

FRANK READE



WEEKLY MAGAZINE,

Containing Stories of Adventures on Land, Sea & in the Air.

Issued Weekly By Subscription \$3.00 per year. Application made for Second-Class Entry at N. Y. Post Office.

No. 94.

NEW YORK, AUGUST 12, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

THE DEMON OF THE CLOUDS; OR, FRANK READE, JR., —AND THE— GHOSTS OF PHANTOM ISLAND. *By "NONAME."*



Procuring a repeating rifle, the Irishman now began to blaze away at the ghosts. At the sound of the first shot they paused. The second shot caused them to look upward. And at the third shot they dropped Pomp and scattered.

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CHAPTER I.

SAVED FROM DEATH.

It was on a cold winter day, the roaring wind was driving the flakes of a heavy snowstorm upon the village of Sea Cliff, and the surf was booming in along the shore with fierce energy.

As the village church bell chimed the hour of nine a small fishing smack, under double-reefed sails, came racing through the inlet into the bay, with her scuppers ripping through the water from being keeled over too far.

There was only one man on the boat, and he was clad in a suit of oilskins and stood at the tiller, managing the frail craft with the skill and courage of a veteran seaman.

He was about fifty years old, tall and brawny, and his bronzed face was partly covered by a closely trimmed beard and mustache.

There was a ghastly pallor in his face and a feverish expression in his keen blue eyes, induced by the thoughts passing through his mind.

"I'm sorry this storm compels me to put into this bay for shelter," he muttered, "but I guess I've given the blood-thirsty villains the slip and thwarted their evil designs upon me. The little craft couldn't stand the gale and rough seas any longer outside, that was evident. I'll have to make a landing here for the night to get something to eat."

Just then a slant of the gale swung the boat around.

Although there was a lighthouse on the headland, the lone sailor failed to see the sunken snag, toward which his boat lurched.

The next moment the bow struck a rock.

A heavy, grinding crash followed.

It flung the man down, and a flood of water gushed into the boat through the ugly hole torn in the planking.

"Heavens! I've wrecked her!" gasped the man.

Scrambling to his feet he saw the water pouring in and he made an effort to steer the sinking boat toward the shore.

He felt uneasy, for he could not swim, and as the storm was so intense he failed to see the land.

Before the boat had gone ten yards toward the lighthouse she capsized and the hardy stranger was thrown into the water.

It seemed as if he was doomed to drown there.

He floundered about in the water for a moment and just as he gave up all hope his fingers clutched the capsized boat.

Eagerly fixing a grip on the frail craft he prevented himself from going down, and clung there with fast waning strength.

Several times he tried to clamber upon the heaving hull, but each attempt proved to be a failure.

It was a desperate battle, and when he found how unsuccessful his efforts were, he shrieked:

"Help! Help! Help!"

It seemed useless to cry out, though, for the blustery wind carried his hoarse voice away, and the roaring of the surf in the inlet drowned his tones completely.

A few minutes afterward the port lights of another vessel gleamed dully through the flying flakes.

He saw them, and his heart gave a throb of joy.

"Help! Help!" he cried frantically, again.

The incoming craft was so near that her crew readily heard his voice then, and she came up in the wind close by him.

"Aho! Who's that?" yelled a man on her deck.

The half-drowned man now caught a good view of the craft, and the look of hope and happiness fled from his face and gave place to an expression of supreme horror.

"Heaven help me!" he gasped. "It's my pursuer—the Dragon—and there is Dan Scott and his whole crew ready to pounce upon me after the mighty efforts I've been making to escape them!"

Just then the lookout in the bow caught view of the wrecked man's features as the port light gleamed upon him.

He gave a shout of triumph.

"Why—it's Captain Ben Buntline!" he cried.

"Is that the Fox capsized?" demanded another.

"Yes, sir; it must be."

"Luck favors us then, my lads."

"Hurrah!" shouted the sailors.

"Haul him aboard, and it won't be five minutes before I either know his secrets or put a bullet in his brain!"

"That's Scott speaking!" groaned the captain, in despair, "and he will keep his word, too."

The helmsman now began to maneuver the big schooner closer to the half-submerged man.

Captain Buntline saw that capture was almost inevitable, and he shouted for help again at the top of his voice,

Once more he was heard.

A young man had been coming down the rocks from the lighthouse, clad in a sealskin coat, cap and gloves, when the appeal for aid pealed out and reached his ears.

He was a powerful youth, with a dashing air, and a startled look mantled his handsome features and gleamed in his blue eyes.

This personage was Frank Reade, Jr., a famous young inventor of electrical diving-boats, traction engines and airships.

He lived in grand style in the village of Readestown, was very rich, and had gone to the lighthouse that night to see the skipper, who was an old friend of his.

Seeing the schooner's lights and fearing a wreck, he ran down to the shore, embarked in a skiff and rowed out toward the Dragon.

As he drew near he saw the capsized smack, with Captain Buntline clinging to it, and observed some sailors on the big schooner trying to reach him with a boathook.

"It's a capsized smack," muttered Frank, "and there's only one man in view. I wonder if any were drowned?"

"Stop pushin' that hook away!" yelled one of the Dragon's crew.

"No, I won't," retorted the captain. "I won't let you get me aboard that craft. I'll drown myself first."

"Don't make a fool of yourself!"

"Oh, I know what you want, but I tell you once for all that I'll never divulge my secret to you!"

"Are you in earnest?" demanded Dan Scott, who was a hulking big man, with a long red mustache, and he raised a boathook he held in his hands with a threatening gesture.

"I am," retorted Buntline; "I swear it!"

"Then I'll brain you!"

And the rascal brought down the boathook and dealt his victim a stunning blow on the head with it.

Uttering a groan the captain relaxed his grip on the wreck and fell back in the water unconscious.

Frank uttered a cry of indignation.

He saw Scott raise the hook again to deal the poor fellow another blow, and as quick as a flash the young inventor drew a pistol and fired a shot at the wretch.

The ball struck the man's arm, arrested the blow, and wrung a yell of agony from the villain.

"I'm shot," he howled.

"You coward, I'll teach you to kill helpless men!" cried

Frank, and he sent his boat over to where Buntline had sunk.

The body rose and Frank seized it.

He hauled it in the skiff.

All hands on the Dragon saw him now, and he heard Dan Scott shout in furious tones:

"Kill him, boys! Kill him! He has shot me, and now is trying to get away with Buntline!"

Several of the men were armed.

They drew their revolvers and discharged several shots at Frank, the bullets barely missing him.

"A fight, eh?" muttered the young inventor, grimly.

"Well, I'll give you all you want of that!"

He was a dead shot, and began to fire at them.

As his pistol rang out again several of the crew of the schooner were hit and yelled with pain.

Having no desire to prolong the fight, Frank hastily rowed away to the head of the bay with his burden.

Making a landing he lifted out the unconscious man and closely examined him.

Buntline was living, but he seemed to be seriously injured by the blow, and Frank realized that he must have medical attendance at once.

Nearby stood an old tavern, mostly frequented by fishermen, and he ran over to the veranda, opened the door and shouted:

"Barney! Come here—quick!"

"Hallo, Frank, me lad!" came the response, and a wiry Irishman, with a red head and freckled face, ran toward him, his face wearing a look of great surprise.

He was a chum of Frank's, and resided with the inventor.

"Barney, I am glad you waited here for me. Get the sleigh. There's a man out here badly hurt. I'm going to take him to the hotel with me."

The Celt nodded and hastened off to the wagon-shed.

In a few moments he drove a fine, speedy mare up, hitched to a cutter, and Frank lifted Buntline into it and they drove away.

While going along he explained what had happened and they stopped for a physician and carried him along with them.

The hotel in which Frank was stopping was in the suburbs, and they quickly reached it and carried the captain in.

Long before this he recovered, but was delirious.

Putting him to bed, the doctor attended him and then departed.

On the following afternoon Buntline was almost entirely

well again when Frank went to see him, and the young inventor then told him what had happened.

At the conclusion of the explanation the skipper pondered a few minutes, and then said in earnest and grateful tones:

"I am deeply indebted to you, Mr. Reade, and as I know I can trust you, I am going to explain the animosity of the schooner's crew. It is a most wonderful and mysterious story, but it is true as Gospel, and you will be astonished."

"Very well," said Frank, sitting on the edge of the bed. "Proceed, sir."

"The story," the captain remarked, "is the history of a most peculiar race of objects—ghosts, I may as well admit, and a treasure worth millions of dollars. I am not a superstitious man, and you may not be, but ere I finish my story I think you will agree with me that the material spirits of the dead haunt an island in the sea, upon which I once had the fortune of discovering the treasure I just mentioned."

CHAPTER II.

ESCAPE OF THE AERONAUTS.

"Get out of here!"

"But I'm an officer——"

"Dat makes no difference, honey."

"And I've got a warrant here for the arrest of Frank Reade, Jr., and Captain Buntline——"

"Yo' go way, will yo'?"

"Not till I arrest him. He shot Captain Daniel Scott on his schooner——"

But just then the door of the hotel was banged shut in the policeman's face, and the rest of the sentence was lost.

The person who did it was a darky, named Pomp, the inventor's friend.

He was a pugnacious little coon, with long arms, short, bandy legs, sparkling eyes and a peppery temper.

Pomp had the reputation of being a good cook, a skillful electrician and a regular fire-eater.

He did not propose to have Frank arrested for shooting Scott, for he knew that the seaman had brought his punishment upon himself.

Moreover, Frank, Barney and Pomp had planned to depart that day on a journey in a new flying machine the

former had built, and if Frank was arrested the project might have to be postponed indefinitely.

It was on this account that he refused the officer admission.

And having shut out the policeman, he took the doorkey and ran upstairs to tell Frank the news.

Buntline was just upon the point of telling his story when Pomp burst into the room, interrupting him with:

"Massa Frank, wot yo' fink?"

"Well—what now?"

"A cop come to de door with a warrant."

"For whom?"

"What and de captain."

"What for?"

"Puttin' bullets inter Daniel Scott."

"Thunder!" ejaculated the captain in amazement. "The audacity of that scoundrel is something appalling. I never saw such nerve before. He must have landed, located us, and now seeks revenge on you, and hopes to detain me so he can try again to learn my secret."

"That's my opinion!" said Frank, with a frown. "I don't mind what he is doing so much as I do the delay he will cause me. I was about to take my departure in the new airship I told you about. Now it seems I can't go. This is very annoying."

"Golly! I didn't let him in," said Pomp.

"What? You kept out the officer?"

"To be sure I did."

"What for?"

"So we could skip."

"Escape, eh? Well, that ain't a bad plan. The flying machine is all ready for departure, and all I've got to do is to step aboard, turn a switch, and away I'll go. I have a notion to do it. The cause justifies my deed. Had I not shot Scott he would have murdered you. A jury would acquit me. I therefore see no reason for surrendering and spoiling my fun to please Scott."

"And with what misdeed does he charge me?" asked the skipper.

"I didn't wait to hear."

"Well, I've committed no crime."

"Then why not escape with us?" asked Frank.

"I shall, if you'll let me."

"Of course we will; hurry and get dressed."

"Very well, sir," said Buntline, getting out of bed.

"Where's Barney?" asked the inventor.

"Out in de barn makin' de Demon of the Clouds ready, sah."

"Good! Ha! What's that?"

Bang! Bang! Bang! came a shower of blows on the front door.

Ding-a-ling-a-ling! rattled the bell, and the uproar increased.

"Let me in!" they heard the officer yell, angrily.

"We'll have to hurry," said Frank, uneasily. "The servants don't know what's going on, and one of them may be stupid enough to admit him. Once he serves the warrant I will have no option but to submit to arrest."

"Gosh amighty!" exclaimed Pomp, rushing for the door. "I bettah go down and tell de servant not to let him in."

And downstairs he rushed in hot haste.

"Have you made all your preparations to go on the aerial voyage you mentioned, Mr. Reade?" asked the skipper.

"Yes; the Demon is packed with clothing, water, provisions and everything necessary for a long voyage."

"What a pity I could not tell you my story."

"You can do so, once we are up in the air."

"Are you sure the machine is safe?"

"Oh, yes; she has been tested. We came here in her from Readestown."

"And it works properly?"

"Precisely as I designed; are you timid about going?"

"Naturally, as I never rode in a balloon before."

"This is no balloon."

"It isn't? Then what is it?"

"You shall see when we get aboard of her."

The captain quickly dressed himself.

As soon as he was ready, he said:

"Go ahead; I'll follow you."

Frank led the way downstairs, and they met Pomp in the hall.

The darky had a worried look on his face, and said:

"Dat man ain't knockin' at de door no more. I was sure he didn't go away. You better go out by de back door, and run fo' de shed. I will go de firstest, and if I have a collision wid dat cop, I'll jump on him!"

"Be careful!" cautioned Frank.

Pomp hastened out the back door into the yard.

A few moments later he whistled, and taking it for a signal that the coast was clear, Frank and the captain rushed out and started for a big shed at the foot of the garden on the bank of a creek.

They had not gone ten steps, however, when the officer, who had been coming around the house, saw them.

"Hey!" he yelled, starting on a run. "Hold on, Mr. Reade, I want you! Stop a moment!"

Frank did not pause or look back.

"Run, captain, faster!" he muttered.

"He's after us!" panted Buntline.

"Never mind. Pomp will attend to him."

And the coon did.

Seeing the officer coming, he darted in front of him, pretended to stumble and fall, and as his body landed directly in the policeman's way, the minion of the law tripped and went down like a ton of coal.

"Fool!" he roared, savagely, as he sat up and glared at Pomp. "What did you do that for?"

"I didn't," stolidly answered the black youth, who sat opposite the policeman, with a stupid look on his face.

"You tripped me, didn't you?"

"No," retorted Pomp. "You fell ober me."

"I think you did it on purpose."

"Go 'way! Wot you tink—I like dem kicks in de side?"

"Don't you dare to interfere with me any more, or I'll lock you up."

"You don't say?"

"I do, and I mean it, too."

"So do I."

"You clumsy clodhopper, you—but, pshaw! I'm wasting time over you. I saw Mr. Reade enter that barn, and I'll bet he won't get out of it without I collar him."

"I think so, too," said Pomp, rising slowly.

"Tell him to let me in that building."

"Wait here an' I'll come back an' tole yo' wot he ses."

"Not much; I'll go in with you."

"Don't yo' know ebery one don't gain admittance dere?"

"That makes little difference to me."

Pomp strode to the shed, the policeman at his heels.

Knocking at the door he sung out:

"Frank! Don't let me in; dere am a cop here."

"Very well," replied the inventor inside.

"Run out de back way."

"All right!" answered Frank.

Pomp feinted a rush around the building, and the officer darted past him with eager anxiety, expecting to head off the inventor.

The coon let him pass.

He then wheeled and dashed at the door.

"Open—quick!" he panted.

The door was banged open and in he dashed.

Frank bolted the door and the policeman, chagrined at the deception practiced upon him, returned in a towering rage.

"You fooled me cleverly," he roared, as he banged at the door, "but I'll enter if I have to break my way in."

Frank paid no heed to him.

All the rest had boarded the Demon of the Clouds.

Following them, the young inventor saw that the broken roof was open, and he boarded the machine.

Outside the policeman was banging the door with his shoulder, threatening momentarily to break it down.

Just as the door gave way, Frank dashed aboard the air-ship and sprang into the turret.

Here he pulled a lever and the machine ascended.

"Come back!" yelled the frantic officer.

He rushed at the machine, seized it with both hands and to his alarm he was lifted with it.

Up, up soared the flying machine.

It passed through the open roof.

"Help! Help!" howled the officer.

But no one came to his aid and he was irresistibly carried up into the air.

Up, up went the machine several hundred feet.

Then it paused.

Pomp came out on deck with a coil of rope in his hand and tied one end to a ring-bolt.

He then drew a pistol and approached the officer.

CHAPTER III.

ON BOARD THE FLYING MACHINE.

The policeman noticed the pistol in the coon's hand and thought he was going to get shot.

"Don't fire!" he roared. "Don't kill me!"

"Yo' amn't got no business heah," sternly said Pomp.

"I know I did wrong to seize this machine."

"Well, yo' had better get down right away."

"How can I? I want to get up on deck. Help me, will you?"

"No sah! Yo' can't come up heah."

"But my strength is giving out, and I'll soon fall."

"Yo' see dat rope dangling down?"

"I do."

"Took hold ob it."

"What for?"

"Ter slide down to der ground."

"Hand it to me."

"If yo' don't do what I say—bing!"

"Bing! What's that?"

Pomp pointed at his pistol significantly.

The officer understood and shuddered.

As soon as Pomp put the rope in his hands he slid down

toward the ground over which the end of the line was trailing.

The moment he alighted the daky hauled up the rope, and as the airship was lightened by the reduction in weight it ascended.

Up it went, several hundred feet higher.

Finally it paused and the coon hastened over to the pilot-house, where Frank stood, steering.

"I got rid of him," he chuckled.

"So I observed," assented the young inventor.

"Now we are safe."

"You worked that splendidly," said the captain, and then he stared around at the airship in the profoundest amazement.

She was so singular in appearance that it was no wonder he was astonished, and exclaimed:

"This is the queerest craft on record!"

The machine consisted of two aluminum cylinders, one hundred and fifty feet in length by twelve feet in diameter, at the largest part, and were joined together somewhat like a marine catamaran.

At the extreme stern of each was a powerful propelling screw, and the railed deck supported a small, round pilot-house.

There were three arches of steel tubing, surmounted by uprights, having at their apexes the most powerful gyroscopes, which by the extraordinary speed of their revolutions raised the Demon skyward.

Between the forward cones a huge, half-moon shaped rudder was secured, while on top of the turret stood a large searchlight.

"You look amazed at her appearance," laughed Frank.

"Can you blame me?" asked Buntline.

"Scarcely; but you see she works like a clock."

"I never saw such marvelous adjustments before, sir."

"Come in here, and I'll let you see what actuates her."

The captain complied.

He found the turret to be handsomely furnished. Upon the walls there hung various kinds of meteorological instruments; there was a wheel controlling the rudder, a compass and a marble lever board.

The machine worked by electricity, as was shown by the numerous cut-outs, switches, voltmeters and other similar appliances.

The incandescent electric lamps throughout the flyer and the big 80,000 candle-power searchlight were controlled by these switches.

So were the motors governing the gyroscopes and driving screws.

"You seem to have perfect control of her," said Buntline.

"It is a fact," assented Frank. "These levers control the speed of the screws and gyroscopes. If I put on more current, the latter revolves faster and lifts us higher. If I diminish the current, the speed is lowered and we descend. The forward impulse is governed by the speed of the stern propellers in the same manner."

"Can you rise to any height?"

"Anything reasonable. Over six miles up you would freeze to death, and the rarity of the atmosphere would kill you."

"Does she travel fast?"

"She can make twenty miles an hour against a forty-mile gale, and in clear weather ought to make sixty miles easily."

"Whew!" whistled the captain. "She must go like the Empire State Express. And she works by electricity, eh?"

"Totally; come below and I'll show you how. Here, Barney, take the wheel."

"Yis, sor," replied the Celt, obeying.

Frank led the captain down a spiral staircase to a landing, and here an inclined walk led to the right and left, leading into either one cylinder or the other as might be desired.

They passed into the one at the right.

"Both are the same," said Frank. "When you see this one you will know exactly how the other one looks. This is the main cabin."

"It is furnished magnificently, too," commented the captain.

"Yes, I like luxurious surroundings," replied the inventor, as they passed into the next room aft. "And here's the combined mess-room and kitchen."

"What sort of a range is that?"

"It is heated by electricity."

"You don't say! This is wonderful!"

"The next room is a storeroom."

"What's in these tanks and boxes?" asked Buntline, following him in.

"Water in the former, and food, tools and arms in the latter."

"I saw bunks for sleeping in the cabin."

"Yes, and this last compartment is our engine-room."

Buntline saw that it was a large apartment.

There was not much machinery in it, either, and as he gazed at the small mass of flying wheels and driving rods of a clock-like arrangement run by a powerful spring, which stood in the middle of the floor, he asked, curiously:

"What's that thing?"

"The mechanism for operating the dynamos."

"Don't it run by a spring?"

"Yes; it's exactly like the machinery of an ordinary clock."

"To what use is it put principally?"

"It is geared to the armature shafts of those two dynamos you see standing over there. One of the dynamos sends its current to the motor, aft, to which the propeller shaft is geared. The current from the other dynamo actuates the big motor, to which the rotascopes are fastened. In a word, one is used to lift the Demon and the other to drive her ahead."

"Very interesting, indeed!"

"By cutting in on the main juice-wires passing between the dynamos and motors," continued Frank, "we steal enough electricity to light the lamps and the searchlight, and to heat the range."

"If this machinery should stop or get out of order——"

"Don't mention it."

"Why?"

"If that occurred the dynamos would stop."

"And then——"

"We would fall like a cannonball to the ground."

"Ugh! It can't occur, can it?"

"Well, sir, if we failed to wind up those springs every twenty-four hours they would run down and we would drop."

The captain cast a troubled look at the springs in question, and having seen everything he returned to the pilot-house with Frank.

"Might I ask where you are going with this machine?" he asked.

"I'll tell you," replied the inventor. "It's no secret. We are bound for the South Pacific Ocean on an errand of mercy."

"The South Pacific!" echoed Buntline, in surprised tones.

"Yes, and our object is to rescue a wrecked ship's crew."

"Who are they?"

"The captain and fourteen sailors who manned a small whaling ship called the Jennie Jerome, which was owned by a company in Readstown of which I am a large stockholder."

"How do you know she was wrecked?"

"One of the crew was picked up by a passing ship. He finally got back to Readstown and reported that the ship had foundered in a gale. All the crew but he had taken to the boats, and the last he saw of them they were pulling toward a small island a few miles away to the southward."

"Do you know the location of that island?"

"Only approximately, sir; it lies several hundred miles west of the coast of Chili, almost parallel with the northern boundary of that country."

"Strange, strange!" ejaculated Buntline.

"What is strange?"

"Do you recollect what I told you about my knowledge of a vast treasure which Dan Scott wanted to get from me?"

"Yes; what of it?"

"Well, sir, that treasure island lies almost in the identical locality to which you are going."

"Indeed! And did you wish to go there?"

"Most decidedly I did; I wanted to secure the treasure."

"How would you like to join issues with us?"

"Nothing would please me more."

"Then suppose you go along with us, and we will try to rescue the men we are after, and at the same time investigate this treasure island of yours."

"Fortune favors me. Scott is going after that treasure, as he has a faint knowledge of where to find it. If we get there first we will forestall the villain."

"Exactly; you have not told me your story about Scott and this treasure island yet. I presume you will do so at the first opportunity, however, and then we will better understand all the details of your affair."

"Are you busy now?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"Because I can tell you my story at once."

"Very well, and as Barney and Pomp are here, this will be a good chance, for they can hear it, too."

The captain nodded and pondered a moment.

He then started with the following narrative, while his companions listened in the profoundest amazement.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAPTAIN'S STORY.

"About a year ago," began Captain Buntline, "I was the commander of the ship Flying Dutchman, trading at the various ports along the Pacific coast of South America. One dark, storm-threatening night my first mate, Dan Scott, came rushing into the cabin where I sat, greatly excited——"

"The same villain who annoyed us at Sea Cliff?" asked Frank.

"Yes, sir," answered the captain. "I sat in the cabin and he told me we were being pursued closely by a strange craft. I rushed out on deck, only to find that we were grappled by a pirate, who threatened to murder the first man who resisted. Seeing we could do nothing to avoid him we surrendered quietly, and he plundered our craft, and having bound us and transferred us aboard his ship, he scuttled my vessel and sailed away. Several days later we reached the pirates' stronghold and were offered our liberty if we chose to join them. Most of my crew were honest, God-fearing men and refused. They were promptly thrown into a dungeon. Scott and I joined the pirates' crew and took the oath of allegiance. My mate did it to save his life and I did it in hopes of gaining my freedom so I could aid my crew to escape."

"Well?" said Frank, as he paused.

"During my stay among those ruffians I incidentally learned that Commodore Wild, the pirate chief, always secured two-thirds of the booty as his share and had amassed a huge fortune which he had hidden somewhere. His lieutenant and a sailor were standing in the bushes one night when I chanced to pass by and I overheard the former say: 'Yes, we can follow the commodore when he conveys the last booty he got to its secret hiding place and kill him. You and I will then have the secret and we can eventually enrich ourselves by carrying away the treasure.' The sailor fell in with the plan and I watched them closely and on the following night I learned that they had let out their plan to all the rest of the gang—some forty or more men. I observed how closely the commodore was kept under surveillance. Finally, at midnight the fourth day after my initiation, I saw the commodore leave his house with two valises containing a large amount of plunder. He was shadowed by the two arch conspirators, and I saw him steal through the woods until he came to a mass of rocks. Here he parted some vines, disclosing an aperture, and passed out of sight. His pursuers followed him in. A moment later I heard a pistol shot and a yell. Rushing in I saw a cave lit by a torch. A secret door in the wall was open, disclosing an inner apartment. Here laid the pirate's treasure. The commodore had shot his lieutenant and was struggling with the sailor, whom he was strangling. 'I'll teach you to pry into my secrets!' he hissed. 'I know all about your conspiracy! Not one of you shall live to kill me!' And as he flung his victim away the man was a corpse. I hid myself, fearing I might share the fate of the two unfortunate men. The commodore rushed out. The moment he

was gone I darted into the cave, opened the door of the treasure chamber, lit a match and glanced around. The room was filled with boxes overflowing with silver and gold coin, valuable jewelry and ornaments, rich tapestries and laces, expensive bric-a-brac, and, in fact, the most magnificent assortment of treasure I ever beheld. It was worth a huge fortune. I left the place and returned to the village unseen. Next day the pirate assembled all his men and told them to prepare for a long cruise. He then invited them to a banquet at his house that night, as was his custom ere they departed. I met Scott and told him all I had learned, excepting the fact that I kept the location of the treasure to myself. He wanted to know where it was, but I refused to divulge the secret then. It made him furious. I warned him to look out for the commodore, as I suspected he contemplated treachery of some sort toward his men. On that eventful night Scott sat on one side of the pirate and I on the other. Before each man stood a bottle of wine and a glass. The commodore proposed a toast and each man filled his glass. Just then a servant came in behind the commodore and said something to him which caused him to turn his head for an instant. Impelled by an irresistible impulse I suddenly exchanged glasses with him.

"Some of the men saw what I did and laughed at what they considered a joke I was playing on him. The next moment the pirate, ignorant of what I had done, gave the toast and the whole gang, excepting Scott, who never drank, swallowed the wine.

"It was poisoned!

"The next moment a scene of horror took place.

"All the men felt the poison and yelled, raved, swore, bounded to their feet and acted like madmen. Chairs were overturned, the cloth pulled from the table with all the glassware and crockery, which crashed to pieces on the floor, and while some of the poor wretches fell and rolled on the floor, others reared about, tearing at their throats and bodies frantically. It was terrible to see those wild, bulging eyes, pale faces and looks of agony and despair. Even the commodore was affected. He was the first man to fall dead. I drank his wine and was not affected. Evidently he had put poison in all the bottles served to his men and reserved one which contained no poison for himself. By exchanging glasses with him I had saved my life; Scott had fortunately not touched his wine. 'Come!' I gasped to him. 'Let's get out of this! I can't stand it!' We rushed away. Next day we returned. All were lying dead about the room!"

"Horrible!" ejaculated Barney.

"Wot happen den?" asked Pomp.

"I'll tell you," replied the captain. "My first thought was, of course, to rescue my crew, board the pirate's ship and sail away from the accursed island with the treasure. We went to the dungeon where our shipmates had been cast, but to our astonishment we found they had all disappeared. We scoured the island for them, but they were nowhere to be found. At last we concluded that the pirates had made away with them. Then we resolved to board the ship ourselves and sail away. Another surprise awaited us. The ship had vanished, too. It was certainly remarkable."

"Perhaps your men escaped and got away with the ship," suggested Frank, thoughtfully.

"I cannot say," replied the captain. "All I know is that neither my men nor the ship were ever heard of again. Scott and I were the sole survivors on that little island, and he was forever begging me to show him the location of the treasure, and I kept refusing persistently. At the end of the week we retired one night in a house which we had chosen for our abode, and both fell asleep. It must have been midnight when I was rudely awakened by hearing an awful din, like the discharge of guns, the rattling of chains, the clanging of bells and the most hideous yells. I scarcely had got my eyes open when I was jerked bodily from the bed and hurled to the floor. Thoroughly aroused then, I gazed around. The room was full of white, ghostly figures flitting about, bathed in a weird, sulphuric glow. I thought I was dreaming, but no! There was Scott being pulled about the room despite his struggles. At one moment he was upon his feet, the next he was banged on the floor, then he was rolled, kicked, cuffed and thrown from one to another, groaning and yelling with pain and fear. I was chilled with horror! They were ghosts, I was sure, and no doubt the spirits of the murdered pirates——"

"Ha! ha! HA! ha!" laughed Frank, skeptically.

Barney and Pomp joined in his merriment.

A chagrined look crossed the captain's face for a moment, but he subdued his feelings, and finally said, with a sigh:

"I know it sounds ridiculous, but wait till you reach the island and judge for yourselves."

"Pardon me," said Frank; "finish your story, captain."

"Very well. As I was saying, the ghosts of Phantom Island raised the deuce with us. The furniture and household articles were flying through the air and we were banged unmercifully. I finally became desperate, and finding my revolver I blazed away at them. Instantly they vanished and left us in the gloom, nursing our bruises, con-

vinced that the island was haunted, and talking over our strange experience. Every night the same thing occurred. No matter where we went to sleep we were haunted and tormented so that our lives became a burden to us. Only in daylight did we get any rest. As soon as night fell we saw those ghosts flitting about in the woods, skulking behind the rocks, rushing over the hills or dodging in and out among the houses of the deserted village. It was a great relief to us when a passing ship finally picked us up and carried us to San Francisco. Then we crossed the continent by rail to Boston, to look out for new berths. I secured work on a fishing smack, and Scott got several unscrupulous capitalists to fit out the ship you saw to go after the treasure. But I refused to tell them where to find it. Desperate, they abducted me and tried to force me by torture to reveal where the pirate's wealth was. I escaped and fled in my fishing smack and they pursued me. You know the rest."

"Your story is a remarkable one," said Frank.

"Of course, you doubt the ghostly part of it?"

"Frankly, I do."

"But if I prove it?"

"Then only will I be convinced, for it is a well-established fact that there are no ghosts on earth, and that they are merely a weird fancy of the disordered imagination."

"I'll prove your error before this voyage is ended, and——"

"Gee!" interrupted Barney just then in startled tones.

"What's the matter?" demanded Frank in alarm.

"See ther smoke pourin' up ther companionway."

"De airship am afire!" roared Pomp.

They saw vast volumes of smoke pouring out of the companionway—thick clouds that quickly filled the turret.

A dull roaring and crackling sound came from below, and Frank made a wild rush for the staircase.

He was followed by all his companions, and as they plunged down through the choking clouds and reached the bottom of the staircase they saw a lurid blaze in the big cylinder on the starboard side.

The airship really was on fire.

There was scarcely any peril which could have been worse than that of the airship catching fire while in the sky.

Frank stood for a moment glaring at the flames.

The odor of gasoline reached the inventor's nostrils, and he remembered that a can of it had been left in the store-room.

The fire he saw came from that direction.

What had set fire to the inflammable liquid?

This question was never answered to any of the crew of the Demon of the Clouds, but the matter of the fact was that the can had been upset and the gasoline spilled on the floor.

A short time afterwards Barney lit his pipe and dropped a spark, and as it fell upon the gasoline, the fire resulted after he left the room.

Frank did not remain long looking at the blaze.

He realized that it would be utterly impossible to extinguish it by ordinary methods, and he feared it would reach the ammunition. If it did there would be a fearful explosion, the Demon would be blown to fragments and all hands would be killed.

He therefore dashed into the smoky room, and headed for a rack on the wall, where hung several blue bottles of fire extinguisher. These bottles did the work, for after a hard fight he extinguished the fire.

CHAPTER V.

THE PIRATES' VILLAGE.

The damage done by the fire was easily repaired, and the airship reached the Pacific Ocean in due time.

On the following Friday land was sighted, and upon a nearer approach it proved to be a chain of small islands.

Here our friends began to search for Phantom Island.

There were numerous geographical points which gave Captain Buntline a clew to the place they sought.

Frank and he remained in the turret all day, directing the airship, and slowly working to the westward.

Some of the islands were inhabited by savages, they observed, and the black men gazed up at the machine in the greatest fear, as they imagined she was some sort of evil spirit.

None of them offered to molest her.

The gloom of night finally fell, and the current was turned into the searchlight and flashed downward.

The search continued.

Along toward midnight a distant light was seen.

Frank steered the machine toward it.

After half an hour's travel he finally brought his invention close to the light and saw that it was on an island.

Upon a near approach he observed that the glow came from a fire on top of a tall stone tower resembling a light-house.

Beside the fire stood a ghostly figure, blazing with a bluish-white light.

The captain was greatly excited.

"There's Phantom Island!" he cried, "and there is one of the ghosts now, up in that tower beside the fire."

Frank gazed at the spectral figure in amazement, for it had a singularly weird and unnatural aspect.

The ghostly figure beside the fire on top of the tower stood there like a statue, its strange, fluttering light glowing intensely at one moment, and then becoming dimmer the next.

"It is about the size of an ordinary man," Frank commented, critically, "and looks like a person covered with a sheet."

"But how do you account for the weird, fiery glow emanating from its body?" asked the captain.

"That certainly puzzles me," replied the young inventor.

"Are you satisfied I told you the truth?"

"Yes—as far as outward appearances go."

"Can you prove that object to be a material thing?"

"Very easily."

"How?"

"By testing it with a bullet."

"Ah! You mean to shoot it?"

"I do. If it can withstand a chunk of lead, I will know it is not human."

"Fire away, then. I never could hurt them while I was here."

"You know I'm a dead shot; I won't miss it. Now watch."

Frank picked up a rifle.

He took deliberate aim at the phantom.

Before he had time to fire, though, the object vanished.

It disappeared as suddenly and completely as though it had melted into thin air and had blown away.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Frank, lowering his rifle. "Where has it gone?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the captain. "Now you see what queer will-o'-the-wisps they are."

Frank stared fixedly at the spot where the apparition had been, but he saw nothing but the bare stone tower and the flickering fire burning on top, casting out a ruddy glow, while a cloud of smoke curled up in a narrow stream to the sky.

There was no sign of any other animation, and Frank shot at the fire in a fit of perplexity and disgust.

The ball scattered the embers and sent up a mass of sparks.

But no sooner had the report rung out when, like magic, a dozen luminous openings appeared in the tower, and there suddenly appeared a number of white figures on the ground at the base of the tower.

These figures began to dart to and fro wildly.

They presented a bewildering aspect for awhile.

All at once they filed through the door of the tower.

Just as they disappeared inside the ghostly heads that were shown all the way up the pile also vanished from view.

Watching them, intensely amazed, Frank waited until the whole grotesque band was gone and then remarked:

"By thunder, this is amazing!"

"I thought you'd be surprised," grimly said Buntline.

"Captain, I am going to try another plan."

"And what is that?"

"Those alleged ghosts all seem to be cooped in that tower. Now, before they have a chance to escape, I'm going to land and enter the building and find them."

"Don't you do it!"

"I am bound to find out more about them."

"You may get into trouble——"

"Oh, I'm not afraid."

Barney and Pomp said nothing.

Both had their superstitious fears aroused.

Now that they were brought face to face with the uncanny objects of their search, neither one had any desire to meet them at closer quarters than then prevailed.

"Let the Demon go to the ground," said Frank.

His order was carried out.

When it landed the captain said:

"You had better not enter the tower alone."

"I prefer to do so."

"Let me go with you."

"By no means; I wish to go alone."

"No! no!" said Barney. "We can't allow that, Mister Frank."

"I am determined," said the inventor, firmly. "You can all arm yourselves and stand ready to aid me if it becomes necessary."

They had to be content with this.

Frank took a pistol and a lantern, debarked and strode over to the door in the base of the tower.

Passing through he found himself in a circular, bare room.

There was a flight of stone stairs, built against the walls of the tower, which wound around and around to the top.

It was strangely and oppressively silent in the room.

The young inventor paused, listened, glanced around, and, seeing nothing of the ghostly objects, he mounted the steps.

He did not feel nervous.

But one thought penetrated his mind, and that was to try to catch one of the ghosts and find out what it was made of.

Up he went, his footsteps echoing hollowly on the stone stairs, and he covered three-quarters of the distance to the top.

Then he heard a hoarse, chuckling laugh.

It had a sinister sound.

It was followed by a fearful shriek.

The next moment a blazing mass of fire came flying down through the air, and although Frank tried to dodge it, he was struck by some of the embers and a thousand sparks flew off of him.

"Jingo!" he exclaimed.

Then he violently brushed off the sparks.

Had he not done so his clothing would have caught afire.

The heavy whacks the burning brands gave let him know very plainly that they were not very spirit-like.

In fact, they were heavy pieces of burning wood.

Frank rushed up the stairs.

He expected to find his assailant.

As he ascended he saw the small windows in which the heads of the phantoms had been appearing.

Reaching the top he found himself upon a platform, from which he stepped through a door on the roof.

Here he found the fire blazing away.

But there was not a soul in sight.

The place was completely deserted, and there was not a nook or corner anywhere in which any one could have hidden.

Frank was intensely puzzled.

"No one here, eh?" he muttered. "I wonder where his ghostship went who fired those burning brands down at me. Somebody or something must have been up here to have done that, for I heard that sneering, diabolical laugh, and that infernal yell."

He searched around again.

It was useless; he could find no one.

He finally gave it up, and went downstairs.

His mind was a prey to all kinds of doubts and theories, but he could not come to a satisfactory conclusion.

When he joined his friends and told them the news he said:

"I'll frankly confess I'm completely mystified."

"You all laughed at my account of these phantoms," said Buntline.

"I'm sorry now that I did," said Frank, candidly. "There certainly is something very strange in all this. I'm positive there was someone ahead of me in the tower whose voice I heard, but where the mysterious object disappeared I have no idea."

"Don't look no more to-night," said Pomp. "Mebbe when daylight comes we found out more, honey."

"That's a wise suggestion," commented Frank.

"Better keep a safe watch posted all night, though," suggested Barney. "There's no tellin' wot them spooks might do."

"Very well," Frank assented, and soon after all turned in.

The next day was very rainy.

Our friends partook of breakfast, and then the airship was sent up and driven over to the mainland.

"We'll go to the pirates' village first," said the captain, "and I'll show you what became of the gang."

"In which direction does it lie?" queried Frank.

"To the eastward of here."

"Who built that tower?"

"The pirates. It was used as a lookout or watch tower. There were sentries posted there night and day to give warning of the approach of enemies, or the appearance of ships in the distance which Commodore Wild could attack."

Frank eyed the island.

It was clothed in luxuriant vegetation.

There were rocky hills, dense woods, jungles and tiny streams.

"If the crew of the Jennie Jerome landed upon this island," he mused, "they were in a garden of paradise. I hope I'll find the poor fellows here. I wonder if the phantoms have caused them the annoyance they have given me?"

He posted Barney on lookout.

"Keep a careful watch for human beings," said Frank.

"Depind on me," said Barney, saluting naval style.

The airship passed on.

In a short time they reached a deep bay.

Here Frank caught view of a settlement.

It was the pirates' headquarters, and he expected to find the castaways there, inhabiting the houses.

"That's Wild's old village," said the captain.

"What is the largest house?" Frank inquired.

"The pirate's castle, where he and his crew lie dead."

"I see; the place looks completely deserted."

"Yes; a city of the dead."

"We shall make a landing here and explore the place," said Frank. "My friends may be located here."

Soon afterward the Demon alighted on the ground.

Frank and the captain then embarked and strode over to the stone building occupied by the pirates in the past. They passed in through the big door, and Buntline said: "Now I'll show you a startling scene!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE GHOST IN THE WOODS.

"What scene do you refer to?" asked Frank, as they entered the house.

"I'm going to show you the remains of Commodore Wild and his forty men, lying dead from poisoning, around the banquet table."

"That surely must be an appalling sight."

"It will prove my story."

"Most decidedly. Where does that door lead to?"

"Into the room where they lie dead."

A moment later they entered the apartment.

The captain was in advance, and suddenly paused, uttering a cry.

"What's the matter?" questioned Frank.

"The bodies are gone!"

"Gone? Gone where?"

"Heaven only knows. See here!"

Pointing into the apartment Buntline stood on the threshold, with a look of intense perplexity upon his face.

Frank saw that the room had once been used for dining, as it contained a huge, massive oak table, around which stood numerous chairs; the floor was richly carpeted, and there were many fine pictures on the walls, and draperies at the windows.

But not a sign of a corpse was to be seen.

Nor were there any of the dishes scattered upon the floor from being pulled from the table.

Everything had an orderly appearance, and a thick coating of dust upon everything failed to show the marks of any one having been in the room recently.

"This is queer," muttered the captain.

"Not at all. It shows plainly that somebody has been here ahead of us, removed the bodies and probably buried them."

"That's true. Probably the crew of a passing ship."

"It might have been the crew of the Jennie Jerome."

"Or the ghosts," suggested the captain.

"No," laughed Frank. "They wouldn't do anything so charitable as that. Is there anything else to see here?"

"Nothing of interest. Let us go and look at the treasure."

"By all means; that's one of the chief points."

The captain led the way out of the house by a rear door, and leaving the settlement behind, he plunged into the woods.

Here he strode along for some distance with Frank, keeping a keen lookout for the heap of rocks giving ingress to the cave in which the treasure was stowed away in an inner compartment.

But he saw no heap of rocks when he arrived at the spot where he judged they should have been.

A perplexed look crossed his face.

He finally paused.

"Could I have erred?" he muttered.

"Can't you find the place?" asked Frank.

"No; I must have made some mistake."

"Try to rectify it, if you can."

"We'll have to begin all over again."

"Perhaps; are you pretty sure of the location?"

"It ought to be right here. There are several blazed trees to show the location and I've followed them faithfully. As near as I can recollect, that heap of rocks was right here where you see this hollow in the ground. The hollow, as you can see, is covered with grass and rubbish."

"That's odd," Frank commented.

"Wait here, and I'll search again and come back to report."

Frank nodded and sat down on a stone.

The captain hurried away.

It was very quiet where Frank sat, and he fell asleep in a deep reverie over the past events which had led up to his present situation upon this lonely island.

The ghostly part of the adventure puzzled him, and he could not form the remotest idea of what the strange objects were, no matter how hard he tried.

"There's one way to test them," he thought. "If I get a shot at one, it will tell the tale. A bullet will soon decide whether they are spiritual or material."

This thought had scarcely entered his mind when he heard a prolonged howl which had such a diabolical ring to it that he was chilled.

Bounding to his feet he glared around.

At the first glance he caught view of a white figure flitting through the darkest part of the woods.

"There's one of the ghosts now!" he thought.

And out flashed his pistol.

Bang! Bang!

Two rapid shots followed.

"Ha! ha! ha!"

This fiendish laugh came from the phantom.

It was a derisive laugh, and made Frank angry.

He was sure he had hit the object.

Yet his bullets seemed to make no impression on it.

The next moment Frank rushed after the flying figure.

Like a flash it darted into a clump of bushes and vanished.

Never pausing, the young inventor swiftly sped on, and reaching the bushes, plunged in among them.

But he saw nothing of the fugitive.

It had disappeared completely.

"Like the snuffing of a candle!" he muttered.

He searched every inch of the location, but failed to find the white object.

Then he thought that perhaps it had left a trail, but the keenest scrutiny of the ground failed to show any foot-prints or other marks there.

He finally desisted.

His astonishment increased.

He did not know what to make of it.

"A human being to stand up against bullets I fire must be ironclad to retain his life, yet this queer object did not seem to be hurt," he muttered.

He returned to where he had been sitting.

The audacity of a ghost appearing in broad daylight was a thing he had never heard of in the weirdest and most harrowing legends he had ever listened to.

When the captain returned Frank told him all.

It caused a grave look to cross his face.

"I'm convinced that this place is haunted!" he muttered.

"Nonsense!" scoffed Frank. "Strange as it all seems, I am not yet convinced that these ghosts are visitors from another world. I can't force myself to believe it."

"You'll see yet!"

"How did you make out about locating the treasure?"

"No better than before."

"That's queer; does the trail lead you here again?"

"Yes."

"Suppose some one has been here, found the treasure and blasted the rocks to fragments. That would wipe all trace of them out of existence, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," answered Buntline, with an uncomfortable look.

"I've got an idea something like that has occurred."

"Well, I hope not," said the captain.

"Let's get back to the airship."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Hunt for the castaways. When we find them we can come back here and make a closer search for the gold."

"Very well."

They thereupon went back to the Demon, and put Barney and Pomp into possession of the foregoing facts.

It surprised the pair, of course.

The Demon was then raised in the air.

Frank took control of the wheel, and as Pomp stood looking out the turret window, he asked the inventor:

"What way yo' gwine now, sah?"

"Around the island first, then diagonally across it. You remain where you are on lookout."

The airship was thereupon sent along on her journey, and Barney and the captain went out on deck to keep watch.

A complete circuit of the island was made.

It was found to be covered with the most luxuriant tropical vegetation, and the shores were indented by bays and lagoons, while off the east coast stood a coral barrier reef.

In the middle the hills rose to a great height, and were abundantly clothed with verdure.

Not a bird or beast or reptile was seen, but they caught view of several long, dug-out canoes drawn up on the shore, and then saw smoke arising from a fire.

Frank steered toward the spot and soon caught view of a glen not far back from the shore, in which were gathered about sixty savages, with tattooed bodies.

They were dancing, yelling and brandishing their weapons as they whirled around a tree to which a black man was bound, with a heap of blazing fagots around him.

"Great Heavens! They are burning the man to death!" cried Frank, in tones of horror.

"Cannibals, most likely!" said Barney.

"Arm yourselves; we must disperse them and save the wretched prisoner," said Frank.

The rest rushed below to obey.

Frank stopped the Demon.

He saw that mere shooting was not going to save the prisoner from being roasted to death.

A plan to save him entered Frank's mind.

He therefore rushed below after his companions, and securing a hose, he fasted it to the water-tank.

He carried it to one of the side windows.

Below raged the fire.

Frank directed the stream of water upon it, and his friends went rushing up on deck with their weapons.

"Fire at them!" cried the inventor.

CHAPTER VII.

A HUMAN CRY.

Obedient to Frank's order his companions blazed away at the natives and the stream of water poured down upon the fire.

A wild yell of dismay escaped the black men when they heard the reports, felt the bullets and saw the flying machine.

To their untutored minds it seemed as if the airship was some dreadful monster come to annihilate them.

Down fell several of them wounded.

The grotesque dance stopped, and there was a cessation of the music they played by beating sticks on a piece of hollow log.

Some fled to the shore.

Others hurled spears at the Demon.

The rest shot arrows and flung their war-clubs.

A panic of desperation assailed them.

The young inventor steadily played the hose on the fire.

It took only a few moments to quench the blaze.

Frank then rushed up to the turret and caused the Demon to sink.

Down it settled rapidly.

In a few moments they reached the ground.

Here Frank alighted and ran over to the captive.

The man had been scorched some, but was not fatally burned, and he was groaning at a fearful rate.

Cutting his bonds Frank liberated him, and glancing around he saw that all the cannibals had gone.

They could not withstand the shots from our friend's weapons and had sped toward their canoes, carrying their wounded companions with them.

"Don't chase them, boys!" shouted Frank.

"But they'll be after escapin'," plaintively protested Barney.

"Let them; we don't care as long as this man is safe."

"Kain't he talk English?" queried Pomp.

"No," replied the inventor, with a smile.

The poor prisoner looked bewildered, for he did not, of course, understand a single word they uttered.

He finally began to jabber in his own tongue, but this

mystified Frank and his companions as much as they had puzzled him.

"It's no use," said Frank; "we can't understand each other."

"Then we'll never know nuthin' about this galoot," said Barney.

"It isn't of much interest to us, anyhow."

"Very true; wot's ter be did wid him?"

"All we can do is to doctor him and let him roam."

This plan was carried out.

When the man was gone, our friends arose in the airship and saw the canoes, filled with natives, being paddled away.

"They evidently came from one of the adjacent islands," said Frank. "It's a habit of these savages to carry their captives to other islands than the ones they occupy to kill them."

"Ay, now," said Barney; "that must 'a' been ther case in this instance."

Frank started the machine off across the island.

"We'll have to make a landing somewhere and refill our water-tanks," he remarked. "I've emptied them quenching the fire which was roasting that unfortunate darky. Pomp, you had better coil in the hose and disconnect it from the tanks."

"Yes, sah," replied the coon, and he hastened out.

The airship had reached the middle of the island and was scudding over the biggest hill, down which ran a stream, when all of a sudden Frank and the rest heard a pistol shot.

It came from directly below, and was almost instantly followed by a piercing cry of mortal anguish.

"Hark! A decidedly human sound," said the inventor, as he stopped the airship. "Did you hear it?"

"Yessah," assented Pomp; "it was under us."

A moment later there came a wild cry of:

"Help! Help! Oh, save me!"

It excited everyone, and Frank cut out part of the current and hastily sent the Demon earthward to investigate that piercing cry for assistance.

"I see the one who gave that cry; I see him!"

The captain uttered this exclamation as the flying machine settled down rapidly toward the hill.

All hands anxiously peered out.

A thrilling scene met their view.

Upon the top of the hill there was a rocky clearing, surrounded by a circle of trees and bushes.

In the middle of this clearing two men stood clasped in a tight embrace, struggling for their lives.

One was the negro whom our friends had saved from the cannibals, and the other was a white man clad in the garb of an American sailor.

As the crew of the Demon glared down at the struggling pair they saw the black man suddenly wrench one arm free and deal his antagonist a crushing blow on the head with a club.

Glaring at his victim a moment exultingly, the savage planted a foot on his breast, brandished his club, uttered a blood-curdling yell of triumph and darted away.

The next moment he disappeared in the woods.

"By thunder, the brute has killed the white man," cried Frank.

"He don't budge an inch," assented the captain.

"We must see who he is."

"The airship is going to land near him."

Down went the Demon to the crest of the hill.

It finally paused close to the fallen man.

Frank and his companions hastily alighted and ran over to the sailor, who lay prone on the ground.

The inventor knelt beside him.

Turning the man over he closely examined his face and a startled cry escaped him.

"It's Ralph Howard!" he cried.

"Who is he? Do you know him?" queried Buntline.

"Yes; he is one of the crew of the Jennie Jerome."

"I see; one of the shipwrecked crew you came to find."

"Exactly so, and as he is here the rest must be here."

"That's reasonable; is he dead?"

"No; simply stunned."

"Try to revive him."

Frank did so, and finally succeeded.

The sailor recovered, but instead of regaining his faculties, he was hopelessly delirious from the blow.

There was no sign of recognition in the blank stare he gave the people around him, and they saw that nothing but the most careful nursing would save his life.

"He seems dazed entirely," remarked Barney.

"I hope his skull isn't fractured," Frank answered.

"Lordy, he don't know nobody!"

"That's true, Pomp; carry him aboard."

They handled the poor fellow with the gentlest care, and he was taken upon the airship, and when they laid him in a berth Frank undressed him and examined the wound.

There was no fracture.

The inventor dressed the poor fellow's injuries and they made him feel easier and more comfortable.

As Frank understood a great deal about medicines he at once began to doctor the patient.

"It's too bad this happened," he remarked.

"Why?" asked Barney.

"Because he can't tell us now where to look for his shipmates, and we'll have to hunt at random for them."

"How long'll it be afore he recovers?"

"That depends upon circumstances."

Each one offered to watch the injured man in turns, and Frank returned to the turret.

For the present he could not do anything further for the patient, so he had the water-casks filled at the stream and sent the machine aloft again.

Pomp took the first turn watching the ill sailor.

Frank stopped the Demon when it rose a few feet and put the current into the driving screws.

The airship drove ahead.

All the rest of the day was spent in a search for the lost crew of the Jennie Jerome.

But they were not found at the close of day.

Frank was puzzled.

As he sat at the dinner table that night he asked:

"Could it be possible that the rest of the crew are either dead or gone from this island?"

"Perhaps thim cannibals ketch'd 'em," suggested Barney.

"I doubt that."

"Well, there seemed to be bad blood atween this feller an' ther darky what we saved, ye know."

"That's very true, too, but it could have been brought about by an accidental meeting, too."

"Will yo' stay up in de air all night?" asked Pomp.

"No; a gale may rise and blow us out to sea. I'll land yonder on the shore, near the cliffs."

When the Demon alighted upon the sand our friends remained up late discussing what had happened.

"If we don't meet with any success after another search for those sailors to-morrow," said Frank, finally, "I'm going to try to find the treasure."

"Oh," said the captain, with a frown and a sigh, as he shook his head, "it's of no use. I've given up all hope."

"But I haven't," emphatically said Frank.

"Where can you look?"

"Just where you indicated.

"It's useless."

"Not if a theory I have is all right."

"What new idea have you got now?"

"I'm under the impression that this place is volcanic, and during an earthquake the rocks sunk, leaving the depression we saw in the soil at that spot."

"Could such an event occur?"

"Most decidedly; I've seen such cases before. My experience showed me plainly that some such convulsion of nature occurred there in the past. Everything about the spot indicates it clearly."

On the following day the Demon was driven to the woods where the captain said the cavern had been.

The injured sailor had rallied a great deal, but he was too sick yet to be asked any questions.

Taking some implements our friends began to excavate about the depression in various places.

It did not result in any good.

Nothing was found.

The ground showed very clearly that it had not been disturbed in ages past.

Finally they gave up the search.

"You must have made an error in locating the place, captain," said Frank at last.

"No, no! It don't seem possible," said Buntline, gravely. "I've searched about for some other indication, but every clew leads me to this spot."

"You'd better try it again after dark."

"Why?" demanded the captain.

"Because the woods will assume the same look they had when you found the treasure, and you will thus be able to locate the place more accurately."

"That seems reasonable," admitted Buntline, "for the reason that I never went near the place in daylight after I first located it, for fear Dan Scott would follow me and find it."

"Scott, eh? Now, I wonder what became of him and his schooner, the Dragon, with which he and his syndicate expected to come here and get the treasure?"

"I presume they are on their way here now."

"Should we meet, there will be a hot struggle."

"No doubt of that; I am extremely anxious to locate the pirate's treasure and get it aboard before those villains reach this island. Nothing would please me better than to baffle them after the way they treated me."

"Oh, there's plenty of time before they get here. I anticipate that we will have our business here finished and be gone before they get anywhere near this island, captain."

"Hark! What's that?" suddenly asked Buntline.

Frank listened intently.

Then he heard a yell and a pistol shot.

"Pomp's voice!" cried the inventor.

"Where are he and Barney?"

"The last I saw of them they were in the woods."

"Ha! Here comes someone."

Peering through the woods they saw Barney.

He was rushing toward them as fast as he could.

In a few moments he reached Frank, in a high state of excitement, and panted hard for breath.

"What's the row?" Frank demanded.

"Oh, Lor," groaned Barney, chokingly.

Then he panted and puffed like a steam engine.

"Has anything gone wrong?" queried Frank, quickly.

"It has."

"Speak out!"

"Pomp is a dead man!"

"What befell him?"

"A crew av thim ghosts sprung from ther bushes an' tackled us. Pomp wuz knocked sinseless; I fired at 'em as one sped away with ther nagur, but ther ball did no harm, so I came here for assistance."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEMON DISAPPEARS.

"Pomp abducted by the ghosts!"

Frank and the captain were amazed.

For a moment they glared at Barney in amazement.

Then the inventor asked hastily:

"Which way did they go?"

"Straight towards ther village," answered the Celt.

"Come on, captain; we must save him."

"Howld on, Frank."

"What now, Barney?"

"It won't be safe to leave ther airship unguarded."

"Very true; you get aboard and stay there."

And as Frank and Buntline rushed away in the direction indicated by the Irishman, Barney proceeded to the Demon.

He soon reached her and went aboard.

For a few moments he stood watching his companions, and when they disappeared from view he gave a sigh and passed into the turret, muttering:

"I hopes as they'll overhaul them blamed goblins an' save poor Pomp from them spalpeens."

Then he went below.

He wanted to see how the sick man was progressing, for Barney expected soon to be able to speak to him and find out where all the rest of the crew of the Jennie Jerome were.

When he reached the cabin he strode over to the berths and glanced down in the one the sailor had occupied.

It was empty!

The man was gone!

"Gee whiz!" roared Barney.

He could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes, and he rubbed them and glared at the bunk again.

But he failed to see the sailor.

"He's gone fer fair," he gasped.

But where had the man gone to?

When Barney had last seen him he was so sick that it seemed to be a sheer impossibility for him to have risen from his bed and walked away.

The Irishman was greatly puzzled:

"I s'pose he got a sudden notion in his head that he wuz able ter take care av hisself," muttered Barney, "an' he must 'a' riz an' wandered off somewheres. I'll search about an' see if I kin find ther baste."

He then began to hunt assiduously.

Every part of the Demon was carefully searched, but to his utter amazement he failed to find his man.

He had completely disappeared.

"Bedad, he ain't aboard!" gasped Barney, finally.

This increased his astonishment, for how the man got off the ship in his feeble condition was more than the Celt could very well understand.

While he was puzzling his mind over the matter, Frank and the captain were racing through the woods like a pair of deer, on a hunt for the ghosts.

They finally saw the objects of their quest.

Far ahead they caught a glimpse of the white figures they sought, racing ahead swiftly.

"There they are! There they are!" excitedly cried the inventor.

"Yes, I see them, and there's a dozen or more of the white, spectral figures," panted the captain.

"Got a pistol?"

"No; have you?"

"I'm sorry to say I haven't."

"Then we'll have to depend on our legs."

"Run faster!"

"I can't."

"Then I'm going to leave you behind."

"Go ahead, then, for we are rapidly overtaking them."

Frank spurted ahead.

At a short distance ahead he caught view of the pirates' village and he saw the phantoms heading for it.

"I'll catch them soon if I keep up this speed," he muttered. "Once I get my hands on them, I'll—oh, jingo!"

The latter exclamation was wrung from his lips by stubbing his foot against a tree root.

He fell prostrate.

But he instantly bounded to his feet again.

During that brief spell, though, the ghosts had vanished as suddenly and completely as if the ground had opened and swallowed every one of them.

Frank paused.

He did not know what to make of it.

"Where in the world have they gone?" he gasped.

Standing there, completely bewildered, for a few moments, he finally strode ahead and reaching the last place he had seen them he glanced around.

As formerly, not a vestige of them was to be seen.

They did not leave a trace.

Presently the captain joined him.

"All gone, I see!" he panted.

"Yes."

"Did you locate them?"

"No."

"It was astonishing how fast they faded."

"Did you see them disappear?"

"I did; they simply melted away."

"And you observed my fall?"

"Of course; it was too bad. I thought you'd catch them."

"So did I, but I didn't."

"Any trail left?"

"Not a clew."

"How mysterious!"

"I can't make it out at all!"

"First I thought they passed into the village, but I'd swear they vanished before leaving the woods, and——"

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

A diabolical laugh was heard.

Then another chimed in, and another, and so it continued until there was a chorus of many voices laughing.

Frank and his companion started.

They glanced quickly at each other as that strange chorus suddenly pealed out with mocking inflections, and then suddenly and abruptly stopped.

"Lord!" gasped Buntline. "Did you hear that?"

"Where did the voices come from?"

"I have not the faintest idea."

"Search about and see if we can locate them."

The captain complied with a poor grace.

As a matter of fact he was getting frightened.

So much of the ghost business as he had experienced was wearing on his nerves and arousing his superstition.

He felt nervous and started at the slightest sound, and a cold perspiration burst out all over him.

Whenever he heard the snapping of a twig or the rustling of the trees his teeth began to chatter and his muscles were drawn.

Frank, on the contrary, was as cool as an iceberg.

He did not have the slightest fear of phantoms, for despite all he had seen, he had no belief in the supernatural.

To his mind there was a logical explanation of all this mystery, and he felt quite confident that if he could once get one of those apparitions in his hands he would analyze it thoroughly, and find out exactly what it was made of.

Although they hunted high and low, they could not find anything of the white figures.

Pomp had disappeared completely, too.

This fact worried the inventor, for he had the gravest fears for his friend's life.

"We'll have to give it up," he remarked, finally, with a deep-drawn sigh of disappointment. "Those objects have hidden him effectively. I only hope he won't come to grief."

"Let's get back to the airship," eagerly suggested the captain, "and we then can rise above the ground and keep a watch below for him. It will be a greater advantage than remaining down here, for from a height we will command a broader view of the ground and see the ghosts quicker."

Frank laughed.

He had noted the captain's feverish anxiety.

"You are getting shaky, Buntline!" he exclaimed.

"It's a painful but veracious fact," assented the skipper.

"Well, you should be skeptical about phantoms."

"A man must credit his eyesight."

"Bosh! A fellow with a sheet flung over him looks like a ghost."

"Yes; but he don't sweat fire like the genuine article just imported from the infernal regions. And he wouldn't be able to vanish like a puff of wind, as these spooks do."

"I am puzzled and mystified about them now," said Frank, "but the moment I get hold of one I'll bet I'll show you something pretty substantial about him."

"Why do you persist in thinking so, after the manifestations you have seen of their unearthly power?"

"That laugh gave them away; the tones were purely human. There never was a spirit with a material voice."

This answer set the captain to thinking hard.

And they went back to the place where they left the Demon.

Here another startling surprise awaited them.

The airship was gone!

"Well, by Jove! Will wonders never cease!" gasped Frank.

"Barney must have been crazy to go away and leave us to our fate in this manner," angrily exclaimed the captain.

"But then, perhaps, he had good reason for acting so."

"We'll wait and see if he returns," said Frank.

CHAPTER IX.

THE STEAMER NANCY NOON.

When Barney found he could not solve the problem of where the sick sailor had disappeared, he finally went up on deck.

He had not been there more than a few moments when he suddenly caught view of a procession of ghosts in the distance.

They were going along in single file at a rapid rate of speed, and were taking the direction of the middle of the island.

In advance he saw his friend Pomp.

Four of the white objects were carrying the coon, and Barney leaped to the ground and rushed after them.

He kept them plainly in view.

But suddenly they all disappeared again.

Barney was wild with chagrin.

He reached the spot where they vanished.

It was a spot densely overgrown with bushes.

From the midst of the bushes there rose a heap of rocks to a height of ten feet, and he searched around them.

He thought the ghosts were hiding behind the pile.

A small, white object caught the Celt's view, clinging to a tangled mass of vines growing up the face of the rocks.

He eagerly picked it up.

It was a handkerchief.

And it bore the darky's initials.

"Belongs ter Pomp," soliloquized Barney.

He cast another glance at the spot where he had picked it up.

A startled look crossed his face.

"Wot's that?" he gasped.

Then he pushed his arm into the vines.

No rocks were behind them.

He parted the vines and saw a dark opening.

It looked like the entrance to a cave and he lit a match, and, pushing through, he entered a large room.

He expected to find the ghosts there, but saw no one.

The cave was empty!

It was a small apartment, and on the floor lay a human skeleton.

"Ther remains av some poor devil!" thought Barney. "I reckoned them ghosts wuz in here, but I see as they isn't."

He was greatly puzzled to know where they went.

Searching the cave thoroughly, and finding nothing, he went out.

Barney spent a quarter of an hour looking around for some sign of the ghosts or his friends, and finally went back to the airship.

From where it lay he had a good view of the central hilltop, and now, to his surprise, he saw the ghostly band winding its way up to the crest of the elevation.

"There they are again," gasped the Celt, rushing into the pilot-house. "Now I've got 'em. I'll send ther ship aloft an' d'rop a bomb down on their heads."

And up went the airship.

It rose directly above the treetops before he drove it ahead, and it was then steered directly for the elevation.

By the time the airship reached the elevation he saw the procession going down the other side of the hill.

Procuring a repeating rifle the Irishman now began to blaze away at the ghosts.

At the sound of the first shot they paused.

The second shot caused them to look upward.

And at the third shot they dropped Pomp and scattered.

Away they darted in all directions.

Rapidly lowering the airship Pomp was soon reached and Barney found him, bound hand and foot with cords, and blindfolded.

"Hey, Pomp!" gasped the Celt.

"Is dat yo', Barney?" replied the coon, joyfully.

"It is, me lad; an' are yer safe?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad ter hear that."

"Cut dese cords, will yer, Barney?"

"Fer sure! They has yer well tied!"

And Pomp was liberated.

He pulled off the blinder from his eyes.

As soon as his eyes became accustomed to the light, and he saw the airship close by, he asked:

"Are yo' alone?"

"I am," replied Barney, nodding.

"Where's Frank and Buntline?"

"Off searchin' fer you."

"How did yer find me?"

Barney told all that happened.

When he finished, he asked:

"Now, where have ye been all this time?"

"Dey kept carryin' me around."

"Did yer see where?"

"Yes—some ob de places."

"Then for Heaven's sake explain them mysterious disappearances."

"Dat am easy; dis island am honeycombed with underground passages. Dere am many cunningly concealed entrances underground in der trees and in der rocks."

"So them ghosts disappeared by a-goin' inter these openin's?"

"Dat's where dey went, fo' shu'!"

"Did they say anything to yer?"

"Not a word."

"Or try ter harm yer?"

"Not once."

"Well, that's funny."

"I think so, too."

"Describe ther ghosts at close range, if you plaze."

"I can't; dey blindfolded me right after I got under ground."

"How did they feel—like fire?"

"Naw; like anybody else."

Barney was anxious to know something about the quality of the spectres, but was doomed to disappointment.

Pomp had no chance to test them, bound and blindfolded as he had been, so he could not give very much information about them.

"Hadn't we better look for Frank and de captain?" he asked.

"Yes; they'll be back and find ther Demon gone."

"Yo' see any ob dem ghosts now?"

"They have all disappeared."

"Dat am good; come aboard."

They got upon the airship and sent her aloft.

As she paused in the air, Pomp suddenly exclaimed:

"Hello! This am funny!"

"Wot is?" asked Barney, in surprise.

"Looker dat steamer."

"It's coming ter this island."

"Yep; dat am sure."

Barney scanned the vessel with a telescope.

It was about two leagues away yet.

The vessel was small and speedy and her course was directly toward Phantom Island.

"Can yo' see wot flag she done carry?" asked Pomp.

"No; she don't carry none."

"I don't understan' dat."

"Let's go out ter meet her."

"But how about Frank?"

"Oh, he can't git lost."

"All right, go ahead."

The Celt steered the Demon out to sea.

In a short time she neared the steamer.

All the crew were upon the deck, eagerly watching the airship, and Pomp hailed them with:

"Ship ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" came the reply.

"What ship am dat?"

"The Nancy Noon of San Francisco."

"Whar yo' gwine?"

"To that island for water."

"Well, yo' better keep away."

"What for?"

"It's filled with ghosts."

"Oh, we ain't afraid of them."

"You'll see wot trouble you have."

"Where's your captain?"

"Frank Reade, Jr.?"

"Yes; I presume he is your leader."

"He is on shore with Captain Buntline."

"Ah! I see. What brought you here?"

"Private business."

"Have you finished it?"

"No, sir; not yet."

"Ah! you haven't, eh? Well, that's good!"

"I don' fink so," laughed Pomp.

"Hush!" interposed Barney, warningly.

"For wot?" demanded the coon.

"Don't give our business away ter that stranger."

"I isn't gwine to."

"You came mighty near it."

"Wait! I'll find out where dat ship go."

"No; don't bother any further with 'em. We kin larn all we wants ter whin we meets 'em ashore."

"All right, den."

"I'm goin' back ter ther land; Frank will be worried."

"Let her go!"

Barney nodded and drove the airship away.

The crew of the steamer keenly watched her movements and she quickly left the stranger astern.

Reaching the island Barney heard a hail below of:

"Hey!"

"Hello!"

"Come down here!"

"Oh, it's Frank," said the Celt.

And he lowered the Demon.

CHAPTER X.

THE APPEARANCE OF AN OLD ENEMY.

"Where under the sun have you been with the airship?" was Frank's first salutation, as he stepped aboard, followed by Buntline.

"Savin' Pomp, fer one thing," replied Barney, with a grin.

"Pomp? Why—have you seen him?"

"I've got him!"

"Hurrah!" cried the captain.

And just then the coon rushed into view, and there was a hearty handshake all around.

When their first transports of joy subsided, Frank naturally wanted to know what had happened to Pomp, and how the Celt happened to recover him.

He was told.

Then he heard of the steamer.

"So she's coming here, is she?" he asked.

"Ay, sor; ther crew wants fresh water," said Barney.

"Her name is the Nancy Noon, you say?"

"That it are, an' she hails from San Francisco."

"We must have nothing to do with them."

"I don't see why, bedad!"

"Simply because we can't have them prying into our business."

"Oh! they seemed ter be honest fellers."

"Granted, but it isn't to our interest to cultivate strangers."

"What do you think of Pomp's account of the ghosts disappearing into underground passages, with hidden entrances?" asked the captain of the young inventor. "Don't that explain the seeming mystery of their rapid-vanishing acts?"

"Very plainly," said Frank. "It also confirms my suspicion that they are very material spirits."

"In which way?"

"Why, if they were real ghosts they would not have to resort to ordinary methods of disappearing; they would simply melt away. What they did to vanish, is what any human being would do."

"That's a fact."

"If this island is honeycombed with secret passages it is more than likely the lighthouse is, too, where I had my first experience with the disappearing phantoms."

"We might investigate Pomp's story with benefit."

"I'm sure we could, for the reason that it might explain how we heard that ghostly laughing and could not find the ones who uttered the sounds. They must have been hidden under ground in their subterranean passages when they laughed, and that is the reason we could not locate them."

"Some of the mystery is being cleared up," said Buntline, with a faint smile. "What you say dispels the illusion to a certain extent and lends the mystery a natural air."

"Could you lead us to one of those hidden passages, Pomp?"

"Ob co'se I can," readily assented the coon.

"We will go, then, and explore it."

"It must lade ter ther cave I wuz in," said Barney.

"What cave are you alluding to?"

"Didn't I tell yer as I seen a ghostly gang vanish into a cave?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then I'll explain."

And he did so.

Everyone listened intently.

When Barney explained about the skeleton, the captain cried:

"Could you find that cave again?"

"I think so," replied the Celt, nodding.

"You had better do so at once, then."

"Why?"

"Because it is the treasure cavern!"

Had a bomb exploded among them they could not have been more astonished than they were to hear this.

Finally Frank asked:

"Why do you say that?"

"Simply because his description fits the place, and the skeleton must be that of the man Commodore Wild killed, as I explained when I first told you my story about the place."

Frank recalled the circumstance to mind of how Wild had gone to the cave with a valise full of booty, and how the two arch conspirators had followed him and were killed.

"Will we go on foot?" queried Pomp.

"No; just raise the Demon over ther treetops," said Barney. "From that elevation I kin better judge where ther heap of rocks lie."

Frank thereupon turned the electric current into the rotascopes, and as they spun around the machine soared skyward.

It soon cleared the trees.

As it gained a good elevation Barney pointed back to the bay, around which the pirates' village was built, and said:

"See! There's ther Nancy Noon! She's come ter anchor, an' ther crew is debarkin' in her quarter boats."

"They are watching us, too," said Frank.

"I hope dat they won't interfere with us," Pomp exclaimed.

"There isn't much danger of that," replied the captain.

Barney now went out on deck.

Leaning over the railing he said:

"Send her more ter ther east'ard."

The young inventor followed his various instructions, and the airship kept darting here and there and sweeping around in circles, while the Celt kept a keen watch on the woods below and directed her course.

In the course of an hour Barney recognized the place where he had been when he saw the cave.

"Drop her here!" he sung out.

"Are you sure of the spot?" asked Frank, complying.

"I'd swear to it."

"Then I'll land her in that clearing."

Settling rapidly the machine finally reached the ground, and Barney saw the heap of rocks he had seen before.

As soon as the captain's glance fell on the pile he cried:

"That's the place! I recognize it now by the peculiar formation of the front, and the vines that cover the entrance."

Everyone was in a fever of anxiety.

They all wished to find out if the treasure was intact.

Grasping a lantern Frank alighted, followed by the others, and they quickly entered the cave.

It was the same place Barney had been in.

The white skeleton of a man lay in a corner and as Frank flashed the rays of the lantern around the walls, he asked:

"Where is the inner chamber you mentioned?"

"The door is in the wall right here, opposite the entrance," answered the captain, touching a certain section.

"Open it."

"Hold the light nearer so I can see."

Frank strode closer and they all saw a faint crack in the wall, showing the outline of the door of stone in the rock.

But there was no visible means of opening it.

The captain groped about blindly and vainly.

At last he remarked:

"We'll have to force it."

"Insert your knife blade in the crevice."

Butline tried this expedient, but it did not work.

He could not force the door open at all.

Frank had been keenly watching it, and now said:

"You'll have to give it up, and I'll blow it open with powder."

Leaving them there he returned aboard the airship and got a package of fine powder, a chunk of putty, a fuse, and a piece of paper which he rolled in a spiral cylinder.

Puttying up the cracks he blew the powder into them with the paper cylinder through a small opening left for that purpose, and inserting the fuse, he lit it.

Then all retreated from the cave.

A few moments later there came a violent explosion.

A cloud of smoke gushed out of the entrance, laden with the odor of burnt powder.

The four waited a few moments to let the smoke clear, and then passed into the cave again.

Here they found the stone door, shattered to pieces, lying on the floor, and a dense cloud of smoke overhanging all.

Through the opening thus left they observed a small, square compartment beyond, in which stood a number of boxes, casks, barrels and packages.

"There's the treasure!" cried the captain, pointing at it.

The young inventor nodded.

He was just upon the point of striding into the room to examine the valuables when they all heard voices outside.

"This way, boys! Here's the place!" cried a voice.

"Hark! Strangers!" said Frank.

"That voice!" gasped the captain, in agitated tones.

"What of it?"

"It's Dan Scott's."

Everyone, startled, rushed to the exit.

Just as they reached it and Frank darted out, they saw a band of a dozen men rushing toward the cave.

The leader really was their old enemy, Scott.

He had his old syndicate with him who had produced the money to pay for the expedition, but the sailors were not the same who manned the Dragon.

Then the truth of the matter flashed across Frank's mind.

"They sold the Dragon in the East, crossed the continent by rail to California, and equipped this steamer, Nancy Noon, for the trip here," Frank muttered. "And having seen the Demon in the air and located where she descended, they came here and now know where the treasure lies. If we wish to save the pirate's gold from their grasp we shall

have to fight hard for it, as they are bound to bitterly contest our efforts to get it aboard the flying machine."

CHAPTER XI.

GATHERING IN THE TREASURE.

As the crew of the Demon made their appearance at the exit of the cavern, Scott's men paused.

"Boys, are you armed?" asked Frank.

"I've got a pistol," said Barney.

"And so have I," added Buntline.

"Then keep them at bay."

"What are you going to do?"

"Get aboard the Demon to arm myself and protect her."

"Look out dey don't shoot yo'," advised Pomp.

"I'm safe, I guess."

"The first one who tries to enter here will get shot," said Buntline in determined tones. "We can hold it against an army."

Frank dashed for the Demon.

As Scott saw him, he yelled:

"Halt!"

Frank refused to obey.

"Stop or I'll fire," continued Scott, furiously.

Still Frank kept on.

Bang! Bang!

The bullets whistled dangerously near Frank's body, but by rare good fortune they missed him.

Scott turned and faced his followers.

"Drop him!" he hissed.

Every man in the party was armed, and everyone raised his pistol, aimed at Frank's flying body and fired.

But just as they did so the inventor sprang behind the airship and it shielded him from the bullets.

He quickly got aboard.

As he banged the door of the turret shut he was panting for breath, and his eyes gleamed with anger.

"So they have no scruples about murdering people, eh?" he muttered. "Well, we'll see if I can't teach them to behave."

He peered out the window.

Seeing that they could not bring down the inventor, some of them rushed toward the Demon.

At a distance of ten paces they opened fire on her, but she was bullet proof and they did her no injury.

Frank remained uninjured.

He picked up a rifle and returned their fire.

The young inventor did not shoot to kill, but every time that deadly weapon sent forth a shot, a man fell, so badly wounded he thought his last hour had come.

In alarm they all retreated.

Carrying their wounded companions with them they got under cover as quickly as possible.

"That takes the spunk out of them," Frank mused.

He then sent the flying machine up in the air, and she hung over the place where the crew of the Nancy Noon were.

The rascals had now turned their attention to the cave.

As Scott realized at once that it was the place where the treasure was hidden he lost no time about charging on it, for he argued that if it fell into his power Frank would not be able to wrest it from him.

Counting upon superior numbers, and willing to sacrifice everything to gain the treasure, the gang made a wild rush for the cavern.

The captain saw them coming.

"An attack!" he cried, warningly.

"Git ready ter repel them!" hissed Barney.

"Fire, old fellow!"

Bang!

Bang!

The two pistols barked actively.

Several of the attacking party fell, wounded.

That did not deter the rest of the desperate gang, however, for every time a man fell there were others savagely pressing forward to fill the vacancy in the ranks.

"They are determined, Barney."

"Arrah, that they be, captain."

"I've only got two shots left."

"An' I've got wan."

"Have you any cartridges?"

"Not one."

"That's too bad, for I have none."

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The last three shots were fired!

Three men dropped in their tracks.

But the others firmly pressed ahead.

It looked as if every man was willing to give up his life in the desperate struggle to force an entrance.

Barney and the captain were now powerless.

Pomp had nothing but a knife, but he thought of the powder that remained after the blast, and he hastily poured it in a hole in the floor, piled stones on it, set a fuse and lit it.

"Run back!" he gasped.

His companions followed him into the cave.

No sooner had they retreated when their enemies crowded in the cave entrance.

At the same moment the powder exploded with a roar like a gun, the broken stones flew in all directions and a fearful chorus of yells arose.

Up flared a wild glare and a dense puff of smoke.

The three friends crouched back against the walls, and some of the flying fragments of the stone hit them.

Luckily no one was badly injured.

The attacking party retreated.

Some of their number were seriously injured.

"I ain't got no gun," chuckled Pomp, "but I had something much better."

"You're a trump, for you've saved us," said the captain, admiringly.

"I t'ink so."

They peered out the entrance and saw their enemies hurrying away into the woods with their wounded friends.

Just then Frank let a bomb drop from the airship.

It exploded near Scott's men and but few in the party now remained who had not been more or less wounded.

They saw where the bomb came from.

It filled them with horror.

All knew they could not contend with the airship.

Despite their injuries they made a frantic rush for the bay to get aboard their craft as soon as possible.

Frank let another bomb fly.

He wanted to keep them moving along and succeeded.

The villains did not pause until they were once more aboard the steamer. Frank had filled them with a panic.

Seeing that they were disposed of for the present he left down the airship.

She landed directly in front of the entrance to the cave and the three besieged aeronauts cheered wildly.

They felt safe then.

As Frank joined them Barney cried:

"By thunder, it wuz lucky fer us as yer thought ter raise ther Demon up in ther sky and pepper 'em!"

"Couldn't you hold the cave?"

"No," replied the captain; "our ammunition gave out."

"Good gracious!"

"Well, dey am gone," said Pomp, "so let's shift de treasure aboard de Demon before dey come back."

They ran into the little vault.

The lantern's light showed them the pirate's hoard.

The boxes were brimful of golden money and rich jewelry set with precious stones.

The rest of the packages contained rare articles of bric-a-brac, fine velvets, rich tapestries, valuable laces and in short, all manner of things, of immense value.

Our friends lost no time transferring them to the Demon and stowing them down in the hold.

She was heavily laden, but was quite capable of carrying the treasure.

When the task was completed, Frank said to Buntline:

"The beauty and value of this treasure-trove far exceeds my wildest expectations, and you have shown your theory to be wonderfully true in every respect."

"I'm glad you are satisfied."

"Now, we have baffled Scott, I think I shall drive the wretch away from this island."

"Oh, he is past doing us any injury now."

"Yes, I know; but then I wish to be left in undisturbed possession of the place, so that we can renew our hunt for the lost crew of the Jennie Jerome."

"You seem confident they are still on this island."

"I am, perfectly so."

"Well, if we can't find all of them, we may at least run across the injured man who so mysteriously left the Demon, and ascertain from him the fate of the rest."

"That's exactly my plan."

Preparations were made for a struggle with the crew of the Nancy Noon, and shortly afterward the Demon shot high up in the air.

Frank remained at the wheel.

He saw the steamer lying in the bay, and observed some of her crew upon the deck, watching the Demon.

Frank smiled, and drove the flying machine toward the steamer and his friends prepared for action.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE GHOSTS' DEN.

"Those scoundrels have been put to a good deal of hardship, expense and trouble to get to this island, but their stay here will be very brief and perfectly fruitless," said Frank to his companions, as the Demon sailed out over the bay.

"It shows you the result of doing evil," replied Captain Buntline, prophetically. "There's a moral in that. It seems to me that people seldom do wrong but that the time comes for them to get punished for it, somehow or other."

"That's true," said Barney.

The Demon reached the steamer.

Frank stopped her there.

He then shouted down:

"Steamer ahoy!"

By way of reply about ten rifles were discharged up at the airship, and the bullets came pattering against her metal hull with a spiteful sound.

"Fools!" Barney exclaimed. "They can't hurt us that way."

Frank waited until the firing ceased.

All the crew had gone off the deck of the Nancy Noon.

But sure that they could hear him, Frank cried:

"Scott, if you don't stop that, I'll drop a bomb on your craft."

Another volley interrupted him.

Frank's ire rose.

"Get a grenade!" said he to Barney.

The Celt brought one from the storeroom.

"Here it is!" he said.

"Now drop it down on the steamer's deck."

"I hopes it'll hit a head."

He let the bomb fall.

It struck the vessel's planks and exploded.

The roar that followed fairly made the air shake, and the yells of dismay that ensued were pitiful.

Waiting until the tumult ceased, Frank cried again:

"Hey, Scott! Scott!"

"Hello!" came the surly response.

"If you don't peaceably listen to me and obey my orders, by Heavens I'll blow you, your ship and your crew to pieces!"

"For mercy's sake, don't bombard us again!"

"Will you listen to me?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, in the first place, I want to tell you that we got all the treasure out of the cave, and now have it aboard here."

"So I expected," was the bitter reply.

"In the second place, it is beyond your reach now."

"Of that I feel sure."

"In the third place, I want you to leave this island at once, as you have no particular object in remaining here, for you cannot wear any vengeance upon us as long as we remain up in the air."

"I'll depart."

"At once!"

"Very well."

"Remember, I'm going to stay aloft and watch you. If I see you failing to obey me, the result will be terrible for you."

No reply came back.

But presently Frank saw some of the injured sailors come up on deck, raise the anchor and secure it.

Shortly afterward the Nancy Noon sped away.

She headed for the north, and she kept receding from view until she finally disappeared in the distance.

Frank watched till she was gone.

"That's the end of her," he remarked dryly.

"Her call was short but sour," laughed Buntline.

"Scott will not trouble us again."

"He may wait for us to return to port."

"Oh, after his murderous attack upon us he would not dare seek redress in the courts, and I feel quite confident that he would not make another personal attack upon us, as by so doing he might get burnt worse than he is now."

Everyone laughed.

They all felt glad to get rid of Scott.

The airship remained aloft till the next day.

Frank then told his companions that he was going to spend a few more days there hunting for the lost crew of the Jennie Jerome, and in trying to find out more about the ghosts.

Once he had these two mysteries solved he would feel quite content to depart for home and face the court of law for their attack upon Scott.

The rest agreed readily enough to this plan, and then Frank asked:

"Pomp, do you think you could show me where one of those concealed entrances are that lead to the subterranean passages under the island through which you said the ghosts carried you at the time you were abducted?"

"Fo' sure I can," replied the coon. "Why?"

"Because I want to explore them."

"Dat am too dangerous."

"Oh, I'll take you and Barney with me."

"Dat am safer."

"Now, where shall I land the Demon?"

"Near dat village where I was taken."

"Very well. Captain, I'm going to leave you in care of the airship."

"Just as you like," assented Buntline.

A few moments later the Demon landed.

Frank and his two companions thereupon heavily armed themselves, and each took a lantern.

Pomp then showed him a spot where he had only to lift a flat stone in the ground to reveal a dark tunnel.

Without the slightest hesitation Frank went down a flight of stone steps, holding the lantern in one hand and the pistol in the other. His companions followed.

They found themselves in a narrow tunnel.

Turning to the left they followed it toward the seashore.

As Frank went along he narrowly examined it and, to his surprise, he found that it had been excavated by the hand of man.

It was about six feet deep by three wide.

After a short walk they encountered numerous flights of stairs, which led them into different houses in the pirates' village.

Each entrance was artfully concealed.

At the end of the tunnel they found themselves going up in the lighthouse between its walls, and in the inner wall were several well-hidden trapdoors.

"Here's where the ghosts went to elude me," said Frank, grimly.

"It looks to me," said Barney, "as if ole Commodore Wild had these exits made fer places av concealment, or escape, in case he wuz attacked."

"Just my own idea of it," assented Frank.

"Let's go back," suggested Pomp.

They retraced their footsteps.

The passage had numerous branches shooting off in various directions.

Numberless exits were discovered all along the route, and some opened into clumps of bushes, others into hollow trees, still others among the rocks, and not a few in the bare ground.

In due time our friends reached a wooden door.

The hinges were so rusted it was easily opened, and they emerged into a big cavern.

Here, to their surprise, numerous torches were found blazing, there were a large number of beds of leaves, a fire was burning in the middle of the place and the floor was littered with cooking utensils, clothing, tools and a large assortment of ship chandlery.

Strangest of all, though, there lay the sailor, Ralph Howard, who had so mysteriously disappeared from the Demon.

He started up with a startled cry as our friends entered, and gave them a most unwelcome look.

"By Jove!" gasped Frank. "See whom we have here."

"Good Lor'!" said Barney. "You're a nice spalpeen to sneak away from ther airship ther way yer did, and leave us all a-wonderin' how yer managed it."

The sailor did not say a word.

Frank strode up to him.

"Say, Howard," said he, "don't you know me?"

"Yes, sir," replied the other; "you are Mr. Reade."

"Well, you don't seem glad to see me."

"That's true, sir."

"But don't you know I fitted out my new airship to come all this distance to save you and the rest of the crew of the Jennie Jerome and take you safely home?"

"I'm sorry you did it, sir."

"What!" cried Frank, in amazement. "Is this a show of the basest ingratitude or have you got a hidden reason for talking so?"

"No, no, sir," hastily replied the sick man, in earnest tones. "I am not ungrateful, for I realize how kind and generous it was of you. But at the same time I'm very sorry you came here. I am, indeed."

"For what reason?"

"Well, sir, I'd rather not say."

Barney and Pomp were amazed, and Frank was not a little astonished at this unexpected reply.

He glanced at the sailor searchingly a moment and asked:

"So you would sooner have been left here to your fate than to have been rescued and taken safely home to your family and friends, eh?"

"I would, indeed, sir," was the earnest reply, and Frank, Barney and Pomp had their surprise increased.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

"Am dat feller looney?" asked Pomp.

"No," answered Howard, with a faint smile; "I'm perfectly sane."

"Where are your messmates?" demanded Frank, sharply.

"They are on the island, sir."

"And are all alive and well?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do they share your singular views?"

"They do, indeed."

"Well, this is the strangest thing on record."

"There is nothing very strange in it."

"Will you explain what motive prompts you to wish to remain upon this island?"

The man pondered a moment.

Finally he said, in hesitating tones:

"I'll tell you under one condition."

"Name it."

"That you will promise not to interfere with us."

"I'll swear to it, if necessary."

"Well, you are all three rich men, and people of the highest character," said Ralph Howard, slowly, "so I don't

see why I should hesitate to tell you all. I'm sure you would not interfere with us in our pursuit of wealth."

"Certainly not," promptly answered Frank. "If it is a pursuit for riches that keeps you here. But I do not very well understand how you can get wealthy on this little island with no apparent resources."

"Well, we can get rich here, and enormously rich, too. But I think before I go into details I had better call some of my messmates in and consult with them, sir."

"Do so, by all means. I would be glad to see them."

The sailor nodded, picked up a hand-bell and rang it. A few moments afterward there rushed into the cave from the different passages a number of the ghosts.

Upon seeing Frank's party they paused.

"Hold on!" cried Howard. "It's Mr. Reade. Throw off those suits."

And instantly the alleged ghosts obeyed.

They flung off the queer white duck costumes they had been wearing and stood revealed, human beings in every sense.

Frank recognized them as some of the crew of the Jennie Jerome, and without saying a word to them he strode forward, and picking up one of the costumes he examined it.

He now saw that the material was steeped in a liquid of phosphorus, which gave it the unearthly glow it had.

A short laugh escaped the inventor.

"It's a clever disguise," he commented, "and the arrangement of these underground passages gave you the advantage of practicing your ghostly roles to perfection. But I do not see how you withstood the shots I fired at you."

"They didn't; several of them are wounded," said Howard, in grim tones. "But to sustain the parts they were playing they dared not let on how badly they were hurt."

"It required great fortitude," said Frank, "and the object they had to stand it must have been great. Now, tell me why you fellows have been playing ghost here?"

"Our object was principally to strike terror to the souls of all seamen and thus keep them aloof from this island. The same applies to the native savages of the neighboring islands. Both they and the crews of many ships that pass this way, hold this island in horror. They think it is haunted. We made them think so."

"And now for your reason in all this."

"Shall I tell him, lads?"

"Ay, ay," answered the sailors.

"Well, sir, as I see we couldn't frighten you away as we did everyone else, I'll tell you. You know already how our ship was wrecked and how we got here."

"I do," replied Frank. "Proceed."

"Well, we got here right after the pirates were poisoned, found the barrel of phosphorus and raised the mischief with two men who survived the poisoning——"

"That was Buntline and Scott," said Frank.

"They finally left the island, and we in the meantime had discovered these subterranean passages. More—we found a most valuable gold deposit on the island and have been quietly mining it ever since, and each man is amassing a huge fortune."

"I see," said Frank.

"We always played the ghost trick whenever anyone came here," said Howard. "We did it to frighten them away so they would not discover our secret and try to kill and rob us. And our method worked like a charm."

"I should say it must have," laughed Frank, "for you frequently puzzled me a great deal. One thing now strikes me. Why did you never leave a trail?"

"Because each man is in his bare feet."

"And how came you to vanish from the Demon?"

"One of my companions found me there and carried me away, fearing I might divulge our secret to you."

"You all feared me?"

"We made no more exception with you than anyone else, although we knew you as one of our ship's owners."

"Another question. Why was the colored man abducted?"

"Simply to enforce our rule. We were going to hold him as a hostage and threaten you with his destruction if you did not promise to instantly leave the island."

"Was that a bluff?"

"Of course it was."

"What are your intentions now?"

"In a month we are going to cease our operations here, and two of us are going to take passage in the first ship that comes this way to get back to civilization. There a ship will be chartered to come here and pick us up, with our cargo of gold, and carry us home. There we will divide our gains and then disperse."

"Was it you who buried the bodies of the dead pirates?"

"Yes—soon after we found them."

"Well," said Frank, "we've solved the mystery of Phantom Island, and I am satisfied, if you are, to leave you here."

"We prefer to remain."

"Then we will take your departure."

"Very well, sir; we can count on your secrecy?"

"We will never divulge your secret."

After some further conversation Frank and his friends took leave of the sailors and departed.

When they joined the captain and told him all they had discovered, his amazement was intense.

There was nothing further to keep them on Phantom Island, so our friends prepared for the journey home.

On the following day they departed.

An uneventful journey followed and in due time they reached Readestown and disposed of the treasure.

The large sum thus realized was divided among the four, and Captain Buntline took leave of our friends.

He never heard or saw anything of the crew of the Flying Dutchman, who had evidently escaped from the pirates' band in the pirates' ship, nor did he ever hear or see anything of Scott and his syndicate again.

Frank was not arrested on Scott's charge, as the matter had been dropped, and Barney and Pomp were soon engaged again at building a new invention.

The author has a new story in preparation about what befell the three friends with the new contrivance, so for the present we will part with Frank and Barney and Pomp.

THE END.

Read "THE WEIRD ISLAND; OR, FRANK READE, JR.'S STRANGE SUBMARINE SEARCH," which will be the next number (95) of "Frank Reade Weekly Magazine."

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