

The Purple Cloud

By M. P. Shiel

Introduction

In May of this year the writer received as noteworthy a packet of papers as it has been his lot to examine—from a friend, Dr. Arthur Lister Browne, M.A., F.R.C.P.—consisting of four note-books, crowded with those giddy shapes of “shorthand,” whose *ensemble* resembles startled swarms hovering on the wing—scribbled in pencil, and without vowels: so that their deciphering has been no holiday. The letter also which accompanied them was pencilled in shorthand; and this, together with the note-book marked “III,” I now publish.

The following is Browne’s letter:

“Dear Old Chap,—I have just been lying thinking of you, wishing that you were here to give one a last squeeze of the hand before I— ‘go’: for going I am. Four days ago I felt a soreness in the throat, so, passing by old Johnson’s surgery at Selbridge, I asked him to have a look at me, and when he muttered something about membranous laryngitis it made me smile, but by the time I reached home I was hoarse, and not smiling: before night I had dyspnoea and laryngeal stridor. So I wired to London for Morgan, and, between him and Johnson, they have been opening my trachea, and singeing my in-side with chromic acid and the cautery; but I am too old a hand not to know what’s what: the bronchi involved—*too far*. Morgan is still, I believe, fondly longing to add me to his successful-tracheotomy statistics, but prognosis was always my strong point, and the small consolation of my death will be the beating of a specialist up his own street. So we shall see.

“I have been arranging some of my affairs this morning, and remembered these note-books—intended letting you have them months ago, but you know my habit of putting things off, and, then, the lady was living from whom I took down the statements: now she is dead, and, as a writing man, and a man, you should be interested, if you can contrive to decipher.

“I am under morphia at present, propped up in a nice little state of languor, and, as I am able to write, will tell you something about her: her name Mary Wilson; thirty when I met her, forty-five when she died; fifteen years of her. Do you know much about the philosophy of the hypnotic trance? That was the relation between us—hypnotist and subject. She had been under another man before my time, suffered from *tic* of the fifth nerve, had had most of her teeth drawn before I saw her, and an attempt had been made to wrench out the nerve on the left side by external scission. But it had made no difference: the clock of hell tick-tacked in that poor woman’s jaw, and it was a mercy that ever she dropped across *me*: my organization was found to possess easy control over hers, and with a few suggestions I could expel her Legion.

“Well, you never saw anyone so singular as my friend, Miss Wilson: medicine-man as I am, I could never behold her without a sort of shock: she so suggested what we call ‘the *other* world,’ some odor of the worm, ghost more than woman! And yet I can hardly convey to you the why of this, except by dry details as to the contours of her lofty forehead, meager lips, pointed chin, ashen cheeks. She was lank and deplorably emaciated, her whole skeleton, except the femurs, being visible, her eyes of the bluish hue of cigarette-smoke or quinine-solution made fluorescent

by X-rays, and they had the strangest, feeble, unearthly gaze, which at thirty-five her wisp of hair was white.

“She was well-to-do, lived alone in old Wooding Manor-house, five miles from Ash Thomas; and I, ‘beginning’ in these parts at the time, soon took up my residence at the manor, she insisting that I should devote myself to her alone.

“Well, I found that, in the state of trance, Miss Wilson possessed remarkable powers: not peculiar to herself in *kind*, but so reliable, exact, far-reaching, in degree. Any tyro in psychical science will now sit and discourse about the reporting powers of the mind in the trance-state—a fact which Psychical Research only after endless investigation admits to be scientific, but known to every old crone in the Middle Ages; but I say that Miss Wilson’s powers were ‘*remarkable*,’ because I believe that, *in general*, the powers manifest themselves more particularly with regard to space, as distinct from time, the spirit roaming in the present, travelling over a plain; but Miss Wilson’s gift was special in this, that she travelled all ways, and easily in all but one, east, west, up, down, in the past, the present, and the future.

“This I discovered gradually. She would emit a stream of sounds—I can hardly call it *speech*—murmurous, guttural, mixed with puffy breath-sounds of the languid lips, this accompanied by an intense contraction of the pupils, absence of the knee-jerk, rigor, a rapt and arrant expression; and I got into the habit of sitting long at her bedside, fascinated by her, trying to catch the import of that visionary language which came croaking from her throat, puffing and fluttering from her lips, until in the course of years my ear learned to discern the words; ‘the veil was rent’ for me, too; and I could follow somewhat the trips of her musing and wandering spirit.

“I heard her one day utter some words which were familiar to me: ‘Such were the arts by which the Romans extended their conquests, and attained the palm of victory’—from Gibbon’s ‘Decline and Fall,’ which I could guess that she had never read.

“I said in a stem voice; ‘Where are you?’

“She replied, ‘Us are eight hundred miles above. A man is writing. Us are reading.’

“I may tell you two things: first, that in trance she never spoke of herself as ‘I,’ but, for some reason, in this *objective* way, as ‘*us*’: ‘us are,’ she would say, ‘us went,’ though, of course, she was ‘educated’; secondly, when wandering in the past she always represented herself as being ‘*above*’ (the earth?), and higher the further back in time she went; in describing present events she felt herself ‘*on*,’ while, as regards the future, she invariably declared that ‘*us*’ were so many miles ‘*within*.’

“To her travels in this last direction, however, there seemed to exist fixed limits: I say seemed, meaning that, in spite of my efforts, she never, in fact, went far in this direction. Three, four thousand ‘miles’ were common figures on her lips in describing her distance ‘above’; but her distance ‘within’ never got beyond sixty. Usually, she would say twenty, twenty-five, appearing in relation to the future to resemble a diver, who, the deeper he strives, finds a more resistant pressure, until at no great depth resistance becomes prohibition, and he can no deeper strive.

“I am afraid I can’t go on, though I could tell you a lot about this lady. For fifteen years, off and on, I sat listening by her dim bedside, until at last my expert ear could detect the sense of her faintest exhalation. I heard the ‘Decline and Fall’ from beginning to end; and though some of her reports were the most frivolous stuff, over others I have hung in a horror of interest. Certainly, I have heard some amazing words proceed from those spirit-lips of Mary Wilson. Sometimes I could hitch her repeatedly to any scene or subject that I chose by the mere use of my will; at other times the flighty waywardness of her foot eluded me: she resisted—she disobeyed; otherwise I might have sent you, not four note-books, but twenty. About the fifth year it struck me

that I should do well to jot down her more connected utterances, since I knew shorthand, and I did Note-book 'III' belongs to the eleventh year, its history being this: I heard her one afternoon murmuring in the intonation used when *reading*, asked her where she was, and she replied: 'Us are forty-five miles within: us read, another writes. . . .'

"But no more of Mary Wilson now: rather let us think a little of A. L. Browne—with a breathing-tube in his trachea, and Eternity under his pillow. . . ." (Dr. Browne's letter then continues on subjects of no interest here.)

(My transcription of the shorthand book "III" I now proceed to give, merely reminding the reader that the words form the substance of a document to be written, or to be motived (according to Miss Wilson), in that Future, which, no less than the Past, substantially exists in the Present—though, like the Past, we see it not. I need only add that the title, division into paragraphs, &c., have been arbitrarily contrived by myself for convenience.)

[*Here begins the note-book marked "III".*]

The Purple Cloud

Well, the memory seems to be getting rather impaired now. What, for instance, was the name of that parson who preached, just before the *Boreal* set out, about the wrongness of any more attempts to reach the North Pole? Forgotten! Yet four years ago it was as familiar to me as my own name.

Things which took place before the voyage seem to be getting a little cloudy in the memory now: I have sat here, in the loggia of this Cornish villa, to write down some sort of account of what has happened—God knows why, since no eye can ever read it—and at the very beginning I cannot remember the parson's name.

He was a strange sort of man surely, Scotchman from Ayrshire, big, gaunt, with tawny hair; used to go about London streets in shough and rough-spun clothes, a plaid flung from one shoulder, and once I saw him in Holborn with his rather wild stalk, frowning and muttering to himself. He had no sooner come to London and opened chapel (I think in Fetter Lane), than the little room began to be crowded; and when, some years afterwards, he moved to a big establishment in Kensington, all sorts of men, even from America and Australia, flocked to hear the thunder-storms that he talked, though certainly it was not an age prone to rage into enthusiasms over that species of pulpit prophet and prophecy. But this particular man undoubtedly did rouse the strong dark feelings that sleep in the heart: his eyes were pretty singular and powerful; his voice from a whisper ran gathering, like snowballs, and crashed, much like the pack-ice in commotion yonder in the North; while his gestures were as uncouth and gawky as some wild man's of the primitive ages.

Well, this man—what *was* his name?—Macintosh? Mackay? I think—yes, *that* was it! *Mackay*, Mackay saw fit to take offence at the fresh attempt to reach the Pole in the *Boreal*; and for three Sundays, when the preparations were nearing completion, fulminated against it at Kensington.

The excitement as to the Pole had at this time reached a pitch which can only be described as *fevered*, if this expresses the strange ecstasy and unrest which prevailed: for the scientific interest which men had felt in this unknown region was now, suddenly, a thousand times intensified by a new interest—a tremendous *money* interest.

And the new zeal had ceased to be healthy in its tone as the old zeal had been: for now the mean demon Mammon was having a hand in this matter.

Within the ten years preceding the *Boreal* expedition no less than twenty-seven expeditions had set out, and failed. . .

The secret of which new rage lay in the last will of Mr. Charles P. Stickney of Chicago, that shah of faddists, supposed to be the richest individual who ever lived, who, ten years before the *Boreal* undertaking, dying, had bequeathed 175 million dollars to the man, of whatever nationality, who first reached the Pole.

Such the actual wording of the will—“*man who first reached*”: and from this loose method of designating the person meant had immediately broken forth a prolonged heat of controversy in Europe and America as to whether or no the testator meant *the Chief* of the first expedition

which reached, until it was finally decided on legal authority that the actual wording held good, that it was the individual, whatever his station in the expedition, whose foot first reached the 90th degree of latitude, who would have title to the “swag.”

At all events, the furore had risen, I say, to the pitch of fever; and, as to the *Boreal* in particular, the progress of her preparations was minutely conned in the newspapers, everyone was an authority on her fitting, and she was in every mouth a bet, a hope, a joke, or a jeer: for now, at last, it was felt that success was near. So this Mackay had an interested audience, if a somewhat startled, and a somewhat cynical, one.

A lion-hearted man this must have been, after all, to dare proclaim a point-of-view so at variance with the mood of his time! One against four hundred millions, they bent one way, he the opposite, saying that they were wrong, all wrong! People used to call him “John the Baptist Redivivus”: and without doubt he did suggest something of that sort. I suppose that at the time when he had the audacity to denounce the *Boreal* there was not a sovereign on any throne who, but for loss of standing, would not have been glad of a galley-post on board.

On the third Sunday night of his denunciation I was there in that Kensington chapel, and I heard him. And the wild talk he talked!—seemed like a man delirious with inspiration.

We all sat hushed, while the man’s prophesying voice ranged up and down through all the modulations of thunder, from the hurrying mutter to the reverberant burst and hubbub: and those who came to scoff remained to wonder.

What he said was this: That there was some sort of Fate, or Doom, connected with the Pole in reference to the human race; that man’s continued failure, in spite of continual effort, to attain proved this; and that this failure constituted a lesson—and a warning—which the race disregarded at its peril.

The North Pole, he said, was not so far away, and the difficulties in the way of reaching it were not, on the face of them, so great: human ingenuity had achieved a thousand things a thousand times more difficult; yet in spite of over half-a-dozen well-planned efforts in the nineteenth century, and of thirty-one in the twentieth, men had never really reached, though some had pretended to: always we had been balked, balked, by some seeming chance—some restraining Hand: and herein lay the lesson—*herein the warning*. Wonderfully like “the Tree of Knowledge” in “Eden,” he said, was that Pole: the rest of the earth open and offered to man—but *That* persistently veiled and “forbidden”; as when a father lays a hand upon his son, with “Not here, my child; where you will—not here.”

But persons, he said, were free to stop their ears, and turn a callous consciousness to the whispers and hints of Heaven; and he believed, he said, that the time was now near when we would find it absolutely in our power to stand on that 90th of latitude, and plant an impious foot on the head of this planet—as it had been given into the power of “Adam” to stretch an impious hand to the “Tree of Knowledge”; but, said he—his voice vaulting now to a prolonged proclamation of awful augury—as the abuse of that power had been followed in the one case by downfall prompt and cosmic, so, in the other, he warned the whole human crew to look out thenceforth for nothing from God but a grumbling heaven, and thundery weather.

The man’s frantic sincerity, authoritative voice, savage gestures, could not but have their effect upon all—as for me, I declare, I sat as though a messenger from Heaven addressed me; but I believe that I had not yet reached home when the whole impression of the discourse had passed from me like water from a duck’s back. No, the Prophet in the twentieth century was not a success: John Baptist himself, camel-skin and all, would have met with only tolerant shrugs. I dismissed Mackay from my mind with the thought: “Behind his age, I suppose.”

But haven't I thought differently of Mackay since, my God . . . ?

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Three weeks—about that—before that Sunday-night discourse, I was visited by Clark, the chief of the expedition—visit of friendship, I having then been established a year at 24, Harley Street, and, though under twenty-seven, had, I suppose, as *élite* a practice as any doctor in Europe.

Élite—but small: I was able to maintain my state, and move among the great; but now and again I would feel a pinch: just about then, in fact, I was only saved from embarrassment by the success of my book, *Applications of Science to the Arts*.

In the course of conversation that afternoon Clark said to me in his haphazard way: "Do you know what I dreamed about you last night, Adam Jeffson?—that you were with us on the expedition.' I think he must have seen my start: on the same night I had dreamed the same thing; but not a word said I about it now. There was a stammer in my tongue when I answered: "Who? I? on the expedition?—wouldn't go, if I were asked."

"Oh, you would"—from Clark.

"I wouldn't. You forget that I am about to be married."

"Well, we need not discuss it, as Peters is not going to die. Still, if anything did happen to him, it is you I should come straight to, Adam Jeffson."

"Clark, you jest," I said: "I know little of astronomy or meteorological phenomena. Besides, I am about to be married. . . ."

"But what about your botany, my friend? *There's* what we should be wanting of you; and as for nautical astronomy, poh, a man of your scientific habit would pick all that up in no time."

"You discuss the matter gravely, Clark," I said, smiling: "such a thought would never enter—There is, first of all, my *fiancée*——"

"Ah, the all-important Countess, eh?—Well, but she, as far as I know the lady, would be the first to force you to go. The chance of stamping one's foot on the Pole does not occur to a man every day, my son."

"Talk of something else!" I said: "there is Peters. . . ."

"Well, of course, there is Peters. But, believe me, the dream I had—"

"Oh, your dreams!" I laughed.

Yes, I remember: pretended to laugh! but my secret heart knew, even *then*, that one of those crises was occurring in my life which, from my childhood, have made it the most extraordinary that any creature of the earth ever lived; and I knew that this was so, firstly because of the two dreams, and secondly because, when, Clark gone, I was drawing on my gloves to go to see my *fiancée*, I heard distinctly the old two voices; and one said: "Go not to see her now!" and the other: "Yes, go, go!"

The two voices of my life! One, reading this, would think that I mean merely two contradictory impulses—or else that I rave: for what modern man could comprehend how real-seeming were those voices, how loud, and how anon I could hear them contend within me with a nearness "nearer than breathing," "closer than hands and feet."

About the age of seven it happened first to me: I playing one summer evening in a pine-wood of my father's; half a mile away a quarry-cliff; and it seemed as if someone said inside of me "Take a walk toward the cliff," and as if someone else said "Don't go that way at all!"—whispers then, which gradually, as I grew up, swelled to cries of wrathful contention. I did go

toward the cliff: and fell. Some weeks later, on recovering speech, I told my astonished mother that someone “had pushed me” over the edge, and that someone else “had caught me” at the bottom!

One night, somewhat before my thirteenth birthday, lying on a sofa, the notion visited me that my life must be of mighty importance to some thing or things that I could not see; that two Powers, which hated each other, must be continually after me, one wishing to kill me, the other to keep me living, one wishing me to do so and so, the other to do the opposite; that I was not a boy like other boys, but a being separate, special, marked for—something. Already then I had notions, touches of mood, fugitive instincts, as occult and primitive, I verily believe, as those of the first man that stepped: so that such expressions as “Lord spake to So-and-so, saying” have never suggested any question in my mind as to how the voice was *heard*: I did not find it difficult to comprehend that originally men had more ears than two, as beasts and “mediums” have. Nor should have been surprised to know that I, in these latter days, more or less resemble those primeval ones.

But not a creature, except maybe my mother, has ever dreamed me what I here state that I was: I seemed the ordinary boy of my day, bow in my “Varsity eight,” cramming for exams., dawdling in clubs. When I had to select a profession, who could have suspected the battle that transacted itself in my breast, while my brain was careless—that conflict wherein the brawling voices brawled, the one: “Be a doctor,” the other: “Be a lawyer, an artist—be *anything* but a doctor!”

A doctor I became; went to what had grown into the greatest of medical schools—Cambridge; and there it was that I came across a man named Scotland, who had an odd view of the world—was always talking about certain “Black” and White” Powers, till it became absurd, and the men used to call him “Black-and-white-mystery-man,” because one day when someone said something about “the black mystery of the universe,” Scotland corrected him with “the black-and-white mystery.”

Well I remember Scotland now—had rooms in the New Court at Trinity, and a set of us were generally there—the genes with a passion for cats, and Sappho, and the Anthology, very short in stature, with a Roman nose, continually making efforts to keep his neck straight, and draw his paunch in. He used to vow that the universe was being furiously contended for by two Powers: that the White was the stronger, but did not find the conditions on our particular planet very favorable to his success, had got the best of it up to the Middle Ages in Europe, but since then had been slowly, stubbornly, giving way before the Black; and finally the Black would win—not everywhere perhaps, but *here*—would carry off, if no other planet, at least *this* one, for his prize.

Such was Scotland’s doctrine, which he never wearied of repeating; and while others heard him with mere toleration, little could they divine with what a burning of inward interest, I, cynically smiling there, imbibed his words. Most profound, most profound was the impression they made upon me.

* * *

But I was saying that when Clark left me, I was drawing on my gloves to go to see my *fiancée*, the Countess Clodagh, when I heard the two voices most clearly; and since sometimes the urgency of one or the other impulse is so overpowering, that there is no resisting it, so it was now with the one that bid me go.

I had to walk the distance between Harley Street and Hanover Square, and all that time it was as though something called at my ear: "Breathe no word of Clark's visit!" and another call: "Tell, hide nothing!"

It seemed to last a month; yet it was only some minutes before I was in Hanover Square, and Clodagh in my arms.

She was, in my opinion, the most superb of creatures, Clodagh—that haughty throat which seemed to be always scorning something just behind her left shoulder. Superb! but, ah—I know it now—a godless woman, Clodagh, a bitter heart.

Clodagh once confessed to me that her favorite character in history was Lucrezia Borgia, and when she saw my horror, immediately added: "Well, no, I am only joking!" Such was her duplicity: for I see now that she lived in the effort to keep hidden her heinous heart from me. Yet, now I think of it, how completely did Clodagh enthrall me!

Our proposed marriage was opposed by both my family and hers: by mine, because her father and grandfather had died in lunatic asylums; and by hers, because forsooth, I was neither a rich nor a noble match. A sister of hers, much older than herself, had married a common country-doctor, Peters of Taunton, and this so-called *mésalliance* made the so-called *mésalliance* with me doubly detestable to her relatives. But Clodagh's passion for me was to be stemmed neither by their threats nor prayers. What a flame, after all, was Clodagh! Sometimes she scared me.

She was at this date no longer young, being by five years my senior, as also by five years the senior of her nephew, born from the marriage of her sister with Peters of Taunton, this nephew being Peter Peters, who was to accompany the *Boreal* expedition as doctor, botanist, and meteorological assistant.

On that day of Clark's visit to me I had not been seated five minutes with Clodagh, when I said: "Dr. Clark—ha! ha!—has been talking to me about the expedition—says that if anything happened to Peters, I should be the first man he would run to—has had an absurd dream. . . ."

The consciousness that filled me as I uttered these words was the *wickedness* of me—the crooked wickedness. But I could no more help it than fly.

Clodagh, standing at a window, holding a rose at her face, for quite a minute made no reply; I saw her sharp-cut, florid face in profile, steadily bent and smelling, till she said in her cold, rapid way: "The man who first plants his foot on the Pole will certainly be ennobled. I say nothing of the many millions. . . . I only wish I was a man!"

"I don't know that I have any special ambition that way," I rejoined: "I am happy in my warm Eden with my Clodagh."

"Don't let me think little of you!" she answered pettishly.

"Why should you, Clodagh? I am not bound to desire to go to the North Pole!"

"But you *would*, I suppose, if you could?"

"I might—I—doubt it. There is our marriage...."

"Marriage indeed! It is the one thing to transform our marriage from a sneaking difficulty to a ten times triumphant event."

"If *I* personally were the first to stand at the Pole; but there are too many in an—"

"For *me* you will, Adam—"

"*Will*,' Clodagh?" I cried: "you say '*will*?' there is not the shadow of a chance—!"

"But why? There are still three weeks before the start. They say. . . ."

She stopped.

"They say what?"

Now her voice dropped: "That Peter takes atropine."

Ah, I started then, she now moving from the window to sit in a rocking-chair, to turn the leaves of a book, without reading and we were silent, she and I, I standing, looking at her, she drawing her thumb across the leaf-edges, and beginning again, contemplatively, until she laughed dryly a little—a dry, mad laugh.

“Why did you start when I said that?” she asked, reading now at random.

“/! I did not start, Clodagh! What made you think that I started? I did not start! Who told you, Clodagh, that Peters takes atropine?”

“He is my nephew: I should know. But don’t look dumb-founded in that absurd fashion: I have no intention of poisoning him in order to see you a multimillionaire, and a Peer of the Realm. . . .”

“My dearest Clodagh!”

“I easily might, however. He will be here presently—bringing Mr. Wilson for the evening.” (Wilson was going as electrician of the expedition.)

“Clodagh,” I said, “believe me, you jest in a manner which I don’t find pretty.”

“Do I really?” she answered with that haughty half-turn of her throat: “then, I must be more exquisite. But, then, it is only a jest. Women ai-e no longer adn~~ed for doing such things.”

“Ha! ha! ha!—no—no longer admired, Clodagh! Oh, well, let us change this talk. . . .”

But now she could talk of nothing else—got from me that afternoon the history of the Polar expeditions of late years, how far each had reached, by what aids, why they had failed: and her eyes shone; she listened eagerly. Before this, indeed, she had been interested in the *Boreal*, knew the details of her outfitting, was acquainted with several members of the expedition; but now, suddenly, her interest seemed inflamed, my mention of Clark’s visit having apparently set her scarlet with Arctic-fever.

The heat of her kiss as I freed myself from her embrace that day I still remember. I went home with a rather heavy heart.

Well, from the house of Dr. Peter Peters, three doors from mine on the opposite side of the street, his footman ran to knock me up that midnight with the news that Peters was ill; and when I hurried to his bedside I knew by the first glance at his gay deliriums and staring pupils that he was poisoned with atropine.

Wilson, the electrician, who had passed the evening with him at Clodagh’s in Hanover Square, and was there, said to me: “What on earth is the matter?”

“Poisoned” I answered.

“Good God! Atropine, is it?”

“Don’t be frightened: I think he will recover.”

“Pretty certain?”

“Yes—that is, if he leaves off taking the drug, Wilson.”

“What! it is he who has poisoned himself?”

I hesitated; but then said: “He takes atropine.”

Three hours I remained there, and, God knows, toiled hard for his life: when I left him in the dark of the morning my mind was at rest.

I slept till 11 a.m., then hurried over again to Peters, in whose room were one of my two nurses, and Clodagh; and at once my beloved put finger to lip, whispering: “Sh-h-h! he is asleep. . . .” then came close to my ear, saying: “I heard the news early—am come to stay with him, till—the last. . . .”

We looked at each other some time—eye to eye, steadily, she and I; but mine dropped before Clodagh’s. A word was on my mouth to say, but I said nothing.

Well, the recovery of Peters was not so steady as I had expected. At the end of the first week he was still prostrate; and it was then that I said to Clodagh: "Clodagh, your presence at the bedside somehow frets me—so unnecessary."

"Unnecessary certainly," she replied: "but I always had a genius for nursing, and a passion for watching the battles of the body. Why do you object?"

"Oh, I don't know. . . . This is a case that I dislike: I have half a mind to throw it to the devil."

"Then, do so."

"And you, too—go home, go home, Clodagh!"

"But *why?*—if one does no harm. In these days of 'the corruption of the upper classes,' and Roman decadence of everything, shouldn't every innocent whim be encouraged by you upright ones who strive against the tide? I find a sensuous pleasure in dabbling in drugs—like Helen, for that matter, and Medea, and Calypso, and the great antique women, who were all chemists. To study the human ship in a gale, and the slow drama of its foundering—And I want you to acquire the habit of letting me have my little way—"

Now she touched my hair with a lofty playfulness which soothed me; but even then I looked upon the rumpled bed, and saw that the man there was really very sick.

I have still a nausea to write about it! Lucrezia Borgia in her own age may have been heroic: but Lucrezia in this late century! One could retch up the heart. . . .

The man grew sick on that bed, I say. The second week passed, and when only ten days remained before the start of the expedition Wilson, the electrician, was one evening seated by Peters' bedside when I entered, at a moment when Clodagh was about to administer a dose to Peters; but, seeing me, she put down the medicine-glass on the night-table, and came toward me; and, as she came, I saw a sight which stabbed me: for Wilson took up the medicine-glass deposited by her, elevated it, looked at it, smelled into it; and he did it with a kind of light-fingered stealth; and he did it with an under-look, and a meaningfulness of expression, which, it seemed to me, meant mistrust. . . ."

Meantime, Clark came each day. He had himself a medical degree, and about this time I called him in professionally, together with Alleyne of Cavendish Square, to consultation over Peters, who now lay in a semi-coma broken by passionate vomitings; and his condition puzzled us all. I formally stated that he took atropine—had originally been poisoned by atropine: but we saw that his present symptoms were scarcely atropine symptoms, but, it almost seemed, of some other vegetable poison or poisons, which we could not definitely name.

"Mysterious thing," Clark said to me when we were alone.

"I don't understand it," I said.

"Who are the two nurses?"

"Oh, highly recommended people of my own."

"At any rate, my dream about you comes true, Jeffson. It is clear that Peters is out of the running now."

I shrugged.

"I now formally invite you to join the expedition," says Clark: "do you consent?"

I shrugged again.

"Well, if that means consent," he said, "let me remind you that you have only eight days, and all the world to do in them."

This conversation occurred in the dining-room of Peters' house; and, as we passed through the door, I saw Clodagh gliding down the passage outside—rapidly—away from us.

Not a word I said to her that day about Clark's invitation; yet I asked myself repeatedly: Did she not know of it? Had she not *listened*, and heard?

However that was, near midnight, to my surprise, Peters opened his eyes, smiled, and by noon the next day his fine vitality, which so fitted him for an Arctic expedition, had rallied, he then leaning on an elbow, speaking with Wilson; and, except his pallor and strong stomach-pains, scarcely a trace left of his late closeness to death. For the pains I prescribed some quarter-grain tabloids of sulphate of morphia, and went away.

Now, David Wilson and I never greatly loved each other, and that very day he brought about a painful situation as between Peters and me, by telling Peters that I had taken his place in the expedition.

On which Peters, a touchy fellow, at once dictated a letter of protest to Clark: and Clark sent Peters' letter to me, marked with a great note of interrogation in red pencil.

Now, Peters' preparations were completely made, mine not, and he had five days in which to recover himself: I therefore wrote to Clark, saying that the changed circumstances of course annulled my acceptance of his proposal, though I had already incurred the inconvenience of negotiating with a *locum tenens*.

So this decided it: Peters was to go, I stay. The fifth day before the departure dawned, a Friday, the 15th of June, Peters now in an arm-chair, cheerful, but with a fevered pulse, and still the stomach-pains, I now giving him three quarter-grains of morphia a day. That Friday night, at 11 p.m., I visited him, and found Clodagh there, talking to him, he smoking a cigar.

Clodagh said: "I was waiting for you, Adam; didn't know whether I was to inject anything tonight. Is it Yes or No?"

"What do you think, Peters?" I said.

"Well, perhaps you had better give us another quarter," he answered: "there's still some trouble in the tummy off and on."

"A quarter-grain, then, Clodagh," I said.

As she opened the syringe-box, she remarked with a pout: "Our patient has been naughty! He has taken some more atropine."

I got angry at once. "Peters," I cried, "you know you have no right to be doing things like that without consulting me! Do that once more, and I swear I have nothing further to do with you."

"Rubbish," says Peters: "why all the unnecessary heat? A mere flea-bite—I felt that I needed it."

"He injected it with his own hand," Clodagh mentioned.

She was now standing at the mantelpiece, having lifted the syringe-box from the night-table, taken from its velvet lining both the syringe and the vial containing the morphia tabloids, and gone to mantelpiece to melt one of the tabloids in a little of the distilled water there, her back turned upon us: and she was a long time. I was standing; Peters in his armchair, smoking; Clodagh talking about a Charity Bazaar which she had visited that afternoon.

She was long, yes, and the crazy thought arose in some corner of my soul: "Why is she so *long*?"

"Ah, that was a pain!" Peters said: "never mind the bazaar, Aunt—think of the morphia."

Suddenly an irresistible impulse seized me—to rush upon her, to dash syringe, tabloids, glass, and all, from her hands. I *must* have obeyed it—I was on the tip-top point of obeying—my body already leant; but in that moment a voice at the open door behind me said: "Well, how is everything?"

Wilson, the electrician, stood there: and with lightning swiftness I remembered an underlook of mistrust which I had once seen in his eyes. . . . Oh, well, I would not, could not! She was my love—I stood like stone. . . .

Clodagh went to Wilson with frank right hand, in her left being the fragile glass containing the injection; and my eyes, fastened on her face, saw it full of reassurance, of free innocence; so that I said to myself: “I must be mad!”

An ordinary chat began, while Clodagh turned up Peters sleeve, and, kneeling, injected his forearm; when she rose, laughing at some remark of Wilson’s, the drug-glass dropped from her hand, and her heel, by an apparent accident, trod on it. As she put the syringe among a number of others on the mantelpiece, she mentioned it once more with that same pout: “The patient has been naughty, Mr. Wilson—has been taking more atropine.”

“Not really?” said Wilson.

“Let me alone, the whole of you,” answered Peters: “I ain’t a child.”

Those were the last intelligible words he spoke: died shortly before 1 a.m., poisoned by atropine, in spite of the morphia, the antidote of atropine, that he had in him.

From that moment to the moment when the *Boreal* bore me down the Thames all was a tumbled dream to me, of which hardly any detail remains in my memory: I remember how at time inquest I was called upon to prove that Peters had himself injected himself with atropine; and, this having been corroborated by Wilson, and by Clodagh, the verdict was in accordance.

And in all that chaotic hurry of preparation, two other things only, but those with distinctness now, I remember.

The first—and chief—is that turmoil of words which I heard at Kensington from that big-mouthed Mackay on the Sunday evening. What was it that enticed me, busy as I was, to that building that night? Well, perhaps I know.

There I sat and heard him: and most strangely have those words of his peroration impressed themselves upon my brain, when, dashing to a passion of prophecy, he proclaimed: “And as in the one case the abuse of that power was followed by downfall prompt and cosmic, so, in the other, I warn the whole human crew to look out henceforth for nothing from God but a grumbling heaven, and thundery weather.”

And this second thing I remember in all that turmoil of doubts and flurries: that, as the *Boreal* moved down with the afternoon tide, a wire was put into my hand, a last word from Clodagh, who said only this: “Be first—for Me”; and I said then in myself: “The woman gave me of the tree, and I did eat.”

* * *

The *Boreal* left St. Katherine’s Docks in beautiful weather on the afternoon of the 19th of June, full of good hope, bound for the Pole.

All about the docks was one region of heads stretched out in innumerable vagueness and down the river to Woolwich a continuous roaring and murmuring of bees droned from both shores to cheer our journey.

The expedition was partly a national affair, subvented by Government: and if ever ship was well-found it was the *Boreal*, which had a frame tougher far than any battleship’s, capable of ramming some ten yards of drift-ice, and was stuffed with sufficient pemmican, cod-roe, fish-meal, and so on, to last us not less than six years.

We were seventeen all told, the five Heads (so to speak) of the undertaking being Clark (our Chief), John Mew (commander), Aubrey Maitland (meteorologist), Wilson (electrician), and myself (doctor, botanist, and assistant meteorologist).

The idea was to get as far east as the 1000, or the 1200, of longitude, to catch there the northern current; to push and drift our way northward; and, when the ship could no further penetrate, to leave her (either three, or else four, of us, on ski), and with sledges drawn by dogs and reindeer make a dash for the Pole.

This had also been the plan of the last expedition—that of the *Nix*—and of others, the *Boreal* only differing from the *Nix* in being a thing of nicer design, of more exquisite forethought.

Our voyage was without incident up to the end of July, when we encountered a drift of ice-floes. On the 1st of August we were at Kabarova, where we met our coal-ship, and took in some coal for an emergency, liquid air being our proper motor; also forty-three dogs, four reindeer, and a quantity of reindeer-moss; and two days later we turned our bows finally northward and eastward, passing through heavy “slack” ice under sail and liquid air in crisp weather, till, on the 27th of August, we lay moored to a floe off the desolate island of Taimur.

The first thing which we saw here was a bear on the shore, watching for young white-fish: and promptly Clark, Mew, and Lamburn (engineer) went on shore in the launch, I and Maitland following in the pram, each party with three dogs. It was while climbing away inland that Maitland said to me: “When Clark leaves the ship for the dash to the Pole, it is three, not two, of us, after all, that he is going to take with him, making a party of four.”

I: “Is that so? Who knows?”

Maitland: “Wilson does. Clark has let it out in conversation with Wilson”

I: “Well, the more the merrier. Who will be the three?”

Maitland: “Wilson is sure to be in it, and there may be Mew, making the third. As to the fourth, I suppose *I* shall get left out in the cold”

I: “More likely *I*.”

Maitland: “Well, the race is between us four: Wilson, Mew, you and *I*. It is a question of physical fitness combined with special knowledge. You are too lucky a dog to get left out, Jeffson.”

I: “Well, what does it matter, so long as the expedition is at success? That’s the main thing.”

Maitland: “Oh, yes, that’s all very fine talk. But isn’t it rather a pose to affect to despise \$175,000,000? *I* want to be in at the death, and mean to be, if *I* can.”

“Look,” *I* whispered—“a bear.”

It was a mother and cub: and with a stubborn trudge she came wagging her low head, having no doubt smelled the dogs. So we separated on the instant, doubling different ways behind ice-boulders, wanting her to go on nearer the shore, before killing; but, in passing close, she spied, and bore down at a trot upon me, whereupon *I* fired into her neck; and at once, with a roar, she turned tail, making now straight in Maitland’s direction.

I saw him run out from cover some hundred yards away, aiming his long-gun; but no report followed: and in half a minute he was under her fore-paws, she rapping out slaps at the barking, shrinking dogs. Maitland roared for my help; and at that moment, *I*, poor wretch, in greater misery than he, stood shivering in an ague: for all at once one of those wrangles of the voices of my destiny was filling my bosom with commotion, one bidding me dash to Maitland’s aid, one passionately commanding me be still. But it lasted, *I* fancy, some seconds only before *I* ran and got a shot into the bear’s brain; and Maitland leapt up with a rent down his face.

But singular destiny! Whatever I did—if I did evil, if I did good—the result was the same: tragedy dark and sinister! Poor Maitland was doomed that voyage, and my rescue of him was the means employed to make his death the more sure.

I think that I have already written about a man called Scotland, whom I met at Cambridge, who was always taking about certain “Black” and “White” beings, and their contention for the earth; well, with regard to all that, I have a fancy, a whim of the mind, which I will write down now: that there may have been some sort of understanding between Black and White, as in the case of “Adam” and “the tree,” that, should mankind force his way to the Pole and time old forbidden mystery biding there, then some mishap should not fail to overtake the race; that the White, being kindly inclined to mankind, did not wish this to take place, and intended, for the sake of the race, to wipe out our entire expedition ere it reached; and that the Black, knowing that the White designed to do this, and by what means, used me—*me*—to outwit this scheme, first of all working that I should be one of the party of four to leave the ship on ski.

But the baby attempt, my God, to read. . . I laugh at poor Black-and-White Scotland! The thing aint so simple.

Well, we left Taimur the same day, and good-bye now to both land and open sea. Till we passed the latitude of Cape Chelyuskin (which we did not sight), it was one succession of ice-belts, with Mew in the crow’s-nest tormenting the electric bell to the engine-room, the anchor hanging ready to drop, and Clark taking soundings. Progress was slow, and the Polar night gathered round us gradually, as we groped still onward and onward into that indigo and glimmering clime of frore, we now leaving off bed-coverings of reindeer-skin to take to sleeping-bags, eight of the dogs having died by the 25th of September, when we were experiencing 19 of frost. In the darkest part of our night the Northern Light cast its solemn gonfalon over us, quivering round the skies in a million fickle gauds.

Meantime, the relations between the members of our little crew were excellent—with one exception: David Wilson and I were not good friends.

There was a something—a tone—in the evidence given by him at the inquest on Peters which made me mad every time I remembered it. He had heard Peters admit that Peters had administered atropine to himself, and had had to give evidence of that fact; but had given it in a most half-hearted way, so much so, that the coroner had asked him, “What, Sir, are you hiding from me?” From which day he and I had hardly exchanged ten sentences, in spite of our constant companionship in the vessel; and one day, standing alone on a floe, I found myself hissing: “If he dared suspect Clodagh of poisoning Peters, I could *kill* him. . . .”

Well, up to 78 of latitude the weather had been splendid, but on the night of the 7th of October—well I remember it—we experienced a fierce tempest. Our tub of a ship rolled like a swing, drenching the whimpering dogs at every lurch, and hurling everything on board into confusion; the petroleum-launch was washed from the davits; down at one time to 40 be low zero sank the thermometer; while a high aurora was whiffed into a dishevelled crush of chromes, resembling the palette of some rabid Rafael or mixed battle of seraphim in their robes, and looking the very symbol of tribulation, tempest, wreck, and distraction. I, for the first time, was sick.

It was with a dizzy brain, therefore, that I went off watch to my bunk. Soon, indeed, I fell asleep; but the rolls and shocks of the ship, combined with the ponderous Greenland-anorak which I had on, and the state of my body, together produced a frightful nightmare, in which I was conscious of a vain struggle to move, a vain fight for breath, for the sleeping-bag turned to an iceberg on my bosom. Of Clodagh I dreamt—that she let drip a liquid, colored like

pomegranate-seeds, into a glass of gruel: and she presented the glass to Peters. The draught, I knew, was poisonous as death; and in a last effort to break the bands of that dark slumber I was conscious, as I wrenched myself upright, of shrieking aloud: "Clodagh! *spare the man. . . !*"

Now my eyes opened to waking; the electric light was shining in the cabin; and there stood David Wilson looking at me.

Wilson was a big man, with a massively-built face, long, made longer by a beard, having nervous contractions of the flesh at the cheek-bones, and splashed with freckles: I can see him now, his clinging pose, his mouth of disgust, his whole air, as he stood crouching and lurching there.

What he was doing in my cabin I did not know. To think, my good God, that he should have been led there just then! This was one of the four-men starboard berths; *his* was a-port: yet there he was. But he explained at once.

"Sorry to interrupt your innocent dreams," says he: "the mercury in Maitland's thermometer is frozen, and he asked me hand him his alcohol one from his bunk. . . ."

I did not answer. A hatred was in my heart against this man.

The next day the storm died away, and either three or four days later the slush-ice between the floes froze definitely. The *Boreal's* way being thus blocked, we warped her with ice-anchors and the capstan into the position in which she should lay up for her winter's drift. This was in about 79° 20' N. The sun had now totally vanished from our bleak abode, not to reappear till the following year.

Well, there was sledging with the dogs, and bear-hunting among the hummocks, as the months, one by one, went by; one day Wilson, by far our best shot, got a walrus-bull; Clark followed the traditional pursuit of a Chief, examining crustacea; Maitland and I were in a relation of close friendship, and I assisted his meteorological observations in a snow-hut built near the ship; sometimes throughout the twenty-four hours a luminous blue moon, very spectral, very fair, imbued our dim and livid dominion.

It was four days before Christmas that Clark made the great announcement; he had decided, he said, if our fine northward drift continued, to leave the ship near the middle of March for the dash to the Pole, taking with him the four reindeer, all the dogs, four sledges, four kayaks, and three companions; the companions whom he had decided to invite being: Wilson, Mew, and Maitland.

He said it at dinner; and, as he said it, David Wilson glanced at my face with a smile of glad malice that *I* was left out.

I remember well: the aurora that night was in the sky, at its brink floating a moon surrounded by a ring, with two mock-moons; but all shone very vague and far, and a fog which had already lasted some days made the ship's bows indistinct to me, as I paced the bridge on my watch, three hours after Clark's announcement.

For a long time all was quite quiet, save for the occasional whine of a dog, I all alone there; and, as it grew toward the end of my watch, when Maitland would follow me, my slow tread tolled as for the grave, the mountainous ice lying vague round me in its shroud and taciturnity, not less dreadfully strange than eternity itself.

But presently several of the dogs began barking together, left off, and began again. I said to myself: "There's a bear about. . . ."

And after some minutes I saw—thought that I saw—it, though the fog had, if anything, thickened: it being now very near the end of my watch.

It had entered the ship, I conjectured, by the boards which slanted from the port gangway down to the ice. Once before, in November, a bear, having smelled the dogs, had ventured on board at midnight; but *then* there had resulted a regular hubbub among the dogs; *now*, even in the midst of my excitement, I wondered at their quietness, though some whimpered—with fear, I thought. I saw the creature steal froward from the hatchway toward the kennels a-port; and I ran noiselessly, to snatch the watch-gun which stood always loaded by the companionway.

By this time the form had passed the kennels, had walked to the bows, was now making toward me on the starboard side; and, as I took aim, never, I thought, had I beheld so immense a bear—though I made allowance for the magnifying effect of the fog.

My finger was on the trigger; and in that instant a shivering sickness took me, the two voices shouting at me, “Shoot!” “Shoot not!” “Shoot!” Ah, well, that latter was irresistible. I pulled the trigger. The report hooted through the Polar glooms.

As the creature dropped, both Wilson and Clark were up once; and we three hurried to the spot.

But the first near glance discerned a singular species of bear; and when Wilson put his hand to the head a lax skin came away at his touch. . . . It was Aubrey Maitland who was underneath it; and I had shot him dead.

For some days he had been cleaning skins, among them the skin of the bear from which I had saved him at Tairnur, and, as Maitland was a born pantomimist, continually inventing hoaxes, perhaps to startle me with a false alarm in the very skin of the creature which had so nearly done for him, he had thrown it round him on finishing its cleaning, then in wanton fun had crept on deck at the hour of his watch; and the head of the bear-skin, and the fog, must have prevented him from seeing me taking aim.

This thing made me ill for many days: for I saw that the hand of fate was upon me. When I rose from bed, poor Maitland was lying in the ice behind the great camel-shaped hummock close by us.

By the end of January we had drifted to 80° 55′; and it was then that Clark, in the presence of Wilson, asked me if I would make the fourth man, in the place of poor Maitland, for the dash in March. When I said “Yes, I am willing,” David Wilson spat with a disgusted emphasis; then, a minute later, he sighed, with “Ah, poor Maitland. . .” and drew in his breath, with tut! tut!

God knows, I had an impulse to spring then and there at his gullet, and strangle him; but I restrained myself.

There remained now hardly a month before the dash, and all hands set to work with a will, measuring the dogs, making harness and seal-skin shoes for them, overhauling sledges and kayaks, and curling out every possible ounce of weight. But we were not destined, after all, to set out that year; about the 20th of February the ice began to pack, subjecting the ship to terrific pressure, while we found it necessary to make trumpets of our hands to shout into each others’ ears, the entire ice continent crashing, popping, crackling on every side in cosmic upheaval; and, expecting every moment to see the *Boreal* cracked to splinters, we had to set about unpacking provisions, and placing sledges, kayaks, dogs and everything in a position for instant flight. Five days it lasted, accompanied by a storm from the north, which, by the end of February, had driven us back south into latitude 79° 40′. Clark, of course, then abandoned all thought of the Pole for that summer.

And immediately afterwards we made a startling discovery: that our stock of reindeer-moss was now somehow ridiculously small. Egan our second mate, was blamed; but that did not help matters: the sad fact remained; and, since Clark, when begged to kill one or two of the deer, pig-headedly refused, by the beginning of summer every one was dead.

Well, our northward drift recommenced. Toward the middle of February we saw a mirage of the coming sun above the horizon; there were flights of Arctic petrels and snow-buntings; spring was with us; and in an ice-pack of big hummocks and narrow lanes we made good progress all the summer.

When the last of the deer died, my heart had sunk, and when the dogs killed two of their number, and a bear crushed a third, I was expecting what came: Clark announced that he could now take only two companions with him in the spring: Wilson and Mew. So once more I witnessed David Wilson's complacent smile of malice.

Then we settled into our second winter-quarters: again December, and all that moodiness and dreariment of our sunless gloom, made worse by the fact that the wind-mill would not work, leaving us frequently without electricity.

Ah me, none but those who have experienced it could dream one half the mental depression of that Arctic dark; how the soul takes on the hue of the universe; and without and within is nothing but gloom, gloom, and the rule of the Power of Darkness. Not one of us but was in a melancholic, dismal and dire mood; and on the 19th December Lamburn, the engineer, stabbed Cartwright, the old harpooner, in the arm.

Three days before Christmas a bear came close to the ship, then turned tail; upon which Mew, Wilson, I and Meredith (a general hand) set out in pursuit; but after a pretty long chase lost him; then scattered different ways. It was very dim, and after yet an hour's search I was returning tired and dispirited to the ship, when I spied some shade like a bear sailing away on my left, and at the same time sighted a man—I did not know whom—running like a handicapped ghost on my right. So I cried out: "There he is—come on! this way!"

The man quickly joined me, but, as soon as ever he recognized me, stopped dead, and the devil must have suddenly got into him, for he said: "No, thanks, Jeffson: alone with you I am in danger of my life. . . ."

It was Wilson. And I, too, forgetting at once all about the bear, stopped and faced him.

"I see, said I. "But, Wilson, you are going to explain to me *now* what you mean, you hear? What *do* you mean, Wilson?"

"What I say," he answered deliberately, eyeing me up and down: "alone with you I am in danger of my life: just as poor Maitland was, and just as poor Peters was. Certainly, you are a deadly beast."

Frenzy leapt, my God, in my heart; dark as that darksome Arctic night was my mind.

"Do you mean," said I, "that I want to put you out of the way, in order to go in your place to the Pole? Is that your meaning, man?"

"That's about my meaning, Jeffson," says he: "you are a deadly beast, you know."

"All right!" I cried, with a blazing eye: "I am going to kill *you*, Wilson—as sure as God lives. But I want to hear first: *who* told you that I killed Peters?"

"Your lover killed him—with *your* collusion. Why, I heard you, man, in your beastly sleep, blabbing the whole thing out. And I was pretty sure of it before, only I had no proofs. By God, I should enjoy putting a bullet into you, Jeffson!"

"You wrong me, you—you wrong me!" I bellowed my eyeballs staring in ravenous lust for his blood; "and now I am going to pay you well for it. *Look out, you!*"

I aimed my gun for his gizzard, I fingered the trigger; but he held up his left hand.

"Stop," he said, "stop." (He was ever one of the coolest of men). "There is no gallows on the *Boreal*, but Clark could easily rig one for you. I want to kill you, too, because there are no criminal courts up here, and it would be doing a good action for my country; but not here—not

now: listen to me—don't shoot. Later we can meet, when all is ready, so that no one may be the wiser, and fight it all out.”

As he spoke, I let the gun drop: it was better so. I knew that he was much the best shot on the ship, and I an indifferent one: but I did not care, I did not care, if I was killed.

It is a dim, inclement land, God knows; and the spirit of darkness and distraction is there.

Twenty hours later we met behind the great saddle-shaped hummock, some six miles to the S.E. of the ship; had set out at different times, so that no one might suspect; and each brought a ship's-lantern.

Wilson had dug an ice-grave near the hummock, leaving at its edge a heap of brash-ice and snow to fill it; and, this grave between us, we stood separated by perhaps seventy yards, each with his lantern at his feet.

Even so we were just ghosts and shades to each other, the air glowering very drearily, and present in my inmost soul were frills of cold, a chill moon, a mere abstraction of sheen, seeming to hang far outside the universe, the temperature at 54 below zero, so that we had on wind - clothes over our anoraks, and heavy foot-bandages under our Lap-boots. Nothing but a weird morgue seemed the world, haunted with despondent madness; and exactly like that world round us were the bosoms of us two poor men, full of macabre, bleak, and funereal feelings.

Between us yawned an early grave for one or other of our bodies; and I heard Wilson cry out: “Are you ready, Jeffson?”

“Aye, Wilson!” I cried.

“*Then here goes!*” cries he.

As he spoke, he fired: surely, the man was in earnest to kill me.

But his shot passed by me, as indeed was only likely, for we were shadows to each other.

I fired perhaps five seconds later than he: but in those five seconds he stood brightly revealed to me in clear lilac light: for an Arctic fireball had shot across the sky, showering abroad a phosphorous shine over the snow-landscape.

Before the intenser blue of its momentary glamour had passed away I saw Wilson stagger forward and drop. And him and his lantern I buried there under the rubble ice.

* * *

On the 13th March, nearly three months later, Clark, Mew and I left the *Boreal* in latitude 85 15’.

We had with us thirty-two dogs, three sledges, three kayaks, human provisions for 112 days, and dog provisions for 40. Being now about 340 miles from the Pole, we hoped to reach it in 43 days, then, turning south, and, feeding living dogs with dead, make either Franz Josef Land or Spitzbergen, at which latter place we should very likely come up with a whaler.

Well, during the first days progress was very slow, the ice being rough and laney, and the dogs behaving most badly, stopping dead at every difficulty, and leaping over the traces. Clark had had the idea of attaching a gold-beater's-skin balloon, with a lifting power of 35 pounds, to each sledge, and we had with us a supply of zinc and acid to repair the hydrogen-waste from the bags; but on the third day Mew over-filled and burst his balloon, whereupon Clark and I had to cut ours loose to equalize weights: so at the end of the fourth day out we had made only nineteen miles, and could still from a hummock perceive afar the leaning masts of the old *Boreal*. Clark led on ski, captaining a sledge with 400 lbs. of instruments, ammunitions, pemmican, aleuronate

bread; Mew followed, his sledge containing provisions only; and last came I, with a mixed freight. But on the fourth day Clark had an attack of snow-blindness, and Mew took his place.

* * *

Pretty soon our sufferings commenced, and they were bitter enough: the sun, though constantly visible day and night, gave no heat; our sleeping-bags (Clark and Mew slept together in one, I in another) were soaking wet all the night, being thawed by our warmth; and our fingers, under wrappings of sennegrass and wolf-skin, were always bleeding. Sometimes our frail bamboo-cane kayaks, lying across the sledges, would crash perilously against an ice-ridge—our one hope of reaching land; but the dogs were the great difficulty: we lost six mortal hours a day in harnessing and tending them. On the twelfth day Clark took a single-altitude observation, and found that we were only in latitude 86° 45′; but the next day we passed beyond the farthest point yet (authentically) attained by the *Nix*.

* * *

Our secret thought now was food, food—our day-long lust for the eating-time. Mew suffered from “Arctic thirst.”

* * *

Under such conditions man becomes in a few days, not a savage only, but a brute, scarcely a grade above the bear and walrus. . . . Ah, the ice! A sordid nightmare was that, God knows.

* * *

On we pressed, wending our petty way over the immense, upon whose loneliness, from before the old Silurian till now, Boötes had pored and brooded.

* * *

After the eleventh day our rate of march improved, all lanes disappearing, ridges becoming much less frequent. By the fifteenth day I was leaving behind me the ice-grave of David Wilson at the rate of ten to twelve miles a day.

Yet, as it were, his arm reached out and touched me, even there.

His disappearance had been explained by a hundred different guesses on the ship—all plausible enough: I had no idea that anyone connected me in any way with his death.

But on our twenty-second day of march, 140 miles from our goal, he caused a conflagration of rage and hate to break out among us three.

It was at the end of a march when our stomachs were hollow, our frames ready to drop, and our mood ravenous and inflamed. One of Mew’s dogs was sick: it was necessary to kill it; he asked me to do it.

“Oh,” I said, “you kill your own dog, of course.”

“Well, I don’t know,” he replied, catching fire at once, “you ought to be used to killing, Jeffson.”

“How do you mean, Mew?” I asked, with a mad start, for madness and the lamps of Hell were prompt and ready in us all: “you mean because my profession—”

“Profession, damn it, no,” he snarled like a dog: “go and dig up David Wilson—I dare say you know where to find him—*he’ll* tell you my meaning, right enough.”

I rushed at once to Clark, who was stooping among the dogs unharnessing, and, savagely pushing his shoulder, I exclaimed: “That beast accuses me of murdering David Wilson!”

“Well?” says Clark.

“I’d split his skull as clean—!”

“Go away, Adam Jeffson, and let me be!” Clark snarled.

“Is that all you’ve got to say about it, then, you?” I asked.

“To the devil with you, man, say I, and let me be!” he cried: “*you know your own conscience* best, I suppose.”

Before this insult I stood with grinning teeth, but impotent, though from that moment a still grimmer mood of malignity brooded in my spirit; and indeed the humor of each of us three was imbued with a certain dangerous, even murderous, rage: for in that region of chill we had become assimilated to the beasts that perish.

* * *

On the 10th of April we passed the 89th parallel, and, though sick to death, both in spirit and body, pressed still on. Like the lower animals we were smitten now with dumbness, and hardly once a day mumbled a syllable one to the other; but in selfish brutishness on through a hell of cold we moved. It is damned territory, not to be penetrated by man: and rapid and deplorable was the degeneration of our souls. As for me, never could I have imagined that savagery so heinous could brood in a human bosom as now I felt it brood in mine. If men could enter a country specially set apart for the habitation of devils, and there become possessed of evil, as we were so would they be.

* * *

As we advanced, the ice every day became smoother: so that, from four miles a day, our rate increased to fifteen, and finally (as the sledges lightened) to twenty.

It was now that we began to encounter a succession of strange-looking objects lying scattered across the ice, whose number continually increased as we proceeded, objects having the appearance of rocks, or pieces of iron-ore, incrustated with glass-like fragments, which we discovered to be precious stones. On our second twenty-mile day Clark picked up a diamond-splinter as large as a child’s thumb, and such objects became common. We thus found “wealth,” beyond dream; but as the bear and the walrus find, and for all those millions we would not have given an ounce of fish-meal. Clark grumbled something about their being meteor-stones, whose ferruginous substance had been lured that way by the Pole’s magnetism, and kept from frictional ignition in their passage through the air by the frigidity there: but, as the Pole’s H is not strong, my own view is that they are due to the greater drag of gravity and the much greater shallowness of the atmosphere there; anyway, they quickly ceased to interest our sluggish brains, except in so far as they obstructed our way.

* * *

We had all along had excellent weather, till, on the morning of the 12th of April, we were overtaken by a storm from the S.W. of such monstrous and solemn volume, that the heart quailed under it. It lasted in its full power only an hour, but during that time snatched two of our sledges far away, and compelled us to lie face-downward. As we had travelled all the sun-lit night, we were gasping with fatigue: so, as soon as the wind allowed us to huddle together our scattered things, We collapsed into the sleeping-bags, and instantly slept.

We knew that the ice was in fearful upheaval round us; we knew, as our eyelids sweetly closed, of a slow booming as of distant cannon, and brittle cracklings of musketry. This may have been a result of the tempest rumpling-up the sea beneath the ice; whatever it was, we did not care: we slept deep.

We were within nine miles of the Pole.

* * *

In my dream it was as though some messenger shook my shoulder with an urgent "Up! Up!"; nor was it either Clark or Mew, for Clark and Mew, when I started up, lay there in their sleeping-bag.

I suppose it must have been about noon. There I sat staring some minutes, and my numb memory was of this: that the Countess Clodagh had prayed me "Be first"—for her. Wondrous little cared I now for the Countess Clodagh in her unreal world of warmth, wondrous little for the fortune which she coveted: fortunes swarmed unregarded on the ground round me; yet that urging, "*Be first!*", was profoundly suggested in my spirit, as if whispered within my inwards: and instinctively, brutishly, as the Gadarean swine rushed down a steep place, I, rubbing my daft eyes, arose.

The first thing which my mind opened to note was that, while the tempest was less strong, the ice was at present in extraordinary agitation, I looking abroad upon a plain stretched out to a waving horizon, varied by hillocks, boulders, and glimmering meteor-stones that everywhere tinselled the blinding white, some big as wire-guns, most little as limbs; and this vast plain was at present rearranging itself in a far-spread drama of havoc, withdrawing in chasms like mutual hacking curtsies, then surging to clap together in passionate mountainpeaks, else jostling like the Symplegades, nimbly inconstant as billows of the sea, grinding itself, piling itself, pouring itself in downfalls of powdered ice, while here and there I saw the meteor-stones leap spasmodically, in dusts, like geysers or hopping froths in a steamers's wake, all standing. I tripped and staggered, and saw all the dogs sprawling, with whimperings of misery.

I did not care, Instinctively, daftly, brutishly, I harnessed ten of them to my sledge; put on Canadian snow-shoes. ; and was away northward—alone.

The sun shone with a clear, benign, but heatless shining, a ghostly, remote, yet limpid light, which seemed designed for the lighting of other planets and systems, and to strike here by happy chance. A wild wind from the S.W., meanwhile, flung thin snow-sweepings flying northward past me.

My odometer had not yet measured four miles, when I commenced to note two things: one that the meteor-stones were now accumulating beyond limit, filling my field of vision to the northern horizon with a blinding brightness, lying in piles, in parterres, like largesse of autumn leaves, so that I had that need to steer my feet among them; now, too, I noticed that, now too, I noticed that , but for these stones, all roughness had disappeared, not a trace of the upheaval going on a few miles south being here; for the ice lay nearly as smooth as a table before me, and it is my belief

that this stretch of smooth ice has never, never, felt shock or throe, but reaches right down to the bottom of the deep.

* * *

And now with a wild hilarity I flew, for a lunacy, a giddiness, had got me, until finally, up-buoyed on air, dancing mad, I sped, I span, with grinning teeth that chattered and gibbered, and eyeballs of distraction; for a fright, too—most cold, most mighty high—had its hand of ice on my soul. I being alone in that place, face to face with the Ineffable; but still, with a gibbering levity, and a fatal joy, and a blind hilarity, on I sped. I span.

* * *

The odometer measured nine miles from my start: I was in the neighborhood of the Pole.

I cannot say when it began, but now I was conscious of a sound in my ears, clear and near, a steady sound of splashing, or fluttering, resembling the noising of a cascade or brook; and it grew. Forty more steps I took (skate I could not now for the meteorites)—perhaps eighty—perhaps a hundred: and now, to my sudden horror, I stood looking at a lake.

One minute, swaying and nodding there, I stood, then dropped down flat in swoon.

In a hundred years, I suppose. I should never succeed in analyzing *why* I swooned: but my consciousness still retains the impression of that horrid thrill. I saw nothing distinctly, for my being reeled and toppled drunken, like a spinning-top in desperate death-struggle at the instant when it flags, and wobbles dissolutely to fall; but the moment my eyes lighted on what lay before me—a lake, circular, clean-cut—I felt, I fathomed, that here was the sanctuary, here the eternal secret of this earth from her birth, which it was a burning shame for a worm to see. The lake, I think, would be something like a mile wide, and its middle is a pillar of ice, low and thick; and I had the impression, or dream or fantasy, that there is a name inscribed round in the ice of the pillar in characters that could never be read; and under the name a lengthy date; and the liquid of the lake seemed to me to be wheeling with a shivering ecstasy, splashing and fluttering, round the pillar, from west to east, with the planet's spin; and it was borne in upon me—can't say how—that this fluid was the substance of a living being; and I had the fancy, as my senses failed, that it was a being with many eyes, dull, repining, and that, as it swept for ever round in fluttering lust, it kept its many gazes riveted on the name and date graven in the pillar. But some of this must be my madness. . . .

* * *

It must have been not less than an hour before a sense of life arose again in me; and when the thought broke in upon my brain that a long, long time I had lain there in the presence of those gloomy orbs, my spirit groaned and died within me.

In some minutes, however, I had scrambled on my legs, caught at a dog's harness, and without one backward glance was escaping from that place.

Half-way to the halting-place I awaited Clark and Mew, being very sick and doddering, and unable to advance. But they did not come.

Later on, when I gathered force to go farther, I found that they had perished in the upheaval of the ground. One only of the sledges, half buried, I saw near the spot of our bivouac.

* * *

Alone that same day I began my way southward, and for four days made good progress. On the seventh day I noticed, stretched right across the south-eastern horizon, a region of vapor which luridly obscured the face of the sun; purple it looked, and day after day I observed it steadily brooding there; but what it could be I did not know.

* * *

Well, onward through the desert I went my solitary way, with a quailing terror in me: for very stupendous, alas, is the load of that Polar lonesomeness on one poor human soul.

Often on a halt I have lain and listened long to the hollow stillness, recoiling, appalled by it, longing that at least one of the dogs might whimper; I have even crawled quivering from the thawed sleeping-hag to flog a dog, so that I might hear a voice.

* * *

I had started from the Pole with a well-filled sledge, and with the sixteen dogs left alive from the ice-packing which had engulfed my comrades, having saved from the wreck of our things most of the whey-powder, pemmican, &c., as well as the theodolite, compass, chronometer, train-oil lamp for cooking, and other implements: I was therefore in no doubt as to my course, and had provisions for eighty days; but ten days from the start my stock of dog-food failed: I had to begin to slaughter my companions, one by one; and in the third week, when the ice became horribly rough, with enough moil and toil to wear a bear to death I did only five miles a day. After the day's work I would creep with a dying sigh into the sleeping-bag, clothed still in the load of skins which stuck to me a mere filth of grease, to sleep the sleep of a pig, in-different if I never woke.

And ever—day after day—about the south-eastern heaven brooded heavily that curious region of purple vapor, streaming like the smoke of the conflagration of the world, its length steadily growing.

* * *

Once I had a pretty agreeable dream—dreamed that I was in a garden—an Arab paradise-sweet to breathe; yet—all the time—I had a sub-consciousness of the storm which was actually blowing from the S.E. over the ice, and at the moment when I awoke was half-wittedly mumbling to myself: "It is a garden of peaches; but I am not really in the garden: I am really in the Arctic; only, the S.E. gusts are wafting to me the aroma of this garden of peaches."

I opened my eyes—I started—I sprang to my feet! For, mad as it was, I could not doubt—an actual aroma like peach-blossom *was* in the algid air about me!

Before I could collect my astonished senses I began to vomit violently, and at the same time saw some of the dogs, skeletons as they were, vomiting also; then for a long time I lay sick in a

kind of daze; and, on getting up, found three of the dogs dead, and all very queer. The wind had now changed to the north.

Well, on I stumbled, fighting each inch of my deplorably weary way, this odor of peach-blossom, my sickness, and the death of the three dogs, remaining a wonder to me.

Two days later I came across a bear and her cub lying dead at the foot of a hummock, and could not believe my eyes: there she lay, a spot of dirty-white in a disordered patch of snow, with one little eye open, and her fierce-looking mouth also; and the cub lay across her haunch, biting into her rough fur. So I set to work upon her, and allowed the dogs a glorious feed on the blubber, while I myself had a banquet on the fresh meat; but then had to leave the greater part of the carcasses, and I can feel again now the hankering reluctance with which I trudged onwards. Again and again I found myself asking: "Now, what could have killed those two bears?"

With brutish stolidness I plodded ever on, almost like a walking machine, sometimes nodding in sleep, while I helped the dogs, or maneuvered the sledge over an ice-ridge, pushing or pulling. On the 3rd of June, a month and a half from my start, I took an observation with the theodolite, and found that I was not yet 400 miles from the Pole, in latitude 84° 50'. It was as though some will was obstructing me.

However, the intolerable cold was over, and soon my clothes no longer hung stark on me like armor; pools began to appear in the ice, and presently, what was worse, my God, long lanes, across which, somehow, I had to get the sledge. But about the same time all fear of starvation passed away: for on the 6th of June I came across another dead bear, on the 7th three, and thenceforth, in rapidly growing numbers, I met, not bears only, but fulmars, guillemots, snipes, Ross's gulls, little awks—all, all, lying dead on the ice, never anywhere a living thing, save me, and the two remaining dogs; and if ever a poor man stood shocked before a mystery, it was I now.

On the 2nd of July the ice began packing dangerously, and soon another storm broke loose upon me from the S.W.: so I left off my trek; put up the silk tent on a five-acre square of ice surrounded by lanes; and it was there that again—for the second time—as I lay down, I smelled that delightful strange odor of peach-blossom, a mere whiff, and presently was taken sick. However, it passed off this time in half an hour.

Now it was all lanes, lanes, alas, yet not open water, and such was the drudgery and woe of my life, that sometimes I would drop prostrate upon the ice, sobbing "Oh, no more, my God, here let me die." The crossing of a lane might occupy ten, twelve hours, and then, on the other side, I might find another one opening right before me. Moreover, on the 9th of July, one of the dogs, after a feed on blubber, suddenly died, leaving me only "Reinhardt," a white-haired Siberian dog, with little brisk up-sticking ears, like a cat's; and him also I had to kill on coming to open water.

This did not happen till the 3rd of August, nearly four months from the Pole.

I can't think, my God, that any soul of man ever tholed that dismal incubus or that abysm of sensations within which, during those four months, I weltered: for, though I was as a brute, I had a man's heart to smart. What I had seen, or dreamed, at the Pole followed and followed me; and, if I shut my eyes to sleep, those other eyes yonder seemed to watch me again with their distraught and gloomy gaze, and in my dark dreams reeled that everlasting ecstasy of the lake.

However, by the 28th of July I knew from the look of the sky, and the absence of fresh-water ice, that the sea could not be far: so I set to business, and spent two days in putting to rights the now battered kayak. This done, I had no sooner resumed my way than I sighted on the horizon a streaky haze, which could only be the cliffs of Franz Josef Land; and in a craziness of jubilation I stood there, waving my ski-staff round my head, with the senile cheers of an aged man.

In three days this land was visibly nearer, sheer basaltic cliff mixed with glacier, forming apparently a great bay, with three islands in the mid-distance! and at dawn of the 5th of August I arrived at the definite limit of the pack-ice in moderate weather near the freezing-point.

At once, but with great reluctance, I shot Reinhardt, then set to getting the last of the provisions, and the most necessary of the implements, into the kayak, making haste to put out to the luxury of being borne on water after all the trudge and within fourteen hours was coasting, with my little lug-sail bulged, along the shore-ice of that land: the midnight of a calm Sabbath; and low down on the horizon smoked the ruddy sunball drowsing, as my canvas skiff lightly chipped her passage through that silent sea. Silent, silent: for neither snort of walrus, nor wawl of fox, nor screech of kittiwake, did I hear: but all was still as the jet-black shadow of cliff and glacier on the sea; and many corpses of dead things swarmed on the face of the water.

* * *

When I found a fjord I wound up it to the end, where stood a stretch of basalt columns, looking like a shattered temple of Antediluvians; and when my foot at last touched land I dropped there bowed down a long, long while in the rubbly snow, and silently wept, my eyes that night a fountain of tears: for the firm land is health and sanity, and dear to the life of man, but the ice is a nightmare, and a blasphemy, and a madness, and the realm of the Power of Darkness.

* * *

I knew that I was at Franz Josef Land somewhere in the neighborhood of C. Fligley (about 82 N.). and, though it was so late, and getting cold, I still had the hope of reaching Spitzbergen that year alternately navigating the open sea and dragging the kayak over the slack drift-ice. As all the ice which I saw was good flat fjord-ice, the plan appeared feasible enough; so, after coasting about a little, and then three days' rest in the tent at the bottom of a ravine of columnar basalt opening upon the shore, I packed some bear and walrus flesh, with what artificial food was left, into the kayak, and set out in the morning, coasting the shore-ice with sail and paddle until the afternoon. Then, on managing to climb a little way up an iceberg, I made out that I was in a bay whose terminating headlands were invisible: so I determined to make straight S.W. by W. to cross it; but, in doing so, I was hardly out of sight of land when a northern storm overtook me toward midnight, and, before I could think, the little sail was all but whiffed away, the kayak upset. I only saved it by the happy chance of being near a floe with an ice-foot, which, jutting out unnder the waves, gave me foot-hold; and on the floe I lay in a mooning state the whole night through under the tempest's piping, for I was half drowned.

Happily, my instruments, etc., had been saved by the kayak-deck when she capsized; but I now abandoned all thought of whalers and of Europe for that year.

* * *

A hundred yards inland from the shore-rim, in a place where there was some moss and soil, I built myself a semi-subterranean Eskimo-den for the Polar night, the spot surrounded by high walls of basalt, except to the west, where they opened in a cleft to the coast, the ground strewn with slabs and boulders of granite and basalt, in three places the snow red, overgrown with a lichen which at first I took for blood; and I found in there a dead she-bear, two cubs, and a fox,

the last fallen from the cliffs; but I did not even yet feel secure from possible bears, and took care to make my den fairly tight, a job which occupied me nearly four weeks: for I had no tools, save a hatchet, knife, and metal-shod ski-staff. I dug a passage in the ground two feet wide, two deep, ten long, with perpendicular sides, and at its north end I dug a round space, twelve feet across, with perpendicular sides, which I lined with rocks; the whole excavation I covered with walrus-hide, inch-thick, skinned during a bitter week from four of a number which lay about the shore-ice; and for a ridge-pole I used a rock-splinter which I found, though, even so, the roof remained nearly flat. This, when finished, I stocked well, putting in everything, except the kayak, blubber bath for fuel and occasional light, and foods of several kinds, procured by just stretching out the hand. The roof of both round part and passage was soon buried under snow, and hardly distinguishable from the general level of the ground; and through the passage, if I passed in or out, I prowled on hands and knees; but that was seldom: and within the little round interior, mostly seated, cowering, with quiverings, I wintered, hearkening to the mouthings of darkling storms that bawled about my forlornness.

* * *

All those months the burden of a thought bowed me, and a question like the slow turning of a mechanism worked in my melancholy soul: for everywhere round me lay bears, walruses, foxes, thousands upon thousands of little awks, kittiwakes, snow-owls, eider-ducks, gulls—dead; almost the only living things which I saw being some walruses on the drift-floes, but very few of these: and it was clear to me that some inconceivable catastrophe had overtaken the island during the summer, destroying all life about it, except some few of the amphibia, cetacea, and crustacea.

On the 7th of December, having crept out from the den during a southern tempest, I had, for the third time, a distinct whiff of that self-same smell of peach-blossom; but now without any after-effects.

* * *

Well, again came Christmas, the New Year—Spring: and on the 22nd of May I set out with a well-stocked kayak, the water now fairly open, and the ice so good, that at one place I could sail the kayak over it, the wind sending me sliding at a fine pace. Being on the west coast of Franz Josef Land, I was in as favorable a situation as could be, and I bent by bow southward with much hope, keeping for days just in sight of land; but toward night fall of my fourth day out, on noticing a floe that presented a lovely sight, looking freighted with a profusion of roses which it reflected within its crystal, I went to it, and saw it covered thick with millions of Ross's gulls, all dead, whose rosy bosoms had given it that bloom.

Well, up to the 29th of June I made good progress southward and westward, the weather mostly excellent, I sometimes coming on dead bears floating away on floes, sometimes on dead or living walrus-herds with troop after troop of dead kittiwakes, glaucus and ivory gulls, skuas, every kind of Arctic fowl; and on that last day—the 29th—as I was about to encamp on a floe soon after midnight, happening to look toward the sun, my eye fell upon something far away south across the ocean of floes—*the masts of a ship*.

A phantom ship, or a real ship: it was all one to me; real, I must instantly have felt, it could hardly be; but at a sight so wild my heart set to beating as though I must die, and feebly waving the cane oar about my head, I collapsed upon my knees, and thence toppled flat.

So overpoweringly sweet was the prospect of springing once more, like the beasts of Circe, from a walrus into a European: for at this time I was tearing my bear's-meat just like a bear, was washing my hands in walrus-blood, to give them a glairy sort of pink cleanness in place of the inky grease that chronically smeared them.

And, worn as I was, I made little delay to set out for that ship; nor had I travelled over water and ice four hours when, to my indescribable joy, I made out from the top of a tallish floe that she was the *Boreal*.

It seemed most strange that she should be anywhere hereabouts! I could only conclude that she must have forced and drifted her way thus far westward out of the ice-block in which our party had left her, and perhaps now was loitering here in the hope of picking us up on our way to Spitzbergen.

In any case, crazy was the rage with which I fought my way to be at her, my gasping lips all the time drawn back in a rictus of laughter at the anticipation of their gladness to see me, of their excitement on hearing the grand tidings of the Pole attained, I anon waving the paddle, although I knew that they could not yet spy me, and then I lashed wildly at the whiteish water. What astonished me was her mainsail and foremast squaresail—set that calm morning, her screws still, for she moved not at all there under a sun which was abroad like a cold spirit of light, touching the ocean-room of floes with blinding spots, a tint almost of rose touching all things, as it were of a just-dead bride in her brilliants and white array, the *Boreal* the one little ink-black spot in all this purity: and upon her, as though she were paradise, I paddle, I panted.

But she was in a queerish state: by 9 a.m. I could see that: two of the windmill-arms not there, and, half-lowered down her starboard beam, a boat hanging askew; moreover, soon after 10, I could see that her mainsail had a rent down the middle. And I could not at all make her out: she was not anchored, though a sheet-anchor was hanging at the starboard cathead; she was not moored; and two small ice-floes, one on each side, were idly bombarding her bows.

I began now to wave the paddle again, battling for my breath, ecstatic, crazy with excitement, each second like a year to me; and when I could now make out someone at the bows, bending well over, looking my way, and something put it into my head that it was Sallit, I set to mouthing an impassioned shouting of “Hi! Sallit! Hallo! Hi!”

I did not see him move, but there he stood, leaning steadily over, looking my way, between me and the ship now being all navigable sea among the ice-floes, and the sight of him so visibly near put into me such a shivering of eagerness, that I was nothing less than demented for the time, sending the kayak flying with venomous digs in sprints, mixing with the diggings my crazy wavings, and with both a hullabaloo of bellowings: “Halo! Hi! Bravo! *I have been to the Pole!*”

Well, vanity, vanity. Nearer still I drew: broad morning now, going on toward noon, I half a mile away, fifty yards; but on board the *Boreal*, though now they *must* have heard me, seen me, I observed no movement of welcome, but all, all was still as death that still Arctic morning, my God; only, the, ragged canvas flapped languidly, and, one on each side, two ice-floes sluggishly bombarded the bows, with dumb sounds.

I was sure now that Sallit it was who looked across the sea, but when the ship swung a little round, I noticed that the direction of his gaze was carried with her movement, he no longer looking my way; and, “Why, Sallit!” I shouted with reproach at him: “why, Sallit, man!” I whined.

But, even as I shouted and whined, a perfect wild certainty was in me: for a perfume like peach, my God, had now been whiffed from the ship upon me, and I must have very well known then that that watchful outlook of Sallit saw nothing, but on the *Boreal* were dead men all; in

fact, I soon saw one of his eyes looking like a glass eye when it slides awry and glares all distraught; and then again my body failed, and my head dropped forward, where I sat, upon the kayak's deck.

* * *

Well, after a long while I started up to look anew at that forlorn and wandering craft: there she lay, quiet, tragic, as it were culpable of the dark cargo of fatality which she bore; there stared Sallit: and I knew quite well why he was there—had leant over to vomit, and had leant ever since, his forearms propped upon the bulwark-beam, his left knee pressing on the boards, his left shoulder propped upon the cathead, his face shaking in response to every bump of the two floes upon the bows, nodding a little, he, strange to say, having no covering on his head, and I noted the play of the zephyrs in his uncut hair. Now I would approach no more, for I was afraid, I did not dare, the stillness of the ship was so sacred; and until late afternoon I sat there watching the black bulk of her hull, watching above her water-line a half-floating fringe of seaweed, proving old sleepiness. An attempt had apparently been made to lower, or take in, the larch-wood pram, for there she hung by a jammed davit-rope, stern up, bow in water; the only two arms of the windmill were moving this way and that, through some three degrees, creaking with an *andante* singsong; some clothes, tied on the bow-sprit rigging to dry, were still there; the iron casing round the bluff tows now red and rough with rust; at several places the rigging in considerable tangle; the boom occasionally moving through the sector of a circle with it tormented skirling cadence; and the sail, rotten, I suppose, from exposure—for she had certainly encountered no heavy weather—gave out anon a ponderous languid flap at a rent down the center. Except Sallit, looking out there where he had jammed himself, I saw no one.

By a paddle-stroke now, and another presently, I had closely approached her about four in the afternoon, though my awe of the vessel was complicated by that perfume of hers, whose baleful effects I knew. My tentative approach, however, proved to me, when I remained unaffected, that, here and now, whatever danger there had been was past; and at last, by a hanging rope, with a thumping desperation of heart, I clambered up her beam.

* * *

They had died, it seemed, quite suddenly, for almost all the twelve were in attitudes of activity: Egan in the very act of ascending the companion-way, Lamburn sitting against the chart-room door, apparently cleaning two carbines, Odling at the bottom of the engine-room stair seemed to be drawing on a pair of reindeer komagar, and Cartwright, who was often in liquor, had his arms frozen tight round the neck of Martin, whom he seemed to be kissing, they two lying stark at the foot of the mizzen-mast.

Over all—over men, decks, rope-coils—in the cabin, in the engine-room—between skylight leaves—on every shelf, in each cranny, lay an ash or dust, impalpably fine, purplish; and, steadily reigning through the ship, like the very spirit of death, that perfume of peach.

* * *

Here it had reigned, as I could see from the log-dates, from the rust on the machinery, from the look, of the bodies, from a hundred indications, during something over a year: it was, therefore,

mainly by the wayward workings of winds and currents that this mortal ship had been brought hither to me.

And this was the first overt intimation which I had that Power (whoever and whatever It or They may be), which through history had been so very careful to conceal Its Hand from men, hardly any longer intended to be at the pains to conceal Its Hand from *me*: for it was just as though the *Boreal* had been openly presented to me by an Agency which, though I could not see, I could readily apprehend.

* * *

The dust, though quite thin and flighty above-decks, was lying thickly deposited below; and, after having made a tour of investigation, the first thing which I did was to examine that—though I had tasted nothing all day, and was exhausted to death. I found my own microscope where I had left it in the box in my berth to starboard, though I had to lift up Egan to get at it, and to step over Lamburn to enter the chart-room; but in there, toward evening, I sat at the table and bent to see if I could make anything of the dust, while it seemed to me as if the myriad spirits of men that have sojourned on the earth, and angel and devil, and Time and Eternity, hung silent round for my verdict: and such an ague had me, that for a long while my wandering finger-tips, all ataxic with agitation, eluded every delicate effort which I made, and I could nothing do.

Of course, I knew that an odor of peach-blossom, resulting in death, could only be associated with some elfluvium of cyanogen, or of hydrocyanic (“prussic”) acid, or of both: so when I at last managed to examine some of the dust I was not surprised to find among the mass of ash some yellow crystals which could only be potassic ferrocyanide. What potassic ferrocyanide was doing on board the *Boreal* I did not know, nor had I either the means, or the force of mind, to dive then deeper into it; I understood only that by some means the air of the region just south of the Polar environ had been impregnated with a gas which was either cyanogen, or some product of cyanogen; also, that this gas, which is very soluble, had by now either been dissolved by the sea, or else dispersed into space, leaving its faint perfume; and, seeing this, I let my abandoned head drop upon the table, and long I sat there staring crazy: for I had a suspicion, my God, and a fear, in me.

* * *

The *Boreal*, I found, contained sufficient provisions, untouched by the dust, in cases, casks, &c., to last me, probably, forty years: for after two days, when I had scrubbed and boiled some of the filth of fifteen months from my skin, and solaced myself with better food, I overhauled her thoroughly; then spent three more days in oiling and cleaning the engine; then, all being ready, dragged my twelve dead and laid them together in two rows on the chart-room floor; which done, I hoisted for love the poor little kayak which had served me through so many tribulations; and at nine in the morning of the 6th of July, a week from my first sighting of the *Boreal*, I descended to the engine-room to set out.

The screws, in the modern way, were driven by a stream of liquid air exploding through capillary tubes into slide-valve chests, a motor which gave her, in spite of her bluff bulk, sixteen knots; and it is the simplest thing for one to take these crafts round the globe, since their starting depends upon nothing but the depressing of a lever, provided that one does not get blown to the sky, as liquid air, in spite of its ten blessings, does blow people. At any rate, I had tanks of air to

last me through twelve years' voyaging, and there was the machine for making it, with forty tons of coal, in case of need, in the bunkers, and the two Belleville boilers, so that I was well off for motors.

The ice, too, was quite slack here, and I do not believe I ever saw Arctic weather so bright and blithe, the temperature at 41°. I found that I was midway between Franz Josef and Spitzbergen, in lat. 79° 23', long. 39°; my way was clear; and something like a mournful hopefulness was in me, as the engines slid into their rhythmic turmoil, and those screws started to churn the Arctic sea, while I, darting up, took my stand at the wheel: and the bows of my bark bent southward and westward.

* * *

When I needed food or sleep, the vessel slept, too; then went on her way anew.

Sixteen hours a day sometimes I stood sentinel at the wheel, overlooking the varied sameness of the ice-sea, until my knees would give, some delicate steering being frequently required among the floes and bergs, I by now, however, less burdened with my ball of Polar clothes, standing almost slim in a Lap great-coat, a round Siberian fur-cap on my head.

At midnight when I flung myself into my old berth, it was just as though the engines, subsided now into silence, were a dead thing, and had a ghost that haunted me, for I heard them still, and yet not them, but the silence of their ghost; and often I would startle from sleep, horrified to the heart at some sound of exploding iceberg, or bumping floe, noising far through that white mystery of quietude, within which the floes and bergs were like floating tombs, the world a liquid churchyard; nor ever could I be able to express the strange Doomsday shock with which such a booming would recall me from depths of chaos to recollection of myself: for oftentimes, both waking and in nightmare, I did not know on which orb I was, nor in which age, but felt my being adrift in the great gulf of space and eternity and circumstance, with no bottom for my consciousness to stand upon, the world all mirage and a strange show to me, and the frontiers of dream and waking lost,

Well, the weather was most fair all the time, and the sea like a pond. During the morning of the fifth day, the 11th of July, I entered, and went moving down, an extraordinary long avenue of snowbergs and floes, most regularly placed, half a mile perhaps across and miles long, like a Titanic double-procession of statues, or the Ming Tombs, but mounting and sinking as to music on the swell, some towering high, throwing placid shadows on the aisle between, many being of a pellucid emerald hue, three or four pouring down water-falls which wawled a far and chanting sound, the sea of a singular thickness, almost like egg-white, while, as always there, some snow-clouds, white and woolly, floated in the pale sky: and down this aisle, which produced a mysterious impression of Cyclopean cathedrals and queer sequesteredness, I had hardly passed a mile, when I sighted a black object at its end.

I rushed to the shrouds, soon made out a whaler: and anew the same panting agitations, rage to be at her, at once possessed me, as I flew to the indicator, put the lever at full, then back to give the wheel a spin, then up the mainmast ratlins, waving a foot-bandage of vadmél tweed snatched up at random; and by the time I was within five hundred yards of her had lashed myself to such a pitch of passion, that I was anew shouting that futile lunacy: "Hullo! Hi! Bravo! *I have been to the Pole!*"; and those twelve dead that I had there in the chart-room must have heard me, and the men on the whaler must have heard me, and smiled their smile.

For, as to that whaler, I should have known better at once, if I had not been doting, since she *looked* like a ship of death, her boom slamming to port or to starboard on the heave of the sea, her foresail reefed that serene forenoon; but only when I was almost upon her, and was rushing down to stop the engine, did the real truth suddenly drench my heated brain; and I nearly ran into her, I was so stunned.

Later I lowered the kayak, and boarded her. . . .

This ship had been stricken into stillness in the thick of a briskness of activity, for I saw not one of her sixty-two who had not been busy, except one boy—a thing of 600 tons, ship-rigged, with an auxiliary engine, armor-plated about the bows; and there was hardly any part of her which I did not overhaul. They had had a great time with whales, for a great carcass, attached to the ship's side by cant-purchase tackle, had been in process of flensing and cutting-in, and on the deck were two blankets of blubber, looking a ton-weight, surrounded by twenty-seven men in many attitudes, some terrifying, some disgusting, several grotesque, the whale dead, and the men dead, too, and death was there, and the germs of nonentity flourishing, and a mesmerism, and a dumbness, whose realm was confirmed, and its government growing old. Four of them who had been removing the gums from a mass of stratified whalebone at the mizzen-mast foot were quite imbedded in whale-flesh; also, in a barrel lashed to the main topgallant mast-head was visible the head of a man with a long-pointed beard, looking out over the sea to the S.W., which made me notice that five only of the probable eight or nine boats were on board; and after visiting the 'tweendecks, where I saw quantities of stowed whalebone plates, and fifty or sixty oil-tanks, and cut-up blubber: and afte visiting cabin, engine-room, fo'cas'le, where I saw a lonely boy of fourteen whose hand was grasping a bottle of rum under the clothes in a box, he at the moment of death being intent upon concealing it—after two hours' search of the ship I returned to my own and started again, to come half an hour later upon all three of the missing whale-boats about a mile apart: so I steered zigzag near, to find in each five men and a steerer and one had the harpoon-gun fired, with the line coiled round and round the chest of the stroke line-manager; and in the others hundreds of fathoms of coiled rope, with toggle-irons, whale-lances, hand-harpoons, and dropped heads, and grins, and lazy *abandon*, and eyes that glared, and eyes that dozed, and eyes that winked.

* * *

After this I began to sight ships not infrequently, and used regularly to have the three lights going at night. On the 12th of July I met one, on the 15th two, on the 16th one, on the 17th three, on the 18th two—all Greenlanders, I think: but of the nine I boarded only three, the glass revealing from afar that on the others was no life; and on the three dead men: so that that suspicion which I had, and that fear, grew heavy upon me.

I went on southward, day after day, sentinel there at the wheel: clear sunshine; the sea sometimes seeming mixed with regions of milk by day; and at night the immense desolation of a globe glimmered-on by a sun ages ago dead, and by a light that was gloom. It was like Night white in death then; and wan as the very realm of death and Hades I have beheld it, most terrifying, that neuter state and limbo of nothingness, when unreal sea and spectral vault, all confines lost, mingled in a void of ghostly phantasmagoria, pale to huelessness, at whose center I, as it were annihilated, seemed to moon aswoon in immensity of space; into which disembodied world would be flirted anon whiffs of that perfume of peach which I knew, and their frequency

grew; but onward the *Boreal* moved, traversing, as it were, bottomless Eternity, and I got to latitude 72°, not far now from Northern Europe.

And now, as to that peach-scent—even while some floes were yet round me—I was just like some fantastic mariner, who, having set out to seek for Eden and the Blessed Islands, finds them, and balmy gales from their gardens stream out, while he is yet afar, to greet him with their fragrances of almond and cornel, champac and jasmin and lotus: for, I having now reached a zone where the peach-aroma was constant, all the world seemed embalmed in its perfume, and I could imagine my bark to be journeying further than the earth's verge toward some clime of eternal spice and delightsomeness.

* * *

Well I saw at last what whalers used to call “the blink of the ice”—its bright apparition or reflection in the sky when left behind, or not yet arrived at, by which time I was in a region where many craft of various kinds were to be seen; I was continually meeting them; and not one did I omit to investigate, while many I boarded in the kayak or the larch-wood pram. Just below lat. 70° I came upon a fleet of what I believed to be Lafoden cod-and-herring fishers, which must have drifted somewhat on a northward current, all loaded with curing fish, and I cruised from one to the other on a zigzag course, they being widely scattered, some mere sand-grains to the glass on the horizon, the evening still and clear with that astral Arctic clarity, the sun just reclining to his low-couched nightly drowse. These brown boats stood rocking there with slow-creaking noises, as of creatures whining in sleep, quite unharmed so far, awaiting the gales of the winter's drama of wrath on that gloomy sea, when a darksome doom, and a deep grave, would not fail them. The fishers were braw carles, having fringes of beard well back from the chin-point, and hanging woolen caps, one kneeling in a forward sprawling posture, clasping the lug-mast with his arms, his knees wide apart, head thrown back, the yellow eye-balls with their islands of grey iris staring straight up the mast-pole. In every case I found below-decks cruses of corn-brandy, marked “*aquavit*,” two of which I took into the pram; but at one boat, instead of boarding in the pram, I shut off the *Boreal's* liquid air at such a point, that, by delicate steering, she slackened down to a stoppage just a-beam of the smack, upon whose deck I was thus able to jump down; and after looking round I descended the three steps aft into the dark and garrety below-decks, to go with a bent back calling in a sort of whisper: *Anyone? Anyone?;*” but when I went up again the *Boreal* had drifted three yards beyond my reach, so, as there was a dead calm, I had to plunge into the water: and in that half-minute there such a sudden throng of terrors beset me! yes, I can feel again now that abysmal desolation of lonesomeness and sense of a hostile universe bent upon eating me up, for the ocean seemed to me nothing but a great ghost.

Two mornings later I came upon another school, rather larger boats these, which I discovered to be Brittany cod-fishers, and most of these, too, I boarded—in every below-decks a wooden or earthenware image of “the Virgin,” painted in gaudy faded daubs, in one boat a boy who had been kneeling before her, but was toppled sideways now, his knees still bent, the cross of Christ in his fist. These blue-woolen blouses and tarpaulin sou'-westers lay in every pose of death, every detail of feature and expression still perfectly preserved; the sloops all the same, all, all: with sing-song creaks they rocked a little, nonchalantly; each, as it were, with a sub-consciousness of its own personality and callous unconsciousness of all the others round it, yet a copy of the others: the same hooks and lines, disemboweling-knives, barrels of salt and pickle, piles and casks of opened cod, kegs of biscuit, and creaky rockings, and a bilgy smell, and dead

men. The next day, about eighty miles south of the latitude of Mount Hekla, sighting a big ship, which proved to be the French cruiser *Lazare Tréport*, her, too, I boarded and overhauled during three hours, her upper, main, and armored deck, deck by deck, to her black depths, even peeping up the tubes of her two rusted turret-guns. I saw three men in the engine-room mangled—after death, I presume—by a burst boiler; and I saw about 800 yards to the north-east a long-boat of hers crammed with marines, one oar still there, jammed between the row-lock and the rower's forced-back chin; while on the ship's port deck, in the stretch of space between the two masts, the blue-jackets had been piped up, for there they lay in a sort of serried disorder, two hundred. Nothing could be of a suggestion more tragic than the helpless power of this poor wandering craft, round whose stolid mass myriads of wavelets, busy as aspen-leaves, bickered with a continuous weltering splash, which kept chattering loud like sparrow-crowds. I sat a good time that afternoon in one of her casemates on a gun-carriage, my head sunken on my breast, furtively eyeing the blueish turned-up feet, shrunk, bloodless, of a sailor who lay before me, his soles being alone visible, since he lay head-downwards beyond the steel door-sill; and drenched in seas of lugubrious reverie I brooded there, till, with a shudder, I awoke, got back to the *Boreal*, and till sleep conquered me, went on my way. At nine the next morning, on coming on deck and spying to the west a group of craft, I turned my course upon them, and they turned out to be ten Shetland sixerns, which must have drifted north-eastward hither. I examined them well, but they were as the long catalogue of the others: for all the men, and all the boys, and all the dogs on them were dead.

* * *

I could have come to land a long time before I did; but I would not: I was so afraid. For I was used to the silence of the ice; and I was used to the silence of the sea: but I was afraid of the silence of Europe.

* * *

Once, on the 14th of July, I had spied a whale, or had thought so, spouting remotely afar on the south horizon; and on the 19th I saw a swarm of porpoises vaulting the water in their successive way, northward: and, seeing them, I had said to myself: "Well, I am not alone in the world, then, my good God."

Moreover, some days later, the *Boreal* had found herself in a shoal of cod making away northward, millions of fish, for I saw them, and one afternoon caught three, hand-running, with the hook.

So the sea, at least, had its breeds to be my comrades.

But if the land should be found as still as the sea, without even the spouting whale, or bank of tumbling sea-hogs—if Paris were dumber than the everlasting snow—what then, I asked myself, should I do?

* * *

I could have made short work and landed at Shetland, for I found myself as far westward as longitude 11° 23' W.; but I would not: I was so afraid. The shrinking within me to envisage that suspicion which I had turned me first to a foreign land.

So I made for Norway, and on the second night of this definite intention, about nine o'clock, the weather being squally, the sky lowering, the air sombrous, and the sea hard-looking, dark, ridged, I was steaming away at a good rate, holding the wheel, my poor port and starboard lights still beaming there, when, without the least notice, I received the roughest shock of my life, being shot bodily as from a cannon to the cabin door, through it head-foremost down the companionway, and still beyond along the passage, having crashed into some dark ship, probably of large size, though I never saw her, nor any sign of her; and all that night, and the next day till four in the afternoon, the *Boreal* went driving alone over the sea whither she would: for I lay dazed. Then I found that I had received really insignificant injuries, considering; but I sat there an hour on the floor in a sulky, disgusted mood, and, when I got up, pettishly stopped the ship's engines, seeing my dozen dead all huddled and disfigured. Now I was afraid to steam by night, and even in the day-time would not go on for three days: for I was angry with I know not what, and disposed to quarrel with Those whom I could not see.

However, on the fourth day a rough swell which knocked the ship about, and made me uncomfortable, coaxed me into moving, as I did with my bows looking east and south.

I sighted the Norway coast five days later, in lat. 63° 19', at noon of the 12th of August, and pricked off my course to follow it; but it was with a dawdling reluctance that I crawled, under half-speed. In some eight hours, as I was aware from the chart, I ought to sight the lighthouse-light on Smoelen Island; and when quiet night came, the black lake-water branded with trails of moonlight, I moved close by it, between ten and midnight, almost within the shadow of the mountains: but, Thou God, no shine was there; and all the way down I marked the rugged sea-board slumber darkling, afar or near, with never one friendly light.

* * *

Well, on the 15th of August I had another of those raptures whose passing away would have left an elephant prostrate. During four days I had noted not one sign of present life on the Norway coast, only cliffs, cliffs, dead and dark, and floating craft, all dead and dark; and my eyes now, I found, had acquired a crazy fixity of stare into the abyss of vacancy, while I remained unconscious of being, save of one point, rainbow-blue, far down in the infinite, which passed slowly from left to right before my consciousness a little way, then vanished, came back, and passed slowly afresh, from left to right continually, until some prick, or voice, would prod me into the consciousness that I was staring, whispering in confidence the warning: "*stare, and all's over with you!*" Well, lost in a trance of this sort, I was leaning over the wheel during the afternoon of the 15th, when it was as if some instinct or premonition sprang up in me to say "If you look yonder, *you will see . . . !*," and in one instant I had ascended from all that depth of reverie to reality, had glanced to the right, and there, at last, my God, I saw something human that moved, at last!— and it came to me.

That sense of recovery, of waking, of new solidity, of the comfortable usual, a millionfold too intense for utterance: anew now I can fancy and feel it—the rocky ordinary, on which to plant the feet, and live: for from the day when I had stood at the Pole, and viewed there the dizzy thing that had made me swoon, there had come into my way not one sign that other things like myself were alive with me, until now, suddenly, I had the proof: for on the south-western sea, not four knots away, I saw a ship, her bows, which were as sharp as a hatchet, briskly chipping through the smooth sea, throwing out profuse ribbons of foam that flowed wide-wavering out, with outward undulations, far behind her length, as she ran the waters in haste, straight northward.

At the moment I was steering about S.E. by S., fourteen knots out from a shadowy-blue series of Norway mountains, and, just giving the wheel one frantic spin to starboard to bring me down upon her, I dashed to the bridge, propped my back upon the mainmast, which passes through it, put a foot on the white iron rail in front of me, and there at once felt all the mocking devils of distracted revelry possess me, as I caught the cap from my hairs, and commenced to wave and wave and wave, maniac that I was: for at a second glance I saw that she was flying an ensign at the main, and a long pennant at the main-top, and I did not know what she was flying those flags there for: and I was embittered and driven mad.

Distinctly did she print herself upon my consciousness in that three minutes' interval, she a dull and cholera yellow, like lots of Russian ships, a space of faded pink visible at her bows under the yellow, her ensign and blue-and-white saltire, a passenger-liner, two-masted, two-funneled, though from her funnels issued no smoke, her steam-cones in all positions, and all about her course the sea spotted with wobbling fulgors of the sun's going down, coarse blots of glory close to the eye, but graduating to a finer pattern in the distance, and at the horizon refined to a line of livid silver.

The double speed of her and of the *Boreal* must have been quite forty knots, and the meeting accomplished within five minutes: yet into that time I crowded years of life, shouting passionately at her insanity, my face and eyes inflamed with rage the most precipitate, uproarious: for she did not slow, nor signal, nor make any show of seeing me, but came furrowing down at me like Juggernaut with a steadfast run: so that I lost reason, thought, memory, sense of relation, in that seizure of hysteria that transported me; and can only remember now that, in the midst of my howling, a sentence howled by the fiends who used my throat to express their frenzy set me laughing high and madly, for I was crying: "Hi! Bravo! Why don't you stop? *Madmen! I have been to the Pole!*"

In that moment an odor arose, and came, and struck upon my brains, most execrable; and while one might count ten I was aware of her engines sounding near, as that cursed charnel went churning the sea past me on her mænad way, hardly twenty yards from my nostrils. She was a thing, my God, from which the vulture would fly with loathing: I got a glimpse of decks piled thick with her festered dead.

Black on her yellow stern my eye-corner caught the word *Yaroslav*, as I bent over the rail to retch and cough and vomit at her: she was a horrid thing.

This ship had without doubt been pretty far south in tropical or sub-tropical latitudes with her throng of corpses: for all the bodies which I had seen until then, so far from smelling ill, seemed to breathe out a certain perfume of the peach; and she was one of those ships which have substituted liquid air for steam, yet retained their old steam-funnels, &c., in case of trouble, for air was still looked at askance by builders on account of the accidents sometimes due to it: so this *Yaroslav* must have been left with her engines working when her crew were overtaken by death, and, her air-tanks being still unemptied, must have been ranging the ocean with impunity ever since, during I knew not how many months, or years.

Well, I coasted Norway for almost a hundred and forty miles without once going closer than two or three miles: for something held me back; but, passing the fjord-mouth where I knew that Aadheim was, I suddenly spun the helm to port before I knew that I was doing it, and made for land.

In half an hour I was moving up an opening in the land with mountains on either hand, streaky rock at their summit, umbrageous boscage below; and the whole softened, as it were, by veils woven of the rainbow.

This stretch of water lies as winding as a thread which one drops, only the windings are more pointed, so that every few minutes the scene was a new scene, though the vessel just pushed her way up; and nothing of what was gone behind me could be spied, or merely a land-locked gleam like a pond.

I never saw water so polished, argent, like polished marble, reflecting everything boldly within the womb of its lucid abysm, over which hardly a whiff blew that sundown, wimpling about the bluff *Boreal*, which seemed to move as if shrinking from bruising it, in rich wrinkles and creases, like glycerine, or dewy-trickling lotus-oil: yet it was only the sea; and the grandeur yonder was only crag and autumn-foliage and mountain-slope: yet all seemed caught-up, rapt in a trance of rose and daffodil, compounded of the stuff of dreams and bubbles, of dust-of-flowers, and blushes of the peach.

I saw it not only with joy, but with astonishment, having forgotten, as was natural in all that long barrenness of snow and sea, that aught could be so ethereally beauteous, yet homely, too, human, familiar, and consoling; the air here richly imbued with that peachy odor; and there was a Sabbath and a nepenthe and a charm in that place just then, as it were of those gardens of Hesperus and fields of asphodel reserved for the spirits of the just.

Alas, but I had the glass, and for me nepenthe was mingled with a despair immense as the heavens, my good God: for anon I would take it up to search some perched hut of the peasant, or burg of the “bonder,” on the tops: and I saw no one; and to the left, at the fourth bend of the fjord, where there is one of those watch-towers that these people used for watching in-coming fish, I saw on a slope of rock just before the tower a body which looked as if it must tumble headlong; and when I spied him there, I felt definitely, for the first time, that shoreless despair which I alone of men have felt, high as the stars, darkness as hell; and I fell to staring anew that stare of Nirvana and the lunacy of Nothingness, wherein Time merges in Eternity, and all being, like one drop of water, flies dispersed to fill the void of space, and is lost.

The *Boreal's* bow walking over a fishing-boat roused me, and a minute later I saw two people on the shore, which, three feet above the water there, is edged with boulders and shrubs, behind which is a path winding upward through a gorge; and on the path I saw a driver of one of those sulkies called karjolers, he on the high front seat lying sideward and backward, his head resting on the wheel; and on a trunk strapped to a frame on the axle behind was a boy, his head, too, resting sideward on the wheel, near the other's; and the pony pitched forward on its fore-knees, tilting the shafts downward; and a little distance from them on the sea a skiff.

* * *

After the voe's next foreland, I commenced to see craft, whose number increased as I advanced, small boats, with some schooners, sloops, the majority aground; and suddenly now I was conscious that, mingling with that delicious odor of spring-blossoms—profoundly modifying, yet not destroying it—was another odor, wafted to me on the wings of the whiffs from the land; and “Man,” I said, “is decomposing:” for I knew it well: the odor of human corruption.

* * *

The fjord opened finally in a wider basin, surrounded by towering mountains that reflected themselves in the basin to their last cloudy crag: at the end of which were ships, a quay, and a homely old town.

Not a sound, not one; only my own engines sluggishly going: and here, it was clear, the Angel of Silence had passed, and his scythe mown.

I ran and stopped the engines, and, without anchoring, got down into a boat that lay at the ship's side, to paddle toward the little quay, passing under a brigantine with her courses set, three jibs, staysails, squaresails, gaff-topsail, looking hanging and listless, and wedded to a copy of herself, mast-downward, with the water; there were three lumber-schooners, a forty-ton steam-boat, a tiny barque, five herring-fishers, and ten or twelve shallops: and the sailing-craft had all fore-and-aft sails set; and about each, as I rowed near, brooded an odor which was both sweet and odious, more suggestive of the genius of mortality—the essential mood and meaning of Azrael—than aught that I had ever dreamed: for all, as I saw, were thronged with bodies.

Well, I went up the old mossed steps in that dazed state in which one notices frivolous things: conscious of the lightness of my new clothes, for the day before I had changed to Summer things, having on now only a shirt of undyed wool, the sleeves rolled up, and cord trousers, with a belt, and a cloth cap over my long hair, and an old pair of yellow shoes, without laces, without socks; and from the edge of the quay I looked out over a piece of rough ground which lay between the town and the quay.

What I saw was not only woeful, but wildly startling: woeful, because a multitude had assembled, and lay dead, there; and wildly startling, because something in their *ensemble* informed me in one minute why they were there in such number.

They were there with the motive, and in the hope, to fly westward by boat.

And the something which informed me of this was a certain *foreign* air about that field of dead, as the eye rested on it: something un-northern, southern, Oriental.

Two yards from my foot lay a group of three: one a Norway peasant-girl in a green gown, scarlet stomacher, Scotch bonnet; the second an old Norway man in knee-breeches, "small-clothes," worsted cap; and the third a Jew of the Polish Pale, say, in gaberdine and skull-cap, with ear-locks.

I went nearer to where they lay thick between the quay and a stone fountain in the middle of the space, and I saw among those northern dead two women in costly dress, Spanish or Italian, and the yellower mortality of a Mongol, probably a Magyar, and a big negro in Zouave garb, and some twenty obvious French, and two Morocco fezes, and the green turban of a shereef, and the white of an Ulema.

So I asked myself this question: "How came these foreign stragglers here in this northern townlet?"

And my wild heart answered: "There has been an impassioned stampede, northward and westward, of all the breeds of Man: and this that I here see is but the far-flung spray of that infuriate flood."

* * *

Well, I walked along a street, cautious where I trod, a street not all voiceless, but haunted by swarms of mosquitoes and dreamy twinges and messages of melody at the tympanum, like the drawing of the fiddle-stick in sorrow-land; a street strait, paved, steep, drear; and the sensations with which I, poor bowed man, went moping about that town, only Atlas, fabled to bear the burden of this earth, may know.

* * *

I thought to myself: If now a swell from the Deep has swept over this planetary ship of earth, and I, who alone chanced to find myself in the furthest stern, as the sole survivor of her crew? . . . What then, my God, shall I do?

* * *

I felt, I felt, that in this place, save the water-gnats of Norway, stirred no living thing; that the hum and the savor of Eternity pervaded, smothered, mummified it.

The houses are mostly of wood, some large, with *porte-cochères* leading into semi-circular yards, round which the buildings stand, steep-roofed in view of the snow-masses of winter; and through one casement of one, near the ground, I saw a stout old woman in a cap on her face before a porcelain stove. But I paced on without stoppage through three streets, and came out, as it got dark, upon a piece of grass-land leading downward to a mountain-gorge, some distance along which gorge it was that I found myself sitting the next morning: and how, and in what trance, I passed all that blank night is obliterated from my mind. When I looked about with the return of light I saw mountains of fir on either side, almost meeting overhead at some points, deeply shading the mossy gorge; and, getting up, careless of direction, I went still onward, to walk and walk for hours, unconscious of hunger, though there was profusion of wild mountain-strawberries, very tiny, which must bloom almost into winter, a few of which I ate; and there were blue gentianellas, and lilies-of-the-valley, and luxuriance of boschage, and always a noise of waters: I saw little cataracts aloft flackering like white wild rags, for they fractured in the mid-fall, and were caught away, and lost; I saw also patches of reaped hay and barley, hung up in a strange way on stakes, I suppose to dry; and perched huts; and a pigmy castle or burg, inaccessible seemingly; but none of these did I enter; and five bodies only I saw in the gorge, a woman with a child, and a man with two small cattle.

Near three in the afternoon, startled to see myself there, I started to go back; and it was dark when I again moved through those gloomy streets of Aadheim, making for the quay, feeling now my hunger and fatigue, without any intention of entering any house; but, as I stepped by one *porte-cochère*, something shoved me in, for my intellect had become as fluff on the winds, not working of its own verve, but the sport of impulses that seemed external: so, after passing across the yard, I ascended a spiral stair of wood by a twilight which just enabled me to pick my way among five or six dim forms fallen there: and in a confined place fantastic qualms beset me. I mounted to the first landing, tried the door, it was locked; mounted to the second: that door was open; and with reluctance, chilly, I took a step inward where all was pitch darkness, the window-stores drawn. I hesitated: it was pretty dark; tried to utter that word of mine, but it came up barely in a whisper, tried still once, and heard myself say: "Anyone?;" but, in venturing yet a step forward, I had trodden upon soft guts, and at that contact terrors got me: for it was as though I beheld the goblin eye-balls of Hell and frenzy goggle upon me out of that gloom; and, murmuring a gurgle of remonstrance, I was gone, helter-skelter down the stairs, treading upon dead, across the yard, down the street, with pelting feet, and open arms, and sobbing bosom, for I thought that all Aadheim was after me; nor was my horrid haste abated till I was on board the *Boreal*, and moving down the fjord.

Out to set, then, I went anew; and within the next few days visited Bergen, and put in at Stavanger: and Bergen and Stavanger were dead.

It was then, on the 20th of August, that I bent my bow toward my native land.

* * *

From Stavanger I steered a straight course for the Humber.

I had no sooner left behind me the Scandinavian coast than I commenced to come among the ships—ship after ship; and by the time I entered the zone of the usual alternation of sunny day and sunless night, I was moving through the medley of an incredible number of craft, a far-cast armada: for over all that expanse of the North Sea, where, in its most populous days of trade, the sailor might perhaps spy a sail or two, I had now at every moment twelve within scope of the glass, oftentimes forty.

And still they lay on a still sea, itself a dead thing, livid as the lips of death, there being a starkness of trance in the calm which was most remarkable: for the ocean seemed weighted, and the air drugged.

Extremely slow was my progress, for at first I would not leave any ship, however remotely pigmy, without approaching sufficiently to investigate her, at least with the glass; and a multitudinous mixture of species they were, trawlers in hosts, war-ships of every nation, used, it seemed, as passenger-boats, smacks, feluccas, liners, steam-barges, great four-masters with sails, Channel boats, luggers, a Venetian *burchio*, colliers, yachts, *remorqueurs*, training ships, dredgers, two dahabeeahs with curving gaffs, Marsielles fishers, a Maltese *speronare*, American off-shore sail, Mississippi steam-boats, Sorrento lug-schooners, Rhine punts, yawls, old frigates and three-deckers, called to novel use, Stromboli caiques, Yarmouth tubs, xebecs, Rotterdam flat-bottoms, floats, mere gunwaled rafts—anything from anywhere that could bear a human freight on water had come, and was there: and all, I knew, had been making westward, or northward, or both; and all, I knew, were thronged; and all were tombs, listlessly wandering, my God, on the wandering sea with their throngs.

And so fair the world round them: suavest autumn weather; all the atmosphere aromatic with the vernal cherriness of that perfume of peach: yet not so utterly calm, but, if I passed close to the lee of any floating thing, the spicy breathings of morning or evening brought me vague puffs of the odor of the mortal over-ripe for the grave.

So burdensome and accursed did this thing become to me, such a plague and a hissing, vague as was the offense, that I began to shun rather than to seek the ships, and also I now dropped my twelve, whom I had kept to be my companions all the way from the Far North, one by one, into the sea: for now I had definitely passed into a zone of warmth.

I was convinced, however, that the poison, whatever it might be, had some embalming, or antiseptic, effect upon the bodies: at Aadheim, Bergen, and Stavanger, for instance, where the temperature permitted me to go without a jacket only hints and whiffs of the processes of dissolution had troubled me.

* * *

Very benign, I say, and joyous to see, was sky and sea during all that voyage; but it was at sunset that my sense of the wondrously beautiful was roused and excited, in spite of that burden which I bore: for, certainly, I never saw sunsets resembling those, nor could ever have dreamt of aught so flamboyant, exorbitant and distraught, all the vault seeming transformed to an arena for warring powers warring for the cosmos, or it was like the wild countenance of God routed, and flying flustered through cosmic storm-gulfs from His foes. But many evenings I watched it with

unintelligent awe, believing it but a portent of the unsheathed sword of the Almighty, until one morning a thought pricked me like a pin, for I suddenly remembered the wild sunsets of the nineteenth century witnessed in Europe, America, and, I think, everywhere, after the eruption of the volcano of Krakatoa.

And whereas I had previously said to myself “If now a wave from the Deep has washed over this wandering Ship-of-Space . . . ,” I said now “A wave—but hardly from the Deep: a wave rather which she had husbanded, and has spouted, from her own unmotherly bowels . . .”

* * *

I had some knowledge of the Morse code, of the manipulation of tape-machines, telegraphic typing-machines wireless transmitting, as of most little things of that sort which came within the outskirts of the interest of a man of science; I had collaborated with Professor Stanistreet in the production of a text-book called *Applications of Science to the Arts*, which had brought us some money: and, on the whole, the *minutiae* of modern things were still pretty fresh in my memory: so I could have wirelessly, or tried to wire from Bergen, to somewhere; but I would not: I was so afraid; afraid lest for ever from nowhere should occur one replying click, or stir of dial-needle. . .

* * *

I could have made short work and landed at Hull; but I would not: I was so afraid. For I was used to the silence of the ice; and I was used to the silence of the sea: but I was afraid of the silence of England.

* * *

I came in sight of the coast on the morning of the 26th of August, somewhere about Hornsea, but did not see any town, for I put the helm to port, and went on further south, no longer bothering with the instruments, but coasting at haphazard, now in sight of land, now in the center of a circle of sea, not admitting to myself the motive of this loitering slowness, nor thinking at all, but ignoring the lurking dread of the morrow which I shirked, and furtively dwelling in today; so I passed the Wash, passed Yarmouth, Felixstowe, the things that floated motionless on the sea being now beyond counting, for I could scarcely lower my lids ten minutes and left them without seeing yet another there: so that soon after dusk I, too, had to stand still among them all, until morning, for they lay dark, and to cruise about would have been to drown the already dead.

Well, I came to the Thames-mouth, and lay pretty well in among the Flats and Pan Sands toward nine one evening, not seven miles from Sheppey and the North Kent coast: and I did not see any Nore Light, nor Girdler Light; and all along the coast I had seen no light, though as to that I breathed not a syllable to myself, not admitting it, nor letting my heart know what my mind argued, nor my mind know what my heart surmised; but with a mock-mistrustful underlook, half daft, I would regard the darkling land, considering it a sentient thing that would be playing a prank upon a poor man like me.

And the next morning, when I idled further on, my furtive eye-corners were very well aware of the Prince’s Channel light-ship, also of the Tongue ship, for there they were; but I would not look at them at all, nor steer near them, for I did not want to have anything to do with whatever

might have happened beyond my own ken, and it was better to look straight before, observing nothing, and concerning one's-self with one's-self.

The next evening, after having gone out to sea again, I was again in, a little to the E. by S. of the North Foreland, and I saw no light there, nor any Sandhead light, but over the sea vast signs of wreckage, and the coasts were strewn with old wrecked fleets; then I moved away about S. E., very slowly steaming—for anywhere hereabouts hundreds upon hundreds of hulls lay dead within a ten-mile circumference of sea—and by two in the 'foreday had roamed up well within sight of the French cliffs: for I had said “I will go and see the light-beam of that revolving-drum on Calais pier, that nightly beams half-way over-sea to England;” and the moon shone clear in the southern sky that morning, like an old dying queen whose Court swarms distantly from round her diffident, pale, tremulous, the paler the nearer; and I watched the mountain-shadows about her spotty full-face, and her nimbus of mist, and her beams on the sea, as it were kisses sneaked in the kingdom of sleep, and among the quiet ships white trails and powderings of light, strange, agitated, like palace-corridors in some fairyland forlorn, thronged with wan whispers, scandals, and runnings-to-and-fro, with leers, and breathless last embraces, and flight of the princess, and death-bed of the king; and on the N. E. horizon a streak of cloud that seemed outside the sky; and yonder, not far, the chalk coast-cliffs, not so low as at Calais near, but arranged in masses with vales of sward between, each with its wreck: but no beam of any revolving-drum I saw.

* * *

I could not sleep that night: for all the operations of my mind and body seemed in abeyance: so, mechanically, I moved the ship westward once more, until the sun came up, when, scarcely two miles from me, there stood the cliffs of Dover, and over the crenulated summit of the Castle I noted the Union Jack hanging motionless.

I heard eight, nine, o'clock strike in the cabin, and I was still at sea; but some audacious whisper was at my brain: and at 10.30, the 2nd of September, just opposite the Cross Wall Custom House, the *Boreal's* anchor-chain, after a voyage of three years, two months, and fourteen days, ran thundering, thundering, through the starboard hawsehole.

Ah, Heaven! but I must have been made to let the anchor go! for the effect upon me for that obstreperous hubbub, breaking out sudden upon all that cemetery repose that blessed morning, and bellowing, it seemed, a year, was appalling; and at the cruel racket I stood excruciated, shivering with a flinching heart, God knows: for not less uproarious than the rumpus of the Judgment trump it raged and raged, and I thought that all the armies of the dead could hardly fail to start and rise at alarum so excessive, and question me with their eyes.

* * *

On the top of the Cross Wall I saw a crab crawling; at its end, where a street begins, I saw a gas-light, and at its foot a black man on his face, clad in a shirt and one boot; I saw the harbor packed with all sorts of craft, and on a Calais-Dover boat nine yards from me I saw the dead piled, she being unmoored, and continually grinding against a green brig.

And when I saw that, I dropped down there by the capstan, and my heart sobbed, as I said “Well, Lord God, Thou hast destroyed the work of Thy hand. . . .”

* * *

After a time I got up, went below in a state of somnambulism, took a packet of pemmican cakes, leapt to land, and went following the railway that runs from the Admiralty Pier to a passage with railway-masonry on one side, in which I saw five dead, and could not believe that I was in England, for all were dark-skinned people, three gaudily dressed, two in flowing robes; and the same when I walked into a street leading northward, for here were a hundred, and never saw I, except in Constantinople, where I once lived eighteen months, so variegated a mixture of races, black, brunette, brown, yellow, white, some emaciated like people dead from famine; and, overlooking them all, one boy in an Eton collar seated on a bicycle, supported by a lamp-post which his arms clasped, he proving the extraordinary suddenness of the death which had overtaken them all.

I did not know whither, nor why, I went, nor had I any notion whether all this was palpably beheld by me in the planet which I had known, or in some other, or was all phantasy of my disembodied anima, for I had the thought that I also might be dead since old ages, my soul roaming now through the profoundness of space, in which there is neither north nor south, nor up nor down, nor measure nor relation, nor aught whatever, save an uneasy consciousness of a dream about bottomlessness. Of sorrow or pain, I think, I felt nothing, though I have a sort of memory now that some sound resembling a sob or groan, though it was neither, proceeded at regular intervals from my bosom during three or four days. Meantime, my brain registered like a tap-machine details the most frivolous—the name of a street, Strond Street, Snargate Street; the fur cap—black fur for the side, ermine for the top—of a portly Karaite priest on his back, his robes blown up to his knees, and neatly folded there; a violin-bow gripped between the irregular teeth of a little Spaniard, his hair brushed back, mad-looking eyes; odd shoes on the feet of a French girl, one black, one brown: they lying as numerous as gunners who fall round their carriage, five to ten feet apart, the majority, as also in Norway and on the crafts, in postures of distraction, with far-spread arms, frantic distortion of limb, like men who in the instant before death called upon the rocks and hills to cover them.

* * *

I came to an opening in the land, named, I think, “The Shaft,” into which I passed, climbing a great number of steps, which I began to count, but left off, then the dead, and left off; and finally, at the summit, which must be even higher than the Castle, came to a great space laid out with gravel-walks, and saw fortifications, barracks, a citadel. I was surprised at the breadth of view. Between me and the Castle to the east lay the crowd of houses, brick and rag-stone, mixed in the distance with a vagueness of azure haze; and to the right the harbor, the sea, the ships; and about me on the heights nine or ten dead, biting the dust; the sun now high, warm, with hardly a cloud in all the vastness of the vault; and yonder a cloud that was the Norman coast. It seemed too big for one poor man.

My head nodded, I sitting on a bench of boards, with intervals; and, as I saw it all, I nodded, heavy-headed, weary: for it was too big for me; and, as I nodded, my forehead propped on my left hand, there was in my head an old street-song that I groaned sleepily, like coronachs and dread funereal nenias, the packet of pemmican-cakes beating time in my right hand, rising and dropping, dropping heavily and rising, in time. . .

I'll buy the ring,
You'll rear the kids:
There'll be servants to wait on our ting, ting, ting.

* * *

Ting, ting,
Won't we be happy?
Ting, ting,
That shall be it;
I'll buy the ring,
You'll rear the kids:
There'll be servants to wait on our ting, ting, ting.

So, maundering, I dropped forward upon my face; and for twenty-three hours, the living undistinguished from the dead, I slept there.

* * *

I was awaked by drizzle, leapt up, and, on looking at my silver chronometer, which, attached by a leather to my belt, I carried in my trousers' pocket, saw that it was 9 a.m., the sky now sombrous; and a moaning wind—almost a new thing now to me—had risen.

I ate some pemmican, for I had a reluctance—needless, as it proved—to eat any of the thousand luxuries here, sufficient no doubt, in a town like Dover alone, to last me hundreds of years; and, having eaten, I descended “The Shaft”, to spend the whole day, though it rained and blustered, in strolling about. Reasoning in my numb way from the number of ships on the sea, I believed that the town would be found to be over-crowded with dead, but this was not so, for that westward furore and stampede must have operated here also, leaving the town empty but for the new-coming hosts.

My first work was to go into a grocer's shop, which was a post-and-telegraph office, with the notion, I suppose, to get a message through to somewhere, in this shop a single gas-jet glimmering its last, this and that other near the pier being the only two which I saw: and garishly enough they glared there, transparently wannish, as it were shamed, like blinking night-things surprised by the brilliance of day, they having so flared and stared for months, or years, inasmuch as they were now bazing diminished, with streaks and rays in the flame, as if by effort: so, if these were the only two, months must have been needed almost to exhaust the gasometer; and this gas-jet blinked upon a negro with a number of parcels scattered about him, and on the counter an empty till, and behind it a little woman, her face resting sideways in the till, her fingers clutching the outer counter-run, with such an expression of terror! So I got over the counter to a table behind a wire-gauze, and went over the Morse alphabet in my mind before touching the Wheatstone drop-handle, never asking myself who was to answer my message, habit being still strong upon me, and my mind dodged from reasoning from what I saw to what I did not see; but when I moved the commutator, and peered at the dial-needle at my right, as it did not move, I knew that no current was passing, for one pair of the commutator-spikes had apparently been in contact with a pair of the uprights, so the battery had run down: and with a

kind of fright, I was up, leapt, and got away from the place, though there was a number of telegrams about, which, if I had been in my senses, would have read.

At the next street-corner I saw open the door of a large house, and went in: but from bottom to top no one there, except one English girl, seated in an easy-chair in a drawing-room furnished with Valenciennes curtains and azure-satin, a girl of the “submerged” class clad in rags, and there she lay back with a hanging jaw in an awkward sort of posture, a jummy at her feet, she clutching a lot of bank-notes, in her lap two watches: in fact the bodies here were either those of foreigners, or else of the very poor, the very old, or the very young.

But what made me remember that house was that I found there on a sofa a paper, *The Kent Express*; and, sitting unconscious of my neighbor, I pored long over what was written there.

It said in an article that I tore out and kept: “Communication with Tilsit, Insterburg, Warsaw, Cracow, Przemysl, Gross Wardein, Karlsburg, and many smaller towns immediately east of the 21st of longitude has ceased during the night, though in some at least of them there must have been operators still at their posts, undrawn into the westward-rolling torrent: but as all messages from Western Europe have been met only by that mysterious muteness which, three months and two days since, astounded civilization in the case of Eastern New Zealand, we can only assume that these towns, too, have been added to the mournful catalogue; indeed, after last evening’s Paris news we might have foretold with some assurance, not merely their overthrow, but even the moment of it: for the rate of the slow-riding vapor which is touring our globe is no longer doubtful, having now been definitely fixed by Professor Craven at 100½ miles a day—4 miles 330 yards an hour. Its nature, its origin, remain matters of conjecture: for it seems to leave no living thing behind it; nor, God knows, is that of any moment now to us who remain. The rumor that it is associated with an odor of almonds is asserted on good authority to be improbable, but the morose purple of its impending gloom has been attested by tardy fugitives from the face of its rolling and smoky march.

“Is this the end? We do not, will not, believe it. Will the sweet sky which today smiles over us be invaded in nine days, or less, by this smoke of Night? In spite of the avowals of the scientists, we still doubt. For, if so, to what purpose that drama of Evolution in which we seem to see the artistry of the Dramaturgist? Surely, the end of a fifth act should be obvious, satisfying to one’s sense of the complete: but History so far, hoary as it has been, resembles rather a prologue than a fifth act. Can it be that the Manager, utterly dissatisfied, would sweep all off, and ‘hang up’ the piece for ever? Certainly, the sin of mankind has been as scarlet: and if this Heavenly earth that he has converted into Hell smother him now under the muck of Hell, little the wonder. But we will not yet believe. There is a sparing strain in Nature; through the world, as a thread, is spun a silence which smiles; and on the end of events we find placarded large the words: ‘Why were ye afraid?’ A tranquil hope, then—even now when we crouch beneath this world-wide shadow of the wings of the bird of death—befits us: and, indeed, we see such an attitude among some of the humblest of our people, from whose heart arises the sigh, ‘Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.’ Hear, therefore, O Lord; O Lord, look down, and save.

“But even as we thus speak of hope, reason, if we would hear her, whispers us ‘dreamer’: and inclement is the sky of earth. No more craft can New York harbor hold, and whereas, among us, men perish of privations by the hundred thousand, yonder across the sea they perish by the million: for where the rich are pinched, how can the indigent live? Already 850 out of the 1500 millions of our race have perished; and the empires of civilization have crumbled like sand-castles to an encumbrance of anarchies. Thousands of unburied dead, anticipating the more deliberate doom that comes and smokes, and rides and comes and comes, and does not tire, strew

the streets of London, Manchester; the guides of the nation have fled; the husband stabs his wife for a slice of bread; the fields lie waste; crowds carouse in our churches, universities, palaces, banks, hospitals; we understand that late last night three territorial regiments, the Munster Fusiliers, and the Lothian and East Lancashire Regiments, riotously disbanded themselves, shooting two officers; disease, as we know, is come into its kingdom; in several towns the police seem to have disappeared, and, in nearly all, every vestige of decency; the results following upon the release of the convicts appear to be monstrous in the respective districts; and within three months Hell seems to have acquired this planet, sending forth Horror, like a wolf, and Despair, like a disastrous sky, to devour and confound her. Hear, therefore, O Lord, and forgive our iniquity; O Lord, we beseech Thee; look down, O Lord, and spare.”

* * *

When I had read this, and the rest of the paper, which had one sheet-side blank, I sat an hour there, eyeing a patch of the purple ash on the floor close to where the girl sat with her timepieces in her eternity; and there was not a feeling in me, except a pricking of curiosity, which later became morbid, to know more about that cloud of smoke of which this paper spoke, of its dates, its source, its nature; then I went own, and entered several houses, seeking for more papers, but did not see any; then found a paper-shop which was open, with notice-boards outside, but either it had been abandoned, or printing must have stopped near the date of the paper that I had read, for the three papers there were dated long previously, and I did not read them.

Now it was raining, and a blustering autumn day it was, distributing all the odors, continually bringing me mixed whiffs of blossoms and the stench of decay; but I would not mind it much, wandered and wandered, till I was tired of spahi and bashi-bazouk, of Greek and Catalan, of Russian “pope” and Coptic abuna, of dragoman and Calmuck, of Egyptian maulawi and Afghan mullah, Neapolitan and sheik, and the nightmare of wild poses, colors, stuffs and garbs, yellow-green kefies of the Bedouin, shawl-turbans of Baghdad, the red tarboosh, the voluminous rose-silk tob of women, and face-veils, the laborer’s corduroy, and stark distorted nakedness, and sashes of figured muslin. About four I found myself seated for very weariness on a doorstep, bent beneath the rain, but soon was up anew, fascinated may-be by this changing bazaar of sameness, its chance combinations and permutations, its novelty in monotony, and about five was at a station marked Harbor Station, in and about which lay a crowd, but no train. There I sat again and rested, rose and roamed again, until after six I found myself at another station named “Priory”; and here I saw two long trains, both bethronged, one on a siding, and one at the up-platform.

On examining both engines, I found them of the old steam-type, in one no water, but in that at the platform the gauge showed some; and, on overhauling all the machinery, I found it good, though rusted, with plenty of fuel, of oil, which I supplemented from a shop near; and for ninety minutes my mind and hands acted with an intelligence as it were automatic, till I saw the fire blazing finely, the steam-gauge registering; and when the safety-valve lever, whose load I lightened by two atmospheres, lifted, I jumped down to try to disconnect the string of carriages from the engine, but failed in this, the coupling being some automatism new to me; nor did I care. As it was now dark, and still some oil for bull’s-eye and lantern, I lit them; then rolled driver and stoker, one to the platform, one upon the rails; and about 8.30 ran out from Dover, my throttle-valve pealing high a long falsetto through the bleak and desolate night.

* * *

My aim was London; but I knew nothing of the metals, their junctions, facing-points, sidings, shuntings, and complexities, nor was even sure whether I was raging toward, or away from, London; but just in proportion as my timorousness of the engine hardened into familiarity and self-confidence, I quickened speed, wilfully, with an obstinacy deaf and obdurate, till finally, from a crawl, I was flying at a shocking velocity, while something, tongue in cheek, seemed to whisper me "there must be trains blocking the rails, at stations, in sheds, everywhere—it is a maniac's ride, a ride of death, Flying Dutchman's frenzy; remember your dark brigade of passengers who rock and bump together, and will suffer in a shock"; but stubbornly I thought "they wished to go to London": and on I raged, not crazily exhilarated, I think, but feeling a wicked and morose unreason glow dully in my bosom, while I stoked begrimed at the fire-box, or caught sight of the corpse of horse or ox, of trees and fields receding, glooming homestead and farm, flowing ghostly past me.

Long, though, it did not last: I could not have been twenty miles from Dover when, on a straight stretch of line, I made out before me a tarpaulined mass opposite a signal-box: and instantly callousness popped into panic in me. But even as I put on the brake, dragged at the link-gear lever, I understood that it was too late—rushed toward the gangway for a wild jump down an embankment to the right, but was flung forward by a series of rough bumps, caused by some ten oxen that lay there across the rails; and when I picked myself up and leapt, some seconds before the collision, the speed must have slackened, for I received no fracture, but lay in semi-coma in a patch of yellow-flowering whin on level ground, just conscious of a conflagration on the rails forty yards away, and, all the dark hours, of vague thunder sounding from somewhere.

* * *

By five in the morning I was sitting up, rubbing my eyes, seeing in a dim light mixed with drizzle that the train of my last night's debauch was a huddled-up chaos of carriages and bodies, while on my right a five-barred gate swung with groans; and four yards from me a wee pony with a swollen wan belly, the picture of death; and dead wet birds.

I picked myself up, to go through the gate up a row of elms to a house which I found to be a tavern with a barn, forming one house, the barn much larger than the tavern part; and I went into the tavern by a side-door—behind the bar—into a parlor—up a little stair—into two rooms, but no one there; then round into the barn, paved with cobblestones, and there lay a mare and foal, some fowls, two cows; then up a ladder-stair to a trap-door, and on the floor above in the middle of a wilderness of hay saw nine laborers, five men and four women, huddled together, with some spirit in a tin-pail, so that these had died riotous.

Amid them I slept three hours, afterwards went back to the tavern, and had some biscuits, of which I opened a new tin, with some ham, jam and apples, of which I made a good meal, for my pemmican was gone.

Afterwards I went following the rail-track on foot, the engines of both the trains in collision being smashed, knowing north from south by the sun; and, after many stoppages at houses, arrived, about eleven in the night, at a populous town. By the Dane John and the Cathedral I recognized it as Canterbury, which I knew well, and walked up to the High Street, conscious for the first time of that regularly-repeated sound, like a sob or groan, which was proceeding from my throat. As there was no visible moon, and these old streets pretty dim, I had to pick my way,

lest I should desecrate the dead with my foot, and they all should rise with hue-and-cry to hunt me. However, the bodies here were not numerous, most, as before, being foreigners: and these, scattered about this prim old city in that mourning darkness, presented such a spectacle of the baleful wrath of God, as broke me quite down at one place, where I stood constrained to jeremiads and sore sobbings, crying out upon it all, God knows.

“Not numerous”—till I stood at the west entrance of the Cathedral, whence I could descry spreading up the darkling nave, to the lantern, to the choir, a phantasmagorical mass of forms; and, going a little inward, flashing three matches, peering nearer, I seemed to see the transepts, too, crowded, the south-west porch thronged, so that a great congregation must have flocked hither shortly before their doom overtook them.

Here it was that I became convinced that the after-odor of the poison was not simply lingering in the air, but was being more or less given off by the bodies: for the blossomy odor of this church positively submerged that other odor, the whole rather breathing the aroma of old moldy linens embalmed for years in cedars. Well, with a stealthy trot I was off from the abysmal stillness of that place, but in Palace Street near made one of those immoderate rackets which seemed to outrage the creation and left me faint, breathless—the racket of the train being different, for there I was fleeing, but here a captive, and which way I fled was capture: for, passing along Palace Street, I saw a lamp-shop, and, wanting a lantern, attempted to get in; but the door was fastened, so, after going away, and kicking against a policeman’s staff, I went again to fracture the window-glass—knew that it would make a row, and for ten minutes stood hesitating; but never could I have expected *such* a row, so passionate, dominant, divulgent, and, O Heaven, so long-lasting: for I seemed to have struck upon the weak spot of some planet which came tumbling, with protracted racket and débâcle, about my brows. It was an hour before I would climb in, but then found what I wanted, and some oil-cans; and until two in the morning the innovating flicker of my lantern went peering at random into the nooks of the town.

Under an arch that spanned an alley I saw the window of a little house of rubble, and between its sashes rags beaten in to make the place air-tight against the poison; but when I went in I found the door of that room open, though it, too, had been stuffed at the edges, and on the threshold an old man and woman lay low: so I conjectured that, thus protected, they had remained shut in, till hunger, or the lack of oxygen, drove them forth, whereupon the poison, still active, must have ended them; and I was to see later that this expedient of making air-tight had been widely resorted to, though the supply both of inclosed air and food had nowhere proved commensurate with the duration of the poisonous state.

Weary as I became, some morbid persistence sustained me, and I would not rest, so that four in the morning found me at a station afresh, industriously stooping, poor wretch, at the sooty task of getting another engine ready for travel: for nowhere hereabouts did I see any motor-cars, all having fled westward; and this time when steam was up I succeeded in uncoupling the carriages from the engine: so by the time daylight glimmered I was gliding light away over the country, whither I did not know, but thinking of London.

* * *

Now I went with more wariness, and got on very well, travelling seven days, seldom at night, never at more than twenty miles, slowing in tunnels. I do not know into what maze the train took me, for soon after leaving Canterbury it must have shunted down some branch-line, nor did the names of stations help, for their situation relatively to London I seldom knew; and again and

again was my progress interrupted by trains on my metals, when I would have to run back to some shunting or siding; in two instances, these being remotely behind, I transhipped from my own to the impeding engine. On the first day I travelled unimpeded till noon, when I drew up in open country that seemed uninhabited for ages, only that half a mile off on a shaded sward was a house of artistic design, coated with tinted harling, the roof of red Ruabon tiles, with timbered gables, and I walked to it after another to-do with putting out the fire and laying a new one, the day lightsome and mild, with counties of white cloud lying quiet over the sky. I found in the house an outer and an inner hail, oil-paintings, a kind of museum, in a bedroom three women with servants'-caps and a footman arranged in a strange symmetrical way, head to head, like rays; and, as I stood looking at them, I could have sworn, my good God, that someone was coming up the stair—some creaking of the breeze in the house, increased a hundred-fold to my fevered hearing: for, used to this muteness of eternity that I have heard for years now, it is as though I hear sounds through an ear-trumpet. So I went down quick, and, after eating, and drinking some clary-water, made of brandy, sugar, and rose-water, which I found in plenty, I lay down on a sofa in the outer hall, and slept until midnight.

I went out then, still possessed with the greed to reach London: and, after getting the engine to rights, went off beneath sparkling black sky swarming with spawn of stars far-cast, some of them, I thought, not unlike this of mine, whelmed in immensity of silence, with one life perhaps to see it, and hear its silence; and all the night I travelled, stopping twice only, once to get the coal from an engine which had blocked me, and once to drink some water, which I took care, as always, should be running water. When I felt my head nod about 4 a.m., I tossed myself, just outside the arch of a tunnel, upon a bank thick with stalks and flowers, the workings of early dawn being then in the east: and there, till near eleven, slept.

On waking, I noticed that the country now looked more like Surrey than Kent—that regular swelling of the land; but in fact, though it must have been either, it looked like neither, for already everything had an aspect of tending to a state of wild nature, and I could well divine that for a year at the least no hand had tended the land—close before me being a few roods of lucerne of such superlative luxuriance, that I was led during that day and the next to scrutinize the state of vegetation with some minuteness, and everywhere detected a certain tendency to hypertrophy in stamens, calyces, pen-carps, pistils, in every sort of bulbiferous thing that I looked at, in the rushes, above all, the fronds, mosses, lichens, and all cryptogamia, and in the trefoils, clover especially, and some creepers. Many crop-fields, it was clear, had been prepared, but not sown, some not reaped, and in both cases I was struck with their aspect of rankness, as also in Norway, and was all the more astonished that this should happen in the months when a poison whose action is the arrest of oxidation had traversed the earth; I could only conclude that its presence in voluminous masses in the lower strata of the atmosphere had been more or less temporary, and that this tendency to exuberance that I noticed must be due to some principle by which Nature acts with freer energy and larger scope in the absence of man.

Two yards from the rails I saw when I stood up a rill at the foot of a rotten bit of fence, barely oozing itself onward under masses of stagnant fungoids; and here there was a sudden splash, and life, I catching sight of the hind legs diving of a frog; so, going to lie on my belly to pore over the wobbling little water, I presently saw three bleaks or ablets go gliding tiny, low down among the moss-hair flying wild from the bottom-rocks, and I thought how gladly would I become one of them, with my home so thatched and shadowy, and my life drenched in their wide-eyed reverie. At all events, these little beings are living, the batrachians also, and, as I found the next day,

chrysalides of one sort or another, for, to my profound emotion, I saw a little butterfly staggering in the air over the flower-garden of a rustic station named Butley.

* * *

It was while I was lying there, poring upon that brooklet, that a thought arose in me: for I said: “If now I be here alone, alone, alone . . . alone, alone . . . one on the earth. . . and my girth have a span of 25,000 miles . . . what will happen to my mind? Into what kind of creature shall I writhe and change? I may live two years so! What will have happened then? I may live five years—ten! What will have happened after the five? the ten? I may live twenty, fifty. . .”

Already, already, there are things that peep and spring within me. . . !

* * *

Wanting food and fresh running water, I walked from the engine through fields of clover whose luxuriance concealed the footpaths, and reached my shoulders; and, after turning the shoulder of a hill, came to a park, in passing through which I saw some deer and three persons, then emerged upon a lawn with terraces, beyond which stood an Early English house-brick with copings and stringcourses of limestone, and spandrels of carved marble: before the porch being a table, or series of tables, in the open air, still spread with cloths that resembled cerements after months of burial, the table having foods on it and some lamps, and all round it, and on the lawn, rustics. I seemed to know the house, no doubt from some print, but could not make out the escutcheon, though I could see from its simplicity that it must be ancient; and over it across the façade spread still some of the letters in evergreens of “Many happy returns of the day”: so that someone must have “come of age,” or something, for here all was joyance, and it was clear that these people had defied a doom which they foreknew. I went almost through the spacious place of halls, marbles, famous oils, antlers, arras, placid bed-chambers, and it took me an hour. In one of a vista of three reception-rooms lay what must have been a number of quadrille-sets, for to the *coup d’œil* they presented a two-and-two look, made very repulsive by their jewels: and I had to steel my heart to go through this house, for I did not know if these people were looking at me as soon as my back was turned. Once I was on the point of flying, for, as I was stepping up the central stairway, there came a pelt of dead leaves against a window-pane in the corridor above, which thrilled me to my soul; but I thought that, if I once fled, they would all be at me from the rear, and I should be gibbering shrill ere I reached the outer hall, so stood my ground, even challengingly advancing; and in a small dim bedroom in the north wing saw a tall lady, with a groom, or woodman, riveted in an embrace on a settee, she with a coronet on her forehead, their lipless teeth still greedily pressed together. Then I collected in a bag some delicacies from the under-regions, salami, mortadel, apples, roes, raisins, biscuits, some wines, bottled fruit, coffee, and so on, with tin-opener, fork, etc., and dragged them all the way back to the engine before I could eat.

* * *

My brain was in such a way, that it was days ere the obvious means of making my way to London, since I wanted to go there, got into my head, so that the engine went wandering the intricate railway-system of the south-country, I having twice to water her with a coal-bucket

from ponds: for the injector was giving no water from the tank, and I did not know where to look for tank-sheds. On the fifth evening, instead of into London, I ran into Guildford.

* * *

That night, from eleven till the next day, a great gale reigned over England: let me note it down; and ten days later, on the 17th, came another; on the 24th another; and I should find it hard now to count the number since: and they hardly resemble British storms, but rather Arctic storms in a certain remarkable something of personalness, and a carousing rowdiness, and a Tartarus dark, that I can hardly half describe. That night at Guildford, after butting about and getting very tired, I threw myself upon a pew in a Norman church with two east apses, called St. Mary s, using the pulpit-cushion for pillow; a little lamp, turned low, burned some distance from me, whose ray served me for *veilleuse* through the night, only one old dame in a chapel on the south side of the chancel, whom I mistrusted, being there with me; and there I lay hearkening, for after all I hardly slept, while over me vogued the megaphones of the immense tempest. Happily I had taken care to close up everything, or, I feel sure, the roof must have gone; and I communed with myself, thinking: "I, poor man, lost in this conflux of infinitudes and vortex of Being, what can become of me, my God? For dark, ah, dark, is this void into which from solid ground I am now gone a trillion furlongs down, the toy of all the whirlwinds: and it would have been better for me to have deceased with the dead, and never to have seen the tenebrousness and turbulence of the ineffable, nor to have heard the thrilling bleakness of the winds of eternity, when they yearn, and plead, and whimper, and when they vociferate and blaspheme, and when they reason and intrigue and entreat, and when they despair and faint, which ear should never hear: for they mean to eat me up, I know, these vast darks, and soon like chaff I shall pass, leaving this scene to them;" so till the morning I lay mumping, with shudderings and coverings: for the shocks of the storm pervaded the locked nave to my heart; and there were hubbubs of thunder that night, my God, like callings and laughs and banterings bawled across from hill-top to hill-top in Hell.

* * *

Well, in the morning, going down the steep of the High Street, I found a young nun at the bottom whom I had observed the previous evening with a troop of girls in uniform opposite the Guildhall half-way up the street, she having been spun down arm-over-arm; and whereas I had left her dressed to her wimple and beads, she was now stripped, and her little crowd slung about; and boughs of trees fleeing, and huddled houses, and clouds of leaves reeling, were all about me that bleak morning.

This Guildford begin a junction, before again setting out in the afternoon when the gale had lulled, having got an A.B.C. and a railway-map, I decided upon my line, feeling certain now of making London, only thirty miles away; and about five o'clock was beyond Surbiton, expecting every minute to see the city, until night fell; and still, at considerable risk, I went, as I thought, forward: but no London was there, I having, in fact, been on some loop-line, and beyond Surbiton gone wrong again: for the next nightfall I found myself at Wokingham more remotely away than ever.

There I slept on a mat in the passage of a tavern named The Rose, for there was a mad Russian-looking man with projecting teeth on a bed in the house, whose appearance I did not

like, and I too tired to walk further; and, setting out early again the next morning, at 10 a.m. I was at Reading.

The notion of navigating the land by the same means as the sea, natural as it was, had not occurred to me; but at the first sight of a compass in a shop-window near the river at Reading, my difficulties as to reaching any particular place vanished: for a chart or map, the compass, a divider, and, in the case of long distances, a quadrant, were all that were necessary to change an engine into a land-ship, one choosing the lines which ran closest to one's course whenever they did not run precisely.

Thus provided, I ran out from Reading in the evening, while there was still some light, having spent there nine hours, this being the town where I first observed that crush of humanity which I afterwards met in towns west of London, the English here quite equal in number to the foreigners, and enough of both, God knows: houses in every room of which, and on the stairs, the dead overlay each other, and in the streets points where only on bodies was it possible to step. I went into the County Gaol, from which, as I had read, the prisoners had been set free, and there found the same crowdedness, cells occupied by ten, corridors rough-paved with faces and old-clothes-shops of robes; and in the parade-ground, against one wall, a mass of stuff, like tough grey clay mixed with rags and trickles of gore, where a cram as of hydraulic horse-power must have acted. At a corner near the buscuit-factory I saw a boy, whom I believe to have been blind, standing jammed, on his wrist a chain, at the end of the chain a dog, he in a haphazard posture from which I conjectured that he and chain and dog had been lifted and placed so by the storm of the 7th; and what made it odd was that his arm pointed rather outward over the dog, so that he looked a drunken fellow setting his dog at me; indeed, all the dead were very mauled and flurried by the storm, and the earth seemed to be making an abortive effort to sweep her streets.

Well, some way out from Reading I found a flower-seed farm looking dead in some plots, in others flourishing rank; and here afresh, fluttering near the engine, three little winged aurelians in the evening air. After which I passed crowds of crowded trains on the down-line, two in collision, even the fields on either hand having a populous look, as if people, when trains and vehicles failed, had set to tramping westward in caravans and streams.

On coming to a tunnel close to Slough, I remarked round the foot of the arch a mass of wooden *débris*, and, as I moved through, was alarmed by the bumping of the engine jumping across bodies; at the other end more *débris*; and I supposed that a company of desperate folk had made the tunnel air-tight at the two arches and provisioned themselves, in the hope to live there till the day of destiny was ended: whereupon their barricades must have been crashed through by some up-train and themselves crushed; or else, other crowds, crazy to share their cave of refuge, had battered down the boardings: this latter, as I afterwards found, being an everyday event.

I should soon have come to London now, but, by bad luck met an up-train on the metals with not a soul in it, and there was nothing to do but to tranship with all my things to its engine which I found in good condition, with coal and water; and I set it going—a hateful back-ache, I already black from hair to toes: However, by half-past ten, when I found myself stopped by another train, I was only four hundred yards from Paddington, and walked the rest of the way among trains within which the dead still stood upright, propped by one another, and over rails where bodies were as ordinary and cheap as waves on the sea, or twigs in a forest: for throngs had given chase on foot to moving trains, or forerun them in the frenzied hope of inducing them to stop.

I came to the great shed of glass and girders which is the station, the night perfectly soundless, moonless, starless, the hour about eleven; and now I saw that trains, in order to move at all, must have moved through a slough of bodies that had been pushed from behind, and formed a packed

mass on the metals; and I knew that they *had* moved; nor could *I* now *F* move, unless I decided to wade, for flesh was everywhere, on the roofs of trains, cramming the intervals betwixt them, on the platforms, splashing the pillars like spray, piled upon lorries, a carnal marsh; outside, too, it filled the intervals betwixt an army-park of vehicles, carpeting that district of London; and all here that odor of blossoms, which nowhere yet, save on one sickening ship, had failed, was now overcome by another.

I found later that all the generating-stations that I visited must have been shut down prior to the arrival of the doom, also that gasworks had been abandoned some time prior: so that this city of dreadful night, in which, at the moment when silence choked it, not less than twenty millions swarmed and droned, must have more resembled the shades of Orcus than aught to which my imagination can compare it.

I got out from the station, with ears, God knows, that still awaited the accustomed noising, but, habituated as I now was to that void of soundlessness, I was overwhelmed in a new awe, when, instead of lights and wheels rolling, I saw the long street which I knew brood lugubrious as Babylons grass-grown, and heard a shocking silence, uniting with the silence of those lights of eternity on high.

* * *

I could not drive any vehicle for some time, for all thereabouts was practically a block; but near the Park, which I attained by stooping among wheels and selecting my foul steps, I boarded a brougham, found in it petrol, set the lamps burning, removed with averted abhorrence four bodies, mounted, broke that populous dumbness, and through streets nowhere empty of bodies went humming eastward my bumpy and bespattered way.

* * *

That I should have persevered, with so much trouble, in coming to this unbounded catacomb, now seems fantastic of me: for by that time I could hardly have expected to find any other like myself, though I cherished, I remember, the (irrational) hope of yet somewhere finding dog or cat, and would anon think bitterly of Reinhardt, my Arctic dog, which my own hand had shot; but, in reality, a curiosity must have been in me to read the real facts of what had happened, so far as it was known or guessed, and to gloat upon all that drama, and cup of trembling, and pouring out of the vials of wrath, in the months prior to the arrival of the end of time—a curiosity which had everywhere made the hunt for papers uppermost in my thoughts; but I had found only four, all antedated to the one that I had read at Dover, though their dates gave me some idea of the period when printing must have ceased, about the 17th of July, three months subsequent to my reaching the Pole, for none I found later than this date; and these contained nothing scientific, only prayers and despairings. On arriving, therefore, at London, I made straight for *The Times* office, only stopping at a chemist's in Oxford Street for a bottle of antiseptic to hold near my nose, though, having once left the neighborhood of Paddington, I had hardly any need of this.

So I made my way to the square where the paper was printed, to see that even there the ground was strewn with calpac and pugaree, abayah and fringed praying-shawl, hobnail and sandal, lungi and striped silk, all very muddled and mauled; and through the darkling square of the twice-dark pile I passed, to find open the door of an advertisement office; but, on striking a match, I descried that it had been lit by electricity, and had now to retrace my stumbling steps,

till I came to a lamp-shop in an alley, stepping now with care that I might offend no one, for in this enclosed neighborhood I began to undergo tremors, and kept flashing matches, which, so still was the black air, scarcely flickered.

When I got back to the building with a little lighted lamp, I saw a "file" of the paper on a table, and since there were a number of dead there, and I wished to be alone, I took the mass under one arm, the lamp in my other hand, passed behind a counter, and up a stair that led me into a great building and complexity of steps and corridors, where I went peering, the lamp obviously trembling in my hand, for here also were dead. Finally I entered a stately chamber like a board-room, large chairs placed about a table covered with baize, on the table stacks of manuscript permeated with purple dust, and books in book-cases around. This room had been locked upon himself by a single man in a frock-coat, tall, with a pointed grey beard, who at some time had decided to fly from it, for he lay at the door, having dropped dead the moment he opened it; and him, by drawing his boots aside, I removed, locked the door upon myself, sat at the table before the dusty file, and, with the light by my side, began to investigate.

I investigated and read until far into the morning: but God knows. . .

I had not properly filled the little reservoir with oil, so about three in the 'foreday it began to burn sullenly lower, letting sparks, turning the glass grey; and in my heart was the question; "Suppose the lamp goes out before the daylight . . ."

I knew the Pole and cold, I knew them, but to be frozen by terror. . . . I read, I say, I conned, I would not stop: but I read that night racked by panics such as have never entered into a heart to fancy, my flesh moving and creeping like a pool which, here and there, a breeze breathes on. Sometimes for three, four, minutes the profound interest of what I read would fix my mind, and then I would peruse an entire column, or two, without consciousness of the sense of one phrase, my brain all drawn away to the innumerable troops that camped about me, to musings on the question on whether they might stand, and accuse me: for the worm was the world, and in the air a stirring of cerements, and the taste of the grey of ghosts seemed to infect my throat, and odors of the loathsome tomb my nose, and deep tones of tollings my ears; at the last the lamp smouldered low, low, and my charnel fancy was chockful with the screwing-down coffins, lynch-gates and grave-diggers, and the grating of ropes that lower into the grave, and the first thump of the earth upon the lid of that gaunt and gloomy home of the mortal; that lethal look of cold dead fingers I seemed to see before me, the insipidness of dead tongues, the pout of the drowned, and the vapid froths which ridge their lips, until my flesh was moist as with the stale washing-waters of morgues and mortuaries, and with such sweats as corpses sweat, and the mawkish tear which pauses on dead men's cheeks: for what is one insignificant man in his garment of flesh against mobs and armies of the disembodied, he alone with them, and nowhere another, his peer, to whom to appeal against them? I read, I bent to it: but God knows. . . . If a leaf of the paper, which I warily, thievishly, moved, made but one rustle, how did that reveille boom through the haunted halls of my heart, and there was a cough in my swallow which for long I shirked to cough, till it burst with pitiless turbulence from my lips, sending crinkles of cold through my very soul: for with the words which I read were all mixed up visions of hearses crawling, palls, and wails, and crapes, and piercing shrieks of distraction pealing through vaults of catacombs, and all the mournfulness of that valley of shadow, and the tragedy of corruption. Twice during the spectral watches of that night the knowledge that the presence of some mute being brooded at my left elbow so thrilled me, that twice I leapt to my feet to confront it with hairs which bristled in frenzy: after which I must have fainted, for when it was broad day I found

my brow dropped upon the papers; and I resolved then never again after sunset to remain in any house: for that night was enough to kill a horse, my God; and that this is a haunted planet I know.

* * *

What I read in *The Times* was not very definite, for how could it be? but in the main it established inferences which I had myself made, and fairly satisfied my mind.

There had been a battle royal in the paper between my collaborator Professor Stanistreet and Dr. Martin Rogers, and never could I have conceived such an indecorous piece of business, men like them calling one another “tyro,” “dreamer,” and in one place “blockhead.” Stanistreet denied that the odor of almonds attributed to the advancing cloud could be due to anything but the excited fancy of the fugitives, because, said he, it was unknown that either Cn, HCn, or K_4FeCn_6 , had been given out by volcanoes, and the destructiveness of the cloud could only be owing to CO and CO_2 ; to which Rogers, in an article characterised by extraordinary acrimony, replied that he could not understand how even a “tyro” (!) in chemical and geological phenomena should rush into print with the statement that HCn had not been given out by volcanoes: that it *had* been, he said, was ascertained, though whether it had been could not affect the question as to whether it was being, since cyanogen, as a matter of fact, was not rare in nature, though not directly occurring, being one of the products of the distillation of pit-coal, and found in roots, peaches, almonds, and many tropical flora; also it had been actually pointed out as probable by more than one thinker that some salt or salts of Cn, the potassic, or the potassic ferrocyanide, or both, must exist in considerable stores at volcanic depths. In reply, Stanistreet in a two-column article used the expression “dreamer,” and Rogers, when Berlin had been already silenced, finally replied with his red-hot “blockhead.” But, in my opinion, by far the best of the scientific dicta was from the unexpected source of Sloggett, of the Dublin Science and Art Department; he, without fuss, accepted the reports of the fugitives, down to the assertion that the cloud, as it rolled, was mixed from its base to the clouds with tongues of flame, purple, rimmed with rose-color: this, Sloggett explained, being the characteristic flame of both cyanogen and hydrocyanic acid vapor, which, being inflammable, may have become locally ignited in the passage over cities, and only flamed in that limited and languid way because of the ponderous volumes of carbonic anhydride with which they must, of course, be mixed, the dark empurpled color of the cloudmass being due to the presence of scorix of the trappean rocks, basalts, green-stone, trachytes, and the various porphyries. This article was remarkable for its discernment, because written so early—not long, in fact, after the cessation of communication with Australia, at which date Sloggett stated that the character of the devastation not only proved an eruption—another, but far greater Krakatoa, doubtless in some South Sea region—but indicated that its most active product must be, not CO, but potassic ferro-cyanide (K_4FeCn_6), which, undergoing distillation with the products of sulphur in the heat of eruption, produced hydrocyanic acid (HCn); and this volatile acid, he said, remaining in a vaporous state in all climates above a temperature of $26.5^\circ C.$, might involve the entire earth, travelling chiefly in a direction contrary to the earth’s spin, the only regions which would certainly be exempt being the colder parts of the Arctic circles, where the vapor would condense to the liquid state, and descend as rain. He did not anticipate that vegetation would be deeply affected, unless the event were of inconceivable persistence and activity, for, though the poisonous quality of hydrocyanic acid consisted in its arrest of oxidation, vegetation had two sources of existence—the soil as well as the air; with this exception, all species, down to the lowest forms, would disappear (here was the one point in which he was at fault). For the rest, he

fixed the rate of the on-coming cloud at from 100 to 105 miles a day, and the date of eruption as the 14th, 15th, or 16th of April—one, two, or three days after the *Boreal* party reached the Pole; and he ended by saying that, if the facts were as he had stated them, then he could suggest no hiding-place for the race of man, unless such places as mines and tunnels could be made air-tight; nor could even they be of use to any considerable number, except in the event of the lethal state of the air being of brief duration.

* * *

I had thought of mines before, but in a languid way, until this article, and other things that I read, as it were, struck my brain a slap with the notion. For “there,” I said, “if anywhere, shall I find a man. . . .”

* * *

I passed out from that building that morning like a man bowed down with age, for the depths of gruesomeness into which I had had glimpses during those hours of gloom made me feeble, my steps tripped, my brain reeled.

I came out into Farringdon Street, and at the Circus, where four streets meet, had under my range of vision four fields of bodies, bodies, clad in a rag-shop of every faded color, or half-clad, or not clad, actually in some cases overlying one another, as I had seen at Reading, but here with a more skeleton appearance: for I saw the swollen-looking shoulders, sharp hips, hollow abdomens, and stiff bony limbs of men dead from famine, the whole having the bizarre air of some *macabre* battlefield of marionettes fallen; and, mixed with them, a multitude of vehicles of all sorts, among which I made my way to a shop in the Strand, where I hoped to find all the information which I required about the excavations of the country; but the shutters were up, and I did not wish to make any noise among these people, though the morning was clear, and it was easy to effect an entrance, for I saw a crowbar on a truck; so I moved on to the British Museum, the cataloguing-system of which I knew, and passed in: no one at the reading-room door now to bid me halt, and in all the round of the reading-room not a soul, except one old man with a bag of goitre at his neck, and spectacles, he lying up a book-ladder near the shelves, a “reader” to the last; then, having got at the catalogues, for an hour I was upstairs among the dim sacred galleries of this still place, and at the sight of certain Greek and Coptic papyri, charters, seals, had such a dream of this earth, my good God, as even an angel’s pen could not express on paper. Afterwards I went away loaded with half a hundredweight of ordnance-maps which I had stuffed into a bag found in the cloak-room, with three topographical books; then at an instrument-maker’s in Holborn got a sextant and theodolite; at a grocer’s near the river put into a sack-bag provisions to last me a week or two; and, finding at Blackfriars Bridge wharf-station a sharp white motor-yawl of a few tons, by noon I was cutting my solitary way up the Thames, that flowed as before the Brits were born, and saw it, and built mud-huts there among the forests, and later on the Romans came, and saw it, and called it Tamesis, or Thamesis.

* * *

That midnight, lying asleep on the cabin-cushions of my boat under the lee of an island, at Richmond, I had a clear dream, in which something, or someone, came to me, and asked me a

question: for it said: "Why do you go seeking another?—that you may fall upon him, and kiss him? or that you may fall upon him, and kill him?" And I muttered sullenly in my dream: "I would not kill him. I do not wish to kill anyone."

* * *

What was essential to me was to know, with definiteness, whether I was alone: for some instinct was beginning to whisper me: "Find that out; be sure, be sure: for without the assurance you can never be-yourself."

I passed into the Midland Canal, and so northward, leisurely advancing, for I was in no sweat, the weather remaining very warm, much of the country still clothed in autumn foliage. I have written, I think, of the terrific recklessness of the tempests witnessed in England since my return: well, the calms were not less intense and novel. This observation was forced upon me: and I could not but be surprised. There seemed no middle course now: if there was a wind, it was a storm; if there was not a storm, no leaf twinkled, not a zephyr fretted the waters. I was reminded of maniacs that laugh now, and rave now—but never smile, and never sigh.

Well, after passing by Leicester on the fourth afternoon, I left my pleasant boat the next morning, carrying maps and compass, and at a small station took engine, bound for Yorkshire, where I loitered away two foolish months, sometimes moving by steam, sometimes by automobile, by bicycle, on foot, till the autumn was quite over.

* * *

There were two houses in London to which I had thought to go, one in Harley Street, one in Hanover Square: but when it came to the point, I would not; and there was an embowered home in Yorkshire, where I was born, to which I thought to go: but I would not, keeping myself for many days to the east half of the county.

One morning, while passing on foot along the coast-wall from Bridlington to Flambro', on looking inward from the sea, I was confronted by a thing which for a moment struck me with profound astonishment—a mansion, surrounded by park, and there at a gate straight before me a board marked: "Trespassers will be Prosecuted." A wild desire—my first—to laugh, to burst with laughter, took me: but I would not, though I could not but marvel at this poor man, with his fantasy that part of a planet was his.

Here the cliffs are some seventy feet high, broken by slips in the upper stratum of clay, and, as I proceeded, mounting always, I encountered gullies in the chalk, down and then up which I had to scramble, till I came to a great mound or barrier, stretching across the promontory, and hacked by a ravine, a barrier raised as a rampart apparently by some of those old invading pirate-peoples, who had their hot life-scuffle, and are done now, like the others; then I came to a bay in the cliff, with boats lodged on the slopes, some quite high, though the declivities are steep, and a lime-kiln is there which I explored, but found no one; then, coming out on the other side of the bay, I found the village, with an old tower at one end; and thence, after an hour's rest in the kitchen of a little inn, went out to the coast-guard station, and the lighthouse.

Looking across the sea eastward, the light-keepers here must have seen that cloud of convolving browns and purples, doubtless embroiled with serpents of fire, walking the water, its top in the sky, upon them: for this headland is in the same longitude as London, and, counting from the hour when, as told in *The Times*, the cloud was sighted from Dover over Calais, London

and Flambro' must have been overtaken about three on the Sunday afternoon, the 25th of July; and at the view in open daylight of a doom so gloomy—foreknown, but may-be hoped against to the end, and now come—the light-keepers must have fled, if they had not fled before, for here was no one, and in the village few. In this lighthouse, a white tower on the cliff-edge, is a book for visitors to sign their names: and I will write something here, for the secret is between God only and me: After reading some of the names, I wrote my name there. . .

* * *

The reef before the Head reaches out a quarter-mile, looking bold in the low-water which then was, showing to what extent the sea has pushed back this coast, three weeks impaled on the reef, and a steamer close and huge, waiting for the next movements of the sea, already strewn, to perish. All along the cliff-wall to the bluff crowned by Scarborough Castle northward appeared those cracks and caverns which had brought me here: so I got down a slope to a rude beach, strewn with blocks of chalk, and never did I feel so paltry and short a being, bays of rock out-flung about me, their bluffs encrusted at the base with crass old leprosies of barnacles and beardedness of seaweed, and, higher up, their whiteness all daubed and time-spoiled, darksome caverns yawning in the enormous withdrawals of the rock-wall. Here, in that morning's walk, I saw three little hermit-crabs, five limpets, and two ninnycocks living their lives in a pool beneath a bearded rock; but what astonished me here, and, indeed, everywhere, in London even, and other towns, was the number of birds that strewed the earth, at some points resembling a rain, birds of almost every sort, including tropic specimens, so that I was compelled to conclude that they, too, had fled before the cloud from country to country, till conquered by weariness and astonishment at Him who by sixty million years of persistence and achievement had completed them into the things they were.

By scrambling over rocks crass with periwinkles, and splashing through sloppy stretches of algæ, which vent a raw stench, I entered one of the gullies, long, winding, its sides polished by the sea-wash, the floor rising inwards, I striking matches in the interior, hearing still from outside the ponderous rushes and jostles of the sea between the rocks of the reef, but now faintly. Here, I knew, I could meet only dead men; but, urged by some curiosity, I searched to the end, wading once through sea-weed three feet deep; but no one there: only belemnites and fossils in the chalk; and after searching several south of the headland, I went northward past it into another bay and place of perched boats, called in the map "North Landing," where, even now, a smell of fish, left by the old crabbers and herring-fishers, was perceptible. Still coves and bays opened as I proceeded, a turf coming down in curves at some parts on the cliff-brows, like wings of hair parted in the middle and plastered on the brow; isolated chalk-masses are common, obelisks, top-heavy columns, bastions; at one point no less than eight headlands stretched to the end of Being before me, each pierced by its arch, Norman or Gothic, in whole or in half; and here again caves, in one of which I found a carpet-bag stuffed with a wet pulp like bread, and, stuck to the rock, a Turkish tarboosh; also, lying in a limestone quarry, five asses: but no man, the east coast having evidently been shunned. Finally, in the afternoon I reached Filey, very tired, and there slept.

* * *

I went onward by steam along the coast to a region of iron-ore, alum, and jet-excavations round Whitby and Middlesborough, and at Kettlewell went down to a bay in which is a cave called the

Hob-Hole, with excavations all round made by jet-diggers and quarrymen: in the cave a herd of cattle, for what purpose put there I cannot conjecture, and in the jet-excavations I found nothing. Further south is the alum-region, as at Sandsend; but as soon as I saw a works, and the gap in the ground like a crater where the lias is quarried, I concluded that here could have been found no hiding. Then from round Whitby and those rough moors I went on to Darlington, not far now from my home: but I would not continue that way; and, after two days' lounging, started for Richmond and the lead mines about Arkengarth Dale, near Reeth. Here begins a region of mountain, various with glens, fells, screes, scars, swards, becks, passes, villages, river-heads, dales, some of the faces that I saw in it almost seeming to speak to me in a brogue which I knew; but they were not numerous in proportion, for this countryside must have had its population multiplied by hundreds, the villages having rather the air of Danube, Levant, or Spanish villages. In one, named Marrick, the street had become the scene either of a battle or a massacre; and soon I was everywhere coming upon men and women dead from violence: cracked heads, wounds, unhung jaws, broken limbs. But instead of going direct to the mines from Reeth, that waywardness which now governs my mind, as gusts an abandoned boat, took me south-west to the village of Thwaite, which, however, I could not enter, so occupied with dead was every spot. Not far from here I went, on foot now, up a steep road which leads over the Buttertubs Pass into Wensleydale, the day warm and broad, with broad clouds looking like pools of molten-silver which give out grey fumes from their center, throwing moody shades over the dale; and soon, climbing, I could look down upon miles of Swaledale, a panorama of glen and grass, river and cloud-shadow, something of levity being in my step that fair day, for I had left my maps and things at Reeth, to which I meant to return, and the earth, which is very nice, was mine. The ascent was rough, and also long: but, if I paused and looked behind—I saw, I saw. Man's notion of a Paradise reserved for "souls" arose from impressions which the earth made upon his senses, for no seventh heaven can be fairer than this, as his notion of a Hell arose from the mess into which his own baby habits of mentation changed this Paradise: thinking which, I went up into what more and more took-on the character of a mountain-pass, with points of Alpine savagery, heather now on the mountain-sides, a beck sending up its sound, then screes, and scars, a waterfall, a landscape of crags, and lastly a lonesome summit, palpably closer to the clouds.

* * *

Five days later I was at the mines: and here I first saw that wide-spread scene of horror with which I have since become familiar, the story of seven out of ten of them being the same, and brief: selfish "owners," an ousted world, an easy bombardment, and the destruction of all concerned, before the coming of the cloud in many cases. About some of the Durham pit-mouths I have been given the impression that the human race lay collected there, and that the notion of hiding himself in a mine must have entered the head of every man alive, and sent him there.

In these lead mines, as in most vein-mining, there are more shafts than in collieries, and hardly any attempt at artificial ventilation, except at rises, winzes and cul-de-sacs; and I found that, though their depth does not exceed three hundred feet, suffocation must often have anticipated the other death. In nearly every shaft, both up-take and down-take, was a ladder, either of the mine, or of the fugitives; and I was able to descend without difficulty, having dressed myself in a house at the village in a flannel shirt, trousers with circles of leather at the knees, thick boots, and a miner's hat having a socket into which fits a candle; with this and a Davy-lamp, which I carried about for months, I lived for the most part in the depths of the earth, searching for the treasure of

a life, to find everywhere, in English duckies and guggs, Pomeranian women in gaudy cloaks, the Walachian, the Mameluk, the Khirgiz, the Bonze, the Imaum, almost every type of man.

* * *

One most brilliant day of Autumn I walked by the market-cross at Barnard, come at last, though with a reluctance in my heart, to where I was born: for I said I would go and see my sister Ada, and the other old one; but I leaned and loitered a long time on the bridge at Barnard, gazing up to the craggy height, heavy with wood that waved, and crowned by the Castle-tower, the Tees round the mountain-base sweeping smooth here and sunlit, but a league down, where I thought of going, brawling bedraggled and lacerated like a sweet strumpet, shallow among rocks under reaches of shadow—the shadow of Rokeby Woods; but I shrank from it, and, instead, went leisurely up the hill-side to the castle, having in my hand a bag with a meal, up the stair in the castle wall to the top, where in my miner's attire I remained three hours, brooding sleepily upon the scene of lush umbrageous wood which marks the way the river takes, from Marwood Chase up above, and where the brabbling Balder bickers in, down to bowery Rokeby daubed now with browns of autumn, the luxury of umbrage lessening away toward the uplands, where there are etherealised reaches of fields, and in the farthest azure remoteness mirages of lonesome moorland. It was not till near three that I went down along the river; then, near Rokeby, up the old hill: and there, as of old, was the little black square with yellow letters on the gate-wall:

No house, I believe, of this countryside was empty of invaders, and they were in Hunt Hill, too—three to the right of the garden-patch, where the lilac, among weeds now, had once grown from rolled grass; and in the bush-wilderness to the left, which had always been wilderness, one more; and in the breakfast-room three; and in the new clinker-built attachment two, half under the billiard-table; and in her room over-locking the porch the long form of my mother on her bed, her left temple battered in; and beside the bed, face down on the planks, black-haired Ada in a night-dress.

Of the men and women who died they two alone had burying, for I delved a hole with the stable-spade beneath the cedar, and wound them in sheets for shrouds, feet and form and countenance, and, not without throes and qualms, bore and buried them there.

* * *

Some time passed after this before the multitudinous and perplexing task of visiting the mine-regions anew claimed me, I meantime finding myself at a place named Ingleborough, which is a table-mountain with a summit of twenty acres, from which the sea is visible across Lancashire to the west; and in the flanks of this strange mount are a number of caves which I scrutinized during three days, sleeping in a tool-shed at a very rural and flower-embowered village, for every room in it was crowded, a place marked Clapham in the chart, in Clapdale, which latter is a dale penetrating the slopes of the mountain: and there I found by far the vastest of the caves which I found, having climbed a path from the village to an arch, screened by trees, leading into the limestone cliff; nor had I proceeded three yards ere I saw the traces of a battle here—all this region, in fact, had been invaded, for the cave must have been famous, and for some miles round it the dead were numerous, so that the approach to the cave was a case for care, if the foot was to be saved from pollution. There had always been an iron gate across near the entrance, within which a wall had recently been built across, shutting in I do not know how many, and both gate

and wall had been stormed, for there still lay the sledges which had done it. So, having a lamp, and on my hat the candle, I went on quickly, seeing it useless now to choose my steps where there was little to choose, through a passage incrustated with a scabrous petrified lichen, the roof low, covered with down-looking cones like a forest of children's toy-trees. I then came to a hole in a curtain of stalagmitic formation opening into a cavern which was quite animated and fistal with flashes, sparkles, diamond-lusters, hung in their myriads upon a movement of the eye, produced by wet stalagmites, down the center of which ran a lane of clothes and hats and faces: over which with hasty reluctant foot I somehow trod; the cavern all the time widening, stalactites on the roof of every size, from cow's breast to titan's club; and now everywhere the wet drip, drip, as it were a crowded bazaar of sweating brows and ardent steps, in which the one business is to drip. Where stalactite meets stalagmite there are pillars; where stalactite meets stalactite there are elegances, draperies, delicate fantasies; there were also ponds in which hung heads and feet; and there were regions where the roof, which continually reared itself, was reflected in the chill sheen of the floor. Suddenly down came the roof, the floor went up, and they seemed to meet before me; but I found an opening, through which, rowing myself on the belly over slush in repulsive proximity to dead personalities, I issued out to a floor of sand under a tunnel which is arched and narrow, grum and dull, without stalactites, in a mood of monks and catacombs and the route to the tomb: the dead there fewer, proving that the general mob had not had time to penetrate so far inward, or else that those within had gone out to defend, or to hearken to the storm of, their citadel. This passage brought me to a hall, the amplest of all, loftily vaulted, fraught with genie riches and buried treasures of brilliance, the million-fold *ensemble* of flashes dancing schottische with the eye, as it shifted or was quiet, this place being quite half a mile from the entrance; and here my prying light could find only nineteen dead, and at the remote end two holes in the floor, just big enough to admit the body, through which from below arose a noising of falling water; both of which holes, I could see, had been filled-in with cement-concrete—wisely, I think, for a current of air from somewhere seemed to be breathing through them, and must have resulted fatally; but both of the fillings had been broken through—by the ignorant, I guess, who thought to get to a den yet beyond. I had my ear an hour at the larger of these holes, hearkening to the charm of that chanting down below in the dark; and afterwards, goaded by my desire to be thorough, got a number of robes from the bodies, tied them together, then tied one end round a pillar, and having put my mouth to the hole, calling "*Anyone? Anyone?*", let myself down by the rope of robes, the candlelight at my brow; but I had not descended far down those mournful darks when my left foot dipped into liquid, and instantly the feeling of appalment pierced me that all the evil things in Gehenna were at my leg to get me down to Hell: and I was up quicker than I went down; nor did my flight rest until, with a sigh of deliverance, I found myself out in the open.

* * *

After this, seeing that the autumn warmth was passing away, I set myself with more system to my task, and during six months stuck to it with steadfast will and strenuous assiduity, seeking, not indeed for a man in a mine, hut for some evidence of the possibility that a man might be alive, visiting in that time Northumberland and Durham, Fife and Kinross, South Wales and Monmouthshire, of the Isle of Man, Waterford, Down; I have gone down the 360-ft. ladder of the graphite-mine at Barrowdale in Cumberland half-way up a mountain 2,000 feet high; and have visited where cobalt and manganese are mined in pockets at the Foel Hiraeddog mine in

Flintshire, and the lead and copper workings in Galloway; the Bristol coal-fields, and the mines of South Staffordshire, where, as in Somerset, the veins are thin, and the mining-system is the "long-wall," whereas in the North the system is the "pillar-and-stall;" I have visited the open workings for iron-ores of Northamptonshire, and the underground stone-quarries, and the underground slate-quarries in the Festiniog district of North Wales; also the rock-salt workings; the tin, copper and cobalt workings of Cornwall; and where the minerals were brought to the surface on the backs of men; and where they were brought by adit-levels provided with railroads; and where, as in old Cornish mines, there are two ladders in the shaft, moved up and down alternately, see-saw, and by skipping from one to the other at right moments you ascended or descended; the Tisbury quarries in Wiltshire, the Spinkwell in Yorkshire; and every tunnel, and every recorded hole: for something urged within me, saying: "You must be *sure* first, or you can never be—yourself."

* * *

At the Fambrook Coal-field, in the Red Colt Pit, my inexperience nearly ended me: for though I had a theoretical knowledge of all British workings, I was, in my practical relation to them, like a man who has learned seamanship on shore. Here I arrived on the 19th of December to find the dead accumulated beyond precedent, the plain being as strewn as a reaped field with stacks, and near the bank more strewn, filling the only house within sight of the pit-mouth—the houselet provided for the company's officials—even lying over the mountain-heap of "wark," composed of the shale and *débris* of the working; and here I did not, as usual, see any rope-ladder fixed by the fugitives in the ventilating-shaft (which, usually, is not deep, being also the pumping-shaft, containing a plug-rod at one end of the beam-engine which works the pumps); though, on looking down the shaft, I discerned clothes and a rope-ladder, which a group of the fugitives, by hanging their weights to it, must have dragged down, to prevent the descent of yet others: so my only way of going down was by the pit-mouth, and after some hesitation I decided, very rashly, first providing for my coming up again by getting a coil of half-inch rope from the bailiff's office, rope at most mines being so profuse, that it seemed as if each fugitive had provided himself in that way; and this rope I threw over the beam of the beam-engine with both ends at the bottom of the ventilating-shaft: in this way I could come up by tying one rope-end to the rope-ladder down there, hoisting the ladder, fastening the other rope-end below, and climbing the ladder; and now, to go down, I lit the pit-mouth engine-fire, started the engine, and brought up the cage from the bottom, the 300 yards of wire-rope winding with a quaint deliberateness round the drum, reminding me of a camel's nonchalant leisurely obedience: so when the four meeting chains of the cage appeared, I stopped the ascent, tied a string to the knock-off gear, carried its other end to the cage, in which I had five companions, lighted my hat-candle, which was my test for choke-damp, and the Davy, and without reflection pulled the string. First the cage gave a little up-leap, then began to descend, normally, I thought—though the candle at once went out—nor had I the least fear, for though a draught blew up the shaft, that happens in shafts; *this* draught, however, soon got to be too vehemently boisterous, I saw the lamp-light struggle, the dead cheeks shiver, heard the cage-shoes go singing down the guides, and quicker we went in that facile descent of Avernus, slipping light, then raging, a rain of sparks shooting from the shoes and guides, a gale in my brain and eyes and breath. When we bumped upon the "dogs" at the bottom, I was tossed a foot upwards with those stern-faced others, then lay among them as one of them.

It was only when, an hour later, I sat disgustedly reflecting on this mauling, that I remembered that there used always to be some “hand-working” of the engine during the cage-descents, an engineman reversing the action by a handle, to prevent bumping. However, the only permanent hurt was to the lamp, and I found thousands in the workings.

I then got out into the coal-hole, a hall 70 feet square, the floor paved with iron sheets, some holes round the wall, dug for some purpose which I never could discover, wagons full of coal and shale standing about, and all among the wagons, on them, under them, bodies, clothes. I got a new lamp, pouring in my own oil, and went down a ducky-road, very rough, with rollers ever which ran a rope to the pit-mouth for drawing up the wagons; and in the sides here, at regular intervals, man-holes, within which to rescue one’s self from wagons tearing down; and within these man-holes here and there a dead, in others things to eat, and at one place a dead heap, the air here hot at 65 degrees, and getting hotter with the descent.

This ducky led me down into a standing—a space with a turn-table—which I made my base of operations, here being a number of putts like punts on carriages, with wagons, such as took the coal from putt to pit-mouth; and, raying out from this standing, avenues, some ascending as guggs, some descending as dipples, and the dead here all arranged in groups, the heads of this group pointing up this gugg, of that group down that dipple, the central space, where weighing was done, nearly empty: and the dumbness of this deep place among all these multitudes I found extremely gravitating and hypnotic, dragging me also into their passion of dumbness, in which they lay, all, all, so fixed and veteran; and at one period I fell a-staring, nearer perhaps to death and the inane Gulf than I knew; but I said I would be strong, and not sink into their habit of stillness, but let them keep to their own way, and follow their own fashion, and I would keep to my own way, and follow my own fashion, nor yield to them, though I was hut one against many: so I pulled myself together, and, getting to work, holding on to the drum-chain of a gugg, I got up, stooping under a roof three feet high, until I came upon the scene of another battle: for in this gugg nineteen of the mine-hands had clubbed to wall themselves in, and I saw them lie there behind their stormed wall with their bare feet, trousers, but naked bodies, countenances all fierce and wild, their grime streaked with sweat-furrows, candles in their hats; and, outside, their own “getting” mattocks and boring-irons to besiege them. Thence I went along a curving twin-way, into which, every thirty yards or so, opened one of those putt-ways called topples; and all about here, in twin-way and topples, were ends and corners, not one of which had been left without its walling-in, and only one was now intact, some, I fancied, having been broken open by their own builders at the goad of suffocation or hunger. The one intact I broke into with a mattock—it was only a cake of plaster, but air-tight—and in a space not nine feet long behind I found the foul corpse of a carting-boy, with guss and tigger at his feet, and the pad which protected his head in pushing the putts, and loaves, sardines, bottled beer, and five or six mice which pitched shrieking through the opening which I made, shocking me, there being of dead mice extraordinary swarms in all this mine-region. I went back then to the standing, and at one point where there was a windlass and chain lowered myself down a “cut”—a pit sunk to a lower coal-stratum. Down there, fancying I could hear the perpetual rat-rat of notice once exchanged between the putt-boys below and the windlass-boys above, I proceeded down a dipple to another standing, for in this mine there were six, perhaps seven, veins: and there I came upon the acme of the drama of this Tartarus, all here being not merely thronged, but at some points a congestion of flesh, reeking a smell of peach mixed with the stale coal-odor of the pit, for here ventilation must have been limited; and masses here had been mown down by only three hands, as I found: for through three holes in a wall built across a gugg stuck out a little three muzzles, plugged in the plaster, which

must have glutted their guts with massacre; and when, after a horror of disgust at wading through a dead sea, I got to the wall and peeped through a hole, I made out a man, two youths, two women, three girls, and heaps of cartridges and provisions, the hole having no doubt been pierced from within at the point of suffocation, when the poison must have entered; and I conjectured that here must be the mine-owner, director, or manager, with his family. In another dipple-region, when I had re-ascended to a higher level, I nearly fainted before I could retire from the commencement of a region of after-damp, where there had been an explosion, the corpses now all bald, ravished and scaramouch. But I did not desist from searching every other district: no momentary work, for not till six did I go up by the pumping-shaft rope-ladder.

* * *

One day, standing in that region of rock and sea called Cornwall Point, whence one can watch the postillion rocks of Land's End dash out into the sea, and the flash of all the wild white steeds of the sea between, and not a building in sight, on that day I finished what I may name my official inquisition.

In going away from that place, walking northward, I came upon a house by the sea, a beautiful house of bungalow type with a sea-side expression, its special feature a spacious loggia or verandah, sheltered by the overhanging of the upper story, the exterior of rough-hewn blocks with a batter, the roofs of low pitch, covered with green slates, a feeling of strength and repose heightened by the long horizontal lines, at one end of the loggia a turret containing a study or nook; and in this place I lived three weeks. It was the house of the poet Machen, whose name, as soon as I saw it, I remembered well, and he had married a beauty of eighteen, obviously Spanish, who lay on the bed in the large bright bedroom to the right of the loggia, on her left breast being a baby with an india-rubber comforter in its mouth, both mother and child wonderfully preserved, she still quite lovely, white brow under curves of raven hair. The poet, though, had not died with them, but was in the room behind in a loose silky-grey jacket, at his desk—writing a poem! writing, I could see wildly quick, the place littered with the written leaves—at three o'clock in the morning, when, as I knew, the cloud overtook this end of Cornwall, and stopped him, and put his head to rest on the desk; and the little wife must have got sleepy, waiting for it to arrive, probably sleepless for nights previously, and gone to bed, he perhaps promising to follow to die with her, but bent upon finishing his poem, writing feverishly on, running a race with the cloud, thinking, no doubt, “just two couplets more,” until the thing came, and put his head on the desk; and I do not know what I ever encountered anything so complimentary to my race as this Machen, and his race with the cloud: for it is clear now that the better kind of those poet men did not write to please the dim inferior tribes who might read them, but to deliver themselves of the divine warmth that swarmed within their breast, and, if all the readers had been dead, still they'd have written, and for God to read they wrote. At any rate, I was so pleased with these poor people, that I stayed with them three weeks, sleeping on a couch in the drawing-room, a place rich in lovely pictures and faded flowers, like all the house: for I would not touch the young mother to remove her. And, finding on Machen's desk a note-book with soft covers, dappled red and yellow, I took it, and in the little turret-nook wrote day after day for hours this account of what has happened, and I think I may continue to write, for I find in it a comfort and company.

* * *

In the Seyern Valley, somewhere in the plain between Gloucester and Cheltenham, in a rather lonely spot, I at that time travelling on a motor-bicycle, I spied a curious erection, went to it, and found it perhaps fifty feet square, made of brick, the flat roof, too, of brick, and not one window, and only one door, which I found open, rimmed with india-rubber, airtight when closed. Inside I came upon fifteen English people of the dressed class, except two, who were bricklayers: six ladies, nine men; and, farther within, two more, men, who had their throats cut, whether through sacrificing themselves for the others when breathing difficulties commenced, or killed by the others, was not clear: along one wall provisions; and a chest full of oxide of manganese, with an apparatus for producing oxygen—a foolish thing, for additional oxygen could not alter the quantity of carbonic anhydride breathed out, this being a narcotic poison; and finally they must have opened the door, and so met their death. I believe that this erection was run up by their own hands under the direction of the two bricklayers, for they could not, I suppose, have got workmen, except on the condition of the workmen's admission: on which condition they would employ as few as possible.

In general, I observed that the rich must have been more urgent and earnest in seeking escape than the others: for the poor realized only the near and visible, lived in today, and cherished the notion that tomorrow would be the model of today. In an out-patients' waiting-room, for instance, in the Gloucester infirmary, I chanced to see an astonishing thing: four old women in shawls, come to have their ailments medicined on the day of doom; and these, I concluded, had been unable to realize that anything would occur to the daily old earth which they knew and had footed with assurance on: for, if everyone was to perish, they must have felt, who would preach in the Cathedral on Sunday evenings? In an adjoining chamber sat an old doctor at a table, his stethoscope-tips still clinging in his ears, a woman with bared bosom before him; and I said to myself: "Well, this old man, too, died doing his work. . . ."

In one surgical ward of this infirmary the patients had died, not of the poison, nor of suffocation, but of hunger—the doctors, or someone, having made the ward air-tight, locking them in, for I came upon a heap of maimed shapes, mere skeletons, crowded round the door within; and I knew that their death was not due to the cloud-poison, for the pestilence of the ward was uninformed with that almond charm which did not fail to have embalming effects upon the bodies which it saturated: so that I rushed from that place; and, thinking it a pity and a danger that such a pest should be, I set to work to collect things to burn the building.

It was while I was seated in an easy-chair in the street the following evening, smoking, watching the combustion of this structure, that something was suddenly born in me, something out of Hell, and I smiled a smile that never man smiled. And I said: "I will burn: I will return to London. . . ."

* * *

On this Eastward journey, stopping for the night at Swindon, I had a dream: for I dreamed that a little old man, brown, bald, with a bowed back, whose beard ran in one streamlet of silver from his chin to reach out over the floor, said to me: "You think that you are alone on the earth, its despot; well, have your fling; but as sure as God lives, as God lives, as God lives"—six times—"sooner or later, later or sooner, you will meet another"

And I started from that slumber with the brow of a corpse, wet with sweat. . . .

* * *

I returned to London on the 29th of March, arriving within a hundred yards of the Northern Station one windy dark evening near eight, where I alighted to walk to Euston Road, then eastward along it, till I came to a shop which I knew to be a jeweller's, though it was too dark to discern any painted words. The door, to my annoyance, being locked, like almost all the shop-doors in London, I went looking about for something heavy, found a laborer, cut one boot from the shrivelled foot, and beat at the glass till it came raining, then entered.

No horrors now at that clatter of glass; no sick qualms; my pulse steady; my head high; my step royal; my eye cold.

* * *

I was going to a hotel, and was not sure of finding sufficient candlesticks, for I had acquired the habit of sleeping with at least sixty about me; and their pattern, age, material, was of importance to me: so I selected from that shop ten of ecclesiastical brass, then found a bicycle, pumped it, tied my bundle to it, and set off; but I had not gone ten jolted yards, when a fork snapped, and, on finding myself across the knees of a Highland soldier, I flew with a shower of kicks upon the foolish thing: and this was my last attempt in that way in London, the streets being in an unsuitable condition.

Throughout that gloomy night it blew great guns: and during nearly three weeks, until London was no more, there was a booming of winds that seemed to bemoan her doom.

* * *

I slept in a Bloomsbury hotel, and, waking the next day at ten, ate with shiverings in the banqueting-hall, went out then, and, beneath drear skies flying low, walked all the way to the West District, accompanied by a prattle of flapping flags—fluttering robes and rags—and grotesque glimpses of decay. I was warmly clad, but the bizarrerie of the European clothes which I wore had become an offence and mockery in my eyes, so at the first moment I set out whither I knew that I should discover such clothes as a man might wear: to the Turkish Embassy in Bryanston Square.

I had been acquainted with Redouza Pasha, but could not recognize him here in an invasion of hanums in their veils, fierce-looking Caucasians in skins of beasts, a Sheik-ul-Islam in his green cloak, three emirs in cashmere turbans, two tziganes, their brown mortality more abominable still than the Western's; but upstairs I soon came to a boudoir odorous of that reclusion and dim mystery of Orient homes: a door encrusted with mother-of-pearl, sculptured roof, candles clustered in tulips and roses of opal, a brazen brasero, and, all in disarray, the silken chemise, the winter-cafetan doubled with furs, cabinets, sachets of aromas, habooshes, stuffs. When, after two hours, I went from the house, I was bathed, anointed, combed, scented, robed.

* * *

I have said to myself: "I will ravage and riot in my kingdoms, I will rage like the Cæsars, and be a withering blight where I pass like Sennacherib, and wallow in soft delights like Sardanapalus; I will raise me a palace wherein to stroll and parade my monarchy before the Gods, its stones of

gold, with rough frontispiece of ruby, and cupola of opal, and porticos of topaz: for there were many men to the eye, but there was One only, really: and I was he.” And always I knew it—some whisper which whispered me: “*You* are the Arch-one, the motive of the world, Adam, and the rest of men not much.” And they are gone—all! all!—as no doubt they merited: and I, as was meet, remain. And there are wines, opiums, haschish; and there are oils and spices, fruits and oysters, and soft Cyclades, luxurious Orients. I will be restless and dreadful in my territories; and again, I will be languishing and fond. I will say to my soul: “Be full.”

* * *

I watch my mind, as in that old time I used to watch a precipitate in a test-tube, to see into what sediment it would settle.

I am very averse to work of any sort, so that the necessity for performing the simplest little labors will rouse me to indignation; but if a thing will contribute greatly to my ever-growing voluptuousness, I will undergo a considerable amount of drudgery to accomplish it, though without steady effort, being liable to side-winds and whims, and wayward relaxations.

In the country I became pretty irritable at the necessity which confronted me of sometimes cooking some vegetable—the only food which I was forced to take some trouble over, for meats and fish, some delicious, I find already prepared in guises which will remain good centuries after my death, should I ever die; in Gloucester, however, I found peas, asparagus, olives, and other greens, already prepared to be eaten without base cares, and these, I now see, exist everywhere in stores that may be named boundless: so I now take my repasts without more cark than when a man had to carve his fowl, though that mote I sometimes find tiresome. There remains the degradation of lighting fires for warmth, for the fire at the hotel always goes out while I sleep; but that is an inconvenience only to this zone, to which I shall soon say farewell.

During the afternoon of my second day in London I sought out a strong motor in Holborn, oiled it a little, set off over Blackfriars Bridge, making for Woolwich through that more putrid London of the south; and one after the other I connected eight drays and cabs to my motor behind, having cut away the withered horses, using the reins, &c., as couplings: and with this train I rumbled eastward.

Half-way to Woolwich I happened to look at my old silver chronometer of *Boreal*-days—and how I can be rushed into these agitations by a nothing, a *nothing*, my good God, I do not know! just by the fact that the hands chanced to point to 3.10, the moment at which the clocks of London stopped—for each town has its thousand weird fore-fingers, pointing, pointing still, to the moment of doom—3.10 on a Sunday afternoon in London. I first observed it in going up the river on the face of that “Big Ben,” and now find that they all, all, have this 3.10 mania, time-keepers still—of the end of Time; noting for ever more that one moment: for the cloud-mass of powdery *scoriae* must have instantly stopped their escapement, and they had fallen silent with man; but in their insistence upon this particular minute I had found something so solemn, yet mock-seldom, ironic, and as it were addressed to *me*, that when my own watch dared to point to the same moment, I was thrown into one of those panting paroxysms, half rage, half horror, which have hardly harrowed me since I abandoned the *Boreal*. On the morrow, alas, another was in store for me; and once more on the morrow after.

* * *

My train was so execrably slow, that not until five did I arrive at the Woolwich Royal Arsenal, and, as it was then too late to work, I uncoupled the motor, and turned back for London; but, overcome by languor, I got candles, stopped at the Greenwich Observatory, and within that gloomy pile burned my watch-lights for the night, musing upon the tempest boiling. But, astir early, I was back by ten at the Arsenal, and started to analyze some of that vast and multiple entity. Parts of it seemed to have been abandoned in undisciplined haste, and in the Cap Factory, which I first entered, I found tools by which to effect an entry into any part, my first search being for time-fuses, of which I required some thousands, and after a hunt found a host arranged in rows in a range of buildings called the Ordnance Store Department. I then descended, walked back to the wharf, brought up my train, and began to lower the fuses in bagfulls by ropes through a chute, letting go each rope as the fuses reached the dray. However, on winding one fuse, I found that the mechanism would not go, choked with scoriæ; and I had to resign myself to the task of opening and dusting every one: a wretched labor in which I spent a day like a laborer till about four, when I threw them to the devil, having done two hundred; then hummed back in the motor to London.

* * *

That same evening as it was becoming dark I paid a visit to my old self in Harley Street, a bleak tempest that hooted like whooping-cough sweeping the streets: and at once I saw that even I had been invaded, for my door swung open, banging, a catch preventing it from slamming; and in the passage my car-lamp shewed a young man who seemed a Jew, seated as if in sleep with dropped forehead, a silk-hat, tilted back, pressed down upon his head to the ears; and, lying, six more, a girl with Arlesienne head-dress, a negress, a Deal lifeboat's-man, and three of uncertain race; the first room—the waiting-room—still more numerous occupied, though there still on the table lies the volume of *Punch*, the *Gentlewoman*, and the book of London views in heliograph. Behind this, descending the two steps to the study and consulting-room, I found as ever the revolving-top desk, but on my little shabby-red sofa a large lady too big for it in shimmering grey silk, round her left wrist a *trousseau* of gold trinkets, her head dropped right back, almost severed by an infernal gash from the throat. Here were two old-silver candlesticks, which I lit, went upstairs, and in the drawing-room sat my old housekeeper, placidly dead in a rocking-chair, her left hand pressing down a batch of the piano-keys, among many strangers. But she was very good, had locked my bed-room against intrusion, and, as the door stands across a corner behind a green-baize curtain, it had not been seen, at least not forced. I found the key hung on the switch by the door: and there lay my bed intact, and everything tidy.

But what interested me in that room was the thing on the wall between wardrobe and dressing-table—that gilt frame—and that man painted within it there: myself in oils, done by—no, I forget his name now, towering celebrity he was; in a studio in St. John's Wood, I remember, he did it, and people said that it was quite a work of art. I suppose I was standing before it thirty minutes that night, holding up the bits of candle, lost in wonder, in amused contempt at that thing there. It is I, certainly, that I must admit, the high-curving brow—really a King's brow, after all, it strikes me now—and that vacillating look about the eyes, and the mouth which used to make my sister Ada say "Adam is weak and luxurious." Yes, that is wonderfully done, the eyes, that dear, vacillating look of mine: for although it is rather a staring look, yet one can almost see the pupils stir from side to side: very well done. And the longish face; and the rather thin, stuck-out moustache, shewing both lips which pout a bit; and the hair, nearly black and the rather visible

paunch; and, oh, Heaven, the neat cravat—ah, it must have been *that—the cravat*— that made me burst into laughter! “Adam Jeffson,” I muttered when it was over, “could that thing in the frame have been *you?*”

I cannot quite state why the tendency toward Orientalism—Oriental dress—all the manner of an Oriental monarch—has taken full possession of me, but so it is: for surely I am hardly any longer a Western, “modern” mind, but a primitive, Eastern one. Certainly, that cravat in the frame has receded a million leagues, ten thousand forgotten æons, from me! Whether this is a result of my own personality, of old acquainted with Eastern notions, or whether, perhaps, it is the natural accident to any soul emancipated from trammels, I do not know; but I seem to have gone right back to the beginnings, to resemblance with man in his first, simple, gaudy conditions: my hair, as I sit here, already hanging an oiled string down my back; my beard sweeping scented in two opening whisks to my ribs; I have-on the *izar*, a pair of drawers of yomani cloth like cotton, with yellow stripes; over this a shirt, or *quamis*, of white silk, reaching to my calves; over this a vest of crimson, gold-embroidered, the *sudeyree*; over this a khaftan of silk, green-striped, reaching to the ankles, encircled at the waist with a gaudy shawl of Cashmere for girdle; over this a wide-flowing torrent of white drapery, warm, lined with ermine; on my head the skull-cap, covered by a high cap, scarlet with blue tassel; on my feet blue-morocco shoes covered over by thick crimson-morocco habooshes. My ankles—my ten fingers—my wrists—are heavy with gold and silver ornaments; and in my ears, which, with considerable pain, I bored three days since, are two needle-splinters, to prepare the holes for rings.

* * *

O Liberty! I am free. . . .

* * *

While I was going to visit my home in Harley Street that night, at the moment when I turned north from Oxford Street, this thought, hissed into my ear, was all at once seething in me: if now I should lift my eyes, and see a man walking yonder—*at the corner there*—turning out of Harewood Place, what, my good God, should I do?” and I turned my eyes, leering suspicious eyes, furtively turned, and I peered deeply with lowering brows.

Horribly frequent has this nonsense become with me—in streets—in nooks of the country: the assurance that, if I but glance just *there*, I shall see—*must* see—a man; and glance I must, though I perish; and when I glance, though each hair creeps and rears, yet in my glare, I feel, is monarch indignation, my neck sticks lofty as sovereignty itself, and on my forehead sits all the lordliness of Persepolis and Serapis.

To what point of wantonness this awfulness of royalty may lead me, I do not know. I will watch, and see. It is written, “It is not good for man to be alone;” but, good or no, the arrangement of one-planet-one-inhabitant already seems to me, not merely a natural, but the *only* natural and proper, condition: so much so, that any other arrangement has now, to my mind, a kind of unlikely, wild and far-fetched unreality, like the utopian schemes of dreamers and faddists. That the earth should have been turned out for *me*—that London should have been erected in order that *I* might enjoy the heroic spectacle of its destruction—that history should have existed to accumulate for *my* pleasures its inventions, its stores of wine and spice—no more extraordinary does it all seem to me than to some little duke of the old scheme of things seemed

the “owning” of fields of which his forefathers slew the holders; but what strikes me with some surprise is that the new scheme should have come to seem *so* commonplace and natural—in nine months. The mind of Adam Jeffson is adaptable.

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