



THE LATEST AMERICAN "CORNER" AND HOW IT TERMINATED.

By FRANK A. HEDGCOCK.

Illustrated by R. W. WALLACE.

THE three greatest financiers in the world were seated round one little table!

Of course, they were Americans. Everyone knows, or if anyone doesn't know, the daily papers will inform one, that only Americans are great financiers; they don't allow anyone else in the business.

They were sitting in an office, also, of course, in Wall Street, New York; for isn't Wall Street the hub of New York, and New York the centre of the universe? Any American will tell you so.

Business, deep, heavy business, was on hand; you could see that by the bottles of champagne and boxes of cigars scattered about in beautiful profusion. Not that there was any ostentation; only your multi-billionaire smokes the best cigars that money can buy from the Tobacco Trust, and drinks the finest brands that the Champagne Trust sends out.

I daresay you have already guessed the names of these three men; they were Morgan Pont, Rockebilt and Vanderfeller. When these three Napoleons of finance—I believe that is the correct synonym for millionaire—forget their rivalry and join forces, something great must be in the air.

And there was!

I have forgotten to mention that with them was that other wonderful man, Van Ericsson, the inventor. He was explaining his new project.

"My idea, gentlemen, is no less a one than to collect the heat of the sun day by day, store it, and sell it at so much a cubic foot."

"Will you give us some details, Van Ericsson?" enquired Mr. Morgan Pont.

"Certainly, sir. The apparatus with which I propose to collect the sun's heat I call my New Patent Soli-calorieolegometer."

"Good name for a Trade Mark," interrupted Vanderfeller.

"It is composed of a number of spherical cylindrical platino-asbestos mirrors, which I shall arrange on hollow towers one hundred feet high. These mirrors are revolved by electricity, and are capable of attracting the sun's rays within a radius of one thousand miles. These rays are reflected down the shaft inside each tower to the special storing tanks, which are filled with a mixture of London fog and pea soup. This liquid is, I find, a magnificent storer for sunlight and heat; no heat or light can possibly pass through it—by the way, you will, of course, interrupt me if I do not make myself plain. This mixture I propose to consolidate, when saturated with the sun's heat, into blocks of convenient size. These we can sell at about five dollars a cubic foot. You put one in your stove, raise it to a temperature of one hundred degrees, when it shines and gives forth heat exactly like the sun itself."

"Won't people think it rather dazzling to have the sun in the stove?" said Rockebilt.

"The heat and light can be graduated by my patent obscurer, and arranged to suit all tastes."

"You see, gentlemen," said Mr. Morgan Pont, "the idea is to work the collecting machines and make a corner in sunlight."

We then put our patent blocks on the market, and the public does the rest."

"I doubt," said Vanderfeller, "if the United States Government will allow us to use these machines in this country. The matter would be costly, anyway."

"That," replied Van Ericsson, "I have provided for. The British Government, at any rate, is unlikely to object to anything. I propose to construct ten great rafts and anchor them fifteen miles off the west coast of Ireland. On each raft we will erect ten of my Soli-calorieologometers. These will be sufficient to collect all the sunlight in the British Isles, during early spring at least. By the summer we can increase our plant, if necessary."

"I suppose there is no Trust already concerned with the weather in that old country?"

"No, Mr. Vanderfeller; they have, I believe, no trust whatever in the weather. We can, by the means I have outlined, deal a final blow at our almost extinct rival, create a great market for our sunlight blocks, and have a good surplus stock for sale here in the winter."

"And you fancy," said Morgan Pont, "that all these arrangements can be carried out without the British Government objecting?"

"I am quite certain," the inventor replied, "that we can construct our enormous rafts, tow them across the Atlantic, and anchor them near Ireland without the English Government knowing anything of the matter. No doubt, later on, questions will be asked in the House of Commons, but by that time the business will be quite settled, and the British Government, after a few words of regret, will let the whole thing drop."

The conversation then became more technical, and I will not bother the reader with it; it is enough to say that at the end of about half-an-hour—for great financiers make a mere bagatelle of such little deals—the Sunshine Trust was practically formed, with a capital of some hundred billion dollars.

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A day in the middle of May, 19—. Scene: London. May, the month of green trees and budding flowers, the "merry, merry month," is with us.

There are three inches of snow on the ground, and a bitterly cold east wind is

blowing. People hurry along, clad in the heaviest of overcoats, and with mufflers wrapped round mouth and nose. And so we've been going on the whole month, so far.

Not that it hasn't been warmer sometimes. The thermometer has even been up to forty degrees occasionally; but this has simply changed the falling snow into heavy rain, and the fallen snow into slush.

The provinces are in the same state. A telegram in the morning papers says: "Snow has been falling heavily in Gloucestershire for the past week. The prospect for fruit this season is not a good one." Communication with the north is interrupted, the snow having broken down the telegraph wires, for which the Post Office is "very sorry."

Turning into one of the London parks, we find a County Council band playing. The bandmen are muffled up in enormous overcoats; half the band plays while the other half blows on its fingers; I mean its own fingers, not the fingers of the first half. The conductor beats time by swinging his arms round his body, in the manner of a bus driver restoring his circulation. But the band evidently gives pleasure to the men who are employed in shovelling up the snow in order to give the spring flowers a chance of appearing.

The English people are beginning to object. "The man in the tube" (a first cousin of the one in the street) remarks, "I don't want to grumble, but this weather seems a little too bad, even for England. One can't expect warm weather every year, but still it is a trifle monotonous to have winter all the time. I am thinking of moving to Spitzbergen."

The reader has guessed that the dear old climate of England is not entirely responsible for the absence of spring. No; the gigantic Trust is at work. Not satisfied with depriving us of tobacco in our cigarettes and substituting a more modern invention, the Americans have commenced operations on our sunlight.

But has no intelligence reached this country of the true state of affairs? Yes; some months before the *Daily Gale* mentioned that "an influential correspondent who has every opportunity of acquiring correct information" had sent them news of the formation of a gigantic combine to attack the English climate. Questions were asked in the House, but Mr. Balfour replied that the Government had no information on the

subject, and further added that as any attempt to do anything with our weather must obviously end in failure, he did not propose to take any steps in the matter. Next day, replying to a further interrogatory, he said that the Government had had full

Then the great rafts had been towed across the Atlantic by steamers of the new shipping combine and anchored at intervals off the coast of Ireland. The morning papers were full of it; the *Daily Gale* again demanded how far our Government intended



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and exact intelligence of the scheme some time before, but that it was a purely commercial enterprise, and as whatever changes the Americans might make in our weather could not fail to be for the better, he intended to leave matters as they were.

to go in its policy of muddle and do-nothing; "even when that possession of which every Englishman is so proud, that unique collection of samples, our weather, is assailed, this lethargic Government sits still. We would not demur against the seizure of our fleet

our colonies, or even our politicians, but our weather should indeed be sacred."

The older and more sober papers pooh-pooed all excitement, and the *Daily Paragraph* informed its readers that "We have been told by Mr. Morgan Pont himself that the new trust proposes to deal simply and solely in shrimps; and that the rafts are there to catch them and to pot them by a new process."

But the people of England were growing anxious, and the truth about the Sunshine Trust was gradually leaking out. Plans for importing sunshine in steel retorts from the Colonies did little to relieve the anxiety, and as the days went by and the weather grew steadily worse, a feeling of despair settled down on the whole community.

* * *

I was walking up and down the front at Brighton. It was the second week in July, but I had my winter clothes on, and walked briskly along the snow-covered sea-wall in order to keep my blood in circulation. Gazing south, I saw a bilious-looking sea rolling its foaming billows 'neath a livid sky, to dash on a strand which no ray of sunshine brightened. On the land side the heavy clouds swept away over the tops of the houses, and not one rift in them gave promise of any attempt on the sun's part to break through the pall.

In the far west one might discern what looked like a broad ribbon of distant light descending from the heavens and vanishing into the sea.

Small groups of people occasionally gathered to discuss this appearance, and it was said to be formed by the sun's rays attracted to Van Ericsson's great Soli-calorielegometers off Ireland.

I remember it was exactly midday when a distant rumble was heard, which gradually swelled into a mighty roar. Again it was repeated, evidently arising from the west; again and again the terrifying shocks shook the ground and turned everyone's face white with fear. I counted ten distinct reports.

Then, suddenly, the scene grew brighter. Scarcely believing their eyes, men gazed at the moving clouds. They parted, they burst asunder, and—oh, glorious sight!—the broad disc of the golden sun, that sun we hardly recognised after its long absence, sprang out and once more shone upon us.

"Hurrah, hurrah!" cried a paper-boy who was standing near me, and he boisterously slapped me on the back, a familiarity which I by no means resented, but responded to by wringing his hand warmly. People now poured out of the houses, and soon the Front was packed with dense crowds, who shouted, danced and sang "God Save the King" at the top of their voices; while a man with a cornet, who played "Rule Britannia" horribly out of tune, reaped quite a harvest of coppers.

Evidently something had gone wrong with the Sunshine Trust; its machinations had somehow been defeated. Rumours were going round of a ring of English capitalists who were running a counter-scheme, while others reported that the Government had at last summoned up courage enough to send torpedo boats to blow up the great rafts; but these latter reports were scarcely credited.

Later on telegrams began to arrive, and more light than the sun could give us was thrown on the situation. But it was not till the next morning that the truth was fully known. Even then only that enterprising paper, the *Daily Gale*, professed to be able to give full details of the disaster.

"Our Own Special Correspondent" at Ballyslush, North Ireland, reported as follows:—

"I have just returned from interviewing the only known survivor of the great explosion which occurred yesterday off what was the West Coast of Ireland. He is an American, though of Hibernian descent, his name being O'Flannagan, and he held the position of sub-chief-deputy-inspector on Raft No. 6 of the Soli-calorielegometer Co., U.S. This gentleman arrived in our city at 12.32 p.m. yesterday on top of a mass of rock weighing about twenty tons. He was picked up unconscious, but was soon revived by the administration of a stiff dose of 'real Irish.' Being on the spot, I proceeded, at his own request, to interview him, and give you the story as told by himself:

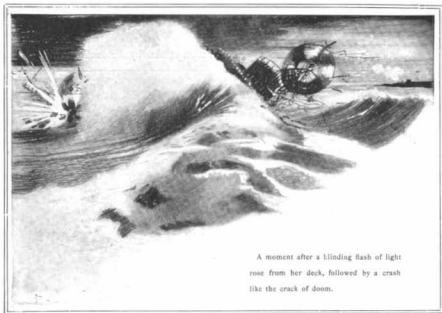
"I am an American, and was, till yesterday, the sub-chief-deputy-inspector of Raft No. 6 of the Soli-calorielegometer Co. At twelve o'clock midday yesterday I was on duty on the maindeck, my work being to keep an eye on the men employed to filter the sunlight as it passed down our collecting towers, and keep it free from germs, bacilli, etc. My attention was called to some unusual proceeding on the mainland, and directing my binoculars

on the spot referred to, I soon discovered that a battery of Artillery from the barracks at Gillhooly was about to begin firing, obviously for practice. I may explain that our raft at this time was quite full of sunlight

blocks, as we were expecting the collecting steamer from New York in a day or two. Now, although our rafts were constructed in such a way as to minimise the effects of the friction caused by the motion of the sea, I



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well knew what the result would be if the atmosphere were suddenly agitated by the discharge of artillery. Hastily communicating with my chief, I had the electric launch lowered and hastened to the shore. I had hoped to reach the land before the battery opened fire; and I did so, in fact, but had hardly set foot on the beach when I heard the heavy boom of the guns on the cliff above me. I ran up the steep approach, hoping that all might yet be well. But just as I reached the rock on which the soldiers were drawn up, I heard an ominous rumbling. Turning seawards I saw our raft trembling and tossing at her moorings. A moment after a blinding flash of light rose from her deck, followed by a crash like the crack of doom; heaven and earth seemed to rush together; I felt myself flying skyward, and remember no more until I found myself in your hospitable city. Pass the whisky, please."

The correspondent went on to give his own theory of the accident, with which I will not trouble the reader. There seems little doubt that the shock of the artillery firing had thrown some of the sun-blocks together. The heat thus generated had caused the whole mass to explode, and the

air was so agitated that the other rafts had been affected in their turn. They had blown up, one after the other, with a tremendous report, loud enough to be heard in New York and Calcutta. And the gigantic explosion had, curiously enough, helped England out of two difficulties. First, the great American combination was destroyed, and a tremendous blow dealt to the millionaire ring, since not only was the money loss large, but the inventor himself had perished, and this money loss affected their other enterprises as well; and secondly, the whole of western and central Ireland had been blown to atoms, thus simplifying the problem of Home Rule to a great extent. But the wonderful destruction caused and the alteration of the face of Nature are matters of history, with which I need not deal.

"We should be profoundly thankful for this great deliverance, Mrs. Brown," said I to my landlady, as she brought in the eggs and bacon next morning.

"Yes, sir, we should indeed," she replied. "There'll be fine weather for the August Bank Holiday after all."

And there was.