THE

CELESTIAL HAND.

A SENSATIONAL STORY.

BY

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THE CELESTIAL HAND.

CHAPTER I.

THIS remarkable announcement greeted the inhabitants of Sydney and suburbs one fine spring morning, for on every hoarding, blank wall, and fence on which they could be placed were placards of white paper about three feet square, bearing the above legend in bold letters of red, and

with a large capital A in the right-hand corner, also in red. People stared astonished as they walked or rode to their work, and many and various were the comments made on the affair. Some considered it the work of anarchists, but this was scouted by others whose views were expressed, in the choice English which he affected, by Mr. J. P. Sullivan, whose avocation, apart from that of following the performances at Randwick, Flemington, Caulfield, and elsewhere, of various quadrupeds (whom he was wont to describe as "spindle-shanked degenerates of the equine race," when they *lost*) was that of reporter on that veracious organ of Public Opinion, the *Telephone*. His opinion on this occasion was delivered for the benefit of three young men, Fred. Crosby, Arthur Pritchard, and Herbert Morwell, whom he had favoured with his company at lunch owing to friendship—and financial stringency.

"There are no Kings in Australia," he said, "which is a great drawback to me, for when I was short of copy I could write the King up—or down. Most of the inhabitants are, like myself, stoney broke, and they rule, or misrule, themselves, therefore an anarchist would have no reason at all for disseminating their fragments over the surrounding country, and, moreover, to be anything like consistent, should blow up the whole continent, not Sydney in particular."

"One does not look for consistency in an anarchist,"

said Crosby, "and personally I lean to the opinion that this is merely preparatory to a high-class outrage, which will level half Sydney to the earth, and keep me employed for years."

"If you are not blown higher than the loftiest 'elevation' that ever arose in your fertile architectural brain, and never arose from the ground," interrupted Sullivan, with a grin and a wink to Morwell, who said:

"You fellows can afford to joke over the matter, but it will prove no fun for me, for my respected—if fussy—Chief, the Minister for Justice, will worry about the affair tremendously, and will give me no peace till the perpetrator of the 'outrage' is discovered."

"Yes, old Spence is a terrible fidget," said Sullivan, "and I shall get a few good headlines out of him: 'Activity of the Law Officers,' 'Statement by the Minister for Justice,' 'An Affront to a Law-abiding Community,' etc., etc.; and now I must go and write an article for to-morrow's *Telephone*, in the most alarmist strain I can command, though privately I regard the placard as merely the work of some crank—one of those chaps with the gift of prophecy and all that, you know. Who else would waste good money in printing a lot of rubbish like that?"

As the day wore on the view thus stated by Mr. Sullivan was almost universally adopted, and the affair was treated as a huge joke, though one or two serious-minded people

shook their heads. By mid-day the evening papers came out with flippant articles on the subject, and youths meeting their friends greeted them in tragedy tones—"A Red Hand! ha, ha!" "Fly from the doomed city while there is yet time!" and so on.

Humourists declared themselves in various ways. One, who hailed from Victoria, said he was "Very glad to hear that Sydney was to be destroyed, for then someone would have a show to build a decent city with straight streets, like Melbourne." Another said he "Always felt something like this would happen, for it was only a matter of time when the City Council was bound to exasperate the gods *too* much. A third stated that "This was designed to get rid of the Premier—all other means having failed." The event provided material for hundreds of more or less feeble jokes, in fact; but many people took the matter in a different spirit, especially the heavy citizen class, and on the following morning their organ, the *Trumpeter*, came out with a laboured denouncement of "What must either be a silly or pointless joke, or the work of some demented person, and which in either case calls for "Speedy retribution." It was all very well to call for speedy retribution, but the police, who had taken the matter in hand from the first, under instructions from the Minister for Justice, could find no trace of the offender. No one had seen any person in the act of fixing the bills, which was the less remarkable as the night had been wet

and unusually dark. Detectives visited every printing establishment in the city and suburbs, but in each case the proprietors were able to show that they had no hand in printing the notice. Various bill-posters were examined, but denied that they had acted for anyone in the matter, and so the affair remained a mystery.

Instructions were given that the placards be removed, and in a week the incident had almost been forgotten, when it was revived one night by the descent on the city of a perfect "snowstorm" of small handbills, bearing the same ominous words. The few people who were abroad at the time of the occurrence declared that they first heard a sudden rustling, and discerned a great number of small white objects falling through the sky from an apparently vast height. As these descended on the roofs of the houses, and into the streets, they were seen to be handbills of very thin, filmy paper. How the distribution was effected remained a mystery, for when morning dawned it was found that millions of the bills were distributed over an area extending from Manly to Parramatta, and Hornsby to Kogarah! Vast numbers must have fallen in the harbour, as thirteen were found on Fort Denison, and a considerable number on the decks of the ships at anchor. On the quarter deck of the "Royal Harry" two were found, and the bills were plentifully strewn over the flower-beds and lawn of Admiralty House. Pitt and George Streets were white with them, and on every pro-

jection of the Post Office, Victoria Markets, Town Hall, and other buildings they fluttered and rustled.

There was less disposition to make light of the occurrence on this occasion, as it was immediately seen that the preparation of millions of handbills, and their distribution by some unknown agency, over an area as large as that of London, argued the existence of an organisation of some kind, with means at its disposal, and it was straining probability too far to attribute the affair to someone's fancy for practical joking on a gigantic scale. Considerable uneasiness began to be felt in some quarters, and, despite the palpably material means by which the threat was conveyed, one or two spiritually-minded people thought fit to improve the occasion by more or less vague hints that Sydney had brought this trouble on herself, and one Moore Street orator, addressing the mid-day lunchers who thronged the broad, sunny street, assured them that something dreadful was about to happen to "This great white city, so fair to see, so tireless in wrong-doing." His listeners, either because their consciences were void of offence, or their bodily circumstances at the moment unfavourable to emotion of any kind, merely grunted blandly and accepted all the speaker's statements without opposition. As on the former occasion, inquiry into the source of production of the handbills proved fruitless, and the means by which distribution had been effected remained

an impenetrable mystery. Dozens of people had seen the bills descending from the sky, and this fact gave rise to the theory that a balloon had been employed, a theory that had scarcely been conceived before it was refuted, for it was easy to show that not one balloon, or a dozen, could possibly have scattered the bills over such a wide area.

The feeling of uneasiness continued for some time, and Mr. Sullivan derived much profit therefrom, for his editor practically gave over "the placard mystery" to him, and "boiled him down" so little that he found his income increased by two pounds ten a week, and was, in consequence, more frequently affected by alcoholic excitation than formerly.

Morwell's prediction concerning Mr. Spence was fulfilled, for, baffled in all his efforts to discover the author of "the impudent threat to the metropolis," as he termed it, the Minister fretted and fumed, and so overworked his chief clerk that the latter felt he might as well be in common or ordinary clerical employment as "in the Government," a position which is, rightly or wrongly, taken as equivalent to being in possession of a sinecure.

CHAPTER II.

Two young men stood on the Suspension Bridge over Long Bay, and gazed at the huge line of earth and mullock which prevented the solution of that local riddle—Duncan's Mine. They were Fred. Crosby and Arthur Pritchard, who had strolled up from North Sydney on the Sunday following the descent of the mysterious handbills, and the latter carried a small camera, with which he was accustomed to take snap-shots of any view or object which struck his fancy.

"That's the funniest mine I ever saw," he remarked to his companion, "and I have seen dozens, and worked in one or two. The mullock, instead of being piled up in one heap, is put into that embankment, which seems to run all round the property."

"Perhaps they are not sinking shafts at all," said Crosby, "but just skimming the surface, and piling up the stuff like that to keep the centre clear."

"I never heard of that kind of mining, and if there really is coal here I don't imagine it's on the surface."

The mine which the young men were discussing had for some time been the object of a good deal of curiosity in North Sydney, Mosman, Willoughby, and surrounding districts.

Some two years earlier the works had been commenced, and it was then rumoured that a Mr. Duncan had bought a large area of the waste land lying between Long Bay and Willoughby, and was mining for coal thereon. Nothing more definite was learned, for a high galvanized iron fence was erected all round the property, and no one was allowed to pass inside this. A number of labourers made application for work, but were, in every case, refused. How many men were employed in the mine was not known, as the only means of communication much used, apparently, was a large wharf, constructed out into the main arm of Middle Harbour, and communicating with the mine by means of a cable tramway. At this wharf vast quantities of machinery had been discharged by specially-chartered ships, and there always seemed to be some craft with its sole cargo consigned to "James Duncan," entering the harbour. No practical results were forthcoming at the end of two years, and Duncan's Mine was beginning to be looked upon as a great white elephant, like the sus-

pension bridge which stretched, deserted, across the deep gully adjoining.

"I'll tell you what, Fred," said Pritchard. "I have a good mind to try for a snapshot of the interior of those works. It is Sunday afternoon, when there is sure to be no one about. I will scale the fence, crawl up the side of the embankment, and look over, and take a shot if I see anything."

"Too risky; you'll only be summoned," said Crosby. But Pritchard was not to be deterred, and leaving his companion at the end of the bridge to "keep nix," as schoolboys say, advanced to the fence, and, being slim and active, was over it in a trice, and a moment later appeared on the slope of the embankment. Crosby, watching from below, saw him clamber to the top, peep over, and gaze steadily for a moment or two. He then turned, and his friend heard him say "Good Heavens!" in a tone of amazement he had never heard equalled, and at the same time saw him unsling his camera.

Next instant, to the watcher's horror, he threw up his hands, uttered a loud cry, and fell headlong down the bank; while the sound of a sharp thud, which he knew instinctively to be that of a bullet entering his friend's body, reached Crosby's ears, but no report followed.

Frozen with horror, the young fellow stood motion-

less, and gazed at the huddled-up form on the embankment, while all things seemed to reel around him.

He was brought to his senses by the vicious whiz of a bullet past his ear, and the next moment was fleeing blindly across the bridge, for the figure of a man with a levelled weapon had come on his vision higher up the embankment; and, although he heard no explosion, he knew the man was shooting at him. As he flew along the bridge, bending below the side railing, he heard bullet after bullet whiz past, or "ping" on the ironwork which protected him. One terrified glance he cast behind as he flew through the gate on the North Sydney side, and caught a glimpse of a dark face sinking below the level of the embankment.

He waited to see no more, but ran at the top of his speed to the tramway office in Ridge Street, whence he sent a message by telephone, which quickly brought up a sergeant and three constables from North Sydney. Having heard the young man's story, the policemen proceeded at a rapid pace towards the Suspension Bridge, but had only reached the brow of the hill above it when they were met by a number of men bearing young Pritchard's body on a rude stretcher of planks, and followed by another group, in whose midst walked a man with his arms pinioned. As the parties met, a tall, full-bearded man came forward and said "I am Mr. Duncan, the owner of the mine. I placed this man"—

indicating the prisoner—"on guard over the works this afternoon, as we do not countenance intruders, but his instructions were merely to warn people off. It appears, however, that he was amusing himself with an air-gun he had recently purchased; and, seeing a man staring over the embankment, and about to photograph the interior, he says, in a sudden fit of anger he discharged his weapon in the direction of the intruder, and, to his consternation, the latter fell. He never intended to kill him——"

"Never intended to kill him!" interrupted Crosby, "Why, then, did he shoot repeatedly at me as I ran across the bridge?"

"I was not aware that he had done so, but I will ask him." So saying, the mine-owner turned to the men in charge of the prisoner, and directed them to lead him forward.

As the onlookers gazed curiously at him, they observed a bulky figure, with a large head covered with a slouch hat. Not much of the face could be seen, as the hat came low down on the brow, and the man wore a pair of large blue goggles. The skin, however, was very swarthy, and the contour of the face almost Mongolian in character.

Duncan addressed him in some unknown language, as he stood sullenly amidst his captors—his wrists bound

with strong cords—and he replied in harsh, gutteral tones.

"What does he say?" demanded the Sergeant.

"That he was frightened at what he had done, and in his terror shot at the other man to prevent him giving the alarm."

"Hum, a pretty bad excuse. But go on with your statement, Mr. Duncan."

"I was walking round the works with my overseer, and I saw from a distance this man, Mueller, point his gun at the man on the embankment, and saw the latter fall. I then saw Mueller run up the embankment and lie on the top, but did not know he was shooting at any one. I called a number of the men, and we secured and bound Mueller, and raised the man he had shot, whom we found to be quite dead. We were taking the prisoner and the body to the police station when we met you."

"Well, the case seems perfectly clear," said the Sergeant; "you and your overseer saw the act, and I now only have to arrest the man on the charge of murder—his name is Mueller, you say?"

"Yes, Franz Mueller; or, at all events, that is the name we have always known him by."

"What nationality,"

"Austrian, I believe."

"Looks more like a Chink," murmured one of the constables.

"So he does, Smith; take off his hat and them specs., and let us have a look at him."

The man advanced to do so, whereupon the prisoner appeared disposed to resist, but then, looking down on his bound wrists, shrugged his shoulders, and submitted. The hat, on being removed, showed a broad forehead, surmounted with thin black hair, while the eyes revealed by the removal of the spectacles were apparently weak, for the lids were almost closed. The face, seen clearly, was more red than sallow, and was very distinctly Mongolian in type, and yet the man did not seem to be of Chinese or Tartar descent.

"Never saw him before," was the Sergeant's remark. "Put them things on aga'n, Smith, and let us have a look at this poor young feller."

Poor Pritchard was found to have been shot through the heart, and, as nothing could be done for him, the body was removed by two constables to Kelly's Hotel, in Carlow Street, to await the inquest; while the others, accompanied by Crosby, Mr. Duncan, and a considerable crowd, conducted the prisoner to the North Sydney Police Station, where he was lodged in the cells for the night.

Next day the coroner's jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against Mueller, and, after a preliminary hearing before a magistrate, when the evidence of Crosby, Mr. Duncan, the overseer, and the sergeant was

heard, he was committed for trial at the Sessions to be held at the Supreme Court, Sydney, in a month; and meanwhile was removed to Darlinghurst Gaol.

The sensational report of the crime, extracted from the unwilling Crosby by Sullivan, and considerably "embroidered" before publication, attracted a good deal of attention, and the Court was crowded during the preliminary trial, particularly by Chinamen, who, doubtless, were attracted by the statement made in the newspaper, that Mueller was in appearance "very Chinese."

CHAPTER III.

His friend's death was a great shock to Crosby, and his trouble was in no way lessened by the fact that his intimacy with Arthur obliged him to witness the grief of the bereaved parents and sisters. Mr. Pritchard was a retired banker in easy circumstances, and the family lived in a fine house on Lavender Bay. Thither Crosby bent his way one evening nearly a week after the murder, and when the family had in some degree recovered from their first grief. He sat talking to the ladies in the drawing-room for some time, when suddenly Ella, the elder of the two girls, said, "I should like to go to the bridge with Mr. Crosby, mother."

"My dear, what a singular idea," said Mrs. Pritchard. "Besides, it is so late."

"I know, mother; but I feel I must go. Mary can come too, if she likes."

"Oh, no," said the younger girl, with a shudder. "I shall never go near that place again so long as I live."

"Well, I shall go; will you come, Fred?"

Thus directly asked, the young man could not well refuse, though he, too, would much rather not have gone near the scene of the tragedy again. They set forth, and, taking the cable tram from Walker Street, soon reached the bridge. The night was clear, and the bridge and the great embankment could be plainly discerned. They walked to the farther side, and Ella Pritchard gazed earnestly at the spot indicated by her companion as the scene of her brother's death. She was a graceful, *spirituelle* girl, and, as she stood there in her white dress, Crosby could not help thinking that she seemed less of the earth than of a higher sphere, and the expression of her face as she turned to him did not diminish this impression.

"You remember the writing when we were table-turning last week?" she said.

He had forgotten the occurrence, but he now remembered that a few nights before the tragedy a number of young people had been amusing themselves by table-rapping at Mr. Pritchard's, and that, after a time, they had given a pencil to Ella, and urged her on to "spirit-writing," which she had often attempted before. This

evening, however, was not productive of much result, for the pencil over and over again wrote: "Arthur—bridge —danger."

The party at length got tired of the repetition, and Arthur himself expressed the opinion that, "like all alleged spirit messages, it was nonsense," though Ella was inclined to take the message seriously. Crosby was as sceptical as most people, but he could not but admit to himself now that, read in the light of later events, the message was singular. He was about to say as much to Ella, when she suddenly grasped his wrist, and saying, "Look! Oh, look!" gazed with widely-opened eyes into the gulf spanned by the bridge. He followed the direction of her gaze, and felt the hair bristle on his scalp as he plainly saw the figure of Mueller, the slayer of Arthur Pritchard, float over the gully, and then rise in the air as if to cross the embankment. With eyes almost starting out of his head, Crosby watched the terrifying vision, and then suddenly lost sight of it as Ella Pritchard loosed her grasp on his arm, and sank senseless to the ground.

His nerves were so unstrung that for some minutes he was incapable of action, and stood motionless in a kind of "dwam," or swoon, gazing at the white form lying at his feet. Rousing himself with an effort at length, he raised Ella, who had partially recovered ,and had commenced to mutter disjointed phrases—"Arthur is power-

less as yet—the veil divides—a supreme struggle—obliteration or continuity—the great forces"—and Crosby, fearing that the shock had unseated her reason, felt considerably alarmed. His fears were groundless, however, for she soon recovered completely, and, taking his arm, said, "Let us go at once. We are not safe here."

"Not safe?" he queried, as they proceeded across the bridge. "Why, what is there—?"

"That terrible being."

"Mueller?"

"Yes."

"But he is safe in Darlinghurst Gaol!"

Ella did not reply, but merely shook her head, and it was not until they were approaching her home that she referred again to what they had seen.

"I shall not say anything of what occurred to-night to them," she said, with a movement of her hand in the direction of the house, "and I think you had better not."

"But why? Is there any good reason?"

"I cannot tell you at present," replied the girl; and then, after a pause, she burst out, "Oh, Fred, frightful things are about to happen; the most awful dangers menace us."

"Good heavens, Ella, what do you mean; are you talking sanely, or is your intellect affected by what you saw to-night?"

"My intellect is perfectly clear, and I know, oh! I

know too well—but I must say no more now. Good night, Fred, good night," and she entered the house, leaving Crosby in complete mystification.

"Well, this is the rummiest start," he mused in the classical English common to our time, "and I'm hanged if I can make anything of it. I saw Mueller as clearly as I saw him the day of the murder, and yet he's in gaol. Is he, though? Perhaps he has escaped! But even if so, how could he float through the air like that? Still, to make sure, I'll inquire at the police station."

He bent his steps towards Mount-street, and, entering the imposing Government building which disfigures the upper portion of that street, accosted the massive official in blue who sat on a high stool in the office, and whose acquaintance he had made through "going bail" for Sullivan on an occasion when the latter worthy, being over stimulated, had so far forgotten himself as to use "language," and was promptly "run in" in consequence.

"Good evening, Smith."

"Good evening, Mr. Crosby," replied the man, who was a hard-faced New South Welsher, with the cold blue eyes of his class. "Anything I can do for you?"

"You know that man Mueller! Well, I saw someone very like him this evening, and I was wondering if by any possibility he could be out."

"Aat! why, he's in Darlinghurst; no bail allowed in capital cases."

"But could he by any possibility have escaped?"

"Not by any possibility."

"Well, would you mind ringing up and asking if he is there?" persisted the young man.

The constable's expression changed to one of pity, as though he said inwardly, "You are a very respectable young man, Mr. Crosby, but you're carrying a drink or two more than is good for you to-night." "I'd only be rapped over the knuckles for giving unnecessary trouble," he said aloud.

"Put the blame on me."

"A fat lot of good that would be if some of them official blokes wanted to be nasty. However, I'll chance it," and telephoning to the exchange, he was soon in communication with Darlinghurst Gaol.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Gentleman here, Mr. Crosby, principal witness in that murder case; says he saw someone like Mueller in the street; wants to know if by any possibility Mueller could be **aat.**"

"Aat! how could he be aat when he's here under lock and key?"

"Are you sure?"

"Certain. Warden reported two minutes ago that he has been asleep these four hours in his cell. The gentleman must have seen his twin brother, or else dreamt he saw the man."

"My opinion too; thanks. Good night."

"Oh, well, I suppose it was a mistake," said Crosby, when this information was imparted to him; but as he walked along Walker Street to his lodgings near Lavender Bay he found himself saying, "Well, if Mueller has been asleep for four hours in Darlinghurst, how on earth did Ella Pritchard and I see him at Long Bay?"

CHAPTER IV.

Having puzzled over this question during the greater portion of the night without arriving at a satisfactory solution, Crosby determined to consult his friend Morwell, who had, he knew, some acquaintance with "occult" phenomena, and with this object in view, called in the forenoon at the office of the Minister for Justice. As a general rule Morwell was not so busy as to be unable to find time for "an eleven o'clock" of sandwich and lager at the bar of a neighbouring hostelry, with Sullivan, Crosby, or some other friend, but to-day he "was up to his eyes," as the common saying is.

A dozen people were waiting to interview the "Minister for Injustice," as one of them—an excited selector from the back blocks—termed him; a deputation of leading citizens anxious to obtain a reprieve for a man who had killed a book canvasser—on the ground of justifiable homicide—

occupied a side room; and Colonel Howard, the well-known American merchant, was stalking about the passages, with an air of indignation, muttering something about "International affairs being hung up in this manner." All these people Morwell, in addition to his ordinary duties, had to placate from time to time with promises that Mr. Spence would not be long, and in consequence he had only time for a few words with his friend.

"I can't possibly go out now, Crosby," he said; "I have all these people on my hands, as you see. The chief has been locked up with a mysterious stranger since half-past nine, and goodness knows how much longer he will be. I have knocked twice at his door, and can get no answer."

Just then Colonel Howard strode in, and after nodding to Crosby, whom he knew, said, "Look here, Mr. Morwell, how much longer is the United States of America to be kept waiting on your doormat? Here is a question that I have been asked by Washington—Washington, mind you—to have answered by Mr. Spence, who made an appointment with me for ten a.m. to-day, and now it is after eleven. Who is with him at all? Surely some important person, or he would not grant him a long interview in the busiest part of the day."

"It is not an important person, so far as I know," said Morwell, and then he went on to explain that a man, speaking good English, but evidently not an Englishman or Australian, had called frequently at the Minister's office

and demanded a personal interview. When asked to state his business he declined to do so, and repeatedly stated that he must see Mr. Spence himself.

Public men in Australia have not found it necessary to adopt the semi-regal exclusiveness prevailing in Parliament Street and thereabouts, and almost any citizen can obtain access to the presence of a Minister of the Crown or other public man.

In this case an appointment was at length made, and, punctual to the minute, the applicant arrived, and was shown into the Minister's room by an attendant, who waited outside for nearly half an hour, and was then summoned away. Morwell presently knocked at the door himself, but received no answer, as he had told Crosby.

"However, I will try again, Colonel, for you," he now said, and going along the passage, rapped smartly on the door. No answer was returned, and he turned the handle only to find that the door was locked.

"There is something wrong," he said, returning, "for I will swear Mr. Spence has not left the building. I will have the door forced."

A locksmith was sent for, and a little crowd of anxious and expectant officials and callers gathered round while he plied his tools on the lock. Under his practised hands it soon yielded, and the crowd entering, turned sick with horror, and more than one fainted, as they beheld, lying

on the ground, the headless body of the Minister, the blood welling in streams from the arteries of the neck.

When the first terror and confusion subsided in some degree, suspicion instantly fell on the stranger who had called so often; but a brief search of the room revealed the erroneousness of this supposition, and a greater mystery, for, huddled up in a corner behind a writing table, was a body, also headless, which, by the clothes, was recognised as that of the man in question.

Who, then, had done this terrible double deed? There was not a sign to show.

Both bodies were as warm as in life; the blood still flowed freely; the murders could not have been committed half-an-hour, yet of the murderer or murderers, or of the heads of the victims, not a trace could be found.

To say that this awful discovery caused widespread consternation would be to speak mildly, for all Sydney, all Australia, in fact, was stunned with horror and fear, and Mr. Sullivan reaped a rich harvest, and, dropping pipes and beer, ascended to cigarettes and brandy and soda, with prospects of champagne, cigars and liqueurs, adding additional lustre to the already bright vista of the future.

"I've denounced vice and lauded virtue (in print)," he said, "and starved, and now I'm floating into affluence on mystery and murder. Faith, it's a funny world!"

CHAPTER V.

The inhabitants of Sydney were justly proud of their Palace Gardens, the green terraces and wooded slopes of which commanded exquisite views of Port Jackson, and the ever-increasing swarm of craft which navigated its broad, sunlit waters. To the tired eyes of those coming from the heated streets of the city, the deep cool green of the gardens, relieved here and there by the brighter tints of the numerous flowers, was as an anodyne to pain-racked nerves, and hundreds sought the gardens every day. Pleasant it was to lie on the grass and watch the waving trees, the sparkling water, and the ever-moving panorama of the shipping, while the sense of hearing was soothed by the strains of a band playing in a distant kiosk, and by the soft voices of women, and the merry laughter of children. The pervading spirit of the place was restfulness. Here and there amongst the frequenters were to be seen worn

faces, lined and seamed less by the struggle with the world than with the passions, instincts and selfish cares, which borne into Paradise, would make of it a dreary waste; but the majority of those present seemed in harmony with their surroundings—the men resting for a space from their honest toil, the women occupied with the care of the younger generation. And of the latter there was a sufficient number to satisfy the observer that the race was in no danger of dying out. A captious critic might perhaps have remarked that they did not play with quite the vigour and *abandon* displayed by the children of Northern latitudes, and that they were, if anything, a trifle too neat in appearance, but could not have denied, on the other hand, that their manners were unusually courteous and polite, and their voices low and melodious, though they did term flowers "flaars," and babies "bibies."

Throngs of cultivated people, hundreds of happy children playing on the green sward, the hum of traffic from the city beyond—all these in a land where but a few generations back the coarse currency lass and chained "lifer" represented the greater portion of the human element, and the creaking of waggon wheels and the exhortations of the "bullocky" to his team—bogged, perhaps, in Pitt Street—were the most common sounds of traffic in the air. Truly a considerable change, and Sydney had fair cause to feel satisfied with herself, her progress, and her gardens.

Placed in a commanding position near Macquarie Street, the statue of Captain Phillip, the first Governor of New South Wales, looked over a scene which the living man could scarcely have imagined when he entered the harbour with the "first fleet" during the opening days of 1788. The statue was a prominent feature in the beautiful Palace Gardens, and it was therefore with a feeling of great anger that the citizens learned, from the *Telephone* and *Trumpeter*, a few days after the death of Mr. Spence, that some vandal had during the night, cut clean through the hard bronze of the neck of the statue, removed the head, and substituted a plaster cast of a hideous faun, with long ears, and leering, wicked countenance. From offices, stores and shops people flocked in thousands to see this extraordinary sight, while the windows and balconies of the lofty houses in Macquarie Street were crowded with eager gazers.

"Here, Crosby, draw that head in my notebook," said Sullivan. "It's the great god Pan himself, I do believe, and I want him made uglier than nature, if possible. Draw his ears a bit longer; that's right. I want to get the bulge on those camera chaps who are snapping all round us, and will deluge the *Telephone* with offers of prints by and bye. The report would have been worth a tenner to me, but I was at the Olympic playing pool till four, and fast asleep in bed at daylight, when some layman went round to the

Telephone and *Trumpeter* with the news, and got it into the special edition."

"Playing pool and playing the fool are convertible terms," said Crosby, as he dashed off the sketch in rapid strokes, "especially when indulged in in the small hours, to the accompaniment of unlimited drinks and smokes."

"I always think so—in the morning. But what is the meaning of this business, Crosby? Is it the result of 'unlimited drinks,' to use your term, or what?"

"I have not the slightest idea. But look, they are drawing a cordon of police round the statue, the crowd is becoming so dense. I wonder what they will do now."

"Wait for instructions from the authorities. I expect Morwell will have a hand in this, as he is temporary head of theDepartment of Justice. Bedad, here he comes." And sure enough, Morwell was seen to be making his way through the crowd, accompanied by a couple of men bearing a ladder.

"We'll follow in his wake," said Sullivan, "for there's copy in this," and so saying, he pushed forward and ranged himself alongside his friend, who was giving some instructions to a Sergeant of police.

Presently a murmur arose from the crowd, as one of the men who had accompanied Morwell was seen to ascend the statue by means of the ladder. Gripping the shoulder with one hand, he essayed to draw off the head with the other, but its round surface afforded no hold, and he was unable

to effect his purpose. He then endeavoured to loosen it by gentle blows with his hand; but it seemed to be fixed on firmly, and his taps had no effect.

"Hit it harder, Jimmy," ejaculated his mate, who was holding the ladder, and gazing up with strained eyes, and Jimmy, complying, dealt the plaster a fairly hard buffet with the "heel" of his hand. An ejaculation of mingled mirth and consternation went up from the crowd as the head was seen to fly off the statue, but a moment later Morwell, Sullivan, and others near the base shouted in horror as, alighting on a portion of the pedestal, the plaster split into pieces, and a blackened human head, which it had covered, bounded into their midst. The men amongst whom it fell sprang back. The thing lay face upwards in the open space, and many of those who gazed on it recognised the features of the late Minister for Justice.

CHAPTER VI.

Amidst the excitement prevailing in Sydney at this period, the statement made by Professor Von Steiner that he had seen a Pterodactyl in the Blue Mountains attracted little attention. At any other time the announcement by a learned gentleman that he had seen a winged lizard, which must have survived from the mesozoic period, millions of years ago, would have brought forth hundreds of witticisms. The Professor would have been asked if he had had "goana" for supper, and been haunted by the ghost of his victim, with wings added; or he would be indicated as a solemn warning to all who drink colonial wine for supper, advised to take a larger specimen bag, and a smaller flask when he went geologising in the mountains, and so on, and so on. As it was, however, few people even troubled to read the paragraph which appeared in a corner

of the *Trumpeter*, into which it had been squeezed beside the double-leaded matter published under the heading of "The Palace Gardens Mystery." One person, however, noticed, and was much interested in it, namely, Morwell.

He had been thoroughly unnerved by the tragic events connected with his late chief, and accompanied by Crosby, whose condition was similar to his own, had sought a few days' change at Katoomba. They were returning therefrom by rail, and Crosby was gazing into the wooded gulfs which opened sheer down from the track when a slight exclamation from his companion attracted his attention.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Old Von Steiner says he saw a Pterodactyl the other night."

"What the deuce is that?"

"A kind of winged lizard, supposed to be extinct for millions of years; was co-temporaneous with the Ichthyosaurus, Plesiosaurus, and other huge lizards."

"Then how on earth could one have survived till now?"

"I don't know, and most people will say Von Steiner was mad, or dreaming; but, do you know, Crosby, I believe I saw the same thing."

"Oh, never."

"I think I did. I was looking out of my bedroom window the night before last, when a long black object, which seemed to have wings, crossed a white streak on the horizon, and disappeared in a dark cloud a moment

later. I only saw it for an instant, but I am almost certain that I distinguished a head and huge pair of wings."

"Strange! And did it look like a lizard?"

"It did; in fact, the idea of 'a flying crocodile' crossed my mind the moment I saw it."

"A dragon at the end of the nineteenth century, and in a country where hides, tallow, and gold hold the public imagination?" said Crosby. "But, really, so many queer things have happened lately that I should be surprised at nothing—perhaps the end of the world is at hand, Morwell."

"Perhaps it is," said the latter absently, and the conversation dropped.

On arriving at Redfern the men were met by Mary and Ella Pritchard. The former, who was an impulsive, rather heedless, girl, with features which bespoke a character much more of the earth than that of her sister, had an undoubted *tendresse* for Fred Crosby—for the time—and frequently persuaded Ella, against her will, into going to places where they were likely to meet him. While he had been away at Katoomba, Mary had been restless and unhappy, and would gladly have followed him if convention allowed—or rather, she would have followed him, convention or no convention, had she been sure that he would have been pleased. As it was, she met him at the first practicable point, namely, Redfern Station, and as she grasped his hand, looked very much as if she would

like to fall into his arms and weep with joy—a fact noted with amusement and some little pain by the silent and observant Morwell. To him it was apparent that Fred was rather perturbed by Mary's effusiveness, and would willingly have attached himself to her more delicate sister. This was not permitted, however, for Mary had not come all that way for nothing, and grappling Fred's arm, led him forth, Morwell following with Ella. The night was delightfully clear and cool, and the white, well-lighted streets of Sydney appeared to great advantage, thronged as they were with well-dressed, quietly-mannered people. Morwell, familiar with many cities, noted, as he had often done before, the general orderliness of the crowd, the absence of coarse sights and sounds, and reflected that if it be true of Australia that she produces few people of the highest culture, it is equally true that she produces few boors, and levels up, instead of down, in the majority of cases.

The expectorating larrikin, with attenuated lower limbs, clad in singularly-designed garments, which he termed, indifferently, "traasers," or "pants," was, of course, in evidence, but his manners were much less boisterous than those of his prototype, the London "'Arry," while his besetting vice seemed to be cigarette smoking rather than drinking. The young girls of the same class, who thronged the streets in hundreds, were quiet and well-behaved as a rule, and invariably neat and tidy. They possessed grace-

ful figures, but were so fearfully and wonderfully thin that *Punch's* London *Modiste*, who declared that she who "'ad 'igh shoulders and no 'ips" was the possessor of the perfect figure, would have found her ideal in Sydney—so far as the "'ips" were concerned, at all events. In fact, the Australian woman generally fulfils the geometrical definition of a line, as laid down by the late lamented Euclides—"length without breadth"—and whether or not this argues well for the future nation of the South, let anatomists and physiologists decide.

Morwell strolled on with his companions, and they reached the Town Hall just at the time that a stream of people, who had been attending a concert in the great hall, was pouring forth, and they were presently engulfed in a sea of white dresses and dress coats, while the air became redolent of white rose, frangipani, and half the perfumes in the calender. A crowd of this kind is by no means unpleasant, and they suffered themselves to be borne along with it unresistingly down George Street to the Victoria Markets.

They had reached the farther end of the great building, and were about to cross Market Street, when a terrific flash of light lit up the scene with the vividness of sunlight, and immediately after a loud report shook the ground they stood on, and caused women to scream and men to start affrighted. All looked up instinctively; but after the glare nothing could be distinguished save a small

phosphorescent light which seemed to be descending towards the earth. But Morwell, who had happened to gaze more towards the Southern horizon, could have sworn that he saw his gigantic Pterodatcyl of the Blue Mountains glide rapidly across the sky, travelling Eastward.

"It was a meteorite," exclaimed Crosby. "See, one of the fragments is descending right over us." True enough, the blue light descended steadily, and in a few moments fell at their feet, and then amazement took possession of all as they saw a small parachute, to which was attached a round object, and below that again a tiny lamp, with a face of blue glass. "It's a bomb!" shouted someone, and in an instant the crowd scattered in all directions. But Morwell did not move; on the contrary, he bent over the object and examined it closely.

"It's no bomb!" he called to Crosby, who, with the girls, had halted at a distance of thirty yards.

"What is it, then?"

"A head."

"A head? Nonsense!" said Crosby, approaching.

But a human head it was, and what was more surprising, it was the head of the man slain at the same time as the Minister for Justice. This fact Morwell, who had seen the man frequently, had no difficulty in determining when the ghastly object had been picked up by a policeman, and taken into an adjacent chemist's shop.

CHAPTER VII.

The blackened head which had descended from the sky in such an unaccountable manner gave Sullivan, who arrived promptly on the scene, two columns of copy, and everyone else "a turn." The Pritchard girls were, in fact, so seriously affected that Morwell and Crosby deemed it wise to accompany them to Colonel Howard's residence, where they were staying, and on arrival were themselves pressed to remain by the hospitable American, who would not hear of their returning to town, and moreover declared that his wife would enjoy no serenity of mind till she had heard "the latest horror."

The Colonel had built himself a fine house on Gore Hill, whence he enjoyed a view unsurpassed by any in the vicinity of Sydney, which is saying a good deal. From the house the ground sloped rapidly away to Lane Cove, with many a handsome villa and emerald lawn to create a

marked contrast with the dark-green native bush, of which much yet remained, and then the Upper Harbour opened up, while straight ahead for several miles ran the Parramatta River, and on the right was the bright streak of the Lane Cove River, wedged in by steep bush-crowned banks. On the left the multitudinous spires, chimneys, and buildings of the city towered high against the sky, and in the middle foreground lay the calm waters of the harbour, with many a stately clipper, huge liner, or fussy ferry-boat upborne on its bosom.

So much for the foreground; but the setting of the picture was even lovelier, for, stretching away to the blue line of the mountains on the horizon was a pleasant, undulating country, here covered with bush, there dotted with white houses or with considerable areas of cultivation; and, above all, was the bright Australian sky flecked with cloud masses, born of the contact of the moist sea breezes with the chillier atmosphere of the mountains.

It was, indeed, an exquisite scene, and, in the Colonel's opinion, was ample compensation for the existence of a cemetery just behind his house. And truly there was little in this contiguity to cause repulsion, or arouse morbid feelings. They repose luxuriously who rest in Gore Hill, for their surroundings are waving bush, and the abundant greenery of ornamental trees and shrubs, while the winds which murmur over its sun-kissed slopes, and sigh amongst the white headstones, bear with them some savour of the

illimitable West, or the fresh quality of the mighty Pacific. No festering mounds of earth are here, or surrounding buildings—with their suggestion that the living are encroaching on the limited domain of the dead, and grudge them even the slight space they occupy—but flower or sward-covered resting places, and a wide and ample area. Surely, if they retain an interest in the shell which once encumbered them, the knowledge that its resolution into its component elements takes place under such conditions must cause them pleasure!

Devoted as he was to the scene described above, Colonel Howard sometimes studied it, like Mr. Pogram, with his boots, and on the morning following the arrival of the young men, sat with his feet on the balcony rail, and his head at a much lower level, concealed behind the broad sheets of a New York newspaper, which had just come to hand by the 'Frisco mail. Suddenly he relinquished the national attitude, and addressing Morwell, who sat near, said, "Just listen to this," and read aloud the following paragraphs:—

REMARKABLE EXODUS OF TOUGHS.

A very singular statement has been imparted to us, namely, that of late there has been a regular hegira of toughs and hoodlums from this city. A prominent police official assured our informant that for months past his men have been greatly surprised to note that a number of well-known criminals had disappeared from their usual haunts. At first the officials feared

that these men were "lying low" and making preparations for some great coup, but inquiry proved this view to be erroneous, and revealed the fact that the men had actually relieved the city of their presence, and gone no one knew whither. Two leading detectives were put on to investigate the matter, but so far their inquiries have proved fruitless.

LATER.

In connection with the above, a report has just reached us that the janitor of No. 68 Liberty Street has made a remarkable statement to the police. He was acquainted, he said, with a man named Flanagan, better known as "The Klondyke Shiner," which name he had acquired by visiting the Klondyke some years since and prospecting with much industry—in the miner's kits and stores. Having secured a moderate competence, he retired from the scene of his labours, all the more rapidly as several miners were anxious to present him with small souvenirs in the shape of conical bullets, and returned to his native slums, where he soon dissipated his gains. Of late he had fallen on evil days, and he had often resorted to the janitor, who, unfortunately for himself, was a relation of his, for the purpose of borrowing a dollar or two. On the occasion of his last visit he said, with a mysterious wink, "I'll trouble you no more after this, pard."

"How's that?" queried the janitor, sceptically.

"Why, I'm off again."

"To Oregon?" (meaning the new gold rush in that State.)

"No, farther than that."

"Where, then?"

"Whisper," looking fearfully round him, "To Australia. Don't give it away, man, or my life isn't worth a cent."

"I'll not give it away," said the janitor. "But who'd hurt you?"

"Ah, I can't say that; in fact, I've told you too much already. But I'll tell you one bit more—all Badgey's gang is going. There, you could put me away properly now, but you won't, I know.

You've been square with me in the past, and I won't forget you."

After a few more words the "Shiner" left hurriedly, and the janitor saw no more of him till he opened the front door of No. 68 this morning, when he was horrified to see the dead body of the "Shiner" huddled up in the doorway, the handle of a bowie knife protruding from his breast. The man had been murdered, and fearful of results to himself, the janitor at once sought the police, and imparted to them the above particulars. If it be true that Badgey's gang—one of the most notorious bands of criminals in the metropolis—is going to Australia, then America's gain will be Australia's loss. But can the rumour be credited? And is there any connection between it and the general exodus of criminals reported by the police? It seems scarcely possible, and yet the murder of the man who revealed the secret of his destination to the janitor would appear to show that some others were concerned in a movement which they wished to keep secret at any cost—even that of murder. The whole business is mysterious, and it is to be hoped that more light will ere long be thrown on it.

"Singular, eh?" said the Colonel to Morwell.

"Very," assented the latter, who discussed the matter for some time with his host, and subsequently with Crosby and Sullivan, whom they met on their return to town.

"I seem to have heard something like this before," said the reporter. "Ah, I remember now: it was Deschamp told me. You remember that wine and spirit merchant chap who wanted to fight a duel with me? He gave me a bottle of brandy a hundred and ten years old, to write a puff par on, and in my usual style I wrote the par the morning *after* sampling, and denounced the drink traffic and all appertaining thereto, and gave such offence to

Deschamp that he sent me a challenge, which I respectfully declined. Subsequently I called at his place, and on his making it Pommery, I re-wrote the par to his entire satisfaction. We became great friends, and just the other day he read me a paragraph from a French paper, which was to the effect that a large number of notorious criminals had recently left France—for Australia, it was rumoured. I intended to make a local of it for the *Telephone*, but forgot. However, I'll do it now, with the additional information you got from the Colonel."

The paragraph duly appeared, and on the day following a letter from a German resident was published, accompanied by an extract from a Berlin paper, containing news of an exactly similar nature.

Some interest was aroused. The *Telephone* demanded that steps be taken to prevent Australia being made "the dumping ground for criminals of the worst type," and the *Trumpeter* commented on the matter in a lengthy leading article, but being of that order of newspaper which would with diffidence and caution make the statement, "Queen Anne is dead," as being almost too positive and direct, its comments did not throw very much light on the subject.

CHAPTER VIII.

What is the explanation of the weird attraction which black broadcloth possesses for the Amurikan? The fabric is expensive, develops a "shine" with the facility of mahogany, is the ideal medium for exhibiting grease spots to the best advantage, and finally forms the most hideous apparel known to man. Yet the American, particularly the middle-aged variety, apparently loves it, and now, as in the forties, encases his person in its sable folds, and, looking undertaker, waiter, showman, and crushed tragedian in one appalling blend, stalks defiantly forth, with the air of one who says within himself, "I'm smart, you bet."

Colonel Howard was generally true to the traditions of his native land, and, when attending ceremonies or public functions, was funereally correct, down to the

smallest detail of costume. In private life he relaxed, however, and one fine afternoon appeared in what he somewhat infelicitously described as "a gold-edged, diamond-pointed, copper-bottomed outfit." The "outfit" consisted of a flannel cap, sweater, blazer, knickerbockers, and stockings, all of a pattern that "could be heard several miles," as Crosby said, and plainly indicated cycling.

The Colonel had taken to this pursuit late in life, and, after performing the figure known as the "spread eagle" on various portions of the Lane Cove Road, he developed sufficient proficiency in the art to enable him to negociate all the hills between his residence and Pymble, and arrive at the latter picturesque resort in that highly-finished condition described by the term "done to a turn." He was fond of inviting various friends to accompany him on these "expeditions," as he termed them—"funerals, as they flippantly described them—and on this occasion set forth with quite a formidable following, amongst whom were Morwell, Crosby, and two young ladies named Grant. Mary Pritchard was not of the party, as, owing to the recent death of her brother, she could not well take part in such amusements as cycling, and it was with very mixed feelings that she watched Kate Grant and Crosby ride off side by side, while she had perforce to remain and aid Mrs. Howard and Ella in making preparations for the entertainment of the

party on their return. Ella seemed silent and depressed, and it had been with some difficulty that Mary persuaded her into visiting the Howards so soon after Arthur's death. She liked the cheerful Americans, but the locality of their residence was distasteful to her, owing to the fact that in the cemetery adjacent her brother's body had been laid. Always a trifle aloof from the very material and mundane conditions which surrounded her, she had become more pronouncedly so since the tragedy, and was now "very poor company for anyone," according to Mary. To the latter Ella was an enigma, as she was to most of the young people who visited the Pritchards. *They* lived for the hour, and the senses; all else was incomprehensible. Time was when all Australia lived thus, when greybeards were as scarce as deciduous trees, when lusty youth formed three-fourths of the population, and found material aims all sufficing. There was no place in this young sunny land for the pale philosopher with his "cui bono?"—or "wherefore?"—but he came in time; and with him the spectre pessimism, as the tools fell from exhausted hands, Mammon proved a dumb, blind, heartless god, or satiated feasters at banquets of the senses, looked round with jaded eyes, and asked in despair, "Is this the goal?"

So it is that to-day we find the time-worn doubts, and fears, and questionings arising in all the older centres of

Australia, while in the more newly-settled districts, material subjects only are of much interest.

As has been said, Ella Pritchard had little inclination for Society at the present time, particularly that of persons bent on amusement, but Mary, in pursuit of Fred. Crosby, was not to be denied, and so it was that Ella found herself that afternoon helping Mrs. Howard.

Meanwhile the cyclists proceeded on their way at the exciting speed of six miles an hour, which soon had the effect of converting the Colonel's following into an advance guard. Tiring at length of their snaillike progress, Kate Grant said to her companion: "Oh, do let us get on. We can go to Wahroonga and back before the Colonel reaches Pymble."

"I am agreeable," said Crosby, and they were soon wheeling merrily along at the rate of ten miles an hour. Passing Chatswood, with its numerous villas and brand-new, red-tiled cottages, they had a glimpse of the Lane Cove River winding away amongst the hills to the left, and thence onward bush and villas alternated on both sides of the road—the primeval forest and modern civilisation in close contact and sharp contrast. It was strange—*bizarre*—or whatever term best describes such unusual contrast, but by no means unpleasing, or absolutely incongruous. Roseville, Lindfield, Gordon—all new and rising suburbs—they passed, and were speeding down a slope to the Pittwater Road Crossing, when a

small dog rushed blindly into the lady's wheel, which turned sharply into the bank. Crosby, who was a little behind, heard a stifled scream, saw a flash of white draperies and shapely limbs as Miss Grant was shot over the handles on to the bank; and then a word which is popularly, but erroneously, supposed to be the exclusive copyright of the male sex reached his ears. He dismounted, and, controlling the muscles of his face as well as he could, said as he raised the young lady, "I am surprised and pained to hear you, Miss Grant."

"I don't care," she retorted, "it's all the fault of that beast."

"You are not hurt?"

"No, and I should have got clear only for my dress. I don't believe in riding in skirts."

"It *has* its drawbacks," he assented; and she reddened slightly as she said, "Now, Fred, if you are not careful I shall leave you and rejoin the Colonel."

"Don't do that. I quite agree with you that skirts are very unsuitable wear for cycling; but why don't some of you make a stand against the absurdity, and adopt the rational dress once and for all?"

"Why ask that; when do women do anything sensible?"

Not being able to answer this query off hand, Crosby mounted and rode on, followed by Miss Grant, who,

pending the general adoption of the rational dress, thought it as well to vacate the position of leader.

On returning from Wahroonga to Pymble, they found their friends standing in a group on the hill above the hotel, intent on the view which lay before and beneath them. To the West and South of them stretched the densely bushed country of Chatswood, South Chatswood, and the Field of Mars, while beyond lay a great portion of the County of Cumberland, the view being bounded on the far horizon by the Blue Mountains. To the Southward the white buildings of a portion of the City and suburbs showed up clearly, and towards the East were terminated by the blue line of the Pacific Ocean. It was a beautiful view—being a wider edition of the Colonel's favourite one from Gore Hill, but lacking the diversity created by the harbour—and all present were enjoying it to the full, when a vivid streak of light tore upward from the earth across the arc of the sky, and a little later a rending crash of terrible intensity almost stunned them, and semed to have some peculiar action on their hearts which caused acute pain for a moment. At the same time a shrieking sound came to them from high up in the sky.

"Heavens! what's that?" exclaimed the Colonel, with his hand pressed against his side. "I felt as if something had pierced my heart."

"So did I," exclaimed several others.

"It was a gun," said Morwell.

"Surely not. There was never a gun made that could create such a flash as that."

"I feel sure it was a gun. The flame darted upwards and across the city, and was gone in an instant."

"But there was no smoke."

"Some kind of smokeless explosive was used—not cordite, for the report was too loud. That shrieking sound was caused by a shell."

"I believe Morwell is right," said Crosby, "I happened to be looking towards Lane Cove, and I saw the flash commence somewhere about Fig Tree, and dart over the houses of the city just as I have seen a flash from a big gun do. Then the screaming sound was exactly like what I have heard when shells have been fired at floating targets outside the Heads.

"But who on earth could possess, or have fired such an enormous weapon?" said the Colonel, incredulously.

"Ah! that is a mystery" replied the young man. "But all is a mystery in Sydney at present, and we seem to be menaced by a power that will crush us at last."

His hearers turned pale, and one or two of the ladies trembled visibly, for the menaces, tragedies, and apparently insoluble mysteries of the last few weeks had had their due effect on the nerves of most of the inhabitants of Sydney.

CHAPTER IX.

When the party returned to Gore Hill, they found that the inmates of the Colonel's house, in common with all the residents of the neighbourhood, had been greatly startled by the occurrence of an hour before. The explosion, which had seemed formidable at Pymble, had at Gore Hill been terrific in its intensity. As described by Ella Pritchard, an appalling report had shaken the ground like an earthquake, smashed windows, caused crockery to rattle, and even precipitated people to the ground. Horses had bolted madly along the Lane Cove Road, and several accidents had occurred. The flash had come, as Crosby conjectured, from near Fig Tree, and sped upward over the city, accompanied by the

peculiar shrieking sound before mentioned. Anxiety was expressed on every face at this recital, and the few guests whom the Colonel was able to persuade to remain for dinner were so possessed by despondency and apprehension that the meal proved but a dull one, and was hurried through in a manner totally foreign to the usual practice of the host, who used frequently to remark that he was "no hustler at meal times." Instead of remaining in the warm room, the men repaired to the wide balcony for the *post-prandial* smoke, and the ladies joined them soon afterwards. Trays containing coffee and tea were brought out, and the party sat for several hours conversing in low tones, and gazing downward on the myriad lights of Sydney.

It had been one of those days in the early spring which give a foretaste of summer, and the atmosphere had been rather oppressive. Now, however, the last dying efforts of a "southerly buster"—which had started bravely from somewhere in the roaring forties and swept tumultuously up the Victorian coast, but subsided into a gentle zephyr between Wollongong and Sydney—were lowering the temperature perceptibly. Heavy with the odour of *pittosporum*, the breeze played gratefully round the temples of the occupants of the balcony, and roused them to greater animation.

"How lovely it is," said Kate Grant, with a slight movement of her hand towards the miles of lights which

twinkled on the water's edge, or crossed rapidly over its surface, as some ferry boat or large steamer sped on its way.

"Yes, and how peaceful," said Morwell, whom the girl had addressed.

"Remarkably peaceful," put in the Colonel, who, restrained by the presence of strangers from placing his feet on the balcony rail, was wriggling uneasily in his chair; "and I will pay Britishers the compliment of saying that where their flag flies, peace soon prevails, and is maintained. Why, in this city of Sydney, established and settled by adventurous men from many parts of the world, I don't suppose seventy men have been killed in fights since its foundation. Now, in olden times I reckon the city would have witnessed a hundred pitched battles in as many years, and even in the States—which, as we know, are inhabited by very law-abiding folks (ahem)—thousands of people would have died from an overdose of lead pills, and such like, in half the time. Oh, yes, you Britishers keep the peace, and you also keep the country, and all its assets."

Some laughter followed this last sally, and then Crosby, who seemed remarkably despondent, said, "Well, I hope the peace of Sydney is not about to be disturbed. What is it, Ella?" This to Miss Pritchard, who had risen suddenly, and was gazing intently in the direction of the cemetery.

"Look, Fred, look!" exclaimed the girl.

"I see nothing."

"That terrible being again,"

"What, Mueller?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens," muttered Crosby; and then, remembering what had occurred at the bridge, he said, "Hold my hand, Ella."

The girl did so, and instantly Crosby saw the form of Mueller float slowly over the hedge bounding the cemetery, and across the Lane Cove Road. He was gazing, horrified at the misty shape, when Ella cried out, "Oh! see who is following him? It is Arthur."

With strained eyes Crosby gazed, but could only distinguish a faint outline of what appeared to be a figure following in the wake of the other.

"It is Arthur—it is Arthur!" cried Ella. "The other is unaware of his presence, but he will follow, he will follow—"

Here she ceased abruptly, and the others, who had been gazing at her as if she were possessed, broke into exclamations, "Who is it; what do you see?" and the like.

At this Ella resumed her usual manner, and said, "Join hands with Mr. Crosby and I, and you will see."

Trembling with eagerness, all, after some fumbling joined hands, and then the remarkable fact was made evident that the figure or vision of Mueller was apparent

to Morwell, Kate Grant and Mrs. Howard, but totally invisible to Mary Pritchard, the eldest Miss Grant, Colonel Howard, and the other two guests present. None of the party except Crosby were able to distinguish even the faintest outline of what Ella declared was the spectre of her brother Arthur.

"Astounding," gasped Morwell, as, with creeping flesh and damp brow, he watched the dim shape floating over gullies and bush in the direction of Longueville.

"But I see nothing," plaintively exclaimed Mary Pritchard."

"Nor I," said the Colonel and Miss Grant, simultaneously.

"There, they have gone!" exclaimed Crosby.

"Yes, they have gone," said Ella, relinquishing the hands she had held, and glancing at the pale faces beside her. "It was Mueller, the murderer, followed by his victim, poor Arthur."

"You make my flesh creep," said Mrs. Howard with a shudder, "but I cannot doubt you, for I distinctly saw one of the forms myself."

"There is no doubt at all," said Crosby. "I am familiar with Mueller's appearance, and that was his form which I saw just now, and also at the bridge the night Ella and I went there."

"You never told us of that," exclaimed Mary. "What did you see?"

Crosby briefly related what had occurred at the bridge, and was heard with the silence of people convinced, but too surprised to speak.

"What does it all mean," said the Colonel, at length. "You can't all be dreaming, or be hypnotised, or something, simultaneously."

"There is no dreaming—it is real, too real," said Ella, decisively.

"But that man Mueller is in gaol."

"His body is there, but his body only at times like these."

"Ella, how strangely you speak! What do you know?"

"I cannot tell, I am restrained from telling; the whole world is menaced—ah——" and the girl sank into a chair gasping for breath, while they rushed to her assistance in terror and dismay. In a moment she recovered, and saying, "Ask me no more," passed into the house, followed by her anxious hostess.

"What terrors are upon us?" said the Colonel. "You know something," he continued, addressing Crosby; "can't you relieve our apprehensions?"

"I cannot; what I know is more likely to increase than relieve them, I fear." And then he told them of his interview with the policeman; of the assurance he had received that Mueller was in Darlinghurst Gaol at the time of the appearance at the bridge, and of Ella's

strange prognostications of approaching evil on that occasion.

"But how does Ella know these things, and see these visions?" objected Mary.

"I think I can partially explain that," said Morwell. "She is one of those rare beings in whom the spiritual completely dominates the material, and who are infinitely more susceptible to impressions conveyed from without than ordinary folks. The highly sensitive nerve centres of such persons readily respond to communication conveyed by ether waves, beams of light, or other media, and their organs of sense, acting in concert, enable them to see sights and hear sounds which pass unnoticed by people in general, unless they are in some way influenced by direct contact with the Medium, as when Miss Pritchard held our hands just now."

"But why were some of us able to see the vision, and others not?"

"The brain is the sensitive instrument, prepared during ages of evolution, which receives the impressions sent from without the sphere of ordinary human life—just as in wireless telegraphy a sensitive instrument receives the electrical waves—but those brains which are occupied with material thoughts relating to money matters, business, love affairs, and the like, are not readily susceptible to what we must call 'spiritual' impressions. This supposition explains why it is that perhaps 95 per cent.

of humanity pass their whole lives without being even conscious of the vast mysterious forces which are around and about them, and shape their destinies if they only knew it. Also, it explains why it is that people who prepare themselves in some degree to receive these impressions at spiritualistic *seances* and in table-turning very often succeed in their effort to secure some communication, however feeble it may be, with external intelligences. Refined and sensitive people are most susceptible to spiritual impressions in the ordinary way; and, on the other hand, gluttony or animalism of any kind tends to prevent such communications."

"Well, Morwell," said the Colonel, "your theories are very interesting, but they are scarcely provable; and if it had not been for the events of to-night I should have put them down as more visionary than the subject they were designed to explain. As it is, however, I don't know what to think, and feel bewildered. We are all nervous and depressed, however, and it won't do to neglect our bodily frames, so let us adjourn within doors for some refreshment. We all look more like ghosts than living people."

CHAPTER X.

In the free lands under the Southern Cross the gentlemen who undertake the duties of conveying to householders material sustenance in the form of bread, meat, and vegetables, and mental pabulum in the shape of newspapers, conduct their business on the fixed principle that too much corporeal exertion is incompatible with dignity, and they, therefore, usually drive to some commanding position in the vicinity of the house, and thence hurl strange words, or the commodity itself if it will bear hurling, in the direction of the residence. The words—"yells" would be the more correct expression—strike on the tympanum of some one, causing such pain that he, or she, to terminate the torture, rushes tumultuously out and shrieks vindictively: "poundofrumpsteak andthreepoundsofsuet—hang you" (this aside), when what was really required was two pounds of loin chops and one pound of dripping. In the case of newspapers, the object itself is hurled, in the form of a hard roll or ball, and, alighting on a lawn or flower-bed, is generally in a damp and limp condition by the time the suffering

subscriber has completed his toilet and is ready for his paper.

The *Trumpeter*, being literally as well as figuratively weighty, carried well, however, and a heavy thud on the verandah usually informed Colonel Howard of its arrival. Its contents were not so startling, as a rule, as to cause its subscribers to hasten to open it, but on the morning following the events narrated in the last chapter, the Colonel rushed out in his pyjamas, and, unfolding the sheet with trembling fingers, gave vent to the exclamation, "Great Cæsar!" as the following announcement met his eyes:—

TERRIBLE EXPLOSION IN MELBOURNE.

APPALLING LOSS OF LIFE AND PROPERTY.

THE CATHEDRAL AND PRINCE'S BRIDGE DESTROYED.

ASTOUNDING RUMOUR TO THE EFFECT THAT THE EXPLOSION WAS CAUSED BY A SHELL FIRED FROM SYDNEY!

The account of the matter, telegraphed through to the *Trumpeter* regardless of cost by its Melbourne correspondent, was as follows:—

"The most startling, unexpected, and terrible event which has ever taken place in this city since its foundation by John Pascoe

Hawkner, in 1835, occurred this afternoon at about 5 p.m. The day being a holiday, the city was comparatively deserted till that hour, but then people began to pour in by thousands from Flemington, Royal Park, Brighton, St. Kilda, and other places where they had been spending the day, and numbers congregated about Princes' Bridge, and in Flinders and Swanston Streets, preparatory to taking trains or trams to the many suburbs for which this is the terminal point. Without an instant's warning hundreds of the holiday-makers were hurled into eternity, for an explosion took place at the end of Princes' Bridge, which completely destroyed the structure throughout almost its entire length, killed every person on it, levelled the entire front of the Anglican Cathedral to the ground, caused the Metropolitan Gas Company's huge premises to crumble like a pack of cards, demolished a portion of both railway stations, hurled stones, pieces of iron, and fragments of human bodies for hundreds of yards in all directions, and caused such a concussion and trembling of the earth that windows were smashed as far away as Brighton, Moonee Ponds, and Box Hill. What occurred in my own case may be quoted as being typical of many. I was seated in my office in Elizabeth Street when an awful concussion shook the building to its foundation, pictures fell from the walls, the windows were shattered to atoms, my chair rocked under me, and for a moment I thought the whole building was about to collapse. The awful report which accompanied the shock nearly deafened me, and half a dozen ideas rushed through my brain in a second: 'The gas-works have been blown up,' 'A store of dynamite has exploded,' 'An earthquake has taken place,' and so on. As soon as I could collect my scattered senses I rushed hatless into the street, and joined the throng of terrified people who were pouring along Collins Street towards the point where some excited men stated the explosion had taken place. Never shall I forget the awful scene that met my eyes in Swanston Street. Buildings levelled almost to the ground, the street at the lower end piled twenty feet high with débris, and everywhere

blood, and the mangled fragments of human beings and horses. A violent nausea seized me; many people fainted, while the screams of women and shouts of men made a horrid babel of sound. I cannot dwell further on the horror of the scene, but will pass on to the account given of the cause of the disaster, which is almost too astounding to be credible. When the worst confusion had passed, and most of the people who had assembled were rendering assistance to the wounded, a policeman, who had been standing beneath the clock in Flinders Street before the explosion, made a remarkable statement. He had happened to glance upward in the direction of the Bridge, and had seen a dark object descend from the sky with such velocity that before he could 'wink his eye,' as he said, the explosion followed. He had been thrown to the ground by the concussion, but the force of the explosion had passed over him, and he was not injured. The man was positive that he had seen the object aforesaid, and his statement was confirmed later on by two other persons, one of whom had seen it from a boat on the Yarra. The impression, therefore, exists here amongst some that the explosion was caused by a meteorite, but others hold that a missile, in the form of a bomb or a shell, was responsible for the explosion. But this seems incredible, and I give you the suggestion for what it is worth. Personally, I place no credence in it."

Much other matter descriptive of terrible slaughter and devastation followed, and then came a footnote added in the *Trumpeter's* own office:—

"Incredible as it may seem, the belief exists that the terrible explosion described by our Melbourne correspondent was caused by a shell fired from Sydney! Thousands heard the report, and hundreds saw the terrific flash coming from the direction of Lane Cove last evening, as described in another column, and now the two events are compared, and the statement has been freely circulated that the one was a consequence of the other. The rumour is so astounding and terrible that we hesitated to express it in print, but deemed it our duty to do so."

Colonel Howard was a brave man, but his limbs trembled under him as he read this report, for, coupled with what he had witnessed himself, and the menaces, tragedies, and mysteries of the past few weeks, it left not a doubt that the community was threatened by one vast power which had under its control forces hitherto undreamt of. What human being had ever heard of a gun that could project a missile 560 miles—the distance from Sydney to Melbourne?

The Colonel puzzled his brain for an hour in vain conjectures as to the nature of the threatening power, and then, giving the riddle up as hopeless, repaired to the breakfast room, whither his wife and the Pritchard girls, who had stayed for the night, had preceded him. The meal was progressing when a measured sound of tramping feet came to them from outside, and going to the window, they discovered a long line of khaki-clad infantry, accompanied by several guns, proceeding along the Lane Cove Road. The Federal Government had taken action then, and recognised that a formidable menacing force existed!

As a matter of fact, the State Government had taken action from the first, and, since the episode of the handbills, had kept a small army of detectives and policemen at work in all directions, making inquiries and investigating rumours. No result had followed so far, but now there was something definite to go on, as it was shown by the evidence of numbers of witnesses that an enormous gun

or weapon of some kind had been discharged somewhere in the vicinity of Lane Cove. During the night orders had been issued to the military authorities, and before daybreak the militia, volunteers, and permanent artillery were under arms, and an hour later several sections were proceeding by various routes towards Lane Cove.

CHAPTER XI.

Crosby and Morwell, who had returned to town on the previous evening, were accosted in Pitt Street by the excited Sullivan.

"Why aren't you at the front?" he demanded.

"The front! What front?"

"Why the front of battle, to be sure. Don't you know that troops have marched to Lane Cove to find the mysterious gentleman who fired that big gun yesterday, and blow him to the divil if they do find him."

"No. We have only just come out. We saw the flash of that gun, though, from Pymble."

"Did you, now? That's first-rate copy for me," said Sullivan. He pulled out his note book, and with rapid dots and dashes took down a brief report of what they had seen, from Morwell,

"I'll tell you what," he said, when he had concluded, "you had better come with me to Lane Cove, and see the fun. I'll just transcribe this at the office, and then we'll drive out in a trap." As work was out of the question, and the young men, in common with all others, were much excited by the trend of events, they agreed to Sullivan's proposition, and the three were shortly after *en route* for Fig Tree by way of Drummoyne. On arriving at the crest of the hill above the bridge they were stopped by a soldier, and then saw that the whole left bank of the Lane Cove River for some distance above and below the bridge was occupied by the military. Looking across they observed that the other bank also was in possession of the troops which had proceeded by the way of North Sydney. Through the bush could be distinguished the figures of numerous scouts, who were searching every inch of ground for some sign that would indicate the location of the supposed huge weapon which had been fired on the previous day.

The search had been going on for some time when the report of a single shot was heard on the opposite side, and an instantaneous commotion arose amongst the troops situated there. A large number rushed along the road and others through the bush, and disappeared from the gaze of the watchers on the other side. A little later another shot was heard, then half a dozen dropping reports, and then the crash of a volley.

"They're at it like mad!" cried Sullivan, his eyes almost starting out of his head with excitement. "Who's the foe? I'd give a thousand pounds to know. Great Heavens! what's that?"

This last exclamation was caused by a screaming sound through the air just over their heads, caused by a shell, followed a moment later by the whizzing of hundreds of rifle balls.

"They're in force! They've got artillery!" shouted an officer near them, and word was passed for the guns, which had been stationed in the rear, to be brought forward to the hill top and placed in position.

No action could be taken, however, as no foe was visible, and the whole opposite bank was occupied by friends. Not for long was this so, however, for the firing increased until it swelled into a continuous roar. Bullets cut through the leaves of the gum-trees in thousands, and presently brown uniforms came pouring through the scrub and along the road in retreat, many staggering along wounded, while every few paces forms would drop and lie prostrate.

"Be heavens, they're bate!" shouted Sullivan, relapsing into Hibernian in his excitement.

Beaten they were, for in ten minutes the whole right bank force was pouring over the bridge in full retreat, if not actual flight. The guns on the left bank now opened fire, as did the infantry, aiming in the direction from which the opposing fire came. They had fired a few rounds when

the bush on the opposite rise seemed to leap—in leaves, branches and fragments—into the air, and a storm of missiles swept over the river and into the ranks of those who held the left bank. A ball struck the trap in which Morwell, Crosby and Sullivan were seated, smashing both wheels to fragments, and precipitating the occupants with violence to the ground. The frightened horse, with the trace bar, splash board, and a portion of the front of the vehicle swinging behind him, galloped madly off in the direction of Sydney, while the startled men, as soon as they could rise, followed in his wake.

"Sydney's done, an' Australia, too!" gasped Sullivan, as he ran, his head bare, his coat torn, and his face bleeding from a wound in the forehead. "People that can fight like that, and have such arms, must have a Government behind them."

"But who are they?" Crosby jerked out.

"Heaven knows; it's the greatest mystery the world has ever seen."

"I did not see a man," exclaimed Morwell.

"Nor I. The divils lay low. But stop a minute, we are below the hill now, and can't be hit." They pulled up panting, and noted for the first time each other's pallid faces and torn clothes.

"We've had a narrow squeak," said Crosby, as he endeavoured to staunch a wound in his cheek.

"I should say so. If that ball had been a foot higher

John Patrick Sullivan would have taken his last note. It's my belief the soldiers won't stand long. Wow! dy'ye hear that?" as a frightful crash shook the ground, and a chorus of shrieks and yells came from above. A moment later the two guns came bounding along the road, the horses galloping madly, while the frightened gunners lashed them with might and main. A stampede of infantry followed, the rear being brought up by the survivors of the right bank force, and in a few minutes the three young men found themselves swept along by the terrified throng, who were fleeing in the direction of Sydney, with no thought but of saving themselves. Along the road on both banks of the river, and in the bush, hundreds of brown forms lay dead, or severely wounded, to mark the power of the unseen foe, for unseen he was, not a living opponent having been visible to any of the attacking force. It was subsequently stated by those who had been on the right bank that the first shot, which had killed a soldier, had come from a stone house, built high up on a rock by the side of the road, and a few hundred yards from the bridge. From this house, also, and its vicinity had come the devastating volleys, but the defenders were not at any time seen.

The expedition had ended disastrously, but it had demonstrated that a powerful foe was in position near Fig Tree, whence undoubtedly was fired the shell which had flown such an incredible distance. But what foe was it that possessed such power, such arms, in a country like

Australia, which had no internecine troubles, and in the whole course of her history had scarce heard a shot fired in anger?

This question, put as it was in tones of dismay and grief by thousands of terrified people, remained unanswered, though theories by the hundred were put forward.

Sullivan having steadied his nerves and impeded his articulation by copious libations, declared that it was a "m'raclous vishitashun deshined (hic) punish shins Shydney," but declined, or was unable, to state how the miracle was worked.

Crosby stuck to his theory of anarchists; the Colonel saw "road agents or pirates" at the bottom of the trouble; Mr. Pritchard made a desperate effort to show that the policy of Protection was indirectly the cause of the whole thing; and his sister-in-law, Miss Manse, an austere lady with ideas pertaining to the year 1649, darkly hinted that the trail of the modern woman was over the whole business, as over *all* troubles.

She and her ally, Captain Marshall, also assured all and sundry that such a thing could never have happened in "Angland," "where the government of the country was in the hands of men of birth and position, not of demagogues elected by the mob."

But the silent Morwell, watching the still more silent Ella, saw that, though she listened, she gave no heed to these theories and opinions, but seemed like one who knows and fears, but cannot speak.

CHAPTER XII.

From the end of the eighteenth century, when the first settlers, in search of suitable land for cultivation, steered their boats between its high, bush-clad banks, the Lane Cove River had been navigated by no more formidable crafts than timber barges, ferry steamers, and pleasure boats; but now Mrs. Howard and the Pritchard girls, looking down on the river from the balcony, beheld a flotilla of gunboats proceeding cautiously up the stream, followed as far as the opening of the estuary by the Admiral's great flagship, the "Royal Harry." Eagerly the ladies watched the vessels, and thousands of other eyes than theirs were fixed on the same objects, for this was the grand movement of the Anglo-Australian fleet, supported on land by the local field forces, which was expected to destroy the mysterious force which had

defeated the first expedition a week or so before, and so clear up a mystery and remove a menace which was becoming absolutely intolerable.

The boats crept slowly up the narrow channel, and the leading one was just abreast of Longueville when the report of a gun from higher up the river caused the watchers to start. A commotion was observed on the boats, and next moment flashes of fire broke from their turrets and sides, and the ripping report of their guns echoed amongst the rocks on either side. The sound had not died away when the water boiled and spurted under an answering discharge, the funnel of one of the gunboats was swept overboard, and a flash of flame just above the waterline of another showed where she had been struck by a shell. Then came a furious spluttering of musketry, with occasional volleys, which indicated that the troops stationed in the bush on each side of the river were engaged. The noise of the battle now swelled into a continuous roar, and the onlookers trembled with terror and excitement, as it became more than ever apparent that the invisible enemy must possess great power and resources, and be present in numbers. The weather had been exceptionally hot for some days previously, and the bush being in dry condition, was fired in several places by shells, and clouds of smoke began to obscure the scene. The firing grew hotter, and the ground trembled under the thunder of the discharges, when suddenly a mass of

flame and debris shot into the air near the bridge; a stunning crash followed, and the firing suddenly ceased.

In the dead silence that ensued, Mary Pritchard exclaimed, clasping her trembling fingers together, "Oh, what can have happened?"

"A mine has exploded," said Ella, who, though pale, was the least agitated of the three. "Masses of rocks and trunks of trees were shot up into the air. See! they are falling now," as a hail of objects descended, splashing into the river.

"I do hope nothing has happened to the Colonel," said Mrs. Howard, tearfully. "I asked him not to follow the soldiers, and I don't think he would, only those young men rode up on bicycles after the troops had passed. They are sure to take him into danger, for that young reporter will go where he can see the fighting at close quarters."

"I imagine that they would not be allowed very close," said Ella, "but we shall soon know what has occurred."

Half-an-hour later an excited cyclist swept over the brow of the hill, and, halting with difficulty at Colonel Howard's gate, proved to be the volatile Sullivan, who had made the acquaintance of the ladies under Crosby's *ægis* a week before, and was now on quite an intimate footing with them, especially Mary.

"It's all right," he shouted, as he rushed up the walk. "Sydney's delivered from danger. They've blown them-

selves into smithereens, an' there's a hole now where they were."

"Heaven be thanked for the deliverance," said Mrs. Howard. "But is the Colonel safe?"

"Safe as a church, ma'am. But he had a narrow shave, and the bike's killed—destroyed, I mean—a ball fired at some troops near us grazed the Colonel's leg, and tore the front wheel of the bicycle to shreds."

"How awful," exclaimed Mary. "And Mr. Crosby and Mr. Morwell?"

"Both quite safe. We saw a lot of the fighting. Those beauties, whoever they were—for not a soul was seen—were entrenched near that house on the rock that they held last week, and they had bored a tunnel or something nearly down to the river bank, where a lot of big guns were placed, and from this point they commanded the river and engaged the fleet. The troops they kept off with musketry, and were making things mighty warm, I can assure you, when the blow up took place. Their magazine must have gone, for I heard that their whole position was destroyed."

The ladies listened with breathless interest to this recital, and then Ella asked "Were any bodies found?"

"I didn't wait to see, but tore off to tell you and take the news to the office. I must be off now; the others will be here in ten minutes," and without more ado Sullivan—the reportorial instinct dominating everything—jumped

on his machine and rode down Gore Hill towards St. Leonards at a breakneck speed.

Half-an-hour later Colonel Howard, Crosby, and Morwell arrived, and brought the information that the explosion had completely destroyed what had evidently been a strongly fortified position, leaving only a gaping rent in the ground, and a few traces of trenches and embankments. One wrecked gun-carriage had been found wedged into a crevice in a rock, but there was no mark on it to show where it had been made, and when Ella reiterated her query as to whether any bodies had been found, the men answered "No."

"That's singular, too," said Morwell, after a pause.

"Oh, they may have bolted into some hole in the rock, and been covered over there," said the Colonel. "A thousand tons of that rock on which the house was built must have tumbled into the hollow. I have no doubt at all that they are all done for; probably some bodies will be found when a more thorough search has been made. Anyway, I believe all danger is over, and we can once more live in peace as civilised people should. Some gang of mad desperadoes—Road Agents or what not—were, in my opinion, endeavouring to establish a reign of terror, out of which they hoped ultimately to profit, and their numbers being small, were obliged to keep out of sight, and act as they did."

This weak and unsatisfactory explanation in default of

a better was accepted with a sense of a mighty deliverance by some of the Colonel's hearers, but Ella subsequently said to Morwell and Crosb-- "The trouble is not over, my friends; it has not even commenced, and the events of to-day and last week were merely designed as blinds to the real movements."

CHAPTER XIII.

Ella's mysterious knowledge and forebodings could not, of course, be shared by the public, and Sydney as a whole shook off its fears, and became hilarious. Those who had not fled beyond sea returned to their homes, country visitors poured in by thousands, every train and steamer from adjoining States arrived crowded, hotel accommodation rose to a premium, and the amount of alcohol consumed per head went up several decimal points—a result that was ably contributed to by Mr. Sullivan, whose absorbtive capacity—always great—now became almost superhuman. He was much more frequently to be found at the Australia, Empire, Pfhalerts or the Thirsty Club, than in the reporters' room of the *Telephone* office, and in recognition of his connection with recent extraordinary events, and skill as a raconteur, was invited to 'refresh'

himself perhaps fifty times a day. He could not possibly honour all these invitations, but made heroic efforts to do so, and would probably have gone on to his undoing, but that the eternal feminine stepped in, and effected a reformation for the ten millioneth—or billioneth—time in the history of the race.

With the shining examples of Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Messalina, Theodora, Madame Du Barry, and a few other lamented ladies of the past before her, woman cannot claim that her influence on man has always been exerted for his good, but she can truthfully maintain, that, taking everything "bye and large," and making allowance for a considerable number of shocking examples to the contrary, she has far more frequently helped him to take the right than the wrong road in life. When man—especially youthful man—evinces a disposition to forswear humanity, and betake himself to the society of those canine companions whom Mr. Mantilini euphoniously described as "the demnition bow wows," there is but a single influence which can cause him to halt on his journey kennel-wards—that exercised by the only woman who can see in him virtues concealed from all other mortal eyes, and who herself, perhaps of the earth earthy, yet has the power to lift his feet from the mire, and set his face towards the light.

The benign influence in Sullivan's case was exerted by Mary Pritchard, who, though she possessed about as much soul as a cow, was refined and eminently good-natured,

and though prone to change her lovers with the seasons, yet was absolutely loyal to the latest object of her regard, and demonstrative to a degree that Crosby, at all events, had found embarrassing. Tiring at length of his coldness, Mary had transferred her regard to Sullivan, and he reciprocating, it came about that the talented pressman, who had hitherto professed a fine contempt for the refinements of life, which he had voted "slow," and found most satisfaction in the rather coarse colonial Bohemianism—bars, barmaids, boating excursions to Middle Harbour with congenially wild spirits, Randwick Racecourse, the Frivolity Music Hall, the Thirsty Club, and so on—changed wonderfully in his habits, and deserting his usual haunts, became a constant attendant at such mild domestic amusements as the recent bereavement the Pritchard family had sustained, enabled Mary to enjoy. His personal appearance even underwent a change, for whereas he had formerly been somewhat of a sloven, he was now neatly and tastefully dressed in the daytime, and at night sometimes appeared in the orthodox swallow-tails. He developed quite a remarkable courtesy of manner, too, and, with the aid of a good cigar, sat out one of Mr. Pritchard's dissertations on the advantages of Freetrade to a young country, without falling asleep; heard several of Captain Marshall's "awmy" stories of the sixties to the end; and completely won the allegiance of Miss Manse by the masterly deceit with which he agreed with her seventeenth-

century views of life, and advocacy of the rights and privileges of blue blood, a curiously-tinted fluid, which endows its fortunate possessors with a kind of divinity, and as a set-off—for in life everything has its disadvantages—is frequently more heavily charged with urate of soda, and other concomitants of gout and rheumatism, than the common, or crimson, stream which flows through the veins of the plebeian.

In all this there was policy, no doubt, for Sullivan had some doubts concerning the view the Pritchards would take of his suit, his assets being represented by a cipher, and his liabilities by three figures, while the most highly-placed member of his family that he could call to mind was his uncle, the miller—now deceased—who had brought him up.

"Oh! but think of your personal character," said Crosby—to whom he once expressed his doubts—with cruel sarcasm.

"Ah! go on, you Job's comforter; if they start investigating *that*, I'm finished in one act, and there will be nothing for me to do but write my own obituary notice, and, leaving it on the editor's table with a footnote instructing him to publish it under penalty of being haunted, take up my residence inside a shark in the harbour."

While Mr. Sullivan was following his new *role*, Sydney was gay to distraction. The streets were crowded by day,

and far into the night, recalling bright visions of what the sometimes inebriated citizen of that period termed the "Sellybrashuns!" and the harbour, which had been deserted for a few disastrous weeks, again became crowded with craft of all descriptions, and the Port Jackson Steamship Company was obliged to requisition policemen to prevent the Manly steamers from being overcrowded. Private owners, less careful, took on board twice as many people as their boats were built to carry, and then jammed in a few hundreds more somehow, with the result that the vessels suggested floating stumps of wood, with swarms of bees clinging to them. Picnics and excursions were the order of the day, and the scene of the fight, near Fig Tree in particular, was visited by over half a million people, who almost obliterated all signs of the conflict, by the liberal distribution of empty bottles and tins over the whole area. "Fears were forgotten, and festivity and folly became fatally fashionable," to use the alliterative language of Sullivan in describing the change.

Colonel Howard, always socially prominent, went with the tide, and gave a ball, a banquet, a picnic, and a cycling party.

The last-named event only, Mary Pritchard—persuaded by Sullivan—attended, and was most devotedly watched over by him throughout the afternoon. In a lonely portion of the Longueville Road he laid his heart at her wheel, and assured her in what might be termed "the language of

hyperbole," that "the rays of pure effulgent light, emanating from your bright soul, Mary, have illuminated the dark and tortuous path of my life with a glorious radiance, which ensures my reaching the goal in safety." Unfortunately, between hyperbole and reality there is often a divergence, and the goal he reached on this occasion was a patch of ti-tree scrub into which he was precipitated with considerable violence, accompanied by his companion, whose pedal he had jammed when endeavouring to kiss her.

"How did you come to grief, Sullivan?" asked Crosby, who rode up with Kate Grant a little later.

"Well, it was what you would call in billiards a 'kiss cannon,'" replied the unabashed pressman, with a solemn wink.

The remainder of the evening passed like a dream to Sullivan, who, for the first time in his life, felt happy without a haunting accompanying sense of uneasiness.

"Mary Pritchard is humanising that chap," said Crosby to Morwell, as they watched Mr. Sullivan bending adoringly over her.

"Yes; but aren't you jealous, Fred?"

"You know I'm not."

"I do; in fact, I imagine you are rather relieved. But, as you say, Miss Mary is improving our friend. That wretched, aimless, half-cynical half-vicious life he was leading, in common with hundreds of others like him in

this city, would have palled in a few more years, and then there would have been nothing before him but despair. As it is, he will marry her, and settle down into a very useful kind of citizen."

"Oh, you think he'll marry Mary?"

"Certainly; such a fiery pair of lovers as they are not to be denied, and if the Pritchards *pere* and *mere* object, French leave will be the order of the day."

Unconscious that his future was being thus confidently mapped out, Sullivan presently joined the two friends, and the three set forth to Lavender Bay with the Pritchard girls. They took the electric tram to Ridge Street, and thence decided to walk, the night being a lovely one.

Arriving at Blue Street, they paused for a while to look down on the myriad lights of the city and harbour glittering below them. They had gazed at the scene in silence for some minutes, when suddenly Mary, who had been looking towards the South Head, uttered an exclamation, and turning, they beheld a sight which caused their previously buoyant feelings to change into sickening apprehension, for stretching from the horizon on the North side of the Harbour to the zenith of the sky, was a lurid nebulous streak, which, becoming momentarily more distinct, stood revealed at length as the vision of the threatening placards—a gigantic Red Arm and Hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

With the exception of Mr. Sullivan, who said "Cripes," the party maintained a stunned silence for some minutes as they watched the ominous presentment, which emerged apparently from the sea to the North of Manly; the forearm, just below the elbow, showing over the slopes intervening. Thence the enormous figure was continued till the outstretched fingers reached a point which appeared to be over Fort Denison. The width of the limb was in just proportion to its length, and the whole was of a blood-red colour.

To Morwell, who, despite some natural awe and fear, noted every detail with a discerning eye, the figure did not appear to have been produced by an electric lamp, or other means of employing light rays. Rather had it commenced to show first in a nebulous state, and gradually become

more distinct, conditions to which he could think of no parallel save in what are known as Psychic Materialisations, which he had witnessed on several occasions. As he gazed, the conviction that he was witnessing a manifestation of some force, which had hitherto been beyond human control, grew on his mind, and he was speculating vainly on what this might portend, when his companions uttered a gasp of astonishment, as the figure was seen to bend at the wrist, while all the fingers, but the index, closed, and this pointed downwards towards the city. For a moment it remained thus, and then the whole figure vanished, and the blue vault of the sky alone met their gaze.

Morwell was the first to speak. "What does this portend?" he said, addressing himself to Ella, as though she alone could answer.

"Much more than was threatened."

"The destruction of Sydney?"

"That, if it occurs, is only an unimportant part of a gigantic design."

"Ella, you terrify me," exclaimed Mary. "Cannot you speak openly and tell us what is coming?"

"No; I can only reveal what I know little by little, and as events progress."

"But who prevents you?"

"Don't ask that; I can tell you no more," and Ella walked on alone, sunk in deep meditation, and apparently oblivious of her surroundings.

"I am thankful that you are all here," said Crosby, as they followed, "otherwise I should think I was mad, or dreamed of all these mysteries and horrors."

"Faith, I think I *am* mad," said Sullivan.

"It's awful," said Mary, passionately; "just awful, and Ella makes it worse by her strange remarks. I shall ask papa to take us away. I could not live here."

"Then I'm off, too," said Sullivan. "Where you go I go, Mary mavourneen, and besides, I could not stand mysterious armies, flying Terrydactils, Red Hands, and all the rest of the diviltry we have had of late, at all, at all."

"I feel as you do," said Crosby, "and have a sinking at my heart now that is almost unbearable, and some impulse that prompts me to fly."

"We shall all go soon," said Ella, who had waited for them, "very soon."

Her words sunk into the hearts of her hearers, and it was in gloom and fear that the evening, which had begun so auspiciously, ended. Impelled by a desire to keep together, Crosby and Morwell accompanied Sullivan to the *Telephone* office, and the first-named drew a sketch of the red hand, to illustrate the article which the reporter wrote for the paper, and which was the cause of an altercation between contributor and editor owing to a request by the former that the "block" should be eighteen inches square, and the article printed in "leaded pica."

Having been told to "go to the devil," and not "talk

rot," and retorted by stating that "everything is messed up in this bally office," Sullivan retreated in considerable dudgeon, and the three friends spent some hours in walking about the streets, and listening to the remarks of the people, who in numerous groups were discussing the strange vision, which, true to the announcement of the mysterious placards and handbills, had appeared "in the Eastern Sky."

CHAPTER XV.

Sullivan's article was written in his most florid style, and the accompanying illustration—engraved, or rather "processed" in a hurry, and the dead hours of night—was "horrible enough for anything," as Crosby ruefully said, and both created a sensation—indeed, a panic—when they appeared in next day's paper. Not content with them only, the *Telephone* published *fac-similes* of the original placard and handbill, with the great red A in the right-hand corner, and under the heading "Is Sydney Doomed?" recapitulated all the surprising events of the last few weeks. The result was that seventy-five per cent. of the people who read all this collected evidence answered the question affirmatively in their own minds, and at once began preparations for flight. A stampede of the weaker

spirits actually did follow, and the panic was showing signs of spreading when the State Government took strong steps to allay the excitement. Criers were sent through the streets, and placards were posted up in all prominent positions, announcing that at noon the Premier, members of the Cabinet, and other leading men would address public meetings in various parts of the city and suburbs. The Premier was to occupy the platform at the Town Hall, and there at the appointed hour an enormous crowd assembled. There was a good deal of jostling and struggling for places, but a dead silence fell on the assemblage as the speaker commenced his address, and he was listened to with much closer attention than had ever been accorded to his hustings speeches or orations on Freetrade and other subjects of mere everyday political interest. The Government, he explained, had from the first made strenuous efforts to discover the authors of the threats as set forth in the placards and handbills, and had left no stone unturned in their efforts to trace the murderers of their lamented colleague, the Minister for Justice. They had come to believe that the object of that murder was to prevent the dissemination of information imparted to the late Minister by the man who shared his fate, and this belief had strengthened them in the opinion that some organisation threatened the community. Subsequent events proved this opinion to be correct, as all present knew, but they were yet in the dark as to the nature

or extent of the organisation. For his own part he was not disposed to admit that it was so formidable as to seriously menace a community like that of New South Wales. (Cheers.) On the contrary, he held that it was a gang of desperadoes, who by threats and a display of some force, were endeavouring to establish a panic, for some ulterior purpose of their own. What that purpose was he could not say, but he wished to point out that as yet nothing had been performed by the mysterious enemy to cause people of British blood to fly in terror. (Cheers; and a voice—"How about the big gun?") Well, that was evidently a formidable weapon, but cranks had often before invented wonderful engines of destruction, which had, after all, done nothing. ("Yes, but that gun did, for it sent a shell to Melbourne.") "And was probably rendered useless by that one shot," replied the Premier; and this somewhat weak retort was accepted as conclusive by many of the crowd, whose spirits were rising under the influence of the speaker's optimistic words. Resuming, he said that the Government, at all events, were going to stand their ground till something more terrifying than red hands, big guns which burst after one shot, and a bit of shooting from entrenched positions, were in evidence to scare them away. (Cheers.) No gang, did it comprise 50, 500, or 5000 men, that did not show itself openly, was going to bounce Australia—(cheers)—and he might tell them that all was in readiness for placing 2 ,000

Federal soldiers in the field to meet any foe. (Cheers.) The Federal Government was on the alert, and he would take his hearers further into his confidence, and tell them that the Imperial Government had long ago been placed in possession of the facts relating to the position, and their co-operation might be relied on should occasion arise. Finally, he counselled equanimity of mind, and a spirit of determination not to fly from a foe who had not pluck enough to declare himself openly. Sydney was in no real danger, he continued, and concluded by advising his hearers to remain quietly in their homes and watch events.

The Premier's speech, weak, nay, groggy, as it was in parts, and failing as it did utterly to throw even a glimmer of light on the nature of the threatening power, yet, was delivered with such "sound and fury," and display of confidence, that it greatly allayed the panic, and determined most of those who heard it to accept the advice given, and remain where they were, instead of flying from an unknown danger.

Crosby, Morwell, and Sullivan, who heard it, were however, affected in a different manner, being, in fact, profoundly depressed. "The Government know nothing," said Morwell, as they walked down George Street.

"Absolutely nothing," assented Crosby; "and I am the more disappointed because, from the promptness with which troops were sent to Lane Cove on the first occasion,

I thought they were in possession of some definite information."

"Well, it is evident that they are as ignorant as we are, and that brave front of the Premier's covers perplexity and apprehension. Still, I admire him for speaking as he did, and without doubt he is right in advising people not to retreat till they know what they are flying from."

"Well, I feel confoundedly inclined to retreat; not to use a word expressive of greater speed," said Sullivan. "My nerves are sorely shaken, and nothing but strong drink will steady them. Let us go to the Australia for a nobbler."

"I thought you had sworn off, Sullivan?"

"So I have, but tea and lemonade won't sustain a constitution sapped by red hands, and thousand-ton guns, to say nothing of the blatherskiting of a helpless Ministry, so I am, as it were, compelled to backslide."

This argument being quite as sound as those usually advanced in such cases, the others agreed to lend their countenance to the lapse, and they turned into King Street, and were passing the office of one of the great dailies, when a crowd assembled round a placard attracted their attention, and going forward they read the following item of cabled news:—

Auckland (N.Z.), 2 p.m.

The steamer "Mariki" has just arrived from San Francisco and Honolulu, and reports that shortly after she left the latter port she discovered far to the right an extraordinary fleet of iron ships proceeding in a Westerly direction. The ships had no masts or funnels, and lay so low in the water that at first sight they were taken for an immense school of whales. Captain Harris, of the "Mariki," states positively that there must have been fully 200 of these extraordinary vessels, some of which, he declares, were of enormous size, though the greater portion lay beneath the water.

"Now, has that anything to do with the Red Hand and other mysteries?" queried Morwell, when he had read the item.

"I wish you wouldn't suggest such things. Morwell, my nerves have become one shade worse, and if I don't get that drink soon I shall have palsy. Here we are in Castlereagh Street. Out, you yellow agony! that is the fourth Chink I have collided with to-day. Sydney seems to be swarming with Chinamen of late. I have seen more in the last week than in the previous five years, which looks as if the poll tax were inoperative."

CHAPTER XVI.

A fact noticed by Morwell was that between the startling events of which Sydney had had an over-sufficiency of late, an interval of quiesence was apparently allowed, as though the mysterious threatening power were playing with its victims, or exercising its ingenuity in preparing an even more terrifying surprise than the last. In accordance with this rule, there were no further manifestations after the appearance of the Red Hand, for a considerable time, and as the ordinary business of life must be carried on, people soon settled down to their everyday avocations again. Trains sped into and out from Redfern; electric trams tore through the streets with clanging of bells, and an average of one collision per hour; ferry steamers, with propellers at both ends, crept to crowded wharves through

narrow lanes of water, which afforded the captains opportunities for exhibiting their marvellous skill in steering; bakers baked, butchers slaughtered, lawyers talked, doctors dosed, "pushes" fought, and generally the everyday life of Sydney went on as before.

Morwell administered "justice" under a new Minister, Sullivan reported meetings, and Crosby went on with his plans for a two-storey shop and dwelling for an ambitious grocer. These labours were presently interrupted, however, when they were summoned to attend the trial of Franz Mueller—on the charge of murdering Arthur Pritchard—at the Sessions, which, after being postponed several times in consequence of the general unsettlement, were to be held at last, at the Supreme Court buildings, King Street.

When they entered the Court next morning they found that it was already tolerably full, though public interest in the case had to some extent subsided, owing to the striking events which had occurred since the crime was committed. A good deal of curiosity was evinced by the spectators when the prisoner was placed in the dock, but for his part, Crosby stared with all his eyes at the being whose presentment he had seen under circumstances that could not possibly be explained by any known science or natural law, and would certainly in any other age have been termed "supernatural." There was nothing in the least mystic or uncommon in Mueller's appearance now,

however. He wore that dreadful garb of alleged civilization, known as a slop suit (which, if placed on the Apollo Belvidere, would make "a sight" of that noble creation), and the large blue spectacles; his face, Crosby thought, was a shade less brown or sallow than on the last occasion, while his hair, being brushed back from his forehead, permitted the great development of the latter to be seen.

"By Jove! he's an intellectual-looking chap," said Sullivan; "frontal development like my own, resolution evidenced by the large nose and firm mouth"—"And thirst by the watery eye"—"shut, up, Sullivan, or you'll have the usher on to us"—"here comes the Judge."

The trial now commenced, but the prisoner seemed totally uninterested in the proceedings as he lounged against the railings of the dock.

He was not represented by Counsel, and uttered a single gutteral negative when asked by the interpreter if he wished to be defended. To the question "Guilty or not guilty," he replied impatiently, in German, "Whichever you like," and maintained a dogged silence when interrogated further.

The Crown Prosecutor rose, and briefly and plainly stated the case against the prisoner, which was so absolutely clear, that no doubt remained in the minds of the hearers that the result would be a verdict of guilty, perhaps with a recommendation to mercy on the ground

that the crime was not premeditated, but that the man had yielded to a sudden fit of anger.

The law officer was still addressing the Court when a startling interruption took place, for the prisoner suddenly exclaimed in English, "The farce is ended!" and taking off his spectacles, glared round the Court. Everyone gazed at him in astonishment, and Crosby, who had noticed the weak half-shut eyes on the former occasion, felt a thrill of fear pass through him as he now saw large widely-opened orbs which blazed with a light such as human eyes had never before shown. The man's glance paralysed where it fell. The barrister hesitated, stammered, and finally ceased speaking; the Judge, as the fierce eyes rested on him for a moment, moved uneasily in his seat, while his face paled, and not a person in Court was unaffected. Mueller smiled as he saw the effect he had produced, and then ejaculated the single word "Now!" and instantly there arose a fierce commotion. From amongst the spectators a dozen men rushed forward--amongst them Duncan and the overseer—all drawing knives and revolvers as they came. The warder in the dock instantly seized Mueller and endeavoured to force him down the steps to the cells, but two shots rang out, and he fell dead. Duncan seized the elderly man who sat beside the dock. "The keys," he said fiercely, but the warder resisted, and held them tenaciously. "Then die, old fool!" and he dashed the butt of a revolver against his

forehead and tore the keys from his failing grasp. A policeman rushing forward was stabbed in the throat and breast, and Mueller cried "I will kill you all if another man moves." After that there was no more resistance, the doors of the dock were thrown open, Mueller stepped out, and, taking a pistol and knife from one of the men, uttered some words in an unknown tongue, and the whole body closed round him, and then, menacing the terrified spectators with knives and revolvers, moved to the door. On emerging into King Street they were joined by at least a score of men, who had been lounging about singly or in couples, and the whole body marched rapidly towards Pitt Street. Passers-by gazed at them curiously, and soon a hoarse murmur arose in the rear, as those who had been in Court—headed by the three friends, who, like everyone else, had been paralysed at first by the suddenness and audacity of the rescue, but quickly regained their courage —rushed out, and told the passers-by what had occurred.

"Come on, Crosby, come on, Morwell," shouted Sullivan. "Surely you're not going to let the bloody-minded villain that killed poor Arthur go scot free!"

"Hold on. Hold on, my friend! They have arms and we have none, and we won't avenge Arthur by getting shot ourselves," said the cool and cautious Morwell.

"You can stay if you like, but I'll have a try at stopping that chap, if it is with a piece of blue metal." And so saying, Sullivan proceeded to hastily fill his pockets

with the favourite projectile of the Sydney larrikin, from a place where the street was being repaired, and then shouting "Come on," to the willing crowd, rushed at their head down King Street. He would have done better for himself and followers to have taken Morwell's advice, however, for as they turned into Pitt Street they were met by a volley which levelled a dozen to the ground. First to fall was Sullivan, who, to the horror of Crosby, following close behind, threw up his hands and pitched forward on his face. In an instant he was by the side of the fallen man.

"Good God, Sullivan——"

"I'm dead, Crosby—shot right through the heart."

"But you couldn't speak—"

"Well, its through the gizzard, then—lower down, at all events. I'm done, I tell you. Oh, Mary, my love, did I think we'd be parted so soon!"

"Hang it, you couldn't talk like that if you were shot through the body. Let me have a look," and removing Sullivan's hand, which was pressed to his side, he felt something hard there, and drew forth an enormous silver watch with a revolver bullet imbedded in its case.

"My uncle's watch—his 'fifty guinea repayther,' as he used to call it, under the magnifying influence of the Cruiskeen Lawn—the last and only unspouted 'jool' of the house of Sullivan—and now it has saved my life. Faith, I've often been refused five shillings on it—which is the

reason I have it now—but I wouldn't take twenty pounds for it this minute. And now I'll see if I can't have some satisfaction out of those scoundrels," and leaping to his feet, the now completely-restored Sullivan discharged his entire magazine of "metal" amongst the retreating foe with such force and accuracy that, though they were now fully eighty yards away, each stone fell amongst the group, and one brought a man to the ground.

A dozen bullets came hissing back in reply to this courtesy, but Sullivan and Crosby had rushed into a doorway and were not injured. No further opposition was offered, and Mueller and his men marched steadily along Pitt Street to Circular Quay. They seemed in no particular haste, and consequently a constable who rode along Macquarie Street on a bicycle succeeded in giving the alarm to the water police, considerably before the escapees reached the Quay. Not alone this, but Garden Island was rung up and informed of what had occurred. At Princess's Stairs a long low vessel of peculiar construction was lying, and the men marched to her on reaching the Quay. No one opposed, and the boat moved at once into the basin, but as she passed under the bows of the liner "Japan," the water-police boat swept out from the P. and O. wharf, and three of the crew got hold with boat hooks. Mueller, who was on the bridge of the escaping boat, shouted an order, and she almost seemed to leap out of the water, and then swept towards Fort Denison at a terrific speed.

The police boat was within an ace of upsetting, and the men's arms seemed as if they would be torn from their sockets, but they held on tenaciously, and efforts were made by one or two to board the other vessel. Seeing this, Mueller gave another order, and a volley was poured into the launch, which killed every man in her, and smashed one of her sides to pieces. Very little noise was occasioned by the discharge, but the water was torn into foam for yards round. This happened within 300 yards of the "Royal Harry," the officers of which had just been informed from Garden Island of the extraordinary rescue of Mueller, and the probability that the escape would be continued by boat. The Admiral, who was on board, declared his intention of not interfering, as it was a matter which concerned the Colonial Civil Authorities, not the Imperial Navy, but when, a few minutes later, the scene of the sinking of the police launch and destruction of her crew was enacted before his eyes, he felt it behoved him to act, and the escaping vessel was hailed and ordered to stop on penalty of being fired on. She paid no attention to this order, however, but continued her course down the harbour at a rate of speed that now increased to a degree never witnessed by the hundreds of nautical men who were watching her flight with intense interest. Again and again she was hailed, and then the Admiral, white with anger at thus being defied, gave an order, and two of the machine guns of the "Royal Harry" were trained

on to the long low mass, which slid through the water like a great fish, and an instant later the reports boomed out. One shot was seen to strike behind the craft and richochet clean over her, the other struck her fair on the after deck. What damage it did could not be ascertained, however, for the most astonishing event of this astonishing day now took place. The decks and whole superstructure of the escaping vessel disappeared in a sheet of flame, and a storm of projectiles howled over the intervening space and smote the "Royal Harry" from the waterline to the mast heads. Solid projectiles, travelling with a velocity that was afterwards declared to be unprecedented, struck the ship on her armoured side, and penetrating this, traversed her entire hull in an oblique direction, and passed out through the other side, while shells burst here and there, enveloping her in smoke, and causing frightful destruction amongst her crew. When the commotion had subsided, and the smoke had blown away, the "Royal Harry" presented the appearance of having been engaged in a conflict of hours' duration, her decks being drenched with blood and covered with debris and portion of human bodies, while away towards Middle Head her terrible antagonist sped snake-like along, and presently turning up Middle Harbour, disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Faith, Crosby, you had better take the job," said Sullivan, "for it's small need there will be in Sydney for your architectural abilities for many a day to come."

"But I'm no reporter."

"Any man can report what he saw in plain language, and there will be no need of padding this time, or I'm a Chinaman. A Reckon-icance in Force,' was what the editor told me, which is Latin for a tearing out-and-out fight, I imagine. He ordered me to do it, but never condescended to explain how I was to 'reckon-ice' in half a dozen places at once, so I'll be glad of your help."

"Well, I'll do what I can. But do you think there will be a big fight?"

"I'm certain of it. The little shindy at Lane Cove

won't be a circumstance to it. Why, haven't they found that Duncan's mine is really a fort of enormous strength, an' stuffed full of Chinamen and blackguards of all descriptions. You know now why poor Pritchard was shot when he was trying to photo the interior. Faith, it was a cute dodge to make that fort under the disguise of a mine, and to bluff the inspectors and police who called there from time to time by taking them down a shaft or two; all the time the place was honeycombed with galleries, no doubt, and full of guns imported as machinery."

"You are assuming a lot."

"Not at all. Several guns can be seen facing towards Long Bay, and it's only reasonable to suppose that the whole circle of the embankment is defended in the same way. But come along, I can't be talking here or I'll be late in getting aboard. I'm going in the "Wasp," so you had better remain with the troops and report what they do."

So saying, Mr. Sullivan, accompanied by Crosby, hastened out of the *Telephone* Office, and proceeded along Pitt Street in the direction of the Quay. As they went it was apparent that a great change had come over Sydney in the last few days, for the peaceful and industrial appearance of the city had entirely vanished, and the streets were almost entirely in possession of the military. This change was due to the fact that within a few hours

of Mueller's escape it had been discovered that Duncan's mine at North Sydney was in reality a fortification of immense strength, and evidently fully garrisoned. This alarming discovery had struck terror into the hearts of the public. But the Government had risen to the occasion, help was telegraphed for to the other States, and the Imperial authorities had been advised of the latest developments, and had promptly replied that a fleet had been despatched. This was the last message received from oversea, as immediately afterwards the cable was interrupted, and a day later came the alarming message from Port Darwin: "Cable cut; supposed a hundred miles North."

This last message, which was not made public, did more than any previous event to excite the apprehension of the authorities, for it evidently indicated that the mysterious foe menacing them was able to operate outside Australia, as well as within. The military forces of the Commonwealth were promptly called out, and concentrated in Sydney as rapidly as possible, and after prolonged consultation it was decided, in conjunction with the Imperial naval forces, to make the reconnaissance in force mentioned by Mr. Sullivan, in order to determine if possible the strength of the enemy.

When Sullivan and Crosby arrived at Circular Quay they saw that it was intended to convey a large body of troops across to Lavender Bay by steamer, for the

North Shore and Mosman ferry wharves were already crowded with men waiting to embark.

"Well, I'll leave you here, Crosby," said Sullivan, "and go in a boat to the 'Wasp,' which is lying in Woolloomooloo Bay. I'm in the devil's own funk, and wish I could get out of the whole thing. Oh, I know we're going to have awful— Great Scott! Look there!—one, two, three, five——Moses! a whole flock of Terrydactils! What's coming to us now?"

Turning, Crosby beheld, to his amazement, at least a dozen huge winged objects rise into the sky on the North side of the harbour, and, poising themselves for a moment like vultures at gaze, came sailing majestically towards the city.

"Flying machines," he ejaculated.

"So they are," exclaimed Sullivan, "and that clears up the mystery of the Terrydactils. They're coming to reckon-ice *us*. Oh! it's Old Nick himself that's against us." Apparently the object of those in the machines was to make a reconnaisance, for, as they passed over the harbour two diverged towards the fleet, while the rest came straight on. When the latter approached their general construction and mode of propulsion could be plainly distinguished, though they could not have been flying at a lesser altitude than 1000 feet. The bodies of the machines were constructed of a shining black substance—probably a light metal—while the wings, which had an

immense spread, were apparently of a soft material. The propelling power was supplied by means of a screw revolving rapidly at the stern or tail. A projection of the fore part, which was movable, was apparently used in steering, and strongly suggested the neck of a reptile. In point of fact, the whole structure created the impression of a "flying crocodile," as Morwell formerly stated to Crosby, and the latter, who had since been reading up the subject of Pterodactyls, formed the opinion that the wonderful machines at which he was gazing had probably been suggested by a study of the remains of some of the gigantic flying saurians found in the mesozoic strate of Western America, though, of course, the largest Pterodactyl that ever flew would have been a mere pigmy beside the great structures now astonishing all gazers.

No human occupants were visible, and those guiding and working the machines were evidently concealed within a portion of the hollow body, the remainder doubtless containing gas to give buoyancy.

The propeller of one of the machines was observed to cease revolving, and the structure remained poised almost over the place where the young men stood, a fact which demonstrated its ability to keep afloat in the air without movement. The others continued their flight, and passing over the city, created astonishment and apprehension as they went.

"They're taking good stock of us," said Sullivan, cran-

ing his neck in his effort to keep his eyes fixed on the strange object above him. "Why don't some of those beggars fire? They might bring the thing down and clear up some of the mystery."

Others were apparently of this opinion, for a word of command was given on the North Shore wharf, and a moment later a volley was fired by some of the soldiers stationed there. No result followed, the machine remaining in exactly the same position without movement. Another volley was fired, and this time there was a response, for a bright object was observed to descend like a flash of light. It was evidently intended that it should strike the wharf, but luckily for those standing thereon, it fell into the water instead. A dull roar followed, and an immense column of water was thrown high in the air, and descending on the wharf, almost drowned those who occupied it. Coughing and spluttering, they rushed to the Quay in fear of another shell, but their apprehensions were groundless, for, turning with a majestic sweep in the air, the machine returned in the direction it had come, and sinking lower and lower as it went, finally sank from view behind the ridge commanding Neutral Bay.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Now, what'll happen, I wonder?" exclaimed Sullivan. "Something not very attractive to us, I'll bet."

"I think we are about to be attacked," said Crosby, "for, if they intended to wait for a movement on our part, they would hardly have troubled to send out these machines."

"That's my belief, too, and I won't venture in the 'Wasp,' but will wait here. I have a clear run up Pitt Street, whereas, if I were on the ship, I couldn't run."

Feeling that "a clear run up Pitt Street" was an advantage not to be despised, Crosby decided to remain also, and those commanding the military were evidently of the same mind, for no movement to embark was made

for half-an-hour. At the expiration of that time, however, the order to proceed was given, and the men, who had been standing at ease on the Quay, commenced to file once more on to the wharf. The leading files had passed over the gangway to the boat, when the young men watching the embarkation from the Quay were horrified to see a number of the soldiers drop their rifles and clutch wildly at their throats, at the same time making frantic movements with their limbs. In a moment all the men on the wharf were struggling in apparently mortal agony. A scream of anguish went up, and dozens, staggering blindly, fell into the water.

"Good God! what's up?" exclaimed Crosby. But ere he could utter another word, an agonising sensation seized his throat and nostrils. He coughed, gasped, drew a little fresh air into his lungs, and in that instant rushed across the Quay and up Pitt Street, followed by Sullivan

A volunteer, hatless and in blind terror, kept pace with them. "Roger, Roger!" he shouted as he ran. Crosby felt that he could breathe now, and, as he rushed on he shouted, "Run, run for your lives." The cry was taken up by others who had escaped from the Quay, and a terrified mob was soon rushing towards Moore Street, foremost being the volunteer, who, in panting gasps, cried out "Roger, Roger!" incessantly. The word seemed to impress itself on Crosby's brain, and he found himself mentally repeating it as he tore along.

"Roger, Roger!" and then, as by a flash of inspiration, he remembered that the operatives in chemical factories in the North of England give this name to the fumes of hydrochloric acid. The horror of the thoughts that followed almost caused him to fall.

"I can run no more," he gasped to Sullivan, and stopped in a doorway.

"If you don't you'll be dead in ten seconds."

"No, no, that awful stuff can't travel fast; we have a minute or two yet. Sullivan, we're done for. The soldiers were suffocated with hydrochloric acid, carbonic acid, or some other gas. That's what the soldier meant by 'Roger.' There's no escape; everyone in the city will be destroyed. My God, the Pritchards, the Grants, the Howards——"

"My heart keeps thumping 'Mary, Mary, lost, lost,' exclaimed Sullivan in tones of anguish. "I must save her, Crosby, d'you hear? Come on, man, and don't stand gasping there. There's a couple of bikes in the office," and he rushed on, followed by his half-dazed companion.

Dashing into the reporter's room of the newspaper office, Sullivan, who seemed crazed with excitement, dragged out the bicycles, and was making for the street again when one of the clerks cried, "Mr. Pritchard, of Lavender Bay, telephoned to you, Mr. Sullivan."

The name caused Sullivan to stop in his flight, when

nothing else would, and he exclaimed, "Yes, yes, what did he say?"

"Here's the message, I took it down in shorthand as he spoke."

"Whoop! faugh a ballagh!" cried Sullivan, throwing his hat up to the ceiling and letting the bicycles fall on the clerk's foot, "They're safe, Crosby, the Lord be praised. Ella's second sight, or sixth sense, or whatever it is, has saved them. Here's what he says—

'Ella states deadly danger, in shape of a noxious gas, will descend on Sydney to-day. She is confident you and Crosby will escape, however, and directs you to come on to Colonel Howard's by Drummoyne and Hunter's Hill. We will be there with Morwell—who has been warned—and safe for the present, as the gas will only be directed to the city. On no account neglect this warning, and come at once!'"

"Faith, I will; I'm off now. Run for your lives, boys," this to the clerks. "There's a poisonous gas coming up Pitt Street that'll make corpses of you in another minute or two if you don't skip quick and lively," and so saying Mr. Sullivan turned and vanished, followed by Crosby, who exclaimed, as they reached the street, "But the editor!"

"Blow the editor! he has never done anything for me except take pounds off my income with his confounded

'condensing.' Besides, he'll manage to save himself somehow."

This prediction proved accurate, for long afterwards they learned that the editor of the *Telephone* had escaped without harm, whereas his *confrere* of the *Trumpeter*, having written an article that weighed five pounds when "set," and a ton metaphorically, in which it was definitely set forth that "the threats and open acts of violence which the inhabitants of Sydney have recently been subjected to and witnessed, cannot longer be allowed to go unpunished by a British community, which prides itself on its belief that an observance of law and order is the primary duty of the citizen," could not be brought to believe that the mysterious enemy would have the temerity to commit yet another outrage on law and order, and so remained in his office till the deadly gas, flowing in through every chink and opening, deprived him of life. His last act was to alter a direct statement by one of his leader writers into a Delphian announcement, which could be read several ways, and so, being consistent to the policy of his journal to the end, he presumably died happy.

Crosby and Sullivan sped on their way at a rapid pace, and were soon clear of the city. Proceeding more slowly then, they speculated as they went on the means whereby so dreadful an agent of destruction had been poured forth, but without arriving at any definite con-

clusion thereon. There was, however, no doubt whatever as to the efficiency of this latest method of taking life, and there was ample justification for Sullivan's opinion that "the man using that gas can sweep the world," while the fact of its being used at all stamped the mysterious enemy as cruel and inhuman to the last degree. No rules of civilised warfare bound *him*; his object was to exterminate utterly, without distinguishing between combatants or non-combatants, or heeding what torture was inflicted by the instruments employed.

"It's the devil himself that's against us, as I've already told you," said Sullivan, "and I have no doubt at all that it's a judgment on the place; Sydney's no good——"

"Sydney is no worse than any other place," interrupted Crosby, "though it is perhaps a shade less hypocritical."

"Oh, it's bad, it's bad; look at the way it corrupted me. Sure, when I left Ireland I was as innocent as a dove, and now look at me." This in a tone of tragic despair.

"Well, you are not such a very desperate character, and Sydney, or rather a Sydneyite, will soon help you to 'blot out every stain,' as the song says."

"Oh, it's too late, I fear," said Sullivan, despondently. "Look at the life I've led—the gambling, drinking, swearing, scoffing——"

"For heaven's sake, don't recapitulate your past life

for me," said Crosby. "We are none of us saints, and you are no worse than the rest, I daresay. We are all fighting the battle of life out in the open in this young country, and have no wealth, family traditions, the dignity which imposes obligation or what not, to shield us from the trials and temptations of life. You are all right as an individual, and this community is all right, and both will get credit for their circumstances in the ledger of Fate. Trust me, too, this trouble will not be confined to Sydney alone, but will spread elsewhere. You remember that Ella Pritchard said 'the whole world is menaced.'"

"So she did," said Sullivan. "Well, then, the whole world must have gone wrong—damn this bike, the wind's all out of it."

"The wind will be all out of you if you keep on talking when going up hill; besides, you shouldn't swear if you are going to lead a new life."

"That expression, and many another like it, goes to the debit of the man who invented the rheumatic tyre. But whom have we here?" as they approached a group of people on the roadside—"Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard, Miss Manse, Ella, my Mary, Miss Grant, and Morwell. Oh, Mary, acushla, I have come through the gates of death to find you," and heedless of the presence of others, Sullivan flung himself from his bicycle, and,

clasping his *fiancee* to his heart, kissed away the tears which were flowing freely from her eyes.

It was an affecting meeting, as all knew that the young men had escaped death by but a hairs' breadth, as it were, and that the storm which had long been threatening had burst in full violence at last.

When the first emotional greetings had passed, and, in reply to questions, Crosby had given some account of the tragic events of the day in Sydney, he asked in turn, "How did you know of the danger, Ella?"

"I was forewarned, Fred," said the girl, quietly, "and the nature of the danger being clearly indicated, I told papa, and he communicated with all our friends."

"Yes, we have learned to repose implicit confidence in what Ella tells us," said Mr. Pritchard. "She has evidently been gifted with special powers for some purpose we do not yet understand."

"Evidently, and yet there are few people in this age who would credit her foreknowledge. I, however, have been compelled to believe what I have seen and heard, and I will ask you now where we will go next, Ella."

"To Melbourne."

"And after that?"

"To England, and with us, or after us, will go all who can leave Australia. The country is lost to its present inhabitants."

This decisive announcement aroused various feelings in

the minds of those who heard it. Colonel Howard, who, accompanied by Captain Marshall, had joined the party, muttered vaguely that "it was a tarnation swindle," as he gazed ruefully on his fine house; the Captain stated that he should "never feel safe, bai Jove," till he was once more "behind the Imperial awmy;" Mr. Pritchard, who, acting on Ella's advice, had made all his arrangements some time before, merely shrugged his shoulders resignedly; Miss Manse observed that "there was no place like England," and then qualified her statement by adding "for those whom a cold climate suits," as memories of chill November fogs, and biting East winds crossed her rheumatism-haunted mind; Sullivan whispered to Mary, "Where ever you are will be heaven to me, and, moreover, London's the market for my press wares just now; faith, I'll make tons of money;" Crosby expressed himself in somewhat similar terms to Kate Grant, and Morwell, for whom Ella's *dictum* was all sufficing, said nothing.

Shortly afterwards, the party commenced the first stage of their flight in two of Colonel Howard's conveyances, and the Colonel, as he took a last look at his beloved home, from the summit of the hill, uttered a loud groan—little forseeing that he was to behold it again, and that it was to be the scene of a still heavier tragedy, than any they had experienced as yet.

CHAPTER XIX.

Fog overhead, greasy pavements under foot; to the right a long row of dingy, substantial-looking houses; to the left iron railings, leafless trees, and sodden grass, and beyond dingy houses *ad infinitum*—in brief, Russell Square, London, in November. Two men, whose brown cheeks marked them as hailing from sunnier lands, emerged into the Square from Southampton Row, and proceeded at as brisk a pace as the state of the pavement would allow in the direction of Montague Street. They had just reached the latter thoroughfare when an umbrella handle was thrust through the trap of a passing hansom, and, as the driver pulled up in obedience to the signal, the occupant emerged with the celerity of a rocket, and greeted the two pedestrians with effusion. "What,

Morwell, Crosby! be me soul your mahogany countenances are pleasant to look on in this land of peach blossom or chalky complexions."

"Why, Sullivan, we did not expect to see you back for weeks; you did not stay long in Ireland."

"No, sir, not being a hippopotamus, shark, duck, or any other amphibious beast, fish, or bird, I evacuated my native country with celerity and despatch; but, be Jove, I don't think I've bettered my lot much by coming here. The old horse there sat down twice coming from Euston. And, as for daylight, I'm blessed if I know whether it's night or morning."

"Morning, of course, don't you see the sun over there?"

"Oh, is that the sun about ten feet above the roofs? I thought it was the moon. Does he never come higher than that?"

"Not in winter. He just rises for a few hours to show he has not retired from business altogether, completes a very low arc in the Southern sky, and then retires for eighteen or twenty hours."

"During the greater portion of which time he is smiling down on Australia, and lighting up many a mile of rippling sea and blue gum forest. Oh, don't I long for the odour of the eucalyptus again? I never thought I had such an affection for Australia till I left it. Shall we ever ride down Gore Hill again, Crosby, and see the harbour

gleaming below us like a mirror set in a green frame, or camp in the wilds of Kuring-Gai-Chase, with the green bush and starlit sky above us, and the mopokes talking to us in our dreams?"

"Don't ask me, Sullivan, the memories your words bring up sadden me, and no man can tell whether any European will set foot in Australia again."

"What is the latest news? The last I saw was in Monday's *Skibbereen Eagle*—the paper that had it's 'eye upon Palmerston,' you know—and that didn't amount to much."

"You probably know all there is to know, for there is no news by the cable, which is apparently done for, and no one has the remotest idea of what is now going on in Australia. Refugees, who have arrived since we landed, however, bring news that Sydney was held by a large army composed mainly of Chinese, and that a fleet of strange ships, standing only a few feet out of the water, had arrived in the harbour."

"That is fresh; I remember about those ships, they were sighted somewhere off Fiji or Honolulu before we left—submarine boats no doubt. And so Sydney is in the hands of the Chinks? I remember now that there seemed an awful number of the yellow divils there the last week or two before the final catastrophe. Faith, that was a terrible thing—fifty thousand people killed by that gas. And to think that Crosby and I were amongst

the first to breathe it, and yet got off safely. There must be a special Providence looking after us, Crosby."

"I told you you were not as bad as you thought."

"You did, and I believe I'm not. Any other news?"

"Only this," said Morwell, handing him a scrap of paper, from which the astonished Sullivan read aloud as follows:—

THE TERROR OF AUSTRALIA.

"All eyes upon Australia now are fixed. Why? Because there has appeared the most terrible enemy the races of the world have ever seen. Who is this so terrible enemy? No one knows; yes, one man knows. Who is he? Ferdinand Schwartz. He will, at the Albert Hall, tell all, on Wednesday, 27th November, at 8 p.m. Come and hear him! You must hear him; your safety and the safety of the world demands it."

And then followed a list of prices of admission, which would make Herr Ferdinand Schwartz comparatively rich for the remainder of his days, if the public swallowed his bait.

"Queer, eh?" said Morwell.

"Oh, it's a swindle," said Sullivan. "This Schwartz is some adventurer who has carefully noted the state of excitement into which London has been worked for some months past by the sensational news from Sydney, the despatch of a fleet, the arrival of refugees from Australia, the cutting of the cables, and a thousand highly coloured articles (why the interview with meself which the *Chronicle* published would shake any nation to its foundations), and is now about to attempt to make a rich harvest by playing on the popular excitement."

"Well, we've been doing the same thing ourselves," said Crosby, with a grin.

"Not at all, we have been giving the newspapers facts, and charging a few hundreds for them. We must live somenow, and that's a legitimate way of doing so."

"Well, we're doing pretty well out of the business. You must be coining money, Sullivan."

"I am doing all right; I have been long enough in the newspaper business to know how to make money out of copy such as I am possessed of. But how about this German swindler. I see his 'revelation' takes place to-night, and think we ought to go and hear him."

"We are agreeable," said Morwell. "And now come along to our rooms and we will give you some lunch, and see if we can't get a bed for you. You will have to sleep just under the roof, I expect, but there will be compensation, as you will secure a fine view of the chimney-pots and things, to say nothing of the dome of the British Museum."

"'That venerable pile!' as one of our Australian writers, deceived by its appearance, termed it. Well, it's a fine thing to be near such a place, for one can often go and study *The Fringe of the Pantechnicon, The Group of the Looker-on, or The Flying Cows of Babylon*, which will come as a pleasant change after the fruit, eggs, landlady, and other antiquities of London."

"Exception might be taken to the nomenclature you

employ in describing Assyrian and Grecian works of art, Sullivan, on the ground of its general inaccuracy. For instance, those you have mentioned should be *The Frieze of the Parthenon, The Group of the Laocoon,* and *The Winged Bulls of Nineveh.*"

"Well, I seem to have been a trifle out," replied the unabashed Sullivan, "and in future I'll come to you when in doubt, Morwell. You'll be worth a hundred a year to me, for I'm fond of classical allusions in my articles, and it's an awful sweat looking up the printed authorities."

CHAPTER XX.

They dined in one of the galleries of the Holborn Restaurant, and Sullivan—despite some regretful reminiscences of Paris House, Bauman's, Pfhalert's, and other places in which he had been wont to regale himself, and which had doubtless long ago been "eaten and drunk right out by a lot of filthy Chinks"—contrived to make a very good dinner indeed, and lingered so long over his cigar that Crosby said impatiently, "Come on, or we shall never get in to hear old what's-his-name."

"No hurry, dear boy," said Sullivan, with the comfortable sigh of satiety, "have some maraschino to put that coffee to rights."

"Yes, and then you'll suggest some liqueur brandy to put the maraschino to rights. Blest if I know how a man who was reared on buttermilk and potatoes can have developed such tastes as yours."

"Hear him, Morwell! The calculating Australian villain knows he can insult me with impunity after dinner, but wait till 'good digestion waits on appetite,' as the immortal William, who appears to have frequently taken on board a larger cargo than he was built to carry, remarked in days of old—and now I suppose we'll have to face the awful Arctic night—blow London," and, having thus given vent to his after-dinner sentiments, Mr. Sullivan proceeded with his companions to take his seat in a lurching Kensington 'bus, which presently arrived at the Albert Hall. This huge building promised to be crowded by persons attracted by Herr Schwartz's singular announcement, for, despite the high prices charged for admission, numbers were pouring in by every entrance. Being very flush of money in these days of marketable "copy," Sullivan paid for three seats near the platform on which the vocalists and musicians usually appear, but which now was furnished with but a single table for the use of the lecturer.

As the hour of eight drew near, a rustle of excitement passed through the audience, which was intensified when, prompt to the moment, a tall, full-bearded, brown-haired man stepped on the stage and approached the table. As he faced the audience it could be seen that his appearance was of the type described as "intellectual," but otherwise "his looks were agin him," as Sullivan said,

for his features were harsh, while his cheeks and large nose were deeply pitted by smallpox.

He glanced round the vast hall, with its tiers on tiers of galleries filled with eager, intent faces, and then, speaking in good English, but with a German accent, commenced his address.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "in the first place I will explain who I am, and how I come to know what I know. I have been told that many think me imposter—a fraud—who seeks to make money by popular excitement at this time. I am no fraud. I am Ferdinand Schwartz, a trained chemist from the University of Jena, and I have here a letter from Professor Schaeffer, of that University, whose name is known throughout the scientific world, certifying to my connection with the laboratory there for nine years; and I have also here a letter from the German Consul in London, which bears out my honour and reliability." (Applause.)

Here he read his letters, to the anoyance of Sullivan, who whispered, "Bust his testimonials, why doesn't he get on?"

Herr Schwartz was, however, in no hurry to come to the kernel of his address, for he next proceeded to give them some particulars of his qualifications as a chemist, and details of discoveries he had made, which proved very trying to the patience of his hearers. This came to an end at last, however, and he went on—

"And now, having told you of my qualifications, I will proceed with my narrative. ("Hear, hear.") I was long working in Vienna on the problem of reducing the number of known chemical elements, having no belief in the existence of the number generally accepted, and I published a little book-pamphlet showing to what conclusions my investigations led me. As a result of this publication I one day received a call from a man who gave the name of Franz Mueller—(the three friends started)—and introduced himself by saying that he had read my paper on the reduction of the number of elements. 'You are right in your conclusions,' he said, 'but you do not go far enough —there are only six elements.' I gazed at him, surprised, thinking him to be insane, but he went on cool and serene: 'Yes, there are only six elements—I have proved it; and, what is more, all metals are of but one element.' 'Nonsense,' I said, 'do you wish me to credit that lead and iron are the same element?' 'You are free to credit what you please—I tell you I *know*.' 'Then you have discovered the philosopher's stone,' I said, sneering, 'and can convert base metal into gold.' 'Possibly I can do that without the philosopher's stone,' he replied, 'but I have not come to instruct you, but to make a suggestion —an offer. I require a trained chemist to assist me in work I am doing. I have read your book; you would suit me well. I will pay you what you wish.' I

stared at him, still doubting that he was sane, and then, to test him, I named a sum four times as great as my then salary. 'I accept,' he said, 'and I will now pay you half the amount as a proof that I am not trifling. I never trifle, and am not to be trifled with,' and as he spoke a light came into his eyes that caused me to tremble, though I am not timid, and not superstitious. Well, to be short—brief—I accepted his conditions, and a week later proceeded as directed by him to a small town in Hungary, where I was met by a coach and driven into the hills, a distance of perhaps twelve English miles from the town. Here I found a number of low buildings, surrounded by a fence, or palisade. I was taken to a house —a small structure of wood—and there I found Mueller. 'Well, Herr Schwartz,' he said, 'so you are come? This will be your residence, and the laboratory is yonder. You will be free to go in and out, but let me remind you of your promise to reveal nothing you see here. That promise must be faithfully kept;' and his eye dwelt on mine for a moment, but in that moment I felt as though I was dying." (Sensation.)

Even now the recollection seemed to overcome Herr Schwartz, for he paused a moment, and wiped his forehead before proceeding.

"Well, to be concise—to avoid details—I entered on my work under Mueller's directions, and within a few weeks I found that he had made no empty boast, but had

really found that all metals were of but one element, and, what is more, was able to transmute them. (Sensation.) Yes, ladies and gentlemen, and manufacture gold by the ton from lead."

A prolonged sensation followed this statement, and, when silence was restored, the speaker seemed to have difficulty in resuming his address, but at length went on:—

"The business of that factory was the making of gold, and my work was to carry the operations to a certain point, but the finish—the completion—I was not allowed to see ('You would not be here now if you had,' muttered Sullivan.) The final operation was carried on in a special chamber by Mueller himself. This chamber was always closed, and I could discover nothing definite—('You tried hard, I'll bet,' was Sullivan's aside)—but one thing I found, namely, that the active agent was electricity."

Here the speaker became very pale, and sat down hurriedly, to the consternation of the audience. An attendant emerged from the side, and spoke to him, but he replied impatiently, "I am all right," and, after drinking a glass of water, once more rose to his feet. His utterance was strangely hesitating and "thick," when he spoke again, and he seemed to have lost the thread of his discourse, for his words had no relevance to what he had said before.

"Beyer stated that the Wesphalian factory was devoted to the manufacture of artillery——"

Here the speaker faltered and again sat down, whereat some of the audience had commenced to rise in alarm, when, starting to his feet once more, he said in a burst, as though by violent effort—

"I cannot talk clearly—something oppresses me—but I *will* speak. His operations extended all over the world, his agents were in all countries; his tools were vile and criminal, but I believe the force he mainly relied on—"

Here the speaker gasped and stamped as though choking, but a moment later said in a kind of shout—

"His name is not Mueller, but"——and then with a scream that froze the blood of his hearers, he cried, "Ach, God! He is here—he kills me!"

Then followed some gurgling phrases in German, and, tearing desperately at his throat, Herr Schwartz fell on the stage with a resounding thud. A murmur of horror arose from the audience, but swelled into a roar of terror as a vapourous cloud arose above the prostrate body, and took the form of a human figure. More clear and distinct it became, until the stricken audience saw before them a large man with dark hair and coarse

Mongolian features, who stood gazing at them with a contemptuous and malevolent smile on his dark face. The presentment was only too familiar to Crosby, and it was small wonder that he lost all reason in the blind fear that came on him, and, shouting "Mueller, Mueller!" at the top of his voice, rushed frantically to the nearest door.

CHAPTER XXI.

In the wild stampede that followed the three friends were separated, but though bruised and torn, each managed to extricate himself without serious injury, and to make his way to the rooms in Montague Street, where his first demand was for stimulants.

"Well," said Sullivan, the last to arrive, when he had gulped down a very "long" brandy and soda, removed his necktie from under his right ear, and assured himself that his left wrist was only sprained, not broken, "what do you make of this, Crosby? And will you still maintain that the world isn't doomed?"

"Ella Pritchard said it was was menaced, not doomed," said Crosby, somewhat feebly, it must be confessed.

"And are you going to take the assertion of a young girl like that, even if she has occult power or whatever you

call it, in the face of facts such as we have witnessed. Here is this Mueller, who killed Arthur Pritchard before your eyes, afterwards killed dozens of people in the streets of Sydney, and was no doubt responsible for the lives lost at Lane Cove, in Melbourne, and in that murderous gas attack, now carrying on his murders in the heart of London, and doing so in a frightfully uncanny way, as a spook instead of a man. Who is he, can you tell me, and how does he do things that no mortal man ever heard of being done before?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I wish I did."

"Well, I'll tell you. He's Old Nick, that's who he is."

"Oh, bosh!" said Morwell, impatiently. "Let us keep to common sense. He is a man all right."

"Is he, faith? Then perhaps you will explain how it is that he can chuck aside his body as I would an overcoat, and traverse the globe in a minute with only a kind of nightshirt of vapour on that I could see."

"That is what is known as 'projection of the astral.'"

"The what?"

"The astral or spiritual body. The theory is that man has a second body of very impalpable material, which is an exact likeness of the material body, and which leaves the latter after its death, and sometimes during its life."

"I don't believe it."

"It is true, nevertheless," said a voice at the doubter's elbow, which made him start almost out of his chair.

"Who is that?" he gasped.

"It is Ella, is it not?" said Crosby.

"Yes, Fred," replied the voice, and then Sullivan following Crosby's gaze, saw beside him the faint outline of a woman's form.

"There, you unbelieving Irishman," said Morwell, "does that not convince you that projection of the astral is possible."

"I don't know—I think I'm dreaming," said Sullivan, pushing back his hair, while Crosby, addressing the vaporous form, said "We thought you were in Devonshire with your relatives, Ella!"

"My body is there," replied the voice, "but I am able to come to you and tell you to have hope and courage."

"You have some knowledge of this Mueller?"

"Some; but it is given me little by little."

"But are you not in danger from him. You know what happened to the man Schwartz to-night?"

"Yes; but he was actuated by selfish and material motives in making his revelations. He knew a portion of the designs of the man who is called Mueller, and was a willing party to them, being all the time in hope of obtaining the secret that would make him wealthy. When he failed in this, and, barely escaping with his life, was driven forth by Mueller, he determined to betray him at the first opportunity, being actuated by a desire to secure money for himself, and having no wish to save others from

danger. His mo... ...ing bad, he was without protection, and Mueller was able to de... But I am in no danger. And now, good bye; be of good cour...

Ella was as plainly visible to Crosby while these words were uttered as if she were present in the flesh, though her voice sounded as if far away, but her form now grew indistinct, and finally vanished altogether. Crosby drew a long breath, and turned to the others.

"You heard," he said.

"I heard," said Sullivan, "and I saw her plain enough, and also that Mueller fiend earlier in the night. Am I sane, though? I doubt it myself, for all this supernatural business seems outside the bounds of common sense and sanity."

"I don't think we have witnessed or heard anything supernatural," said Morwell, thoughtfully, "and probably what is termed the supernatural has no existence. The limitations of our senses are extreme, and in all likelihood what goes on without our sphere of vision, hearing, or touch is just as real and natural as what we see, hear, or feel. But a few years ago, comparatively speaking, the telephone, phonograph, wireless telegraphy, and a score of other scientific discoveries would have seemed supernatural to even educated men. For myself, I see no reason why, if electrical waves can carry intelligible messages through miles of space or ether, through walls, hills, living bodies, and all sorts of obstructions, the thoughts of

the living (or even of th[illegible] describe as being "dead"). can[illegible] space in a like manner."

"But there's a receiver for the electric messages."

"Quite so; and the brain is the receiver in the other case."

"It's all theory," said Sullivan, after a pause.

"Not to such an extent, as you might think. There is a vast mass of evidence which shows that communications with external intelligences have taken place in all ages, and of late years have been of everyday occurrence all over the world. The majority of—but not all—scientists and ordinary people scout these communications as delusions or something worse, but as they have never been able to disprove the fact of their being made, or show how delusions can affect millions of people who are otherwise sane, and often highly intellectual, I take it that the truth is with the other side."

"Well, anyway, what you said about electrical waves carrying thought, the brain as a receiver and so on, is pure theory."

"I admit that," said Morwell, "and it is arguing from analogy; but any way, it's an attempt to explain things in a natural way, which is better than shaking our heads and muttering 'these things are inscrutable.' If the thousand and one natural phenomena which have been investigated had been treated as 'inscrutable,' we should still be as ignorant and superstitious as blackfellows."

"Then you are a materialist?"

"No, indeed; I am a believer in, and have direct personal proof (convincing to myself, anyway) of the existence of a Supreme Beneficent Power, but that Power guides the affairs of men by means perfectly intelligible to us if we only once found the key to them."

"But how do you see these disembodied spooks?"

"Some people have naturally the gift of what is known as clairvoyance, or second sight, which enables them to see the astral just as it is, but when 'disembodied spooks,' as you call them, become visible to ordinary people as Mueller and Ella did to-night, the theory is that they obtain some vital matter from surrounding bodies, and form from this a temporary body or covering, which is actually material, and therefore visible to all eyes."

"Well, the matter is totally beyond me," said Sullivan, "and if you fellows had not been with me to-night, and seen and heard as I did, I should have thought I was going the way of my uncle, the Skibbereen miller, who was always seeing leprechauns amongst the sacks in the flour store, and phookas dancing on the water-wheel, and ended his days in a padded cell in Cork Asylum."

CHAPTER XXII.

"Have you kissed me since I arrived, Mary?"

"Several times, John."

"Fifty times, you mean," interposed Kate Grant. "In fact, you seemed to have done nothing else since lunch time."

"You must have been watching us, Kate."

"She was, Mary, and there was jealousy in her eye. Not that she wanted to deprive you of that inestimable blessing—myself—but was thinking of what would happen if I were Crosby. Ah! I've made a discovery."

"What?" asked Mary.

"Why, that a Sydney girl can blush; but perhaps it is the English air."

"I daresay the Sydney girls of your acquaintance could not blush, Mr. Sullivan;" and with this somewhat spiteful shot, delivered Parthian-like over her shoulder, Miss Grant retired.

"That was unkind," said Sullivan, trying to meet Mary's eye, which was upon him.

"Is it true?"

"Is what true?"

"You know very well; what she said about the Sydney girls of your acquaintance."

"I knew very few *ladies* in Sydney," replied the guileless Sullivan.

"You are evading my question; I said *girls*."

"Well—hum—ha," began Sullivan, who felt that his collar was too tight, and boots a mis-fit, "you see the existence I led in Sydney in the days when I had no object in life, and no angel in earthly form to guard me—(Oh, sacred groves of Blarney!)—was not calculated to raise one—(though it often 'elevated' me, he thought to himself)—and I was often thrown into company that was not all it might be—(as a matter of fact he was not 'thrown,' but *went*), and—and perhaps what Miss Grant said of them was true; but it was not so *very* bad," he added hastily, as Mary turned her head away, "and it's all done with now. Sure, I hate to look back on it, and the hours wasted with those young remittance noodles and chappies, with their 'Bai Joves,' and 'H'yah's t'yah,

ol'fla,' which, being translated into the mother tongue, which they had never learned, meant 'Here's to you, old fellow.' I half saw through the falsity of it even then, and when I, once in a while, met Father O'Brien, and he used to say, 'It's all dross, John, and therefore worse than earthy; find a purpose in life, my boy, and while working at that do not forget the life to come,' I knew that he was right, and I wrong; but, bless you, next day, when some be-collared noodle invited me to accompany him to the races, with a dinner in town and a box at the Tivoli to follow, I forgot everything but the pleasure of the moment. Faith, now that I look back on it, I think it was the night work on the paper that saved me from going too far. I have therefore nothing but kindly thoughts for the old *Telephone*, though I *did* give some awful twisters to the world through its columns," he added regretfully, as there came to his mind the memory of several articles on the seamy side of Sydney life, which he had written when in the same state of mind as His Satanic Majesty when he 'a saint would be.' I have told you all now, Mary—(he hadn't told her one-sixteenth)—and knowing how changed I have become since I knew you, sweetheart, I am sure you will forgive me for the past, and take me for the John Patrick Sullivan I am to-day."

"I am not sure that I shall forgive you."

"Well, Mary," said Sullivan, who, well knowing his case was weak, determined (like Agathocles of old) to carry

the war into the enemy's country, "if you do forgive me, I won't say a word about Crosby."

"I don't know what you mean," said Mary, wincing, nevertheless.

"Well, if you don't, I will tell you. The day we had the picnic near Gordon, I was sitting in a lovely patch of green sward on the banks of the Lane Cove River with Kate Grant—I wish I was there now—"

"What! with Kate Grant?"

"No, no, sitting on the Lane Cove River—I mean on its banks—with *you*."

"Oh! well, go on."

"She noticed you *botanising* on the rocks with Fred Crosby, and, being jealous, I suppose, told me that you were infatuated with him—"

"The wretch! Wait till I see her."

"Yes, 'infatuated' was the word she used; and then, becoming more venomous, like a scorpion that has stung you once—for she had indeed stung me—(this with a sigh that suggested the South wind rustling the trees of Blarney), she went on to say that before Fred Crosby came on the scene at all you were—"

"That will do, Mr. Sullivan; I will not listen to any more of Miss Grant's calumnies," and Mary rose in high dudgeon. But Sullivan grasped her hand, and a brief, wordy engagement followed, which ended as all such

encounters do—in the guileful and guilty magnanimously consenting to forgive the guileless and innocent.

"And now, Mary," said Sullivan, when they had exchanged twenty kisses of forgiveness, twenty of reconciliation, and twenty as compensation for the dreary period coming when for several hours they would be unable to exchange osculatory endearments, "who is coming to dinner? Morwell and Crosby, I know about, but who else?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Howard."

"The Colonel here? Wonders will never cease. Why, it will be quite like old times. Anyone else?"

"Oh, yes, a large number of English friends and relations of my father's, who are dying to make our acquaintance. They know, of course, that we were in the midst of the Sydney sensations, and they have some hazy idea of Ella's occult powers. Indeed, I am pretty sure that some of them are largely influenced in coming by the hope that she will exhibit these."

"Do you think she will do so?"

"I think not. Ella is extremely sensitive on that point, and nothing puts her out more than the exhibition of curiosity on the part of strangers."

"Well, I hope she will depart from her rule on this occasion, for I may tell you that Morwell and Crosby, knowing that I was coming here early, asked me to ask you to ask Ella (which is tautology) if she would try to

obtain some information as to what is going on in Sydney, and what is likely to be the next move on the part of the holy terror. You know that since we arrived in England little or no news has come in, and the authorities observe a solemn sphynx-like silence—for the same reason that the sphynx kept silence: inability to speak—and we who saw in the past that a new trouble always followed each period of quiescence, believe that some gigantic move will next be made, which will fairly paralyse the Imperial authorities, who have not, we are certain, the remotest conception of the extent of the power they are supposed to be dealing with. We have waited, hoping that some further action would be taken, but they rest content with the despatch of a single fleet, and don't even seem to know what *that* is doing, so we deem it our duty to endeavour to obtain information, by the only means at our command —Ella's occult powers."

"Oh, can't we let that dreadful question alone," said Mary, tremulously. "I have been hoping to forget it, and trying to believe that it would be settled without our having anything further to do with it—but here is Ella herself."

"We will have much to do with it; more than any other living persons," said Ella, who heard Mary's last words. "I knew of your mission to-day," she went on to Sullivan, "and I will do what you wish. The time is

ripe, and we will obtain some very important information, I feel assured."

"That will be great," said Sullivan, his eyes lighting with enthusiasm, for he now had full confidence in Ella's powers, "and we can pass it on to the Government——"

"You can do so, but it will not be believed; afterwards, when events have brought changes, it will be different."

"Ella makes me shiver," said Mary, when her sister had withdrawn; "the look in her eyes, and the tone of her voice at times, seem more like Arthur's than her own, and now she speaks of further 'events' and our having much to do with them. I hate to think of it."

"It's no use hating it, I fear, Mary; what is to be will be. I hate it myself now that I've got you, though in the old aimless days in Sydney I would have hailed anything with delight that promised excitement, and I fancy we'll get plenty more of that. I am all on tenter-hooks to know what the "revelation" of to-night will be. Faith, I must brace up my nerves to meet it with some of your father's wine. And now, Mary, I hope dinner will not be late, for I don't mind telling you, I am famished. There are compensations in all things, and, though this foggy, dingy London depresses us inhabitants from the land of the 'broad red sun,' it improves our appetites. I'm as hungry as a hunter, and yet I spent the forenoon in no more active employment than looking for a man in Alsatia, or what used to be Alsatia, a wild and desolate

region lying back of Fleet Street, once inhabited by cut-throats of all kinds, and now in the occupation of pirates, that is to say, printers and publishers. I did not find the man, but lost myself, and when I emerged at length into known country, somewhere about the beginning of High Holborn, I was completely exhausted. After being invited half a dozen times to 'Pickidilly,' ''ide Park,' I took a Hammersmith 'bus because the conductor did not say ''Ammersmith,' and came on here, where I forgot all hunger and fatigue in the pleasure of being with you again, my rose, or waratah, of the South."

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Pritchards having returned from a visit to Devonshire, were now living in a large house in Kensington, which had been lent them by Mr. Pritchard's brother, a wealthy man, who had welcomed his Australian relatives with fine, old-fashioned hospitality—as soon as he was satisfied that they did not need it. Prior to that he made very cautious advances, and worked with the energy of a small Tangye pump to discover the condition of his brother's finances. When satisfied that Mr. Pritchard, who had not been an Australian banker for thirty years for nothing, had realised most of his property, and remitted the result to England some time before he came himself, "Uncle Tom," as he was to the girls, became extremely cordial, and when he found that his relatives

were, in a way, celebrities, on acount of their connection with recent events in Australia, his natural affection welled out like the pure Pierian spring, or the more prosaic and material stream which feeds the village pump, and all he had he placed at their disposal, or at least he stated so in a letter to his brother, who remarked when he read it, "Tom is a damned old humbug. But, as he never did anything for me in his life before, though he got three-fourths of father's estate, I will let him do something for me even at this late hour, and will accept his kind offer so far as the house is concerned."

Uncle Tom and two of his daughters were amongst those invited to the dinner party referred to by Mr. Sullivan, and there was such a number of other guests that, when the pressman entered the ante-room, he had at first some difficulty in singling out his acquaintances from the throng.

It was more or less of a "family reunion" party, given by the Australian branch, long separated from the main body, and numbers of obsolete and long-forgotten Pritchards, emerged from their retirement to take part in it.

There was a faint odour of camphor and lavender about a section of the guests, and curls, lace, and peg-top inexpressibles, took the beholder back to the mid-Victorian period, when man's efforts to make himself look hideous probably reached their acme. In such an assemblage Miss Manse felt herself to be almost alarmingly modern,

while Captain Marshall, rendered youthful by contrast, was as frisky as a four-year-old, as he threaded his way amongst the crowd of "old buffers," or, bending gallantly over the chair of some charming maiden of fifty, set her simpering, and almost blushing, by some such remark as "I must have dreamt I was away twenty years—you all look so astonishingly young, bai Jove."

Noting these things amusedly, Sullivan was presently aware of a coat of surprising cut, an expansive shirt front, and a diamond stud of surpassing brilliancy, in a corner of the room, and, rightly concluding that to Colonel Howard alone could such embellishments belong, he made his way in that direction, and found there the American in deep conversation with Crosby and Morwell.

Having heard a brief account of the Colonel's visit to his native city, Chicago, and hasty retreat therefrom to avoid being "fruz up like a Noo Zealand laamb," Sullivan acquainted his friends with Ella's decision to seek that night for some information on the great subject, and they, like himself, became at once excited and expectant. Dinner was presently announced, and Sullivan, true to his resolution, and not knowing, as he explained to Crosby, that he might not have to take a trip to Sydney that evening, fortified himself thoroughly with champagne, which was extra dry, and therefore to his liking.

With the knowledge of something uncommon to follow,

the gentlemen did not linger long over their wine, but soon joined the ladies in the drawing-room, where the bustle of their arrival was succeeded by a hush of expectancy, when Ella arose and said—

"I am going to attempt a difficult feat to-night, that of actually proceeding in spirit to Sydney, and observing what is going on there. To do this would be impossible unless the necessary power were forthcoming from a very large circle, and I may say that this party was prearranged for the purpose—not by me, but by external powers."

This statement was met by looks of incredulity or blank astonishment by some, but others seemed very pleased to think that they were chosen to play a part, however small, in the drama which was attracting the attention of the world.

By Ella's direction the guests seated themselves in a circle and clasped hands, an arrangement that entirely met the wishes of Mary and Sullivan, who had been separated by a cruel and measureless space of tablecloth or carpet since dinner had been announced. In somewhat apprehensive expectation the party joined hands, leaving, however, a gap which Ella presently completed by seating herself between Crosby and Sullivan, and taking their hands. Her action in so doing was greeted by an outburst of surprised "Ohs!" occasioned by what Sullivan, with a Perrier Jouet smile at Mary, described

as "a 'lectric shock." They sat in absolute silence for some minutes, and then it was noticed that Ella's eyes were closed and her arms hanging limply by her side. Some of those present gazed at her in apprehension, but Morwell said, "There is no cause for alarm; her spirit is absent, but will return presently, when she will relate to us what she has seen." This mightily whetted the curiosity of the guests, though one or two turned pale, and seemed to wish themselves well out of such an uncanny business. They sat on, however, and in about half-an-hour Morwell's prediction was verified, for Ella stirred, opened her eyes, and, after a dazed glance or two round the circle, came fully to herself.

"I have been to Sydney," were her first words.

A rustle of surprise followed this statement.

"I have been to Sydney," repeated Ella, "and Arthur was with me."

"Yes, Ella."

"I seemed conscious of his presence, but heard or saw nothing of him. I felt suddenly drowsy when sitting here, and when I awakened I was on the Suspension Bridge over Long Bay, looking up at a vast black tower, which rose into the air above a huge embankment, the same that poor Arthur lost his life on, but enormously enlarged. A moment later I seemed to be standing on the top of the tower, and could see right over Sydney, and out to sea to the South and East. The harbour was

crowded with shipping, but there were no ferry boats or ordinary steamers, but only huge transports and strange, low-lying craft that looked like warships. I saw a great ship anchored in the stream off Neutral Bay, and a swarm of men passing from her in boats to the shore. Close to me, in Middle Harbour, was a vast dockyard, connected with the works amidst which I stood by a subterranean railway. Everywhere were signs of great activity and preparation. Presently I was inside the tower in a large chamber, where sat Mueller, the man we know, and fear so much, surrounded with telegraph instruments, telephones, and a number of apparatus which I had never seen before. He was poring over a map of Asia, and every now and again marked some position with a drawing pen. He became conscious of my presence in a few moments, and, after a glance or two round his gaze met mine, and I knew that I was visible to him. He took a revolver from a drawer, but replaced it instantly with an impatient 'pish!' and, throwing himself back in his chair, closed his eyes. I seemed to hear Arthur's voice say 'Come!' and a moment later I was passing over Sydney, and saw vast numbers of men—mostly Chinese—in the streets, and noticed that rails had been placed down Pitt Street from Redfern Station. The scene seemed to pass from me in an instant, and I was conscious only of the presence of Mueller, who, with fury in his face, seemed to be endeavouring to reach me,

but was constantly repelled by some invisible force. He presently disappeared, and Arthur's voice came again to me, saying, 'You have seen what is being done in Sydney, but it is not thither you must next look, but to Asia!' Then I awoke and found myself here."

Her hearers sat in silence for a moment, and then the Colonel and Sullivan, forgetful of their suroundings, simultaneously ejaculated, "Tarnation!" and "By gum!"

"But do you credit it?" asked an elderly lady timorously, noting their startled looks.

"Credit it, Ma'am?" replied the Colonel. "If you had had our experience in these matters, you'd feel as certain that something mighty serious was going to happen in Asia, as that the sun will rise to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Ella's statement that the authorities would take no heed of information obtained in such a manner, proved quite accurate, for though Sullivan received a reply to a letter in which he set it forth in detail, he was merely asked to supply the source of his information. He complied, and knowing how such matters are usually regarded, strengthened his communication as much as he possibly could by obtaining the signatures of all, or nearly all, of those who had been present at the Pritchard's. But his second letter was absolutely ignored, and the authorities, not considering it as even remotely possible that Sydney was being converted into a vast military and naval base, confidently awaited news of the destruction of the

mysterious latter-day pirates, or desperadoes, whom the fleet had been despatched to deal with.

When news did at length arrive, it was not exactly of this character. A French tramp steamer, bound from New Caledonia to Batavia, and driven South of her course by a hurricane, had picked up, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, a man-o'-war's boat, with an officer and twelve men on board, who reported that they were the sole survivors of the British fleet in question, all the men in which had been destroyed by an unbreathable gas off Thursday Island. The gas had come from no one knew whence one dark night, but the officer had since concluded that it was generated in submarine vessels, and forced up through tubes which rose above the surface of the sea, but were invisible in the darkness. This officer had read in a Singapore paper an account of the destruction of life in Sydney by means of the gas, and the moment the first agonising sensation seized his throat he knew as by inspiration that the same awful agent of death was on them now. The gas had not yet gained complete ascendancy, and it was possible to breathe—with difficulty—for a few moments, and in that brief space a boat was lowered by the deck watch, and, jumping from the ship anyhow, eighteen men and the officer reached the boat, where, to their joy, they found they were as yet below the stratum of gas, and could therefore breathe freely. Pulling frantically, they were soon beyond the danger zone; but then

six of the men died from inhaling the poison on the ship, while all the others were seriously ill for hours. Of the complete destruction of all life on the ships they had no doubt, as at dawn they had seen a score of long hulls rise silently to the surface, and men climbing from them to the ships. Then for hours afterwards a continuous splashing in the sea marked where bodies were being thrown from the ships. By mid-day a clearance seemed to have been effected, smoke issued from the funnels, and shortly afterwards the ships began to move, and the entire captured fleet made for Cape York, which it rounded, and then disappeared from view.

The publication of this news created the utmost consternation in Britain, where people were already in a condition of nervous tension owing to the events that had taken place in Australia, the news of which had at first been received with incredulity, then with a belief that the troubles affecting Sydney were of a merely local character, and occasioned by a small band of desperadoes —whose object was to create a panic for the purpose of rendering easy some scheme of plunder—and finally, with an ever-growing fear that the mysterious organisation was of sufficient power to seriously menace the Empire. A stunned feeling took possession of the people for a day or so, and then a period of wild excitement and anger followed, as though the blood had flowed from the brain of the nation at the first shock, and returned with violence a

little later. And while some asked in consternation "Who was this terrible and audacious foe who had attacked and captured an Imperial fleet so easily?" the more fiery spirits —and these were in the great majority—replied "Never mind who he was; he had attacked the fleet, and that was enough without reckoning up his other offences. By cruel and inhuman means he had destroyed thousands of British seamen, and had taken the ships for his own use. He had defied the Empire, and slain its subjects. He must reap the consequences of his acts—let loose the Dogs of War."

Then arose the hum of preparation. Every naval dockyard and arsenal worked night and day, ships were commissioned, stores and armaments placed on board, and within a week one fleet left England, while another was almost ready to sail. The naval reserves were called out, and troops were mobilised at Aldershot, Plymouth, and other convenient points.

Meanwhile the Continent was confused. When more or less distorted accounts of the happenings in Sydney had first appeared in the French Press, journals of the type of *La Patrie* had been inclined to exult in the fresh trouble which had come to "Perfide Albion," and to predict that the nation which aimed at nothing less than the absorption of every territory in the world which it could seize, by fair means or foul, must inevitably become a mere loose collection of such heterogeneous materials that it

must ultimately fall to pieces as Rome had done. Even now it was apparent that Britain could not keep peace within the borders of even her long-established colonies, as was shown by her frequent struggles in India and South Africa, and now by this trouble in Australia. Several Austrian and Russian publications echoed these sentiments, but the more responsible journals, beyond reporting the facts, observed a surprised silence, and did not seem to know what to make of the strange occurrences in the distant South.

When the news of the wholesale destruction of British seamen came to hand, even the yellow press of France was silent, and a note of alarm was sounded here and there, for it did not follow that the mysterious users of a terrible agent of destruction would necessarily confine their attentions to British people or possessions only. Presently a perfect howl of rage and apprehension arose in France when it became known that a French cruiser, which was lying in Port Moresby, New Guinea, for a few days, had been served as the British fleet had been. Next Germany was agitated by the news that one of her cruisers had been obliged to surrender to an enormous fleet, between New Guinea and Celebes; and a little later America was horrified to learn that Admiral Rainy's fleet of fourteen vessels, with a number of transports, had been captured in Manila Harbour, the crews being destroyed as in the former cases. Then news came in thick

and fast. Hong Kong was taken by an invading force of Mongolians, all the white inhabitants being summarily shot; Canton fell next, Shangai a little later, and then came advice of the seizure of Wei-hai-wei and Port Arthur. Russia now seethed with alarm, for which there was good grounds, as within a week arrived news of the capture of Vladivostock, and of the awful destruction of life there by means of a suffocating gas, driven in on the town from a swarm of strange craft, which had suddenly appeared from no one knew whence.

And now, when the great nations awoke from their first stupor of amazement and fear, they found themselves faced by the fact that a foe, employing agents of destruction to which all hitherto invented were as nought, was firmly established in China, with all seas open to him, for who dare offer opposition after what had occurred?

CHAPTER XXV.

"The country is paralysed, bai Jove," said Captain Marshall, glaring at Mr. Pritchard through his eyeglass as though he held him responsible for the nation's unfortunate condition, "for since the last news came from China, not a thing has been done, except mawch the awmy in sections from point to point, after the manner of the immortal King who led thirty thousand men up the hill and then down again. The Government is bewildered, I take it."

Her faith in "Angland" shaken by the defection of her military adviser, Miss Manse retired in some disorder on her main line of defence—her bedroom—and double-locking the door, set about packing her portmanteau with a vague idea of "going somewhere" out of danger. Con-

sulting Sullivan later on as to the locality he would advise, he suggested the Moon or Mars as the two likeliest spots he could think of, and they were open to several objections, one of which was that the enemy's flying machines would be likely to "command the lines of communication." Mr. Sullivan's method of soothing Miss Manse's fears was similar to that he employed with the general public. He was in tremendous request as a descriptive writer of recent events, and finding after several experiments that a pessimistic tone best suited the present temper of the public, he adhered religiously to that, and spread terror broadcast, with much profit and satisfaction to himself.

"You look happy, Sullivan," said Crosby; "what good work have you been doing now?"

"Oh, just pointing out that the East is about to precipitate itself upon the West, as it used to do in the good old times, and that we have no such champions of the Occident nowadays as Charles Martel or Charlemagne, or even the means to arm one-twentieth of such poor fighting stuff as will be available."

"Yes, and what else?"

"Well, then I go on to say that it is painfully apparent that Europe is in no state of readiness for an extensive war, for now that international jealousies are laid aside in the face of a common danger, the deficiencies concealed before are made apparent. Russia is short of money, of

artillery, ammunition, rifles, and transport, and though France, England and Germany can supply the first named, all the rest they are short of themselves; and therefore Russia, which will be the first to feel the impact of the foe, will be in no state to offer an adequate resistance."

"Very encouraging; go on."

"Well, then I assert that the coming war will be a death grapple in which the resources of civilisation will be lost after a while, and the struggle continued with the primitive weapons of war—spears, swords, and the like—in which case the numbers of the Orientals will probably ultimately tell, unless the whole male European population is armed with simple weapons with which they can continue the conflict when the regular soldiers, with their modern armaments, have been wiped off the face of the earth. Then to give further encouragement, I quote a writer who maintains that probably no opportunity of exchanging blows with the invader will ever arise, as the latter will use such terrible agents of destruction as to render opposition impossible. He mentions in support of this argument the death-dealing gas we know so much about, the flying machines which scatter death as they go, and the artillery which can send projectiles hundreds of miles."

"You are doing excellent work, Sullivan, and should be rewarded—by being shot at the first opportunity. You do not believe a word of that dismal stuff yourself, and

are merely a mercenary scribe of the worst type, making capital out of the fears of the people."

"Here, young fellow, what about your black and white work? For instance, the big gun which you never saw, and yet barefacedly depicted in the act of firing the shell to Melbourne. The bally gun was nine miles long according to your sketch, and the shell looked like the dome of St. Paul's. Then the explosion in Melbourne—which you never saw either, by-the-way—suggested the disruption of the universe rather than the bursting of the said shell. Your flying machines, and red hands, too, must have created an epidemic of nightmare, and driven numbers of weak-minded people to drink; while as for your 'Portrait' of Mueller—well, if that amiable individual ever lays hands on you, he will make you repent turning him into an ogre, I'll bet."

"The fact is, both of you have been perverting your very slight knowledge of literature and art to the low ends of further terrifying an already terrified public, with the object of securing profit for yourselves," said Morwell. "Now, if you had taken a leaf from my book it would have been much better."

"I think I see myself giving dry facts to a swarm of pressman and letting them make the money that ought to come to me," said Sullivan. "No, Sir, sensational writing has been my *forte* since the day I produced my first

immortal romance, 'The Blood-stained Putty Knife,' and to that I'll adhere."

"I did not confine myself to giving interviews," said Morwell. "What about my article in *The Year?*"

"I had forgotten that for the moment. It was splendid, I admit; solid and dry as an Oregon beam, and created in me a dryness of the oseophagus that obliged me reluctantly to seek the ministrations of the elegantly-enamelled Hebe of Foxton's bar."

"Well, anyway, it had more important effects than your frothy productions, for it brought us into contact with Lamson."

Morwell referred to an article which he had written, in his slow painstaking way, on the psychic aspects of the recent mysteries, and in which he gave a full account of the remarkable fulfilment of Ella's predictions, and of the rejection of the latest by the Foreign Office. This article attracted much attention, and amongst those interested in it was one of the Under-Secretaries at the F.O.—Mr. Edward Lamson. This gentleman had had some previous experience of psychic matters, and while well aware of the usually "hazy" character of "messages from the unseen," thought that Morwell had made out a case to the contrary this time, and accordingly wrote to him asking for an appointment to discuss the subject. The upshot was that he "sat" with Ella and the others one evening, and heard the prediction that the next step would

be a movement from China Westward of an enormous force which would overrun Asia.

Further, he was told that vast preparations had, all unknown to them, been made against the European Powers. For years a vast ironworks in Westphalia, nominally a machinery factory, had really been devoted to the manufacture of machine guns, which were shipped away in hollow steel casings in the guise of propeller shafts. The deception was all the more easy as the factory actually did manufacture propeller shafts, which were mostly shipped to Chili, Peru, and Equador, and were subsequently used in vessels which could progress with great rapidity under, as well as upon the sea.

More than half incredulous, Lamson said to Ella, "Are you not imagining these things?"

"No," she replied, "I simply tell you what is told to me," and then went on to say that in Germany, France, Italy, and America, factories for the production of explosives, rifles and other munitions of war had been in active though secret operation for years, and that purchases had been largely made from private manufacturers by the Chinese Government ,and by various mercantile firms in South America, who had indented for customers, engines, boilers, and iron plates in large quantities, with no real idea as to their ultimate use."

"Well," Lamson remarked, when Ella had ceased, "if what you state is correct, we would seem to be menaced

by some gigantic power, but how is such a thing possible, and who could have originated and carried out such marvellous schemes?"

"You will learn that very shortly," said Ella, "for one is now nearing London who has heard the Originator himself speak concerning his motives and intentions."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Man will make love though the world be menaced—aye, though the sky be about to fall—and Mr. Sullivan filled in the intervals in his daily task of terrifying His Majesty's lieges at £10 per column of leaded type, by making love to Mary Pritchard. His love was not of the kind that sits coyly aloof—nor, truth to tell, was hers—and they, in consequence, found London a most unpleasant place to live in.

"Confound this crowded, jostling, dirty, brick-and-mortar Pandemonium," exclaimed Sullivan, in "mixed" phraseology, a dozen times a week, "Oh, Mary, why aren't we in the Domain, or the bush near Balmoral Beach."

"How do you know about those places in such a connection? Did you ever——?"

"No, I never. Now you know, Mary, you promised to take me for what I am, not what I was. But, I say, do let us get away from this wretched Rotten Row, which well deserves its title, and is more crowded than Piccadilly."

"Shall we go to Kensington Gardens?"

"No; they are as bad—millions of kids, nurse girls, perambulators, pug dogs, invalids, and all that. Let us go to the Imperial Institute."

Sullivan always fell back, in connection with his love affairs, on the Imperial Institute, which was the "loneliest spot in all London," he declared. Accordingly, thither they bent their steps one fine afternoon, to find, to their disgust, that a garden *fete*, or some such side-show, designed to stimulate languid public interest in the Institute, was in full swing, and, being "patronised by Royalty, was reckoned *comme il faut*," and, therefore, attended by all "smart" London. Having failed to find a deserted nook in the whole vast building, and been "sassed" by an insolent waitress, who recognised at a glance that he was not "of" the crowd present, Sullivan was about to retire in disgust, when a bland voice at his elbow said, "How do, Mistlee Sull'van—you rememble me?"

"Can't say I do," replied Sullivan, when he had sur-

veyed the well-dressed Chinaman who had addressed him.

"My name Lo Hoy—keep dlaper's shop, George Stleet Nor'—often sell you lady han'chief, silk stocking—you remember?"

"Hum—ha—I remember buying ties and things for myself from you," said Sullivan, with an inward wish that Lo Hoy was at the deuce, and that Mary would not gaze at him with such a questioning look in her eyes. "Well, so you have left Sydney?"

"Yes, I left Sini—bleen China."

"Ah! went home to be made a Mandarin of, I suppose?"

"No makee me Mandarin—no Mandarin China now—countlee velly upset."

"Of course, I had forgotten that for the moment. Well, Lo Hoy, I am very glad to have seen you again, and we may yet meet in Sydney—good-bye." And Sullivan, anxious to escape, was about to move away, when the Chinaman, laying his hand on his arm, said, "Don't go, Mistlee Sull'van, I want see you—*have* see you—was sent see you."

"Sent to see me?"

"Yes, but can't tellee who sendy me. Mistlee Sull'van, Amarbel—you know, him namee Mueller——"

"What!" ejaculated Sullivan.

"Mueller—real name Amarbal—he Chinaman, old, old, long ago Chinaman; he pleachee holy war China,

down with foreigner, down with West—Chinaman, he rulee world."

"Good Lord," said Sullivan, gazing at the moon-like face of the stolid Lo Hoy, and scenting copy of great value, as the vulture scents carrion from afar, "and who is he?"

"Chinaman, common Chinaman in stleets, what you call 'larrikin,' he say Amarbal god Mulge—old god, long ago, before Confucius or Buddha come. But *he* no say that."

"What does *he* say, then?"

"That he man, but Mulge helpee him. Mulge he thrown into pit long ago; will get back and rulee heavens, but Chinaman must first rulee world."

"I begin to see glimmerings," exclaimed Sullivan: "Mary, we are on the verge of reading the great riddle; I'll make ten thousand out of it before I give it to the world (why should I save the Aryan race for nothing?) Lo Hoy, I wouldn't have missed seeing you for a great deal. You are the handsomest Chinaman I ever saw, and that's not overwhelming you with flattery. Come this way, and we'll find a seat, even if we have to dispossess a Duchess. Faith, there'd be no more Duchesses soon if it wasn't for me."

For more than an hour Sullivan remained in close conversation with Lo Hoy, and when they parted it was with an agreement to meet at the lodgings of the three friends,

whither Sullivan promised to bring a highly-cultivated Chinese interpreter, so that Lo Hoy could relate all he had seen and heard in his own language instead of the broken English, in which he could not possibly convey the startling information with which he was "loaded to the muzzle," as the excited pressman said to his *fiancee* when he was escorting her home.

"It's the most important thing that has happened yet, and I'm the most important man in London."

"You certainly look as if the place belonged to you."

"So it does in a measure—don't I hold the fate of the world in the hollow of my hand?—the hand of John Patrick Sullivan, whose revered uncle, now deceased, and in purgatory, no doubt, used to say, 'The only stir you'll ever make in the world, Johnny, will be when you're leaving it wid a rope round your neck.' He was as right as the old ones generally are. And now, Mary, here we are at your father's—or uncle's—house, so you had better kiss me behind this pot plant, which is the only bit of bush the desolate region boasts, and then you can go in and startle the family, while I go off for Lamson, who must be in this."

"The man who held the fate of the world in his hands" (to use his own words), "was kept cooling his heals in a corridor, while the French Ambassador, or some such tin-pot plenipotentiary was being attended to," but he at length obtained audience of Mr. Lamson, to whom he

unfolded his tale, which was listened to with the closest attention by the Under Secretary, who said, when he had concluded—

"You have not overrated the importance of this. It gives us far more light than anything we have heard yet. Not a word of your Chinese friend's communication must be lost, and the man of all others to help us in this is my brother, Professor Lamson, who is one of the leading Oriental Scholars in England. I will drive to his house myself at once, and bring him to your rooms this evening without fail."

CHAPTER XXVII

Lo Hoy's tale, told in Chinese to Professor Lamson, by him translated into English, and taken down in short-hand by Sullivan, was sufficiently startling, and cleared up many hitherto mysterious points.

In the first place, he stated that he was warned to leave Sydney by a fellow-countryman at the time the threatening placards referring to the appearance of the Red Hand were placed on view in the city. This man had told him that a great prophet, some said a god, had arisen who would give the world to the Mongolian race. The whites were to be destroyed, and the attack was to begin in Australia. More than this the man could not tell, as he was merely an emissary charged with the mission of warning the Chinese residents of Sydney of

the coming danger. Lo Hoy soon satisfied himself by inquiries amongst his countrymen that the warning was genuine, and, being anxious to save the money he had been accumulating for years, he sold his business to a Jew, whom he did *not* think it necessary to warn of the impending danger, but on the contrary, assured that the position was one bound to increase in value as the city prospered, and left for his native village near Tientsin. Here he had not long been settled when rumours of some great movement afoot reached his ears, and he gradually became aware that the whole country was in a seething state of unrest, created by agitators who travelled about from city to city, and village to village, and addressed secret meetings on the subject of a holy war to be levied on the white nations. He obtained entrance to one of these meetings, and then for the first time heard the name of Amarbal, the coming deliverer, who was to lead the Chinese to universal dominion.

Not very long afterwards the mysterious fleet appeared off the coast, Tientsin was seized, and, in a moment, the country declared for conquest. Insurrection there was none, as the makeshift Government established on the evacuation of the country by the military forces of the European nations was heart and soul in the new movement, which it had secretly helped by the importation of vast quantities of arms. These were now distributed, as were incredible quantities of arms, ammunition, and

stores brought to the various towns by transports. Some of these vessels came from Europe and America, Lo Hoy learned, but the majority came from Australia, which was evidently destined to be the principal base for the new movement. There were many foreigners on these ships and on the fleet, and a large number of these were landed and employed in drilling troops, instructing them in the use of artillery, building fortifications, and other military work. These foreigners were very jealously guarded, and were treated more like prisoners than free men, being obliged to wear a distinctive dress and live apart in palisaded camps. They seemed very unhappy, Lo Hoy thought, and several committed suicide. Two great armies were rapidly organised, one proceeding to the Western border of the Desert of Gobi, while the other, splitting into sections, garrisoned all the important towns, and fortified every commanding position on the coast.

As yet Amarbal had not appeared, and all this work was carried out by men who were believed to have been appointed by him. "At length, however," said Lo Hoy, "a swift ship came moving over the sea faster than a train," and in a moment Tientsin and Pekin were ablaze with the news that Amarbal had arrived.

Eager to see the man whose name was in everyone's mouth, Lo Hoy joined the vast crowd which surged towards the wharf, and, obtaining a good position, was rewarded by a close view of the famous personage. Great

was his amazement to recognise, despite the flowing, Oriental robes and singular high-peaked head-gear which the figure before him wore, Mueller, the man whom he had happened to see at the North Sydney Police Court shortly after the murder of Pritchard. Gone were the coarse European clothes and the disfiguring spectacles, and the man to whom the crowd did obsequious homage, looked every inch an Oriental ruler, as, upborne in a palanquin by a dozen bearers, he passed on his way.

Later on he addressed an enormous crowd from the steps of a joss house, and again Lo Hoy was fortunate enough to get so close as to hear every word. Mueller, or Amarbal, began by stating that he was a Turanian like themselves, but of far more ancient stock, for he was an Akkad, a lineal descendant of the great race which, in the days "when the world was young," possessed more knowledge, wealth and power than all the other races of the earth, and which subsequently gave to the Chaldeans, and after them to the Assyrians, Persians, and other Semites, the knowledge, which they in turn transmitted to the Greeks, Romans, and Aryan nations generally. Thus, from the Turanians, or Mongolians, had sprung all knowledge, and the Aryans were merely usurpers who had obtained by force and cunning what they could not have discovered for themselves. Their ascendancy was an accident, and could not endure. It was brought about by the dethronement, and banishment to the under world of

Mulge, the presiding and protecting deity of the Akkadians, and the usurpation of his place by false gods who favoured the Aryan races.

With the restoration to power of the Mongolians, Mulge would, it was foretold, regain his true position, and would for ever maintain his favourite children in power and affluence. This cherished belief had been kept alive for centuries by a remnant of the Akkadian race, living in the mountain fastnesses of Turkestan, together with much knowledge of the relation of the spiritual to the material world, and of Nature's secrets, which had never been obtained, and never would be obtained, by the Western world. All this knowledge, he, Amarbal, possessed, and he further knew every detail concerning the Western civilisation. As mechanical producers the Europeans had made great progress, and when he had perfected his knowledge of Akkadian lore, he had gone forth into the Western world, and quickly mastered *their* methods. His knowledge now transcended that of any man on earth, and he was further aided by direct inspiration from Mulge, who gave him power to read the secret thoughts of all men, and to detach his spirit from his body and traverse vast distances in an instant of time. No man could play him false, for treachery became known to him in an instant, and the death of the traitor followed. "Therefore, let traitors beware," said Amarbal, and, as his gaze swept over the vast crowd a stillness fell upon it

like that of death. As for Lo Hoy, he fairly trembled in his wooden-soled shoes, for he well knew in his heart that he had a sneaking regard for Europeans, "Sini, and George Stleet Nor,'" where he had accumulated the little fortune for which he had the greatest regard of all. As soon as he could do so he retreated, without waiting to hear more, and a few days later managed to escape to Singapore in a small sailing craft manned by native Christians, who had been heavily paid to convey a number of Europeans to a place of safety. From Singapore Lo Hoy had sailed to London, and, immediately after landing in the latter city, had been warned in a dream, he said, to communicate what he knew to Mistlee Sull'van, of whose very presence in London he had previously been in ignorance.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Much of what Amarbal had uttered was beyond Lo Hoy's comprehension, but he repeated what he had heard as nearly as his memory served him, and Professor Lamson's knowledge enabled him to supply all deficiencies, and prepare a connected and comprehensible narrative, and this the Europeans sat discussing after the Chinaman had left.

"Well, what do you make of this rigmarole?" asked Sullivan, when he had transcribed, and the Professor had corrected, Lo Hoy's statement.

"I don't call it rigmarole," said Lamson. "On the contrary, I consider it a very clear statement, and believe it to be quite true."

"But all that stuff about the Arcadians, or Arkangels,

or whatever they were, and Mulled Gin, the god of the hinder world?"

"That is quite accurate; the Akkads were an ancient race of the Mongolian stock, and they undoubtedly *did* impart much knowledge to the Chaldeans and Assyrians, and through them to the Western world. Mulge, god of the under—not hinder—world, was one of their deities."

"But do you believe that this Amarbal, or Mueller, as we know him, is really one of that race, and inspired by Mulge? If he is inspired by anyone, it is the devil, *I* should say."

"Well, orthodox people would probably say that Mulge *was* the devil," replied the Professor. "For my part, I prefer to advance no opinion on this part of the narrative, but one thing is absolutely certain, namely, that the majority of the Chinese will believe it."

"And it is also certain that Amarbal could not have hit on a better method of rousing them to the enthusiasm necessary for the carrying on of a holy war against the European nations," said Morwell.

"Quite so; and the time is opportune, for they were already animated by a deadly hatred of foreigners. He must be a marvellously able man."

"The ablest man the world has ever seen," said Morwell, "and that he has some of the powers he claims, such as that of traversing space in spirit, we can vouch for—eh, Crosby?"

"Rather; I have seen his disembodied spook too often for my peace of mind."

"And I, too, though I only saw him once," said Sullivan. "Shall I ever forget the way he killed poor old Schwartz?"

"He is no dreamer, and does not neglect the material for the occult, though," said Edward Lamson, thoughtfully. "I consider his move in first seizing Australia as masterly in the highest degree. Separated far from the rest of the world, and sparsely inhabited, it offered him an opportunity of maturing his plans, and securing a perfect natural base for his extensive operations, such as was offered by no other country. In Sydney he secured the finest harbour in the world, with a limitless back country from which to draw supplies, and at the same time found railways, workshops, and all other conveniences of civilisation ready made to his hand. He must have been preparing for years."

"For many years, I should say," said the Professor, "and the limitless wealth secured by his discoveries in connection with the metals placed all the resources of civilisation at his disposal. He has, in fact, employed the mechanical knowledge of the Westerns against themselves, and his command, in addition, of forces of which they know nothing, makes him, indeed, a formidable foe."

"Too formidable altogether," said Sullivan, "and I for one shall retire in his favour. Kindly get someone

else to carry on the revelation business in my place, Mr. Lamson. I am thinking of taking up farming in Greenland, which is, I understand, a very fertile and peaceful country."

"It is too late now, Mr. Sullivan," said the Secretary, smiling, "events have hemmed you in, as it were, and we cannot do without you, and if there is a struggle coming, which I must say looks extremely probable, you will be in the thick of it, I fear."

"My luck," groaned Sullivan, "and to make matters worse, the struggle will be useless, for it's all up with our sinful portion of the human race—just when I had the ball at my foot, too, and all was smiling. Oh, why did I leave old Ireland?"

"Would you have been any safer there?"

"I don't know; I think so. Ireland is a holy country; St. Patrick and all the saints made it so, and then the people live good lives. It was going about with Englishmen that first ruined me. I'd have been all right if I'd stuck to my own countrymen."

"You used to say that it was Sydney ruined you," said Crosby.

"Well, Sydney is run on English—and that's the same thing as sinful—lines."

"Well, go back to Ireland, and hide in the mill at Smithereens, or whatever you call the outlandish place in which you were born. It is the very last place that

Amarbal will go to, for he'll exploit all the habitable portions of the globe first."

"Ah! go on, you benighted Sassenach; you and your sort have brought destruction on the world, and that's enough. Give me some whisky, for my heart is in my boots, and (in parenthesis), may Mulge, any other gee, or the devil run away with Lo Hoy, for he has completely destroyed my peace of mind this evening."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"For ways that are dark and tricks that are vain the Heathen Chinee is peculiar," remarked Truthful James on an immortal occasion, and nothing has yet arisen to cause the European or American to dissent from this opinion. This being so, it is not surprising that Lamson's Chief received Lo Hoy's statement with incredulity, and expressed suspicions of a trick. However, having considered the supporting evidence of Sullivan and his friends, and reflected that "a Chinaman, though not a reliable witness, is better than a spook," he decided to act, and communicated the substance of the ex-draper's statement to all the Governments in Europe. The result was that the "din of preparation" swelled into a roar, and the nations girded themselves for a mortal struggle,

for was not the Yellow Terror about to burst on them at last, and not as a half-armed rabble, but possessing means of destruction hitherto undreamt of, and led by a man whose genius bordered on the superhuman?

As the popular alarm became greater, Sullivan saw a golden opportunity, and diving into the British Museum, diligently read up all the information he could obtain concerning former Asiatic irruptions. The great historical parallel was, of course, the Mongolian invasion of the thirteenth century, and Sullivan, in a lurid and alarmist article, now reminded all whom it might concern that when the forces of Ogotai, son of Gengis Khan, fell on Europe, in 1241, they overran Russia, and a great part of Germany, Bohemia and Hungary in less than two months, defeating in succession the Polish Prince Miczielas, Henry II. of Silesia, Wenceslas of Bohemia, and Frederick II. of Germany, with his allies the Hungarians. Further, he recalled the events of the fifty years preceding, during which Gengis, or Tchingiz, Khan conquered all the Manchu portion of China, Thibet, Afghanistan, Beluchistan, Bokhara and Persia; and he freely prophesied that Amarbal would now do what Gengis and Ogotai had done before him. They had been opposed by the flower of European chivalry, armed in the most approved fashion of the time, yet had swept over the country as though not opposed at all, and would, without doubt, have conquered all Europe but for the recall of the forces to China in

readiness for the invasion of Japan, which took place some years later.

The armament of the Mongolians was inferior to that of their opponents in those days, but that of Amarbal was vastly superior to anything possessed by the Western nations, as was shown by the events in Sydney, and during the progress of the submarine fleet to China. That Amarbal would ruthlessly use his dreadful instruments of destruction no one could doubt, after what had occurred. His object was to exterminate, and he would pursue it like a true Mongolian. He well knew that his power would never be secure so long as any considerable portion of the Aryan race remained, and so he would be even more remorseless than his predecessor, Gengis, behind whose army "marched another army of Chinese functionaries, used to the machinery of government, and bent only on wringing the last farthing out of the conquered people. Everyone who resisted the advance of the Khan's armies was massacred; the other able-bodied males either set to work as carriers and pioneers for the army, or sent with their good-looking sisters to the worst of slavery in China, and all useless mouths were cut off with as much consideration as if they were kittens." Before that awful visitation the last vestiges of the civilisation established in Asia by Alexander the Great and his Greek and Roman successors, sunk, never to revive, and in like manner would disappear the latter-day civilisation of the West

before the onset of Amarbal and his hordes. So ran Mr. Sullivan's theme, and its results were such that in a few days he was able to boast with some truth that "London was in a bluer funk than ever Sydney had been."

"Well, there is a very good cause for it, apart from your penny-dreadful writings altogether," said Crosby, to whom the remark was made.

"I admit it, my boy, and was only stating a fact. Personally, as I said the other night, I am in as great a funk as anyone, more especially as that cold-blooded villain Lamson has darkly hinted that where the British Army sees fit to venture its fat head, I must go, too."

"You know in your heart that you enjoy the prospect of a fight, Sullivan."

"Well, if it were not for Mary, I don't know that I should mind being in a scrap for once—though I am a peaceful man by nature. Besides, there is the great *revanche* to be considered. This infamous Turanian dared to lift sacreligious hands against the only remnant of the illustrious house of Sullivan, and would undoubtedly have perforated the epigastrium of the said remnant with a conical leaden missile, but for the providential protection afforded by the last bit of family *vertu*. He must die."

"Yet he set the remnant on his feet, too, and that when he was going at bargain-counter prices in Sydney. You would never have been the frock-coated, champagne-

drinking, society-sought swell you now are, Sullivan, but for Amarbal."

"That's true, but he never meant to do me a good turn, so that cannot go to his credit. Further, he has let me in for a life which does not suit me a bit. I was meant for a Bedouin, I think.

"I never was fond of hard work;
It didn't come kind to the Bradys.
But I'd make a most illigant Turk,
For I'm fond of tobacco and ladies."

"Well, I fear you will soon have to forswear the society of ladies, Sullivan," said Morwell, who had entered, looking very grave.

"What's up now?" asked the pressman, his gaiety vanishing as he noted the expression of the other's face.

"Ella says that a great movement is about to take place in Manchuria, where an enormous force has been concentrated."

"Whew!" said Sullivan. "We're in for it now."

They were, for from this on "event thundered on event with startling and portenteous rapidity," to quote the inflated language of an Exeter Hall orator, when predicting—some fifty years ago—the then impending destruction of the world.

CHAPTER XXX.

"The Chinks are off, and the divil himself won't stop them now," shouted Sullivan, as he burst into the room in which Morwell and Crosby sat at luncheon.

"Well, we knew it was coming. But has any definite news arrived?"

"Yes, here it is," and Sullivan read an "Extra Special" headed "The Eastern Terror," "Mongols Moving in Masses from Manchuria," to the effect that a vast force had crossed the Chinese frontier, and was advancing Westward.

"They've started, and will be in Europe in their own good time. You know, of course, what Ella told Lamson, about the warnings of our F.O. being lost on the Mus-

covites, who have no fight left in them, after Vladivostock. They'll make no stand, you'll see."

Ella and Mr. Sullivan, in the event proved truthful prophets, for the wholesale destruction of life at Vladivostock had spread a superstitious panic amongst the Russian forces in the East, and they could not be brought to face the Mongol army, which advanced rapidly Northward and Westward. They fell back from town to town, and as they went an ever-increasing rabble of fugitives impeded their movements, and reduced their discipline. Yielding at last to the frantic adjurations of their superior officers, the army, now swollen to enormous dimensions by the accession of the various garrisons along the route, made a stand at Yeniseisk, on the Yenesei River, and was practically annihilated in two hours, without being able to come into contact with the enemy at all.

Vague rumours of a great defeat first reached London, then a definite announcement of the overthrow of the Russian army, and finally full details of the disaster wired to the *Times* by its special correspondent, who fortunately for himself had not reached the army, and received his information from fugitives. They stated that from the direction in which the Chinese army was supposed to be advancing, though it was miles away, had come wave on wave of the deadly gas, which had previously wrought such destruction, and in a moment all was confusion in the vast army. Those in the front ranks rushed madly back

on those behind, who, in turn, tried to escape by retreating on the town, and the thousands of unarmed fugitives who crowded the streets. The Cavalry and Artillery, spurring and flogging their horses like madmen, galloped through the flying masses, trampling on and killing hundreds in their ruthless course. Every avenue of escape finally became so blocked that progress was impossible, and the subtle agent of destruction, flowing silently on, soon reduced to stillness the whole tortured mass. Only those on the flanks—mostly cavalry—escaped, and they, jibbering and gesticulating in blind terror, conveyed the awful news to the nearest garrison, whence it was disseminated over the world, and brought horror into every house in Christendom.

Sullivan conveyed the news to the Pritchard's, and on announcing it, was at once clasped in the arms of Mary, who said, "You will not go to fight those dreadful wretches?"

"Not by myself, my love; indeed, my personal inclination just now is to go West rather than East."

"But you will go later on?"

"Well, dear, if the entire British army escorts me I suppose I'll have to go, by compulsion if not of my own free will. Lamson, Lord Ronan, and other official despots seem to think Christendom can't be saved without me—and the rest of our circle."

"This is all Ella's doing," said Mary, rebelliously.

"She is not to blame, Mary, and like the rest of us, is only an instrument in the hands of Fate. I am only a minor instrument—a Jew's harp, or penny whistle, as it were—and incidentally I may remark that I wish Fate had begun to play on me before the fibres of my being were attuned to the sacred theme of love. Ah! Mary, you have made me put a miser's value on my poor life, for don't I know that in the inscrutable mystery of things it has come to have a value for *you*."

"Oh, John."

"Mary, my own!"

Sob, kiss, sob; kiss and *exeunt*—sobbing (and kissing) in direction of conservatory.

Miss Manse afforded Captain Marshall an opportunity of administering consolation in a similar manner, for on receipt of the direful news, she fainted into his arms, but he only said "howid disaster, bai Jove" (in reference to the affair at Yeniseisk, let us hope), and bore his charming burden to the nearest couch. The rest of the household received the message with a measure of stoicism—though Uncle Tom and the Colonel, who were present, looked rather pale, and muttered, the one something concerning "investments," and the other about "going 'way home to 'Murika;" and Ella presently said "The invaders will meet with no opposition in Asia."

Events proved her right again, for the Russians offered practically no further resistance to the progress of Amar-

bal's armies, of which, it now became known, three were advancing on Europe—the Northern by way of Tobolsk and Perin to St. Petersburg; the Central, which had been encamped near the Desert of Gobi, by way of Bokhara and Teheran to Constantinople and Southern Europe; and the third and smallest by way of Thibet, Cashmir, and Northern India to Persia, where it would reinforce the Central Army, it was conjectured.

What was happening in the rear of these armies was not known in Europe, but it was rumoured that all Sclavs and Semites who did not succeed in escaping were slain, while the Tartars and other Mongols were enlisted in the armies, which thus gathered strength as they proceeded.

The panic which had overcome the Russians was due as much to superstition as to physical fear, for ever in the sky above the van of the Mongol armies, at night time, flamed the Symbol under which Amarbal marched to conquest—"The Celestial Hand," as it was named by the *Times* correspondent. This correspondent learned from a peasant, who had awakened in the morning to find a section of the Mongolian forces within a few hundred yards of his hut, that all the banners, and even the uniforms of the soldiers, bore upon them the device of a red hand. The peasant also declared that when flying towards the watch fires of his retiring compatriots that night, he had seen the figure of a man, whom he conjectured to be Amarbal, stretched along the sky from the

horizon to the zenith, and "looking down" on the retiring army.

The Russian armies finally degenerated into disorganised rabbles, and when they passed into Europe fully three-fourths of the soldiers were unarmed, having thrown away their rifles in their flight, while every cannon and machine gun had been lost.

Once in Russia, however, they regained a measure of courage, and made some attempt to reform behind the Germans, who, on first receipt of the news of Yeniseisk, had been pushed forward over the Russian border, and now guarded the European frontier from the Kara Sea to the Caspian.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Will the German's make a stand, Ella?"

"Yes, Fred, but it will be unsuccessful."

"What! after all that information which we have given the F.O. and Lord Ronan?"

"Yes, for when transmitted to Germany it was treated with scorn. Confident in their scientific knowledge, they are relying on their modern armament, and on an invention of one of their scientists which will enable them to nullify the great destructive agent of the foe. Unfortunately, this is only one of many such agents at his command, and so he will be again victorious, though a step in the direction of successfully meeting him will have been taken."

"And so the Teuton as a bulwark will prove as useless

as the Sclav," said Sullivan. "I can see this thing working my way as clear as daylight, and it will remain for us to stay the Mongol rush. Are we to go yet, Ella?"

"No, not yet."

"But will they have to go at all?" asked Mary, anxiously.

"I think so, though, as I told you before, I only know of events close at hand."

"Oh, it is awful!" said Mary, with a sob, and even the eyes of the less-emotional Kate Grant filled with tears, as she tenderly returned the pressure of Crosby's hand, while Morwell, on whom a habit of taciturnity seemed to be growing of late, watched Ella with an expression in which pain and resignation were curiously blended.

And then came news of the event. As Ella had suggested, the Germans had no superstitious fears, and believed that they were opposing a leader who had, by virtue of extraordinary intelligence, anticipated scientific discoveries by a decade or two. That Amarbal was a supernatural being, or was aided by supernatural beings, they did not believe for a moment. He was a man, and against the efforts of a man men could guard. As for themselves, they were fighting for life, for family, for the Fatherland, for civilisation, and that was sufficient, and they therefore did not take very seriously the Kaiser's statement that Providence was on their side, though they duly applauded the announcement—made with the

authority of one who is sure of his allies. They were more interested when he went on to state that Herr Steiner, the great mechanician, had invented and constructed a machine which, he hoped and believed, would be successful in literally counterblasting the worst danger they had to fear, namely, the poisonous gas used by the Mongols. The "Hochs" which greeted this statement had scarcely died away when the appliance itself was brought into evidence, and proved to be an enormous blowing machine mounted on wheels, and obtaining the motive power required from a horizontal oil engine attached to it. The machine was tested in the presence of the army, and was so entirely successful that it blew Baron Von Kummelwasser—who inadvertently rode in front of it just as the fan was set in motion—off his horse, as if he had been a feather. Everyone in the army (except the Baron) was satisfied with this trial, and as orders were given by the Kaiser for a thousand of the machines, to be made without delay, the spirits of the soldiers rose mightily. At length came the fateful moment when, from a distant hill, the outposts signalled the approach of the Northern Mongol Army, which was the first to impinge on the European frontier.

Scarcely had the alarm been given when mounted scouts came galloping frantically from all directions, which was taken as a sign that the noxious gas was already in use. Accordingly, the blowing machines were put into use, and

roaring blasts of air were soon passing from their wide mouths and sweeping over the country like a tornado. That they were to be successful was instantly apparent, for horsemen who had been dropping over their saddles in stupefaction, were seen to sit up, and look round them as though completely restored, and at the sight a shout of joy burst from the army. Hope and confidence revived, war balloons were instantly sent up, guns were trained in readiness, and expectant officers stood at the telephones connected with the balloons, anxiously awaiting instructions as to the direction in which the first shots were to be fired. No such instructions were given, however, and those in the balloons, after sweeping the country below them for miles with powerful glasses, reported that they could not see the enemy.

Half-an-hour passed in expectation and anxiety, and then a screaming sound was heard, an enormous missile rushed over the plain, and, striking on the foot of the hills at a distance of three miles, burst with an explosion that shook the ground like an earthquake, stampeded thousands of horses, and precipitated half the rear ranks of the army to the ground.

The power of the shell was so enormous, and range of the gun projecting it evidently so great, that even experienced artillery officers glanced at each other in apprehension, and the results of a second shot directed so as to fall in the midst of the army were awaited with trepida-

tion. No such shell followed, however, and all began to breathe freely as the hope that the gun had been damaged by the first discharge gained ground.

Whether this was so or not, no further sign was made by the enemy that day, and in doubt, and a condition of extreme tension, the Germans stood to their arms till the shadows of night fell.

Darkness had not long set in when, from the far Eastern horizon a streak of red light crept up into the sky, until its extreme point was above the expectant Germans, who presently gave vent to a long sigh of astonishment as the red gleam gradually assumed definite shape, and Amarbal's threatening symbol—the Celestial Hand—stood revealed. As the thousands whom it menaced gazed upon it, it extended further into the arc of the sky, and the most materialistic scientist present felt a thrill of superstitious fear as he saw the presentment of a man's head, in vivid red, rise above the horizon. Slowly the gigantic figure emerged from beneath the earth line, and extended into the sky until the whole body was visible, and the enormous head was above the army. For a while it remained thus, and then the head was seen to move and the great face seemed to look down upon them.

Fascinated, they gazed upwards, and in their preoccupation did not notice a number of dark objects which had crept up the sky from the North and distributed themselves over the whole area occupied by the army.

Suddenly the figure disappeared, thousands of flashes of light rained down on the earth from the sky, explosions took place in all directions, choking bluish fumes rose from the ground, and covered everything like a pall. . . .

A veritable pall it proved, for beneath it lay fully two-thirds of the German Army which had been concentrated at that point, stark in death.

CHAPTER XXXII.

As the gigantic plans of the mighty Eastern genius were successively revealed, and each well-considered step was attended with success, the heart of Christendom became fainter, and, when the direful news of the German overthrow was spread abroad, its beats may be said to have ceased. Action there was none for a time, for who could stay for a moment the resistless onrush of the yellow wave which would efface the Aryan civilisation, as the rising tide obliterates the sand castles of children.

On the first dark day following the receipt of the news in London, it might truthfully be said that but two persons in the whole vast city did not despair—Ella Pritchard and her faithful disciple, Morwell. Crosby even lost heart, and Sullivan alternately prayed and swore, and

called high Heaven to witness that this was a judgment on him for leaving Ireland, and deserting Mother Church "to follow the teachings of evil spirits."

"I'm lost here and hereafter, Crosby," he said to his equally despondent, but less noisy Australian friend, "*Miserere mei—Domine dirige nos*: In the midst of life we are in death—all flesh is grass. J. P. Sullivan is an ass. Oh! my uncle, whileloo murder, why did you die?"

"Oh, give us a rest! Think of Mary, and be a man, you wretched Irisher."

"Think of Kate and be a man, you miserable Australian. You're as 'down' as I am, but lack my power of expression."

"For which I am thankful; and now let us pull ourselves together, and try to cheer up the girls."

In this object they succeeded so well, that, when Ella entered the darkened drawing-room of the Pritchard domicile, she found two despairing couples in different corners, bathed in tears, and locked in each other's arms.

With a few calm and incisive words she soothed their fears, and bade them be of good courage, for all would yet be well.

It was impossible to listen to her without being reassured, and the volatile Sullivan, in particular, recovered his courage so completely, that, ere midnight, he was thirsting to meet the Mongol, and singing "Shons of the Shee," and other warlike ditties as he wended his way

unsteadily along Shaftesbury Avenue from the "Cri'," whence he had previously despatched Uncle Tom, Captain Marshall, and the Colonel to their respective homes, in cabs, and a regrettable state of "stimulation," following on what he called a "revival supper."

During his temporary depression, Sullivan made one hundred and forty vows of amendment—or so Crosby said—and of these he kept one, namely, a determination to write no more pessimistic, or unnecessarily alarmist articles. He was not altogether without sense, and saw clearly that the situation was grave enough in all conscience, without his endeavouring to make it worse. He therefore entered the now sorely-diminished ranks of the optimists, and, having the faculty of writing forcibly in accordance with his latest mood, a rousing article from his pen soon appeared, and did something towards restoring the mental equilibrium of a section of the public. He followed with another and another, a number of other writers took up the theme, and, as the courage of the people returned, these articles were more and more read and quoted, until the light of hope, which had flickered and almost gone out, began to shine forth clearly once more.

Encouragement, advice, and assistance were accorded to France, which mercurial nation, though daunted at first by the downfall of their one-time enemies, the

Germans, had quickly regained courage, and now awaited the fray almost with impatience.

Meanwhile, the Mongolians, as though sure of success, and indifferent to any feeble preparations that might be made against them, advanced leisurely, enjoying the fruits of conquest as they went in their own peculiar manner—a manner which roused fierce hatred in the breasts of the Europeans, as tales of horrors almost unthinkable reached their ears, and a once-smiling country was given over to ruin and desolation.

It was some six weeks after the overthrow of the Kaiser's army that the first section of the advancing horde appeared on the frontier of Germany—the Southern and central armies in the meantime having overrun Turkey and Southern Europe almost to Vienna. By this time the French Government had perfected the wonderful flying machine which they had been secretly experimenting on for years, and believed in firmly as the means whereby France would stand at the head of the nations of the world in power and influence. "La Diable Bleu," as the soldiers called it from its sky blue colour, was certainly a formidable engine of destruction, for it rose from even flat ground as readily as a balloon, moved with the celerity of an express train when aloft, and was capable of carrying a considerable number of shells and cylinders charged with chemicals, with which it was proposed to repay Amarbal's gaseous courtesies. He had

had it all his own way so far, this wonderful Akkadian, but when "La Diable Bleu" paid him a visit things would be different—ah! ah! And so the French awaited the approach of the foe with confidence, if not actual impatience.

He did not arrive when expected, and a perfect flock of blue devils was out in all directions looking for him, when the French army suddenly went mad. A strange excitement took possession of everyone; faces became flushed, pulses rose to 120; maniacal gestures were indulged in; soldiers seized their rifles and discharged them in all directions; cannon boomed out; machine guns spluttered, and generally Pandemonium reigned, after which a panic took possession of the troops, and they retreated in disorder.

When some fifteen miles had been covered, reason began to reassert itself; heart beats became less rapid, and finally the army halted, and regained a portion of its order. Then M. Monet, a scientist, approached the General in supreme command, and informed him that he suspected the cause of the excitement to be the prevalence of an undue proportion of oxygen in the atmosphere of the area occupied at the time of the outbreak.

"But how was such a condition brought about?" the General asked, incredulously.

"Either by the withdrawal of nitrogen, the other main constituent of the atmosphere, by some means un-

known to us, or by the forcing in of volumes of oxygen artificially generated."

This theory found ready acceptance amongst the scientists present, and the military men—after wishing a foe who employed such methods in a region where the consumption of oxygen in the chemical processes of combustion is popularly supposed to prevail eternally—had perforce to accept the theory, and blankly ask themselves what was to be done next? If they could get within striking distance of Amarbal and his Mongolians they would make Lyons sausages and bouillon of their bodies, drums and saddles of their skins, and pate de fois gras of their livers, but in this accursed war of fumes and stinks no anatomical joys of the kind were obtainable. Oh! for the good old days of Charles Martel, the hammer of the infidel, when courage, muscle, and cold steel decided the question of supremacy! Regret for the past, with its simple and satisfactory methods of slaughter, would not help them in the present, however, and there was nothing for it but to devise fresh means of meeting a foe who was within measurable distance of proving himself omnipotent.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

While these events were progressing, the British army had sailed, and in the *entourage* of Lord Ronan went Morwell, Crosby and Sullivan.

The parting scene at Kensington—like many another —was harrowing in the extreme, and but for Ella's reassuring presence and words, the girls at all events would have gone almost insane with grief and despair. At length—they scarcely knew how—the young men tore themselves away, Morwell bearing with him an ineffacable picture of serene, saint-like features, and hearing ever the words which were as balm to his aching heart—"In spirit I will be with you always."

The army landed in Belgium and marched at once to join its allies, and, as they drew nearer to the scene of

action, Crosby and Sullivan shook off more of their depression, and, feeling fully confident of success—with the knowledge they possessed—became in the end actually impatient for the struggle.

The spirits of the French were greatly raised by the arrival of the British, and this feeling increased almost to the point of elation when it became known that the latter were in possession of some extraordinary knowledge which gave them good hopes of being able to meet all the devices of their common foe, and, what is more, attack him by methods which were as far in advance of his own as his had hitherto been superior to those employed by the Western nations.

After a hasty conference of the leaders, it was arranged that the combined armies should fall back to the frontier of France, which was now held by the Russians, Germans, Austrians, Spaniards, and, in fact, troops of all the nations of Europe.

At a great Council of War held in Metz, Lord Ronan, the British Commander-in-Chief, revealed the position to his allies in a speech that was listened to with an interest never vouchsafed to a speech before, for on it hung, not the fate of a nation, but that of the civilized world. This was not a war of the kind made familiar to them by history, he said—a war of strategy and material weapons only—but was something unheard of before, a scientific war; a war of chemistry, if he might use such a term, in

the course of which subtle and powerful agents of destruction hitherto undreamt of had been used, with the effects they knew of, by their terrible foe. Going further than that, it took them beyond the scope of men's knowledge derived through the senses, and employed forces which had hitherto, for want of knowledge, been vaguely termed psychic or occult. A few months ago he would have laughed at, or pitied, anyone who had talked as he himself was now doing, but facts had conquered him, as they had the executive heads of the great Empire whose servant he was, and with them he believed, nay, knew, that their foe had sources of information at his command which, but a short time back, would have been described as supernatural, but which really were merely the result of an extension of human knowledge. To meet the extraordinary knowledge possessed by their enemy it was necessary for them to obtain equal knowledge, otherwise they would infallibly be crushed, and this his Government had obtained—(sensation)—and obtained through the agency of a woman.

A hoarse murmur of astonishment went up from those who knew English, as Lord Ronan made this statement, and, as the meaning of his words was conveyed to those ignorant of the language, volleys of comments and ejaculations followed. Many of those present imagined the British General to have become a victim to the insanity which had been so prevalent since Amarbal's progress

commenced; but others, who knew his reputation, and that of his countrymen, for caution and cool-headedness, believed that he had good grounds for his statements, and waited anxiously to hear more.

They were not disappointed, for, when order had been restored, he went on to describe how one of the members of the British Cabinet had been informed that a certain person possessed accurate knowledge of Amarbal's movements, intentions, and agents of destruction, and, in the interests of humanity, wished to impart this to the Government. Without going into details of the doubts held and difficulties raised, he might tell them that the person in question—a woman—had convinced the entire Cabinet, and a Committee composed of the leading scientific men in his Kingdom, that she actually did possess the knowledge claimed, and was able to place in their hands information which, when applied, would enable them to completely overthrow the foe, and preserve the great Aryan civilisation.

Loud exclamations of excited satisfaction followed this statement, which was renewed when the speaker went on to state that his army actually had brought with it the agents whereby they would neutralise Amarbal's greatest efforts, and with the aid of the means already invented by their allies hurl destruction on the Mongolian, and for ever remove the greatest danger which had menaced Europe. Further details followed, and for two entire

days and nights the Council sat, and a plan of campaign for the decisive struggle was decided on.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

In a position, the centre of which was Metz, the Europeans awaited the shock which was to be final, for all knew that further retreat was impossible, and that they might as well die then as a little later on. In due course the approach of the Mongol army, now swollen to enormous dimensions, was heralded by its symbol, The Celestial Hand, which was followed, as on former occasions by the gigantic presentment of Amarbal stretching across the sky. Long did the figure remain gazing down on the Aryan forces; and the millions who watched it in silent awe felt a conviction that Amarbal was truly and literally "gazing" on them, and that his material brain received all impressions gathered by the eyes of the great figure stretched above them.

"Ay, you see us all right, old Blood and Murder," said Sullivan, shaking his head at the figure, "and I swear you see what discomposes you. Your gun is spiked, old Cockalorum, and you won't have a walk-over *this* time—in spite of Mulled-gee or all the other yellow divils who help you."

"Blest if he doesn't hear you," exclaimed Crosby, as the figure was seen to clench its hand and shake it threateningly."

"He hears me, right enough—he'd hear a whisper in Alaska, in my opinion—but I don't care; I'm not afraid of him. Look here, Mr. Amarbal, *alias* Mueller, I was one of those who gave your show away, and made known the means by which you will be—be—bowled out, as it were. Euchred, you'll be all right. Why, we have here a——"

"Shut up, Sullivan!" exclaimed Crosby, seizing the excited speaker's arm. "Do you want to give *our* show away, too? Haven't you said that he can hear all we say?"

"That's right, Crosby, I wasn't thinking; but see, he's fading. Ta-ta, old Yellow Agony; you'll hear of us later."

"Yes, and we will hear of him, or I am mistaken," said Morwell. You may be certain that he knows, or will know, that it was through our instrumentality, or that of Ella, to speak more correctly, that his plans and methods of warfare were made known."

"Well, we can't help it if he does for us," said Sullivan. "We'll die in a good cause, anyhow. Did I ever think that I, John Patrick Sullivan, of Skibbereen, Sydney, London, and a few other places, would be instrumental in saving the world? All the same, I wish the shindy was well over; and further, that I was not so mixed up in it as to be a kind of intermediary between human and extra-human intelligences. There goes the signal that the gas is coming. Oh! Moses, we're in for it now."

As he spoke a rocket flared up into the sky from the lookout tower which commanded the country for miles round, and in an instant the great army was in active movement. Within a minute 5000 of Steiner's machines were in full blast, but this time they blew, as well as air, a gas prepared by British scientists which, meeting that of the Mongolians, generated a cloud or haze, which was blown back upon the whole position occupied by Amarbal. Screened from view by this cloud, the European front ranks were pushed steadily forward, and it was hoped that they would come within such distance of their foe as to be enabled to use artillery; but only one card in Amarbal's hand had been trumped, for a little later a storm of projectiles descended on the earth, and the choking blue fumes which had wrought such navoc in the German army arose in clouds. But now each soldier drew down a kind of visor which had been fitted to his helmet, and which, communicating with a small reservoir strapped

to his back, gave him a supply of air sufficient to last eight minutes. He then detached a small glass grenade from his belt, and threw it on the ground, and in a moment the blue fumes were in combination with a gas which converted them into a harmless powder, which the great blowing machines—turned this way and that—swept away in clouds.

As the scene cleared, the flying machines whence the projectiles had been dropped became visible, and a flock of "Les Diables Bleu" sailed grandly to attack them. A furious aerial battle—the first of its kind—was soon in full progress, at the same time that the earth-shaking boom of monster guns announced that Amarbal had brought his terrible artillery into action. The Europeans now played their trump card, and the "Devastator," the crowning glory of the British, was brought into action. This fearful machine, by electricity or other means not made known, generated heat to the extent of 3000 degrees, and sent sheets of flame roaring across the country in the direction of the opposing army. Herbage, trees, and vegetation of all kinds burst into flame, and water was instantly generated into steam beneath the fiery breath of the monster, which at once demonstrated itself as the most terrible instrument of destruction yet invented. Nothing living could stand against it, and in a very brief space the cessation of artillery fire gave good grounds for believing that the Mongolian Army was in full retreat. By this time

"Les Diables," being more effectively armed, and constructed of heavier metal than the flying machines of the enemy, had disposed of the latter, either by causing them to retreat, or by so riddling them with shot that their mechanism was destroyed, and they were precipitated to the ground with all their living freight.

The Devastators soon ceased operations, and over the blackened and smoking country—lately a fair landscape, now an inferno—the army advanced with caution. Presently the veil of smoke and dust lifted somewhat, and away in the distance was seen the vast Mongol army spread over the country, as far as the eye could reach, in full retreat. At the sight a roar of cheering went up that shook the very air, and men, throwing down their arms, grasped each other's hands, embraced, and shed tears of joy. The evil was averted, and Amarbal, the hitherto invincible and terrible, was checked at last.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Though the triumphant advance of the Mongolians had been checked, and their faith in the leader's omnipotence rudely shaken, they were yet far too numerous and strong in resources to be crushed by one battle, or a dozen. Sullenly they retreated, fighting every now and again, and converting the country as they went into an absolute desert. As Russia was traversed, and the country became rougher and wilder, the great engines of scientific warfare were gradually left behind, owing to the impossibility of transporting them, and by the time pursuer and pursued had crossed the Ural Mountains the war had become one of artillery, rifles, and the usual weapons of modern times; and as the struggle progressed, and the tide of conflict swept over the desert Steppes of Siberia, even these were

gradually discarded. Almost all the efforts of both sides were now directed to maintaining the food supply, and it became impossible to do this and at the same time convey heavy guns and ammunition. The main line of retreat was far to the Southward of the trans-Siberian railway, and the only porterage available was that of animals, and this soon proved quite inadequate for the conveyance of heavy munitions of war. When finally, at Alakul, on the frontiers of China, Amarbal turned like a boar at bay, and it was seen that *the* great battle had yet to be fought, both sides were armed very much as were their ancestors of the days of Gengis and Ogotai, for they had little more than swords, and guns which could not be discharged for lack of cartridges, but had bayonets on the barrels, and therefore represented the spears of olden time. Those who in the commencement prophesied that the war would be one of mere brute force, in the end were proved right; while those who had maintained that it would be a scientific war, in which the most learned in modern methods would win, could not be said to have been wrong. The Titanic struggle had, in fact, passed through all phases and ages of warlike methods, and was now reduced to a very primitive stage indeed. Many of the Europeans were armed with any kind of weapon they had been able to pick up on the march; and some, who had annexed the arms dropped in flight by the enemy, displayed spears, crooked swords with unprotected hilts, and even bows and arrows.

Perhaps the most singularly-armed individual in the whole army was the illustrious Sullivan, who, with his friends, had come safely through many a hard-fought contest, and league on league of weary marching, "with the commissariat stuck on the stairs—or Steppes—a thousand miles away, and whisky a sweet and beautiful memory only."

Soon after crossing the Ural Mountains, he had discovered an overturned and deserted waggon, which contained curios evidently plundered from some museum in Germany or Russia by the Chinese. Amongst them were several suits of complete armour, and one of these and various weapons Sullivan had annexed, and in some mysterious manner managed to convey to the very frontier of China. When the firing era passed, and day after day hand-to-hand conflicts became more general, he donned his panoply, and rode proudly forth on a stolen Cossack pony. His appearance was scarcely that of "a knyghte of ye olden time," though he fondly believed that it was so. The suit was of mail, and the hose being drawn on over trousers, his legs presented a mis-shapen and bulgy appearance, while two inches of dirty flannel shirt showed above the steel at the warrior's throat. The helmet fitted fairly well, and having a mail hood, and being ornamented with a singular-looking plume or tuft of red feathers in the centre, imparted to the wearer a tolerably crusader-like appearance from the back, which was somewhat marred

when closer inspection showed that the "plume" was a small feather duster, which he had obtained heaven knows how. Having to discard his coat, and there being no pockets in the mail shirt, he had constructed a small apron from an old sack, and furnished it with a large pocket on either side. This elegant addition to his knightly apparel he had fastened round his waist with a leather horse-girth, to which was suspended a large-bladed battle-axe on one side, and on the other an immense dagger with a steel hilt. On his right foot he had a British infantry "brogue," and on his left a Cossack jack-boot with a spur on the heel. In his hand was a bamboo lance, and his appearance was further embellished by a disreputable-looking briarwood pipe, which he held between his teeth by the stem, the mouthpiece having long since disappeared. Sullivan undoubtedly created a sensation as he cantered along with his feet nearly touching the ground, and his cross-grained pony jibbing and rearing every time the one spur grazed its legs, or ill-poised lance caught it in the ribs.

"Good heavens! Sullivan, is that you?" was Crosby's salutation as the strange figure drew up beside him.

"Yes, it's me all right; and for the moment I am what I used to long to be when a kinchin in Skibbereen—'A warrior bold, with spurs of gold;' only my one spur is made of pot metal instead of gold. I took for my models Brian de Bois Guilbert, Cœur de Lion and Marmion, and with a *soupçon* of Thunderbolt and Ned Kelly added, I

now present a complete and harmonious whole such as the palmiest times of chivalry could not have produced."

"That is very true; but you won't be able to fight in that absurd get-up."

"Won't I, faith? Guns and all modern diviltry are at a discount now, my boy; and with this tin suit and dish-cover to protect me, and meat-cleaver to admonish the foe —for I'll drop the spear—my name isn't John Patrick Sullivan if I don't make it warm for the Mongolian. I have been waiting for a chance like this for a long time. I hate your smothering and choking and long-distance potting; hand-to-hand slogging for me. *Allons! avant!* a Sullivan to the rescue; hurroo!—— Stand still, you bally Cossack goat! how can a man keep up his knightly dignity with you rearing and kicking under him like a Barcoo buckjumper?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

By some means Amarbal had infused fresh confidence, or a determination to die fighting, into his troops, and the battle of Alakul, fought near the lake of that name, proved the most awful struggle in which human beings had ever engaged. For three days the tide of conflict ebbed and flowed over forty miles of country, the combatants sinking exhausted where they stood as darkness fell, and springing up each morning to renew the conflict with desperate ferocity. Time and again the jaded Europeans, as they saw the ranks of the foe still facing them, unbroken though depleted, felt their hearts sink in despair of success; but it was not so with all. The British section kept up their courage well; and Morwell, Crosby and Sullivan fought with the absolute conviction

of victory, for, had they not the assurance of Ella Pritchard, the messenger of higher intelligences, that the fight would result in favour of the Europeans? On the eve of the battle she had come to them in spirit, and brought words of comfort and hope. Her they could not doubt, for she was the medium through whom Amarbal's destructive agencies had been nullified—through whom, in point of fact, the Aryan civilisation had been preserved. So they fought with the utmost hope and confidence, which exerted a most encouraging influence on all around them.

Sullivan, in particular, fought like a hero, and not greater valour was shown by "Roland Brave, and Oliver, and every paladin and peer" who "on Roncesvalles died," than by this weedy Irish larrikin, as Crosby and Morwell had once been disposed to regard him. The spirit of Brian Boru, Red Hugh O'Neill, Sarsfield, and other redoubtable champions of his race seemed to possess him, and when, in imitation of Navarre at Ivry, he bade his friends "press where you see my tin pot shine," he was, though facetious, not bombastic, for, when the first charge of irregular British cavalry took place, and "in they burst, and on they rushed" amidst the Mongolian ranks, the said tin pot, if not an "oriflame," was a most conspicuous object in the forefront of the battle for a considerable time. It then suddenly disappeared, and Morwell and others pressed forward in horror, believing

that Sullivan had been killed. They found that valiant warrior, however, just struggling to his feet, and, anathematising his pony, which had stumbled just as its rider was about "to make mincemeat of the mandarin of Cochin China," according to his own account. Someone caught the pony, and Sullivan remounted, after kicking the animal three times in the ribs by way of rebuke, and rode once more into the thickest of the fray.

All the veneer of civilisation gone for the moment, the erstwhile scribbler of unveracities for the vanished *Telephone* fought like a primitive ape man, and felt hot exultation rise within him as his "cleaver" shore through a Mongol's guard, and stretched him bleeding on the earth; and in this respect he was no worse and no better than his comrades, though the Saxon phlegm of some of them, perhaps, better concealed the joy they felt in killing.

It was a fight for national as well as individual life, and every man felt that each foe cut down was a menace to civilisation removed. So the conflict raged, now surging this way, now swaying that, with no cloud of smoke to cover its horror, no roar of firearms to drown the shrieks of the wounded and furious exclamations of the combatants.

At the end of the third day the tide definitely turned, and by nightfall the Mongolian army was in full retreat, unpursued, however, by the Europeans, who were too

jaded to do more than advance beyond the area of conflict, and throw themselves down exhausted on the first clear ground they came to.

This was the decisive battle, and not Xerxes after Salamis, or Napoleon after Waterloo, was in more hopeless case than Amarbal, so far as Asiatic help was concerned. He still had his fleet, however, as well as the remnant of his original army of desperadoes of all nations, whose case, being desperate if they fell into the hands of the Europeans, might as well die fighting for Amarbal as any other way. Accordingly, he made all haste to the coast, and, with every man he could persuade to accompany him, and all the arms he could collect, set sail for Australia; while the civilised world, falling on its knees, gave thanks to the God who had so signally shown that darkness shall not take the place of light, or evil that of good. So, from the countries of Europe and Asia disappeared their greatest danger, and from their skies the threatening symbol of the Celestial Hand.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

From Castle Hill the land sloped rapidly downward, and then, in level patches or gentle undulations, dotted with orchards or clothed with bush, swept onward to the Kurrajong, and thence upwards to the line of the Blue Mountains, which bounded the horizon. The fierce rays of the midsummer sun beat down upon the landscape, and about all was the strange Australian stillness, which in times of peace was occasionally broken by the barking of dogs, lowing of cattle, or human voices, but now reigned unbroken, for all the region round was deserted, save where, in the far distance, a few smoke wreaths and the occasional flash of steel marked the presence of an army.

Three men rode up the hill from the road, and, halting

on the summit, gazed upon the scene lying beneath them. Lean, haggard, and war-worn, dressed in khaki, with bandoliers on their shoulders and rifles in their hands, they had been through much since the great day of Alakul, and were now Mounted Rifles in the great army of Lord Ronan, which had swept down from the north, and held all the country between the mountains and the coast.

"Whew, it's hot!" said Sullivan, wiping his streaming brow, "and though it is a terrible come down from a crusader to a common-or-garden 'Tommy,' I must admit that the change suits the climate. If I had continued as an Ironclad I should have been 'cooked' in every sense of the word. And so we are drawing near to our well-beloved home. Well, I for one must confess to a feeling of some surprise, despite my faith in Ella's predictions."

"I had no doubt about our ultimately reaching Sydney once we landed," said Crosby, "but I must say my faith was sorely tried when the fleet had to face those submarine boats and iron islands. The secret of our own submarines was well kept, and they saved us at the last. Amarbal must have lost a fourth of his men and three-fourths of his artillery when they sank his boats and blew up his islands."

"He is failing, I think;" said Morwell. "His defence of the Hawkesbury was weak, and he seemed to have only a few guns."

"He is probably reserving himself for the defence of Sydney. Faith, I'm burning to know if the town still stands, and the *Telephone* office is intact. Very likely the Chinks have made bullets of the type long ago, and a whole lot of our chaps been laid out by my 'side' articles. And then the *Trumpeter*—the 'paleozoic periodical,' as I used to call it when I wanted to be witheringly sarcastic—I wonder if they availed themselves of its 'solid matter?' I had a suspicion that time the shot went through the *Vanguard* from end to end that the damage could have been done by nothing less heavy than one of the *Trumpeter's* leading articles."

"Well, you ought to know all about it soon," said Crosby, "for I presume that we shall be allowed to scout right to Sydney, as we know the country."

"Somehow I wish Ella was not so near the fighting line," said Morwell, thoughtfully. "I have an ever-increasing foreboding of evil regarding her."

"I have more than a foreboding," said Crosby. "Don't you know what she said yesterday?"

"No."

"Oh! well, you will soon enough; but I should prefer not to tell you. And now we had better move on; we are to scout five miles in advance, you know."

Strange it was to be once more amidst familiar scenes, after their extraordinary experiences. The warm breeze, the hush of the bush, the indescribable balminess and

odour of the atmosphere, all appealed gratefully to their senses, and they felt that it was good to be here again.

Surely if the sun is the origin of material life, it is well to live where his vitalising rays fall unimpeded by chilling cloud banks, and he must partake somewhat of the nature of the mole or bat, who prefers dull Northern climes!

"Ah, do you hear the silence, and feel the smell of the eucalyptus?" exclaimed Sullivan presently, in an ecstasy. "Did I ever think I'd experience them again when I was being soaked in my native land, fogged in London, or chilled to the marrow on the frozen Steppes of Siberia. Oh! my heart leaps responsive to your fiery embrace, Australia, daughter of the sun! And when this blight which now oppresses you is removed I'll sink upon your warm breast, and there repose till—till—"

"Called upon to depart to still warmer quarters," put in Crosby, unpoetically. "And now let us trot."

By a road leading through the sweet-smelling bush and open areas of orchard land they proceeded for several miles without seeing a human being, for the homesteads which bordered the road here and there were tenantless, and falling into ruin.

"There used to be a store and bakery at Pennant Hills," said Sullivan. "I wonder if by any chance they were overlooked by the Chinks; if so, we might have a bushie's meal of tinned meat, biscuits, jam, and what not."

"They are not likely to have overlooked it. A large section of them retreated by this route not long ago, judging by the signs, and they are safe to have looted the store, if it were not done long ago," said Morwell.

He proved to be right, for they found that all the buildings at Pennant Hills had been stripped of everything that was easily portable, though they were not destroyed. The young men were walking disappointedly from room to room of the large store, in the hope of finding something eatable which the enemy had overlooked, when they were startled by hearing a groan coming from a bed in one of the rooms.

"Who is there?" exclaimed Crosby, drawing a revolver from his belt.

A moan was the only reply.

"We'll soon see," said Sullivan, drawing aside the tattered blind which hung before the window. On the bed lay a man clad in greyish-brown clothes, on which were numerous red marks.

"The Celestial Hand! This is one of Amarbal's men, wounded and left behind in the retreat from the Hawkesbury, no doubt."

"But he is a European."

"So he is," said Crosby, bending to obtain a closer view of the face; and then he exclaimed, "Duncan, the bogus mine owner, as I am alive!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Morwell, who had seen Duncan at the trial of Mueller, bent over the couch and studied the worn features of the man. "Duncan it is," he said. "Now this is a fortunate capture—"

"Water! Water!" gasped the man.

Sullivan unslung his water bottle, in which there was a dash of spirits, and held the vessel to the lips of the prostrate man. He drank feverishly in gulps, and then reviving, asked in a clear, but weak, voice, "Who are you?"

"Scouts of Lord Ronan's army."

"Ah! I thought so. I was wounded in the battle, and after being carried for some time in the retreat, was

thrown down in the bush and deserted by those dogs. I managed to crawl here, and found a little water——"

"Furthermore, Mr. Duncan," interrupted Crosby, who had been paying no heed to what the man said, "we are friends of Arthur Pritchard, who was murdered by Mueller, or Amarbal, at Long Bay. I am the man who was with him. Do you remember all the lies you told on that occasion?"

The wounded man gazed at him with dilated eyes. "You, you," he stammered; "then you are the people to whom Amarbal attributed his defeat."

"That's right," put in Sullivan, "we are the crowd that checkmated him, or rather, were the means employed to that end by the Higher Powers, and well we performed our duty, as no doubt posterity will recognise, if posterity is not an ass; in fact——"

"Bother your discursiveness, Sullivan. We have to decide what we must do. It is clearly our duty to arrest this man and take him back to Lord Ronan. His information——"

"You cannot arrest me. I am done. In an hour I shall be dead. Give me a drink, and I will tell you what I know; it will ease my mind."

They gave him another drink, and propped him into an easier position with a couple of pillows, and he began to speak, slowly at first, more rapidly and distinctly afterwards.

"I was brought up as an engineer in England. I went to sea at an early age, and have knocked about all over the world, in mining camps and what not. I always had a crooked strain in me, and when roused would stick at nothing. Crimes of violence I committed by the dozen, and spent years in gaol. At length, with my life forfeited to the laws of three of the most powerful nations on earth —England, France and America—I was hiding in the Chinese quarter of San Francisco, and hourly expecting capture, when this man Amarbal—or Mueller, as he then called himself—came to me, and made me an offer which I jumped at, for it promised me life, freedom and vengeance, for I had grown to hate my kind, and especially my countrymen.

"I cannot go into details; I have not the strength; but I was conveyed to a ship, which sailed to a rendezvous—an island in the South Pacific—and here my instructions were given me by a man who had come with me in the ship. I was to land in Sydney with a number of men. I would there be met and shown an area of land which I was to buy with money furnished by those who would meet me. I was to state that I was mining for coal, and was to sink a shaft, piling up the earth to form an embankment all round.

"When down a certain depth, tunnels were to be driven in various directions, particularly towards Sydney, under

the harbour. I did as ordered, and unlimited funds were placed at my disposal by certain Chinamen.

"When the shaft was down, and the main tunnel driven almost to Sydney, Mueller arrived with a large number of men, and thereafter work went on like magic. He brought with him machines which burrowed through the earth at a speed which was to me incredible, and he soon had tunnels running in all directions, and for great distances, the openings of all but one or two into the main shaft, being carefully concealed, so that when the workings were inspected there was nothing unusual to be seen.

"The number of men was steadily increased, and presently goods began to arrive from oversea, which were packed as machinery, but were really guns of enormous calibre; tons of material, which I suspected to be some high explosive, also poured in.

"All this portended some gigantic enterprise, and in my desperation and hate I felt glad. Others were anxious, however.

"About half of us were Europeans, or of European descent, the rest were Asiatics—mostly Chinese, with a sprinkling of Japanese, Hindoos and other nations.

"I had been told that any attempt to discover or discuss what was going on would mean instant death, and the others had, doubtless, been similarly warned. We were lodged separately, and each European was virtually a prisoner, though I and a few others had more liberty

than the rest. Six or seven men managed to get together and discuss means of escape; next day each man was found dead in his cell. Men were constantly found dead after that, and in some way it gradually came to be held that Mueller knew when a man even *thought* of treachery or escape. He put us to a final test, however, for when he had shot that young fellow, your friend, who had looked into the works when the largest gun the world ever saw was about to be lowered down the shaft for conveyance to a point on the Lane Cove River, he pretended that he would have to give himself up to prevent the works from being searched, arranging that we were to rescue him on the day of his trial. This was only a ruse to try us, and well it succeeded, for he had no sooner been led off by the police than half the Europeans met and decided that they would stay in such mysterious surroundings, and as virtual prisoners, no longer, but would escape, no matter what the consequences might be.

"In vain I and others of the more intelligent warned them to beware how they flouted Mueller, who, we believed, possessed supernatural powers, and, moreover, was supported by an enormous force of Asiatics. They would not heed; they would get away. What if they had committed crimes for which their lives were forfeited! Better to die on a civilised gallows than remain penned up by a lot of filthy Chinese, and ultimately be killed, anyway; for war was meant. What were all those guns for, if it were not?

"Well, to cut it short, for my breath is failing, we could not persuade them, and they made for the embankment, to find every point guarded by armed Asiatics. They were caught, and were forced at the rifle's muzzle back to their cells.

"That night Mueller showed himself to several of us, though his body was, we knew, in gaol, and next day every one of the would-be escapees was dead.

"After that there was no more talk or thought of escape. Mueller visited us every night, as if to make assurance doubly sure, and we Europeans went about with a sense of having sold ourselves to the devil.

"Desperate criminals as we were, a single glance from the awful eye of that man—or fiend—made us quake. I believe his influence is upon me now. My brain swims, I——"

The man's eyes closed, and he lay still.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A cold air seemed to fill the room, and the young men felt a terrible feeling of apprehension seize them.

"It's Amarbal, I see him!" exclaimed Crosby. "Remember Schwartz!—Heaven protect us——"

But then another voice said: "Have no fear," a phrase that was repeated a moment later by still another and deeper voice.

"Ella and Arthur," cried Crosby; and, as he spoke, the chill feeling passed from the air, and the man on the bed stirred and opened his eyes.

"It is all right, he has gone," said Crosby. "Give him a drink, Sullivan, and let us hear the rest of his story.

Revived by the draught, Duncan commenced to speak, but now his voice was weaker.

"By the tunnels below Sydney, and cut even in the walls of some buildings, Amarbal was able to learn if any movement was being made against him. A sailor from one of his ships wished to betray him, but his men killed this man and the Minister to whom he spoke. A tunnel in the wall let them in; the heads they removed —afterwards they were used to terrify the inhabitants."

"But the Celestial Hand?" interrupted Sullivan, "you have not told us how he produced that."

"I cannot. I do not know. It was not produced by mechanical means, or light rays. I tried to discover, but failed. He could produce it at will, and project his figure along the sky. All the figure saw he saw. The Chinks said he was helped by their gods; if he was helped at all it was by devils."

The dying man paused and gasped for breath, but presently he came to again, and went on:—

"He evidently wished to terrorise Sydney and the whole country, so as to obtain a strong base without much fighting, wishing to reserve his strength for the conquest of Asia and Europe."

"Had he many men in Australia?" asked Crosby.

"His agents must have won over half the Chinese in Australia—he landed thousands secretly besides. After the fleet came his force was very large."

"Many Europeans?"

"Thousands—all criminals—all prisoners—all sold to the devil."

"What did they do?"

"Mechanical work mostly—flying machines—fleet—artillery——"

The man's words came in gasps. They forced a little liquid down his throat.

"He wished to conquer the world for the Mongols. I understood their lingo. I heard the Chink he talked to most say to another, he blamed his failure on a woman, on a dead man too—the man he shot that Sunday. The Chink said Amarbal vowed vengeance, and would yet destroy the world."

"But what is his present strength?" asked Morwell, anxiously.

"He is short of men; I don't think we had 150,000 when we landed from China. Many were lost in the fleets and floating islands. The battles fought since your armies landed have reduced his force to a shadow."

"Has he many guns?"

"Few or none—they have been lost."

"This is vitally important," said Morwell, as Duncan ceased.

"Yes," said Crosby, "and we had better get back. Hush! he speaks again."

"He has something in reserve—some force—look out——"

He ceased, and lay still for a moment; then, springing to a sitting posture with a convulsive effort, he gasped: "I am lost; they come round me—Pierre Leroy, whom I killed at Havre; Halford, I stabbed on the ship ———; and *he* is there, he threatens me—oh! God, I wrought to destroy my countrymen—the world—but I had doubts—I told the truth at the end—Mercy. Ah! they come, they beat him back. They tell me to pray—God forgive ——mother—ah!" and, throwing out his hands and gasping horribly, Duncan fell back dead.

As he lay on the bed Crosby saw his astral body extended in the air above the material shell, saw it open its eyes in apprehension as a dark form approached it, and then look with joy at the white figures which repelled the other. The figures then passed through the roof and disappeared. Whatever was to be the fate of Duncan, the murderer and renegade, Amarbal and his dark aids were not to have their will with him in the first stage of his new existence.

"It was a singular thing that we should find that man just in time to receive his dying confession, which cleared up such a lot, and contained such important information," said Crosby, as they were returning from their expedition.

"It may have been pre-arranged, for all we know," said Morwell.

"Possibly, for if Chinese gods aid Amarbal, others are clearly against him."

"I don't believe in the Mulge theory, myself," said Morwell, "though I think it extremely likely that Amarbal may have been aided—and misled—by intelligences as human as his own, though no longer in the flesh. Fiends and gods with human attributes, are creations of men's minds, in my opinion."

"And how do you explain the Celestial Hand?"

"I don't know that I can explain it satisfactorily. I always thought—and Duncan's statement confirms my supposition—that it was not created by mechanical means, and the only possible explanation I can venture is, that it was a psychic materialisation produced by Amarbal, who doubtless derived the necessary magnetic force, or whatever 'power' is required in these manifestations, from the large body of men under his command."

CHAPTER XL.

Duncan's statement concerning Amarbal's deficiencies in men and materials of war proved correct, for Lord Ronan advanced to the confines of North Sydney without opposition of any kind, while the Southern and Western armies, which had been simultaneously converging on Sydney, were able to take possession of the city proper and all the South side of the harbour without an opposing shot being fired.

The city was found to be in a chaotic condition. Huge manufactories for producing cannon, explosives, preserved foods and other necessaries of war, had been established in the principal streets, fine public and business buildings being used for the purpose. Thus the Victoria Market had been turned into an explosives factory, and

its fine facade and handsome carvings were disfigured and blackened by smoke.

The Town Hall had been used as a barracks, and was in a state of filthy disorder, while the Lands Office had been put to a similar purpose. A line of railway had been carried down Pitt Street, and it was by its means that Amarbal had evidently brought most of his supplies from the country to the harbour.

Private houses, offices, warehouses, banks had been stripped of everything valuable which they contained, and all their fittings had been ruthlessly damaged, panels and ceilings being riddled with bullets, mirrors starred and smashed by the same agency, and hangings and pictures torn down and destroyed.

"'Twould make the heart of a putty image bleed to see the havoc the heathen have wrought," said Sullivan, "and the destruction of Sydney they threatened had been almost as thoroughly effected as if they had blown it up. The Australia would be more fittingly called the China; the *Telephone* office, whence some of my loftiest thought were given to the world, now yields nothing to the inquiring mind but a Pekinese odour suggestive of a Joss house in the last stages of decay; my rooms have been wrecked; the family cat eaten, and some infamous Celestial has gone to Mulge in my new dress suit."

The damage wrought to Mr. Sullivan's interests might have been taken as typical of what was general through-

out Sydney proper, and the whole city was in the same filthy and insanitary state as the European and Asiatic towns which had been occupied by the Mongolians, and the wonder was that Amarbal's army had not been decimated more by disease than by the enemy. On the North side of the harbour less damage had been done, and in one instance none at all, for Colonel Howard's house on Gore Hill was found absolutely uninjured, and with all its contents practically as they had been when its inmates fled before the destroying gas.

The Colonel, who had accompanied the Pritchards to Australia and throughout the campaign in which Ella's advice and information had proved so invaluable, was delighted to find his cherished residence uninjured, and with his friends took immediate possession, though the young men were opposed to the step.

"There is some sinister reason for this exceptional preservation," said Morwell; "the place looks as if it had been swept and garnished for our occupation. Amarbal must have foreseen our return, and prepared a trap for us. I have forebodings about the place, and I wish the Howards had remained farther in the rear of the army."

"Well, we seem to be actors in a drama, the developments of which we can in no way control," said Crosby, "and I suppose we are here for a purpose, and must play our parts to the end. The General has allowed us to take

up our quarters here, and we must keep close watch and ward over Ella."

In accordance with this resolution the three friends took turns at keeping watch day and night, and one of them was always near Ella. One night Crosby, who had been relieved by Morwell, was sleeping the sleep of the utterly exhausted, when a loud cry of "Help!" rang in his ears. His campaigning experience had taught him to waken on the instant, and in two seconds he was in the corridor with a lamp and revolver in his hands.

An extraordinary sight met his gaze, for Morwell was struggling with an awe-inspiring figure, whose face was covered with a black visor, and who bore the insensible form of Ella Pritchard on one shoulder, while with his free hand he thrust back his assailant. The latter, with an old-fashioned double-edged dagger, which he had picked up somewhere in Asia, and kept by him ever since, struck his opponent in the chest, but the blade rebounded. Changing his direction in an instant, he struck at the face, but the visor was like adamant, and again the dagger rebounded. All this Crosby saw as he was rushing to his friend's assistance, and he also beheld Sullivan burst from his room, and rush along the corridor, but he saw no more. He heard the strange being utter a cry, the lamp was dashed from his hand, he felt a cloth thrown over his head, was flung with violence to the floor, and held down by at least three pairs of hands. A moment later his

brain swam, the tension of his muscles relaxed, and he became insensible.

* * * * *

When about mid-day Colonel Howard awoke, his head seemed as if it would split, and a heavy feeling of depression held him. He turned to his wife, who was still slumbering heavily, and though he called and shook her vigorously, he could not arouse her. Rising with difficulty, he partially dressed himself, and, suffering agonies from his throbbing head, went out of the room. A scene of disorder met his eyes; the whole house reeked with the smell of some anæsthetic or chemical agent; Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard and Mary were all slumbering in their rooms, but Ella and the three young men had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed them—which it, indeed, had, as some of Lord Ronan's men, who were hastily summoned, found on close examination of the premises.

CHAPTER XLI.

High above the waters of Long Bay stood the Black Tower, a threatening and sinister object, dominating the landscape for miles. Far out from its base was the line of earthworks whence the remnant of Amarbal's force kept Lord Ronan temporarily at bay with rifle fire and that of a few machine guns, while below, in the harbour, lay the war and transport vessels which had survived the many battles with the Europeans, whose fleets were forced to remain outside the Heads by the batteries which lined the coast, and still more by the dread of mines. On the flat summit of the tower lay an air-ship, all ready for flight, and beside it stood Amarbal, gazing sullenly at the darkening landscape. He was looking his last on the scene, for by sunrise to-morrow he would

be far away; but he had much to do before he went, and, with the rage of defeat in his heart, he turned and descended an iron ladder into the interior of the Tower. Half-way down the structure he paused, and then, opening a massive iron door, entered a semi-circular chamber. He pressed a knob, and a powerful light made the interior as bright as day.

This was his laboratory, his study, his holy of holies, in which no one but himself had ever set foot, and in which all his later plans had been perfected, and operations initiated. It was a fitting shrine for such genius as his, for it contained the perfected results of the most recent human thought, in odd juxtaposition with creations that were of hoary antiquity when Romulus founded his city on the Seven Hills, or even when Rameses scattered his gigantic sarcophagi with lavish hand over the Nile delta. A beautiful aluminium model of a flying machine rested on a pile of Assyrian clay tablets; an instrument somewhat resembling a phonograph stood on a bench beside an ancient clay alembic; a rifle of singular design leaned against a stone figure with mailed head, and stiff, pointed, beard; papyri kept in position by cartridges used as paper weights, lay open on the tables; a scarabaeus rested on the keys of a telegraph instrument, and beside it was a paper covered with figures, as though an attempt had been made to translate its hieroglyphics. So it was throughout the

whole great apartment, but amongst all its numberless contents there was not a single curio, or object of merely artistic or historical interest. All had a bearing on the great schemes of Amarbal, either in the direction of psychic lore, or of modern scientific knowledge.

Passing by tubes, wires and instruments innumerable, Amarbal seated himself at a table which was itself studded with knobs, and keys and electric switches, and, leaning back in his great chair, fell into a fit of brooding.

As he sat there with his arms folded across his breast, there was nothing in the heavy and somewhat ungainly form and coarse features to indicate the genius which had accomplished so much. The head, with its vast expanse of brow, certainly indicated great ability; but, if it had not been for the eyes, the countenance as a whole would not have been classed as supremely intellectual. The eyes were, however, extraordinary, and gleamed and scintillated in a manner that seemed scarcely human. Heavy were the thoughts of the beaten Akkadian—for beaten he was he well knew—and in this hour of defeat came doubts as to whether he, who had fancied himself well-nigh omnipotent, had not been misled, and made a tool of by intelligences as finite and human as his own, though occupying a different plane of existence, and operating for their own purposes, in the guise of the man-created gods of primitive times. The thought was maddening; for, if to lose was bitter, to be

fooled was ten times more so. He had wrought, the man feared, on a false assumption, had failed, and nothing remained. Yes, one thing remained—vengeance! and, at the thought his eyes gleamed with a cruel light; and, rising, he made for the door.

CHAPTER XLII.

Descending to the base of the tower, Amarbal opened a heavy door, and entered a chamber similar in shape to the one above, but containing very different objects.

On depressing a switch the interior was illumined by a powerful light, which dazzled the eyes of the unwilling occupants of the room, as Amarbal addressed them.

"So you have awakened, my prisoners," he said in a voice of cutting irony, very different to his former assumed raucous tones, "and will now be able to appreciate and enjoy the position in which you find yourselves."

In the semi-circular wall of one side of the chamber were a number of recesses, in which were, half reclining, half sitting, Ella Pritchard, Morwell, Crosby, and Sullivan. Between them and the portion of the chamber on which Amarbal stood was a yawning gulf, from the depths of which came damp and foetid airs. Their tormentor watched them maliciously as they gazed with startled eyes into this.

"Aye! look," he said, "but you will not see the bottom, for this is the main shaft of which my friend Duncan told you, and is over one thousand feet in depth."

"You infernal fiend," broke from Sullivan, as he glared with rage, and yet interest, at the dark and evil

face of Amarbal, and bore without flinching the return glare of those most uncanny eyes.

"Stay a moment, you may be able to still better appreciate my character, and interest in your welfare when you learn all. You will not go together, but one by one—the last to leave the earth plane being the good lady to whom I owe so much. She will thus have the pleasure of watching the departure of all her friends. It will greatly enhance your pleasure, no doubt, to learn that you will not be wasted in your subterranean flight, but will at a depth of 50 feet or so be impaled on spikes operating electric batteries, which again communicate with various mines and other means of extermination, which, as I cannot have the world, may make the world less worth having. For instance, the particular battery which you will operate"—addressing Sullivan—"will destroy the remnant of my fleet. I do not intend that my inventions shall benefit the Aryan, and my men are doomed anyway. That which you will operate"—to Morwell—"will totally destroy Sydney and its environs, with the armies now occupying them."

He paused to enjoy the torments of his victims, and then went on, addressing Crosby—

"As you have been a more active agent in thwarting me, you will go second-last, and will perform a more important office: that of firing a chain of mines which lie all round the coast of Australia, under all the prin-

cipal cities, under the sea beyond the Heads here, where ride the European fleets, and finally extend to all the Chinese ports now in the occupation of the Europeans."

"As for you, Messenger of the Gods," he said to Ella, with savage irony, "you will go last, and fulfil the most important work of all. Firstly, you will destroy this tower and all appertaining to it, thus sealing the tomb of yourself and companions; and, secondly, you will liberate a force which, if my calculations do not mislead me, will, by effecting a change in the composition of the atmosphere, terminate the existence of the human race. This will efface Turanians as well as Aryans, you will say! Certainly; but better so than that they should exist as mere thralls of the Western tyrants. As for me, I shall pass hence when I have arranged your affairs; and that the last act in my drama will result in my own destruction is a matter that I should advise you not to be too certain about. I am not affected by the laws which operate on lesser beings."

The mocking voice and words of bitter irony ceased (the speech was uttered with a malignity that was hideous), and turning from his victims, the arch-tormentor pulled the first of a series of small levers which stood close to the wall.

"That sets your particular mechanism," he said over his shoulder to Sullivan; "in twenty minutes you will be thrust over the brink, and on the welcoming point."

Sullivan groaned and wiped his clammy brow, but uttered no appeal for mercy, which he and all the others knew would have been absolutely useless. There was nothing for it but to die; but oh! if they could but thwart his last hellish designs! They scanned the wide gulf in impotent rage, and he, noting, smiled, in mockery, as he turned to move a second lever. At this moment a slight sound attracted the young men, and turning towards Ella, they beheld an extraordinary sight. She rose from a reclining to a sitting posture, and in that position was "levitated" across the gulf to where Amarbal stood with his back towards them, still engaged in setting the levers. As she landed on the iron floor he turned and saw her.

With a cry of rage and fear he plucked a knife from his belt and thrust at her breast as she rushed upon him. The blow went home straight and true, and the red blood gushed forth, but it availed Amarbal nothing, for her arms were around him in an instant, and with a shout of amazement the three onlookers saw the frail girl raise the burly form as if it had been a feather, and hurl it into the section of the gulf intended for Sullivan. There was a cry, a swish through the air, a sickening thud far down, an awful groan, and Amarbal the Akkadian was seen by mortal eyes no more!

"So passes a danger to the world," came from the lips of the being who had wrought this marvellous thing—the form was Ella's, but the voice was Arthur's, as the

strength had been. "He was the means through which malevolent intelligences whom he imagined to be gods, acted. And now to release you, my friends, for the body through which I act grows faint from the loss of blood." And thus saying he (or she) thrust over a lever set in the floor, and instantly two iron plates glided out, and meeting in the centre, presented a solid surface where a moment before had yawned the hideous gulf.

Trembling and dazed from the ordeal through which they had passed, and the marvellous nature of their rescue, the friends stepped down from the recesses. As they did so a dull roar, and the rocking of the solid tower on its foundations, told that the first and only of Amarbal's final designs had eventuated; but they paid no heed, but rushed towards their rescuer, who sank down as they approached. Raising the fair form, they saw by the eyes that it was Ella who once more occupied her own material body.

"Yes, I am here," she said faintly, "but only for a little while. It had to be this way. Arthur told me, and I willingly gave up my earth life. I would not have it otherwise. A great evil has been averted, and I am happy, oh! so happy. I shall be with you always. You will see me often, and I will meet you when you, too, pass from the material plane. Give my dear, dear love to mother, father, and Mary. I know, I know" (to Morwell, who sobbed in anguish), "and the knowledge has been sweet,

but it was not to be in this life. It *will* be in the next, however, and for ever and ever we shall be together. The parting will be but brief. Kiss me, dear, dear one—oh! do not grieve so terribly. God—bless—and keep you all, my —dear—friends—good-bye."

And her sweet spirit passed into the Light.

* * * * * *

The sun shines down upon a regenerated world, and on a chastened and subdued humanity, whose traditional thoughts of strife have, under the stress of an awful visitation, given way to feelings more akin to those of the higher life, wherein love and the desire to aid others are the dominant features.

Strenuous efforts were made to obliterate every trace of the war in Europe, Asia, and Australia, and in the latter country wonders were wrought inside five years. Amarbal's mines were traced and destroyed, and tunnels and shafts filled up as far as practicable. The Black Tower was razed to its foundations, and the whole area round laid out and planted to form a beautiful public demesne. The city was practically re-built on a greatly improved plan, and in beauty, natural and artificial, is not now surpassed in the world.

The mausoleum in which lie the mortal remains of Ella Pritchard, and erected to her memory by the Aryan peoples of the world, is said to excel all previous efforts of the kind, and attracts thousands of visitors annually.

With the proceeds of his literary efforts, Sullivan purchased a large estate, and thereon lives with Mary, his loving spouse, while, close by, reside Crosby and Kate. Morwell is a constant visitor, as he is to Gore Hill, where reside the elder Pritchards and Miss Manse, in close contiguity to Colonel Howard and Captain Marshall, who has built himself an eccentric bungalow on the crest of the hill. No sadness oppresses Morwell, and he is universally beloved, but, true to a memory, he is content to look forward for his reward.

The Nations would willingly have made much of those who had enacted leading parts in the tremendous tragedy which has shaken the world to its foundations, but Sullivan may be said to have stated their collective opinions when he wrote to a would-be hero-worshipper, "To play the part of a hero, a man must be fashioned from heroic clay. Speaking for myself, I am fashioned from turf, and inferior turf at that, for weaknesses ooze out of me at every pore. Why Fate should have selected me to bear a prominent part in this great matter, passes my comprehension altogether. I am well aware that it was no merit of my own which caused me to flash athwart the gloom like a comet or sixpenny rocket. I emerged from the nowhere; I return thither with great content. Where fore, I pray you, let me ring down the curtain."

THE END.