke, the subject for the quips of their paragraphers.

They did not know Dr. Eldridge!

But notwithstanding the professed disbelief of Europe, the 25th of August was awaited with a world-suspense—

and when that fateful morning came, Dr. Eldridge's grasp of the situation was again shown in a way that was as emphatic as it was awful.

It was as if The Death had ill-brooked restraint; like water that had been pent it lashed Europe with its flood of death.

Hardly a hamlet had been left unscoured, and from all of Europe arose the cry of people in bewilderment, in fearful anguish.

But if they had scoffed at Dr. Eldridge, they were quicker than we to accept the conditions he had imposed as necessary to immunity, and, even as the United States had done, they exchanged the benefit of their vast electrical organization for a surcease from the Martian massacre.

Dynamic generation of electricity upon the earth had ceased!

#### IV.

In this final crisis all minds, all hearts, turned to the white haired, feeble man in the dingy laboratory in New York city.

Almost involuntarily I sought the place, and when I had entered the bare reception-room was already filled with a motley throng.

Representatives of the press were there, and those who had been accounted great upon the earth, men of millions, heads of great corporations, financial magnates; and all were eager for a word which they trusted would be one of hope.

Each excitedly questioned the others—but no one knew anything that every one else did not. They knew that the earth was like a man who had been almost drained of blood, and whose heart has well-nigh ceased to beat.

They wanted to know, how long will it continue so—for days, for years, forever?

When Dr. Eldridge came softly in—he wore carpet slippers and the old familiar dressing gown—Hallowell, president of the Amalgamated Lighting & Traction Co., assumed the rôle of interrogator for those assembled. He outlined conditions which were familiar to every one, and he concluded:

"You advanced a theory regarding

this Blue Death, and said that if we would do one thing it would cease—and it did. You predicted the attack upon Europe, and your prediction has been verified.

"I—we—therefore come to you now. Can you say how long the generation of electricity must be discontinued? Even if you say so long a time as one year, that will restore some degree of confidence, and may prevent the general, final panic which seems about to sweep the nation.

"Or, if you can hold out no hope in this direction, can we not fight? Can you suggest defensive action—or even offensive action? I think you know that millions will be at your command."

The very air of the room seemed to throb in unison with the hearts of those who stood there as the verdict was awaited.

But their souls were chilled when the doctor spoke.

"So far as I can now tell," he said, "the cessation must be permanent."

There was a murmur from the audience of despair and of—anger.

"There is one hopeful sign," the doctor continued; "the signals from Mars have not stopped. They have gained their desires; why should they continue to signal us? There is only one conclusion to be reached—there is, I am sure, a way out of the difficulty if we can discover it. There are only two ways in which we may do this: we must find it through our own efforts, or we must read the signals from Mars.

"The first I regard as hopeless. On the last, as you gentlemen know, myself and my assistants are working night and day. My new 'plant'—which combines a station for generation, a laboratory, and an observatory—is now completed, and practically all of my apparatus has been installed. I will not enter into technical details, but I will say that we have taken a few steps toward success. Anything more definite I cannot now say."

I have always believed that during the strain of this conference Hallowell, the Amalgamated's president, lost his reason, and that when he arose to reply to Dr. Eldridge he was, for the time at least, deranged.

"Generation shall be started to-morrow in each of our plants," he said—he almost shouted.

All present were aghast, and several started to speak, but Hallowell would not permit them:

"Dr. Eldridge believes that no one except himself can think, and in order to remain posing upon his pedestal as our savior he is willing to sacrifice the interests of us all.

"According to him, we of America were the first sufferers because of the relative positions of the earth and Mars; Europe came within the direction of the rays and has suffered in its turn. This being true, why is it not also true that we are now beyond the reach of the rays—why are we not now secure from Martian harm?"

Hallowell had almost shrieked his inquiry.

No one had thought of this phase of the situation; there was an undertone of surprised questioning—which was stilled as Dr. Eldridge spoke:

"Our observations and experiments have shown that the rays from Mars which have dealt The Death, and the light signals seen, have come from the same point on the surface of that planet. Now, do any of you know what was the color of the light signals first seen?"

No one knew.

Hallowell sniffed disdainfully. Light was light—he could not see that the color was material.

Dr. Eldridge pointed out that there is a great difference in the color of light, and cited the fact that the stars are classified according to the color of the light from them.

"The color of the first light signals from Mars was yellow; we no longer see those lights."

"You yourself have just stated that the Martians are still signaling," interrupted Hallowell triumphantly.

"And so they are," Dr. Eldridge replied, "but not with the same light as that first visible to us. The light signals first seen in America are not now visible here, but are visible in Europe—and for the same reason that the death dealing rays first commanded this country and then Europe.

"The Martians have done just as we would do if we found that one gun would not protect a harbor—we would mount another gun!"

"The Martians have erected another station, and now, independent of the relative positions of the planets to each other, they hold at the same time the continents of Europe and America at their mercy!"

The doctor turned to the wall and pressed a spring. A map came into view—a map made up of dark and light spaces, of large black dots, and of many diverging lines.

He pointed with a ruler.

"That," he said, "is a map of Mars. Here, in Sinus Titanum, is one Martian station; and here, thousands of miles distant, in the region of Solus Lacus, is the other. Rays from these two points will command every part of the earth, except an area including China—and there is no electrical generation there!"

The doctor paused a moment, and then continued, more to himself than to us:

"What wonderful lenses they must have—what visual heights they must have reached! How vast must be their store of knowledge, grown from a fund which must have been considerable when our planet was a mere molten ball rolling untenanted in space!"

Hallowell had listened scornfully, and now he spoke:

"To-morrow every wheel in our plants shall be turning, and they may do their worst. And suppose lives are lost. Most of them will be of the poor, who are better dead. And"—sneeringly—"you and I at least need not worry, for we have life suits."

Dr. Eldridge replied as patiently as he would have spoken to a wayward child—and indeed, Hallowell was then, as I believe, entirely irresponsible:

"I furnished the formula for making the life suits, and stipulated the prices at which they should be supplied, although I have left the details of the business in the hands of subordinates. It is proper for me to say that, although I have received a considerable sum of money from their sale, I have regarded it as a trust fund, and it has all been ex-

pended in securing the special apparatus necessary for equipping my observatory at Mars Hill.

"And I warn you, Hallowell, that the life suits will in all probability not be effective against the new Martian rays. They have changed the character of signal light commanding us; it is probable that they have also changed the penetrative power of the death rays."

After the others had left one by one, some in anger—as did Hallowell—and others sodden with despair, I remained with Dr. Eldridge.

"Are you sure what the result will be if generation is started again?"

"I cannot be sure," he answered. "I am only sure that the Martians have established another signal plant; it is reasonable to deduce that they have established with it another Blue Ray battery. If Hallowell puts his determination into effect, the next few hours will tell, and, I fear, in an awful language."

"But I had understood that the Martians gained a knowledge of the amount of our electrical generation simply by the lessening of their own supply. In this event, unless there is a general resumption, we are not in jeopardy."

"They have another source of information."

"And that?"

"I believe they actually *see!* I believe that to-morrow morning the Martians will actually see Hallowell's firemen as they start the furnace fires—the motormen and the conductors as they assemble to take charge of their cars. And is it so wonderful—so past belief? The ocean cable to your great-grandfather would have been as wonderful—and to you, it is a matter of course.

"Consider. Long before the inhabitants of earth knew that the earth was round, the inhabitants of Mars must have had telescopes more effective than those we now have; given so great a start, and not an unreasonable rate of progress, why should they not have seen the collision yesterday on the Pennsylvania road and been able to count the dead as well as we?"

"But surely," I objected, "they have made moral progress also, and are they therefore not merciful? Hallowell's is

a great system, but considered with the whole of generation, even in America, his is insignificant."

"But the principle," insisted Dr. Eldridge. "If Hallowell starts generation and no harm results, day after tomorrow every wire in the United States will be alive with its accustomed voltage. The Martians cannot afford to overlook it. You do not understand what electricity means to them."

"They wish their cars, their lights," I answered.

"Their cars! Their lights! Their life, man! Do you not suppose their application of what we call 'electricity' has advanced as have other things with them? It not only lights them, carries them—it probably feeds them, keeps them alive.

"We say that Mars is a dying planet. So it is—and have they done nothing to make good their loss of forests, of coal, even of air and water? With their vast knowledge, have they calmly awaited a general death? You may be sure that they have not, and you may also be sure that they have met the crisis with—electricity. It is *the* thing—the material thing—of the universe, and properly applied, it would give us immunity from disease, it would feed us; from a material point of view, it would put us 'in a lordly pleasure house, where we might forever dwell at ease'!"

The doctor paused, somewhat abashed at his own vehemence.

"That day for us is far off, but if the condition had come to us after the slow toil of years, would we not zealously guard it, even as the Martians are doing?"

"You have seen a father and his son—the boy prattling in his childish way, and the father giving him amused attention. That is the relation of the Mars-men to us.

"How amused they must have been when, years ago, some of our wise men discovered that a piece of amber, rubbed with a silken cloth, would attract small pieces of pith and other substances—and were mightily astonished at their discovery. That must have been a choice item of news for the Martian papers, and a subject for the quips of their paragraphers (if they have them)

for many days! Imagine some of the headings: 'The Earth-Men Have Discovered Electricity!' as if our papers should one day announce, 'The Fijians Have Discovered Fire!'"

"But since then we have grown," I suggested. "The boy's head now reaches to the shoulder of his father, does it not?"

"Yes; and can you not imagine with what interest they have watched our development? How they have, possibly, sympathized with us in our gropings in the dark? How they may have applauded as one by one we have produced the telegraph, the ocean cable, electric traction, electric lights? And how, during the last twenty years, their feeling of interest has changed to one of alarm, until now we have this crisis, this tragedy?"

Before I left the doctor he informed me that he would leave the city the next day for Mars Hill—as he called his station—and that he would not quit it, night or day, until he had achieved success—or failure.

"Martian communication is necessary to our salvation—it is essential to the continuance of humankind upon the earth; and for it I would count my life a small price to pay."

These were the words of the grand old man as he left me at his door.

## V.

HALLOWELL started generation as he said that he would do.

And the cataclysm of death commenced again, as Dr. Eldridge had predicted it would.

From the north and from the south, from the east and from the west, the death roll came and grew hour by hour; and many wearers of life suits were among the victims.

And now the general question was:

"If we are to be afflicted because one concern is operating, why should not all be operated? Will the calamity be made the greater?"

Dr. Eldridge, upon being appealed to, gave it as his opinion that it would not be, and stated that, if Hallowell and his associates could not be induced to desist, there might as well be a general resumption of generation.

So plants that had been deserted glowed with relighted furnace fires and crackling dynamos, cars were taken from their sheds, transportation in full was resumed, and electric lights gleamed forth once more.

But with all this came death, The Death. It was everywhere. The country was one vast morgue.

Europe had ceased generation entirely and had not resumed, but with the resumption in America, the plague commenced there again its fearful work.

The power that wielded this quivering lash considered the earth as a unit! Brothers must answer for the transgressions of their brothers.

There was a speedy congress of the nations of Europe. In concert they demanded that we cease the generation of electricity.

But the United States paid no heed. The people bitterly remembered the attitude of Europe when we alone had been the sufferers—and even if our government had endeavored to force compliance with the European demand, it is doubtful if it would have been successful.

For in this dreadful time authority was toppling on its foundations, and the power supposed to be vested in the government of the nation and of the States was hardly more than a name.

The expression of anarchistic sentiment, and in the large cities anarchy itself ran riot; laws, hitherto held of the utmost sacredness, were daily infringed, and there was no attempt at retribution.

The fabric of our government, deemed so strong, had been rent in twain, and through the ragged opening there was thrust the head of a monster which threatened to bring to us a period more horrible than that in France during the red days of their memorable revolution!

The last day of August, 1907, brought to our President a formal notification from the coalition of Europe that if generation in the United States had not ceased within forty-eight hours thereafter, a combined fleet of their swiftest cruisers, which had been assembled at Portsmouth, would move against

us—that they would compel the cessation of generation, and would exact reparation.

It was a declaration of war of the world against our nation!

Our people laughed! But unnaturally, hysterically. There could be no better evidence of the abnormal condition of the whole country at that time.

An ultimatum—a practical declaration of war from a coalition so powerful that we could not hope to resist it! And it created not so much excitement as did the firing of a Colombian gunboat upon the newly formed republic of Panama in the fall of 1903.

No effort was made to meet the demands of the nations of Europe. No preparations were made for defense.

And all the while The Death was reaping a steady harvest; not only throughout our wide domain, but in foggy London, on the sunny Paris boulevards, and in icy St. Petersburg. No station in life, however noble or however lowly, served to stay the quivering bolts; they found their victims by the thousands in the crowded cities and in the dreary wildernesses.

Was it to be annihilation? Was the earth again, as in the beginning, to roll untenanted in space—but carrying upon its waters mighty fleets, and upon its land magnificent cities, and nowhere a human soul?

It was late on the night of the first day of September when I received Dr. Eldridge's message urging me to come at once to Mars Hill.

I caught a late express, and was soon at the dreary little station, which became drearier still when the train had wound itself away, and left me beginning my walk to the isolated spot where Dr. Eldridge had been spending his days and nights in labor—not for money nor for fame, but for the general good of the peoples of the world. I knew that he was alone, for while he had assistants, they returned each night to the city.

First, I saw the smokestack of the plant—reaching straight up into the sky like an enormous interrogating finger, as if it were sensate and itself seeking a solution to this weird world-tragedy.

A thin stream of smoke was coming from its mouth, straight at first, then

eddying into fantastic shapes; and when I entered the main room of the plant—where the huge engine and dynamo were placed—I found it thrown into a yellow illumination by the open furnace door, and an occasional spiteful crackling from some of the multitude of wires announced that here at least electricity still held sway.

I did not see Dr. Eldridge, and I called his name. There was no response. I called again, and louder, and still no answer came.

A feeling of depression, almost of fear, for which I could not account, took possession of me. Perhaps, more than I had thought, the strain of the past fearful weeks—the strain on nerve and brain and heart—was telling upon me.

Foolish phantasms forced themselves upon me.

Suppose that the happenings of the past month were a mere dream, only a horrible nightmare, and that I had awokened in the power plant of some strange city? Or, suppose this were one of the Martian stations (I doubt that I was entirely sane in those last few days), and that I had been lured here to my death?

But then I noticed that I held in my hand the note of Dr. Eldridge calling me thither. Perhaps the sight of his name caused me, involuntarily, to push open the door of a smaller room—his private laboratory.

And I found Dr. Eldridge.

He was sitting at the low, broad table which served for a desk. His elbow rested upon the table, and his hand held a pen, still moist with ink. And he was smiling.

But he was dead.

And laid carefully in front of him, so that it could not escape notice, was a note addressed to me:

MY DEAR ALLAN:

I have sent for you because I know that you will be sure to come, and can be trusted absolutely in a vital matter. After you have read the sealed letter which you will find with this, you will understand. Good-by.

I seized the doctor's statement—then in his crabbed handwriting, but before forty-eight hours had passed in the big, clear type of ten thousand papers:

TO THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD:

I have communicated with Mars. The distress of the world will be relieved. Tomorrow full generation may be commenced again and no harm will result.

I stated in the beginning my belief that there was one law which, if it could be learned, would bring us relief.

I have learned this law.

The sun supplies us not only with light and heat; it supplies us (as scientists have long suspected) with electricity as well. It is an immense generator, and from it the subtle current is shot to all the corners of our solar system.

But not in equable volume. At some times the voltage is much less than at others, and the variation is coincident with the appearance and disappearance of the "spots" upon the sun.

The "sun spot cycle" is fourteen years, and in the middle of that cycle is a period of four weeks which may be called the "minimum sun spot period."

During that period the generation of electricity by the sun, and, consequently, the supply to all the planets, sinks far below the normal.

It is that period which has just passed, and which has brought us such distress.

The Martians did not feel our encroachment in the prodigal use of electricity until the last minimum sun spot period, which was in 1893. They suffered then greatly and without offensive action against us—although they had then the same means for forcing our discontinuance of generation that they have now. But their self-preservation during this period, and the periods that will come with each fourteen years hereafter, demanded that they do as they have done.

It was a choice between whether *some* of us should die or *all* of them.

In the year 1921—fourteen years hence—generation must again cease for a space of four weeks.

The time for cessation will be indicated by a light signal from Mars—in flashes which will make the letter "Y" in our Morse telegraph alphabet. The time when generation may recommence will be indicated by a discontinuance of the signal.

This must continue through all the time to come.

Heed, all nations of the earth, or the penalty will be more awful than the one we have just paid, and my sacrifice will have been in vain.

For to learn what I have told, I have agreed to give my life. How gladly do I make the exchange! I would have besought it if it had not been offered me.

For in allowing me to learn this, the Martians have been compelled to show me other things—wonderful things—our general knowledge of which would place them in jeopardy, and which they are not willing to trust to the honor of a man. In all things pertaining to honor the name of Dr. Eldridge has stood high—but the Martians do not know me, and I do not censure them.

I will be permitted to write this (the fact that they will know I do not write anything they have not given me permission to divulge hints at the wonders which have been opened to me), and then

it will come—The Death, which has made many miserable, and has made happy only

JACQUES S. ELDREDGE.

The fleet of the coalition did not sail. The United States is triumphant. The world is tranquil. But 1921 is hard upon us. Will we heed the signal's flash?

We must, for there is no one to succor us, now that the great soul of him who once saved us has voyaged outward through the world-spaces into which his mind had so often journeyed.