



“IN MID-AIR THE MACHINE EXPLODED.”

(See page 15.)



## The Adventures of a Man of Science.

BY L. T. MEADE AND CLIFFORD HALIFAX, M.D.

### VII.—A RACE WITH THE SUN.

**I**T was in the spring of 1895 that the following apparently unimportant occurrence took place. I returned home somewhat late one evening, and was met by my servant, Silva, with the words :—

“A lady, sir—a nun, I think, from her dress—is waiting for you in your study.”

“What can she want with me?” I asked. I felt annoyed, as I was anxious to get to work on some important experiments.

“She is very anxious to have an interview with you, sir—she called almost immediately after you had gone out, and said if I would allow her she would wait to speak to you, as her mission was of some importance. I showed her into the study, and after a quarter of an hour she rang the bell, and desired me to tell you that she would not wait now, but would call again later. She left the house, but came back about ten minutes ago. I did not like to refuse her, and——”

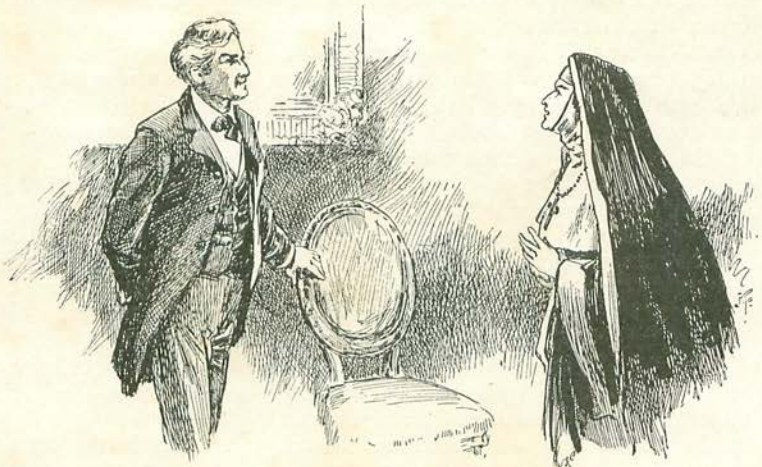
“Quite right, Silva ; I will see to the matter,” I answered.

I went straight to the study, where a bright, young-looking woman, in the full costume of a nun of the Church of Rome, started up and came forward to meet me. She made a brief apology for intruding upon me, and almost before I could reply to her, plunged into the object of her visit. It so happened that she knew a young man

in whom I was interested, having come across him when in hospital—she confirmed my views with regard to him—told me a subscription was being got up for his benefit, and asked if I would contribute towards it. I gave her two sovereigns—she expressed much gratitude, and speedily left the house.

At this time I was lecturing in several quarters, and did not give another thought to such an apparently uninteresting event. In the autumn of the same year, however, I was destined to recall it with vivid and startling distinctness.

During the special autumn I was, as I fondly hoped, approaching the *magnum opus* of my life—I was in a fair way to the discovery of a new explosive which would put gunpowder, dynamite, and all other explosives completely in the shade. It was to be smokeless, devoid of smell, and also of such a nature that it would be impossible for it to ignite except when placed in certain combinations. Its propelling power would be greater than anything in existence ; in short, if it turned out what I dreamed, it would be



“SHE MADE A BRIEF APOLOGY FOR INTRUDING UPON ME.”



a most important factor in case of war, and of immense use to England as a nation. Giddy hopes often throbbed in my head as I worked over it.

My experiments were progressing favourably, but I still wanted one link. Try as I would I could not obtain it. No combinations that I attempted would produce the desired result, and in much vexation of spirit I was wondering if, after all, the secret of my life would never reveal itself, when on a certain afternoon Silva opened the door of my laboratory and announced two visitors. This was an unusual thing for him to do, and I started up in surprise and some involuntary annoyance. A tall man had entered the room—he was dark, with the swarthy complexion of a gipsy; his eyes were small, closely-set, and piercing; he had a long beard and a quantity of thick hair falling in profusion round his neck. Immediately following him was a little man, in every sense of the word his antitype. He was thin and small, clean-shaven, and with a bald head. The two men were total strangers to me, and I stood still for a moment unable to account for this intrusion. The elder of the two came forward with outstretched hands.

"Pardon me," he said, "I know I am intruding. My name is Paul Lewin—this is my friend, Carl Kruse. We have had the pleasure of listening to your lecture at the Royal Society, and have taken these unceremonious means of forcing ourselves upon you, for you are the only man in England who can do what we want."

"Pray, sit down," I said to them both. I hastily cleared two chairs, and my uninvited guests seated themselves. Lewin's face seemed fairly to twitch with eagerness, but Kruse, on the contrary, was very quiet and calm. He was as immovable in expression as his companion was the reverse. The elder man's deep-set eyes flashed; he looked me all over from head to foot.

"You are the only person who can help us," he repeated, breathing quickly as he spoke.

"Pray explain yourself," I said to him.

"I will do so, and in a few words. Mr. Kruse and I heard you lecture in the early part of last summer. From hints you let drop it became abundantly clear to us both that you were in the pursuit of a discovery which has occupied the best part of both our lives. We are in a difficulty which we believe that you can explain away. We had hoped not to ask you for any assistance, but time is precious—any moment you may perfect your most

interesting experiments. In that case the patent and the honour would be yours, and we should be out of it. Now, we don't want to be out of it, and we have come here to ask you frankly if you will co-operate with us."

I felt the warm blood rushing into my face. "I don't understand you," I said; "to what discovery do you allude?"

"To that of the great new explosive," said Kruse.

I sprang to my feet in ill-suppressed excitement.

"You must be making a mistake," I said. "I have not breathed a word of the matter over which I am engaged to a living soul."

"You dropped hints at your lecture, which made it plain to us that you and we were on the same track," said Kruse. "But, here, I can prove the matter." He took a note-book hurriedly out of his pocket and began to read from it.

I listened to him in dismay and astonishment. There was not the least doubt that these men were working on my own lines—nay, more, that their intelligence was equal to my own, and it was highly probable that they would be first in the field.

"The fact is this," said Lewin: "my friend and I have been really working with you step by step. While you have been perfecting your great explosive in your London laboratory, we have been conducting matters on a larger and freer scale in our more extensive laboratories off the Cornish coast. The solitude of our place, too, enables us to test our explosive in the open air. Now, we know exactly the point to which you have come, and your present difficulty is"—he dropped his voice to a semi-whisper—"you are trying to combine certain gases to produce a certain result. Now, we have discovered what you want, but our explosive is still far from perfect, owing to the instability of nitrogen chloride"—he dropped his voice again.

"You can help us," he said, abruptly; "I see by your face that you have certain information which will be valuable to us. Now we, on our side, have information which will be of immense benefit to you. Will you join us in the matter? You have but to name your own price."

I could not help staring at Lewin in astonishment—he started impatiently from his seat.

"This is the state of the case, sir," he continued: "our lives have been spent over this matter—it is a great work—a magnificent



discovery; it is nearly complete. When absolutely completed we intend to offer it to the German Government for something like a million sterling—but there is a probability that you may be first in the field. If you patent your discovery before ours, we are done men. Will you be content to work with us, or?”—he stopped, his face was crimson, his eyes seemed to start from his head.

“My friend is right,” said Kruse, “but



“WILL YOU BE CONTENT TO WORK WITH US?”

he is far too excitable: I have told him so over and over. We know of your discovery, Mr. Gilchrist; we believe that you can help us, and we know that we can help you. We are working on the same lines. The discovery of this new explosive means money, a very large fortune, and fame. Now, we don't mean to resign our own share in this without a struggle, but we are satisfied to go hand in glove with you. Will you visit us in Cornwall and help us with our experiment? We will impart to you gladly what we know, on condition that you in your turn give us information. You thus see that between us the discovery is complete; without our united efforts it may be a very long time before it is ready for use. Let us go shares in the matter.”

“I am not working at this thing for money,” I said. “I am an unmarried man, and have as much money as I need. When my discovery is complete I shall offer it to the English Government—they can do what they please with it—my reward will be the gain which it will give to my country. This is a time of peace, but on all hands men are armed to

the teeth. The discovery of this explosive, if it means all that I hope it may mean, will be a most important factor in case of war.”

Kruse laughed somewhat nervously.

“We are not so quixotic as you are,” he said; “I have a wife, and my friend, Lewin, has large claims upon him which make it essential that he should make money where he can. Now, will you come to terms or not? The fact is this, our knowledge is indispensable to you, your knowledge is indispensable to us—shall we go shares or not?”

I thought for a little. I had begun by being much annoyed with my strange visitors, but now, in spite of myself, I was interested. They not only knew what they were talking about, but they had something to sell, which I was only too willing to buy.

“Can I look at your notes for a moment?” I said to Kruse.

He immediately handed me his note-book. I glanced over what he had written down—his statements were clear and to the point. There was no doubt that he and his companions were working on identical lines with myself.

“I cannot give you an answer immediately,” I said; “your visit has astonished me; the knowledge that you and I are working at a similar discovery has amazed me still more. Will you call upon me again to-morrow? I may then be in a position to speak to you.”

They rose at once, Lewin with ill-suppressed irritation, but Kruse quietly.

The moment I was alone I gave myself up to anxious thought. It was impossible to pursue any further investigations that day, and, leaving the laboratory, I spent the rest of the evening in my study. At night I slept little, and on the following morning had resolved to make terms with the Cornish men. They both arrived at ten o'clock, accompanied now by a pretty young woman, whom Kruse introduced as his wife. The moment I saw her face I was puzzled by an intangible likeness to somebody else—she



was fair-haired, and, I had little doubt, had German blood in her veins—her eyes were large and blue, and particularly innocent in expression—her mouth was softly curved; she had pretty teeth and a bright smile—she was like thousands of other women, and yet there was a difference. I felt certain that she was not a stranger to me, but where and under what possible circumstances I had met her before was a mystery which I could not fathom. She apologized in a pretty way for forcing herself into my presence, but told me she was really as much interested in the discovery as her husband and friend, and as the matter was of the utmost importance, had insisted on coming with them to visit me to-day.

Having asked my guests to be seated, I immediately proceeded to the subject of their visit.

"I have thought very carefully over this matter," I said, "and perceive that it may be best in the end for us to come to a mutual arrangement, but I can only do so on the distinct understanding that if this explosive is completed it is not to be offered to a foreign nation, except in the event of the English Government refusing it. That is extremely unlikely, as, if it is perfected on the lines which I have sketched out in my mind, it will be too valuable for us as a nation to lose. I am willing, gentlemen," I continued, "to help you with my knowledge, provided you allow a proper legal document to be drawn up, in which each of us pledges the other that we will take no steps with regard to the use of the explosive or the surrendering our rights in it, but with the concurrence of all three. My lawyer can easily prepare such a document, and we will all sign it. On those terms and those alone I am willing to go with you."

Lewin looked by no means satisfied, but Kruse and his wife eagerly agreed to everything that I suggested.

"It is perfectly fair," said Mrs. Kruse, speaking in a bright, crisp voice; "we give you something—you give us something. When the explosive is complete we go shares in the matter. We are willing to sign the document you speak of. Is it not so, Carl?"

"Certainly," said her husband. "Mr. Gilchrist's terms are quite reasonable."

Lewin still remained silent.

"I have nothing else to suggest," I said, looking at him.

"Oh, I am in your hands," he said then; "the fact is, the thing that worries me is

having to offer this to England. I am not a patriot in any sense of the word, and I believe Germany would give us more for it."

"My terms are absolute," I repeated. "I am rather nearer to perfect discovery than you are, and the matter must drop, and we must both take our chances of being first in the field, if you do not agree to what I suggest."

"I am in your hands," repeated the man. "When the legal document is drawn up I am willing to sign it."

"And now," said Mrs. Kruse, coming forward and pushing back the fluffy hair from her forehead, "you will immediately arrange to come to us in Cornwall, will you not, Mr. Gilchrist?"

"Certainly," I replied, "and the sooner the better, for if this thing is to be completed, we have really no time to lose. I can go to Cornwall the day after to-morrow, and bring my lawyer's document with me."

"That will do, capitally," said Mrs. Kruse—"we ourselves go home to-night—we are greatly obliged to you. This is our address." She took out her card-case as she spoke, extracted a card, and hastily scribbled some directions on the back.

"Our place is called Castle Lewin," she said—"it is situated on the coast not far from Chrome Ash—the country around is very wild, but there is a magnificent view and some splendid cliffs. Your nearest station is Chrome Ash. Our carriage shall meet you there and bring you straight to Castle Lewin."

"You had best take an early train," said Lewin, "that is, if you want to arrive in time for dinner. A good train leaves Paddington at 5.50 in the morning. I am sorry we are asking you to undertake so long a journey."

"Pray do not mention it," I answered; "I am quite accustomed to going about the country, and think nothing of a few hours on the railway."

"We will expect you the day after to-morrow," said Mrs. Kruse; "we are greatly obliged to you. I am quite sure you will never repent of the kindness you are about to show us." She held out her hand frankly, her blue eyes looked full into mine. Again I was puzzled by an intangible likeness. Where, when, how had I met the gaze of those eyes before? My memory would not supply the necessary link. I took the hand she offered, and a few moments later my guests had left me alone.

I went out at once to consult my lawyer and to tell him of the curious occurrence



which had taken place. He promised to draw up the necessary document, and begged of me to be careful how far I gave myself away.

"There is no doubt that the men are enthusiastic scientists," I said. "It is plainly a case of give and take, and I believe I cannot do better than go shares with them in the matter."

Mr. Scrivener promised that I should have the terms of agreement in my possession that evening, and I returned home.

The next day I made further preparations for my Cornish visit, and on the following morning, at an early hour, took train from Paddington to Chrome Ash. The season of year was late October, and as I approached the coast I noticed that a great gale was blowing seawards. I am fond of Nature in her stormy moods, and as I had the compartment to myself, I opened the window and put out my head to inhale the breeze.

I arrived at Chrome Ash between five and six in the evening. Twilight was already falling and rain was pouring in torrents. It was a desolate little wayside station, and I happened to be the only passenger who left the train. A nicely appointed brougham and a pair of horses were waiting outside, and with her head poked out of the window, looking eagerly around, I saw the pretty face of Mrs. Kruse.

"Ah, you have come; that is good," she said. "I determined to meet you myself. Now, step in, won't you? I have brought the brougham, for the night is so wild. We have a long drive before us, over ten miles—I hope you won't object to my company."

I assured her to the contrary, and seated myself by her side. As I intended to return to town on the following day, I had only brought my suitcase with me. This was placed beside the driver, and we started off at a round pace in the direction of Castle Lewin.

To get to this out-of-the-way part of the country we had to skirt the coast, and the wind was now so high

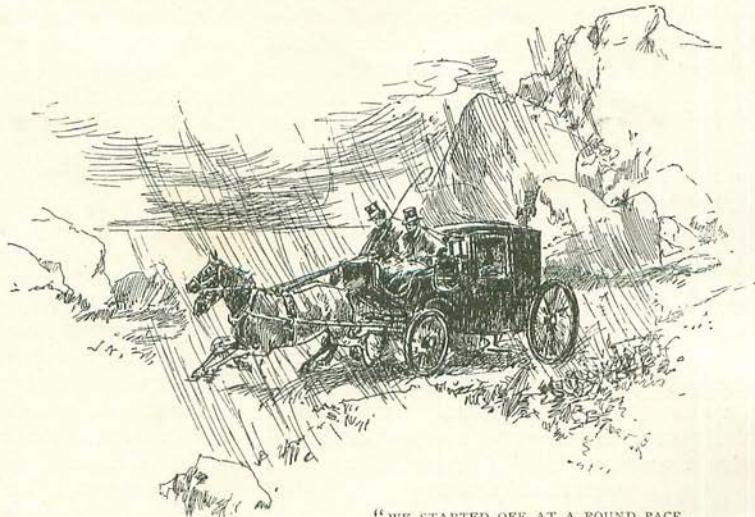
that the horses had to battle against it. The roads were in many places unprotected, and less surefooted beasts might have been in danger of coming to grief as they rounded promontories and skirted suspicious-looking landslips.

The drive took over an hour, and long before we reached Castle Lewin darkness enveloped us. But at last we entered a long avenue, the horses dashed forward, the carriage made an abrupt turn, and I saw before me an old-fashioned, low house with a castellated roof and a tower at one end. We drew up before a deep porch, a manservant ran down some steps, flung open the door of the brougham, and helped Mrs. Kruse to alight.

"See that Mr. Gilchrist's luggage is taken to his room," she said, "and please tell your master and Mr. Lewin that we have returned. Come this way, please, Mr. Gilchrist."

She led me into a square and lofty hall, the walls of which were decorated with different trophies of the chase. The floor was of oak, slippery and dark with age, and although the evening was by no means cold, a fire burned on the hearth at one side of the room. The fire looked cheerful, and I stepped up to it not unwillingly.

"From the first of October to the first of May I never allow that fire to go out," said the young hostess, coming forward and rubbing her hands before the cheerful blaze. "This, as I have told you, Mr. Gilchrist, is a solitary place, and we need all the home comforts we can get. I am vexed that my husband is not in to receive you—but, ah! I hear him." She started and listened attentively.



"WE STARTED OFF AT A ROUND PACE,



A side door which I had not before noticed opened, and Kruse and his extraordinary dark companion both entered the room. They were accompanied by a couple of pointers, and were both dressed in thick jerseys and knickerbockers. Kruse offered me his hand in a calm, nonchalant manner, but Lewin, who could evidently never check his impetuosity, came eagerly forward, grasped my hand as if in a vice, and said, with emphasis :—

“We are much obliged to you, Mr. Gilchrist—welcome to Castle Lewin. I am sorry the night is such a bad one, or, late as it is, we might have had a walk round the place before dinner.”

“No, no, Paul,” said Mrs. Kruse, “you must not think of taking Mr. Gilchrist out again—he has had a long railway journey and a tiring drive, and would, I am sure, like to go to his room now to rest and dress for dinner.”

“I will show you the way,” said Kruse.

He took me up a low flight of stairs—we turned down a corridor, and he threw open the door of a pleasant, modern-looking bedroom. A fire blazed here also, the curtains were drawn at the windows, and the whole place looked cheery and hospitable. My host stepped forward, stirred up the fire to a more cheerful blaze, put on a log or two, and telling me that dinner would be announced by the sounding of a gong, left me to my own meditations.

I stood for a short time by the fire, and then proceeded to dress. By-and-by the gong sounded through the house, and I went downstairs into the hall. The pointers were lying in front of the fire, and a great mastiff had now joined their company. The mastiff glanced at me out of two bloodshot eyes, and growled angrily as I approached. I am always fond of dogs, and, pretending not to notice the creature’s animosity, patted him on his head. He looked up at me in some astonishment; his growls ceased; he rose slowly on his haunches, and not only received my caresses favourably, but even went the length of rubbing himself against my legs. At this moment Mrs. Kruse, in a pretty evening dress, tripped into the hall.

“Ah, there you are,” she said, “and I see Demoniac has made friends with you. He scarcely ever does that with anyone.”

At this instant Lewin and Kruse entered the hall. I gave my arm to Mrs. Kruse, and we went into the dining-room. During dinner the gale became more tempestuous, and Kruse and his wife entertained me with tales of shipwreck and disaster.

The cloth was removed, and an old

mahogany table, nearly black with age and shining like a looking-glass, reflected decanters of wine and a plentiful dessert.

“Pass the wine round,” said Lewin. “Pray, Mr. Gilchrist, help yourself. I can recommend that port. It has been in bins at Castle Lewin since ’47, and is mellow enough to please any taste.”

So it was, being pale in colour and apparently mild and harmless as water. I drank a couple of glasses, but when the bottle was passed to me a third time, refused any more.

“I never exceed two glasses,” I said, “and perhaps as we have a good deal to do and to see—”

“I understand,” said Mrs. Kruse, who was still seated at the table. “We will have coffee brought to us in my husband’s study; shall we go there now?” She rose as she spoke, and we followed her out of the room. We crossed the hall, where the fire still smouldered on the hearth, and entered a large, low-ceiled room at the opposite side. Here lamps were lit, and curtains drawn; the place looked snug and cheerful.

“We may as well look over your document before we repair to the laboratories, Mr. Gilchrist,” said Kruse. “I gather from what you said in town that you do not care to impart any of your knowledge to us until we have signed the agreement.”

“I have brought it with me,” I answered; “with your permission I will go and fetch it.”

I left the room, went up to my bedroom, took my lawyer’s hastily-prepared agreement from its place in my suit-case, and returned to the study. As I did so, the following words fell upon my ears :—

“It will be the third cup, Carl—you will not forget?”

I could not hear Kruse’s reply, but the words uttered by his wife struck on my ears for a fleeting moment with a sense of curiosity—then I forgot all about them. The full meaning of that apparently innocent sentence was to return to me later.

Lewin, who was standing on the hearth with his hands behind him, motioned me to a chair. Mrs. Kruse sat down by the table—she leant her elbows on it, revealing the pretty contour of her rounded arms, her eyes were bright, her cheeks slightly flushed—she certainly was a very pretty young woman; but now, as I gave her a quick, keen glance, I observed for the first time a certain hardness round the lines of her mouth, and also a steely gleam in the blue of her eyes which made me believe it just possible that she



might have another side to her character. As I looked at her she returned my gaze fully and steadily—then raising her voice she spoke with some excitement.

“Carl,” she said, “Mr. Gilchrist is ready, and we have no time to lose. Remember that to-night, if all goes well, we perfect the great explosive. Now, then, to work.”

“Here is the agreement,” I said, taking the

breath seemed now and then to come from her body with a sort of pant.

“At this point we are stuck,” said Kruse, pulling up short; “we have tried every known method, but we cannot overcome this difficulty.”

“And for the success of the experiment,” I interrupted, “it is almost an initial knowledge.”

“Quite so, quite so,” said Lewin.

“I can put you right,” I said; “you are working with a wrong formula—you do not know, perhaps”—I then began to explain to them the action of a substance as yet never used in the combination in which I had worked it. I was interrupted in my speech by Kruse.

“Anna,” he said, “get paper. Write down slowly and carefully every word that Mr. Gilchrist says. Now, then, sir, we are ready to listen. Are you all right, Anna?”

“Quite,” she answered.

I began to explain away the main difficulty. Mrs. Kruse wrote down my words one by one as they fell from my lips. Now and then she raised her eyes to question me, and her use of technical terms showed me that she was completely at home with the subject.

“By Jove! Why did we not think of that for ourselves?” said Lewin, interlarding his remark with a great oath.

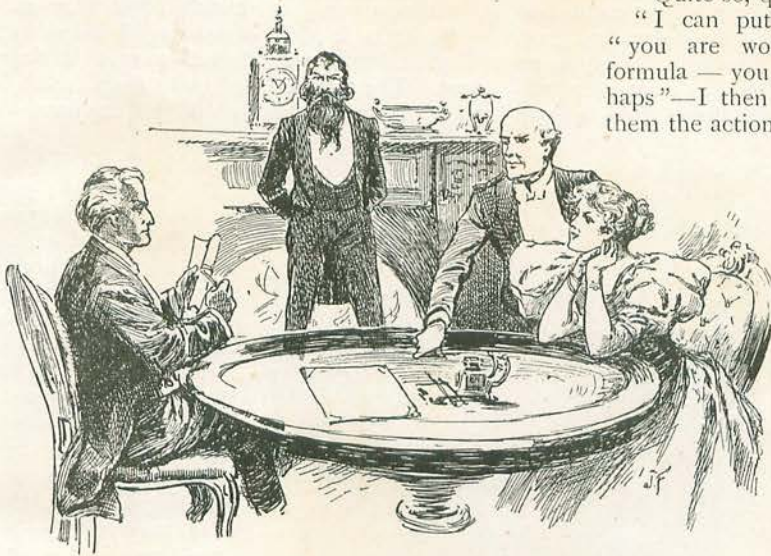
“We are extremely obliged to you, Mr. Gilchrist,” said Kruse. “This sweeps away every difficulty, the discovery is complete.”

“Complete? I can scarcely believe it,” said Mrs. Kruse.

At this moment the servant entered with coffee; it was laid on the table, and we each took a cup.

“You told me,” I said, when I had drained off the contents of the tiny cup which had been presented to me, “that you have failed in this initial difficulty, and yet you have conquered in a matter which baffles me.” I then named the point beyond which I could not get.

“Yes, we certainly know all about that,” said Kruse.



“‘HERE IS THE AGREEMENT,’ I SAID.”

lawyer’s document out of its blue envelope—“will you kindly read it? We can then affix our signatures, and the matter is arranged.”

Kruse was the first to read the document. I watched his eyes as they travelled with great speed over the writing. Then he drew up his chair to the table, and dipped his pen in ink preparatory to signing his signature.

“Hold a moment,” I said; “we ought to call in a servant to witness this.”

A slightly startled look flitted across Mrs. Kruse’s face, but after an instant’s hesitation she rose and rang the bell.

The footman appeared—he watched us as we put our names at the end of the paper, and then added his own signature underneath. When he had left the room Kruse spoke.

“Now that matter is settled,” he said, “and we can set to work. You know, I think, Mr. Gilchrist, exactly how far we have gone.” Here he produced his pocket-book and began to read aloud.

I listened attentively—Mrs. Kruse and Lewin stood near—I noticed that Mrs. Kruse breathed a little quicker than usual; her



"You will give me your information?"

"Of course, but the best way of doing so is by showing you the experiment itself."

"That will do admirably," I replied.

"If you are ready we will go now," said Mrs. Kruse.

She started up as she spoke, and led the way.

We left the study, and, going down some passages, found ourselves in the open air. We were now in a square yard, surrounded on all sides by buildings. Lewin walked first, carrying the lantern. Its light fell upon an object which caused me to start with surprise. This was nothing less than a balloon about twenty feet in diameter, which was tied down with ropes and securely fastened to an iron ring in the pavement. It swayed to and fro in the gusts of wind.

"Halloa!" I cried, in astonishment, "what is this?"

"Our favourite chariot," answered Mrs. Kruse, with a laugh. "Wait a moment, Paul, won't you? I want to show our balloon to Mr. Gilchrist. Is it not a beauty?" she added, looking in my face.

"I do not see any car," I replied.

"The car happens to be out of order. You do not know, perhaps, Mr. Gilchrist, that I am an accomplished aeronaut. I do not think I enjoy anything more than my sail in the air. It was only last Monday——"

"My dear Anna, if you get on that theme we shall not reach the laboratories to-night," interrupted her husband. "This-way, please, Mr. Gilchrist."

He opened a door as he spoke, and I found myself in a large laboratory fitted up with the usual appliances.

Kruse and his companion, Lewin, began

to show me round, and Mrs. Kruse stood somewhere near the entrance.

The laboratory was full of a very disagreeable smell—Kruse remarked on this, and began to explain it away.

"We were making experiments until a late hour this afternoon," he said, "with some isocyanides, and as you are aware, the smell from such is almost overpowering, but we thought it would have cleared away by now."

"I hope you don't mind it?" said Lewin.

"I know it well, of course," I answered, "but it has never affected me as it does now. The fact is, I feel quite dizzy." As I spoke I reeled slightly and put my hand to my head.

"The smell is abominable," said Kruse.

"Come to this side of the laboratory; you may be better if you get nearer the door."

I followed my host.

"What is the matter with you, Mr. Gilchrist?" said Mrs. Kruse, the moment she looked at my face.

"It is those fumes, my dear," said her husband; "they are affecting Mr. Gilchrist in a curious way—he says he feels quite dazed."

"I do," I answered.

"My head is giddy; it may be partly the long journey."

"Then I tell you what," said the wife, in an eager voice, "you shall not be worried with any more experiments to-night. The best thing you can do is to go straight to bed, and then in the morning the laboratory will be fresh and wholesome. Carl and Paul

Lewin will experiment for you in the morning to your heart's content."

"Yes, really it is the best thing to do," said Kruse.

I sank down on a bench.

"I believe you are right," I said.

My sensations puzzled me not a little.



"HALLOA! WHAT IS THIS?"



When I entered the laboratory I was full of the keenest enthusiasm for the moment when Kruse and his companion should sweep away the last obstacle towards the perfecting of the grand explosive—now it seemed to me that I did not care whether I ever learned their secret or not. The explosive itself and all that it meant might go to the bottom of the sea as far as I was concerned. I only longed to lay my throbbing and giddy head on my pillow.

"I will take your advice," I said. "It is quite evident that in my tired state these fumes must be having a direct and poisoning effect upon me."

"Come with me," said Kruse; "you must not stay a moment longer in this place."

I bade Mrs. Kruse and Lewin good-night, and Kruse, conducting me through the yard where the balloon was fastened, took me to my bedroom. The fire burned here cheerfully—the bed was turned down, the snowy sheets and befilled pillows seemed to invite me to repose. I longed for nothing more in all the world than to lay my head on my pillow.

"Good-night," said Kruse—he held out his hand, looking fixedly at me as he spoke. The next moment he had left the room.

I sank into a chair when he was gone, and thought as well as I could of the events of the evening, but my head was in such a whirl that I found I could not think consecutively. I threw off my coat and, without troubling to undress, lay down and fell into a deep and dreamless slumber.

"Have you got the hydrogen and chlorine ready?"

These words, whispered rapidly, fell upon my ears with distinctness. They did not disturb me, for I thought they were part of a dream; I had a curious unwillingness to open my eyes or to arouse myself—an unaccountable lethargy was over me, but I felt neither frightened nor unhappy. I knew that I was on a visit to Lewin and Kruse in Cornwall, and I believed myself to be lying on the bed where I had fallen into such heavy slumber some hours ago. I felt that I had slept very deeply, but I was unwilling to awake yet, or stir in any way. It is true I heard people bustling about, and presently a vessel of some kind fell to the floor with a loud clatter. A woman's voice said, "Hush, it will arouse him," and then a man made a reply which I could not catch. My memory went on working calmly and steadily. I recalled how the evening had been passed—the signing of

the document—the balloon in the yard, the horrible smell in the laboratory. Then I remembered as if I heard them over again Mrs. Kruse's words when I returned to the study, "*It will be the third cup.*" What did she mean? Why should I be bothered with this small memory now? I never wanted to sleep as I did at this moment—I had never felt so unaccountably, so terribly drowsy.

"I hope that noise did not wake him," said a voice which I knew was no echo of memory, but a real voice—I recognised it to be that of Mrs. Kruse.

"He is right enough," replied her husband. "I gave you enough narceine to put into his coffee to finish off a stronger and a bigger man—don't worry. Yes, Lewin, I will help you in a moment to carry him into the yard."

"The storm is getting less," said Mrs. Kruse. "Be quick. Oh, surely he is dead!" she added.

"If not dead, all but," replied her husband. "I tell you I gave him a stiff dose—he never moved nor uttered a sigh when we took him from his bedroom."

Lethargic as I undoubtedly was, these last words had the effect of making me open my eyes. I did so, blinking with the stupor which was oppressing me. I stared vacantly round me. Where was I?—what had happened? My limbs felt as if weighted with lead, and I now experienced for the first time since I had heard the voices an unaccountable difficulty in stirring them. I tried to raise my hand, and then I was conscious of a hideous pang—the knowledge flashed across me that I was bound hand and foot. I was, then, the victim of foul play—but, good God! what? What awful discovery had I just made? My memory was becoming quite active, but my whole body felt numbed and dulled into a lethargy which almost amounted to paralysis. Making a great effort, I forced myself to turn my head. As I did so a woman's face peered down into mine. It was the face of my hostess, Mrs. Kruse. She turned quickly away.

"He is not dead," I heard her whisper; "he is coming to."

At that moment I knew where I was—I was lying on the floor of the laboratory. How had I got there—what was about to happen? I found my voice.

"For God's sake, what is the matter?" I cried; "where am I? Is that you, Mrs. Kruse? What has happened?"

The moment I spoke, Mrs. Kruse stepped behind me, so that, bound as I was, I could no longer see her face or figure. The light



in the laboratory was very dim, and just then the huge form of Lewin came between me and it. He bent over me, and, putting his hand under my shoulders, lifted me to a sitting posture—at the same moment Kruse took hold of my feet. In that fashion, without paying the slightest attention to my words, they carried me into the yard where the balloon was fastened. The contact with the open air immediately made me quite wide awake, and a fear took possession of me which threatened to rob me of my reason.

"What are you doing? Why am I bound in this fashion? Why don't you speak?" I cried.

They were dumb, as though I had not uttered a word. I struggled madly, writhing in my bonds.

"Mrs. Kruse," I cried out, "I know you are there. As you are a woman, have mercy; tell me what this unaccountable thing means. Why am I tied hand and foot? If you really mean to kill me, for God's sake put me out of my misery at once."

"Hold your tongue, or I'll dash your brains out," said the ruffian Lewin. "Anna, step back. Now, Carl, bring the ropes along."

As the brute spoke he flung me with violence upon a plank, which ran across the iron hoop to which the meshes of the great balloon were attached. I struggled to free myself, but in my bound condition was practically powerless.

"What are you doing? Speak; tell me the worst," I said. I was gasping with terror, and a cold sweat had burst out in every pore.

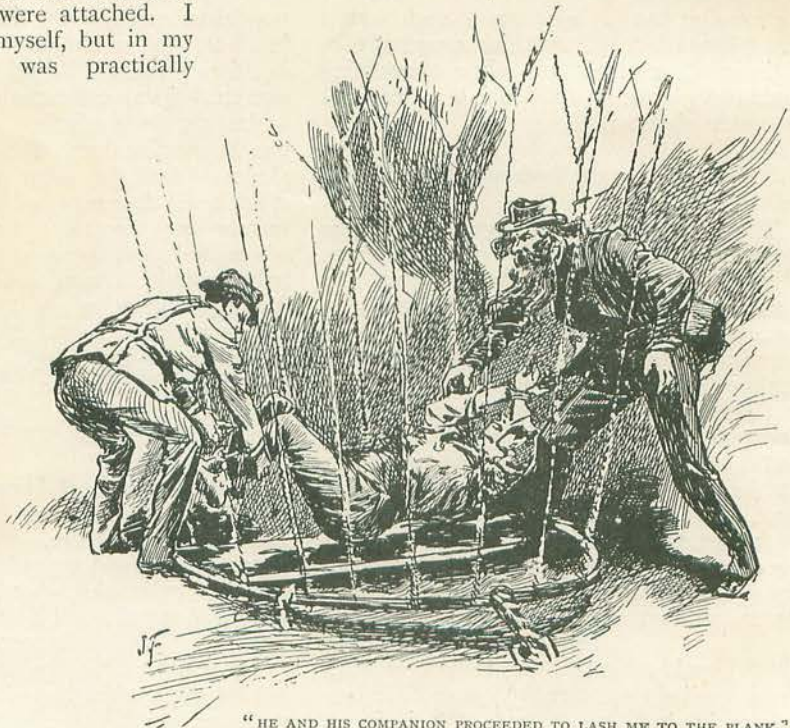
"If you want to know the worst, it is this: you are going to carry your secret to the stars," said Lewin. "Not another word, or I'll put an end to you on the spot."

As he spoke he and his companion began to lash me firmly to the plank. My hands, which

were already tied together round the wrists, were drawn up over my head and fastened securely by means of a rope to one end of the plank; my feet were secured in a similar manner to the other. Just at this instant a sudden bright flash of lightning lit up the yard, and I caught sight of a large dumb-bell-shaped glass flask, and also what appeared to be a tin canister. These Kruse held in his hand and proceeded, with Lewin's assistance, to fasten round the *outer* side of the plank, just under where I was lying. They were kept in their places by an iron chain. As soon as this operation was over Lewin began to slash away at the ropes which kept the balloon in the yard. I now found myself lying stretched out flat, unable to move a single inch, staring up at the great balloon which towered above me. It was just at that supreme moment of agony, amid the roaring of the gale, that Mrs. Kruse, coming softly behind me, whispered something in my ear.

"I give you one chance," she said; "the loop which binds your hands to the plank is single." She said nothing more, but stepped back.

The next instant, amid a frightful roar of thunder, the balloon was lifted from its moorings and shot up into the night. As it



"HE AND HIS COMPANION PROCEEDED TO LASH ME TO THE PLANK."



cleared the buildings the full force of the gale caught it, and I felt myself being swept up with terrible velocity into the very heart of the storm. Blinding flashes of lightning played around me on every side, while the peals of thunder merged into one continuous, deafening roar. Up and up I flew, with the wind screaming through the meshes of the net-work and threatening each moment to tear the balloon to fluttering ribbons. Then, almost before I was aware of it, I found myself gazing up at a wonderful, star-flecked firmament, and was drifting in what seemed to be a breathless calm. I heard the thunder pealing away below me, and was conscious of bitter cold. The terrible sense of paralysis and inertia had now, to a great extent, left me, and my reason began to re-assert itself. I was able to review the whole situation. I not only knew where I was, but I also knew what the end must be.

"Hydrogen and chlorine," I muttered to myself. "The dumb-bell-shaped glass vessel which is fastened under the plank contains, without doubt, these two gases, and the tin canister which rests beneath them is full of nitro-glycerine." Yes, I knew what this combination meant. *When the first glint of the sun's rays struck upon the glass vessel it would be instantly shattered. The nitro-glycerine would explode by the concussion, and the balloon and I myself would be blown into impalpable dust beyond sight or sound of the earth.*

This satanic scheme for my destruction had been planned by the fiends in human shape who had lured me to Cornwall. Having got my secret from me, they meant to destroy all trace of my existence. The deadly poison of narceine had been introduced into my coffee. I knew well the action of that pernicious alkaloid, and now perceived that the smell in the laboratory had nothing whatever to do with my unaccountable giddiness and terrible inertia. Narceine would, in short, produce all the symptoms from which I had suffered, and would induce so sound and deadly a sleep that I could be moved from my bed without awakening. Yes, the ruffians had made their plans carefully, and all had transpired according to their wishes. There was absolutely no escape for me. With insane fury I tore at my bonds. The ropes only cut into the flesh of my hands, that was all.

The storm had now passed quite out of hearing, and I found myself in absolute stillness and silence. I was sailing away to my death at the dawn of day. So awful were the

emotions in my breast that I almost wished that death would hasten in order to end my sufferings. Why had not the hydrogen and chlorine exploded when I was passing through the storm? Why had the lightning not been merciful enough to hurry my death? Under ordinary circumstances they would certainly have combined if they had been subjected to so much actinic light. I could not account for my escape, until I suddenly remembered that in all probability the stop-cock between the two gases in the dumb-bell-shaped glass had only been turned just when the balloon was sent off, in which case the gases would not have had time to diffuse properly for explosion.

At the dawn of day the deadly work would be complete. The question now was this—how long had I to live, and was there any possible means of escape?

The action of the drug had now nearly worn off, and I was able to think with acuteness and intelligence. I recalled Mrs. Kruse's strange parting words, "The loop which binds your hands to the plank is single." What did she mean? After all, it was little matter to me how I was bound, for I could not stir an inch. Nevertheless, her words kept returning to me, and suddenly as I pondered over them I began to see a meaning. The loop was single. This, of course, meant that the cord was only passed once round the rope straps which secured my wrists together. I nearly leapt as I lay upon my hard and cruel bed, for at this instant a vivid memory returned to me. Years ago I had exposed a spiritualist who had utilized a similar contrivance to deceive his audience. His wrists had been firmly tied together, and then a single loop was passed between them, and fastened to a beam above his head. He had been able to extricate himself by means of a clever trick. I knew how he had done it. Was it possible that my murderous hosts had tied my hands to the plank in a similar manner? If so, notwithstanding their sharpness, what an oversight was theirs!

In desperate excitement I began to work the cord between my wrists up and up between my palms until I could just reach it with my little finger, and by a supreme effort slipped it over my left hand. Great God, I was free! I could now move my hands, although they were still tightly tied together round the wrists. In frantic despair I began to tug and tear at the cords which bound them. Cutting hard with my teeth, I at last managed to liberate my hands, and then my next intention was to unfasten the horrible



explosive from the plank. Here, however, I was met by what seemed to be an insuperable difficulty. The glass vessel and the tin canister had been secured round the plank by means of a chain, which was lashed in such a manner that by no possible means could I undo it. I was now free to move, but the means of destruction were still close to me. How long had I before the sun would rise? Even now the light in the heavens was getting stronger and stronger. What should I do? My hands were free and I could sit up. In another moment I had managed to untie the cords from my legs. And then, with many a slip and struggle, I contrived to clamber up the network till I came to the balloon itself, when I set to work to tear at the silk with my nails and teeth like a man possessed. After almost superhuman efforts, I managed to make a very small hole in the silk. This I enlarged first with my finger and then with my whole hand, tearing away the silk in doing so till I had made a huge rent in the side of the balloon. As soon as this happened, I knew that the balloon would slowly, but surely, begin to descend. The question now was this: how soon would the sun rise? Perhaps in an hour, but I thought sooner. The murderous explosive was so secured to the plank that there was not the smallest chance of my getting rid of it. My one and only chance of life was to reach the ground before the sun got up. If this did not happen, I should be blown to atoms.

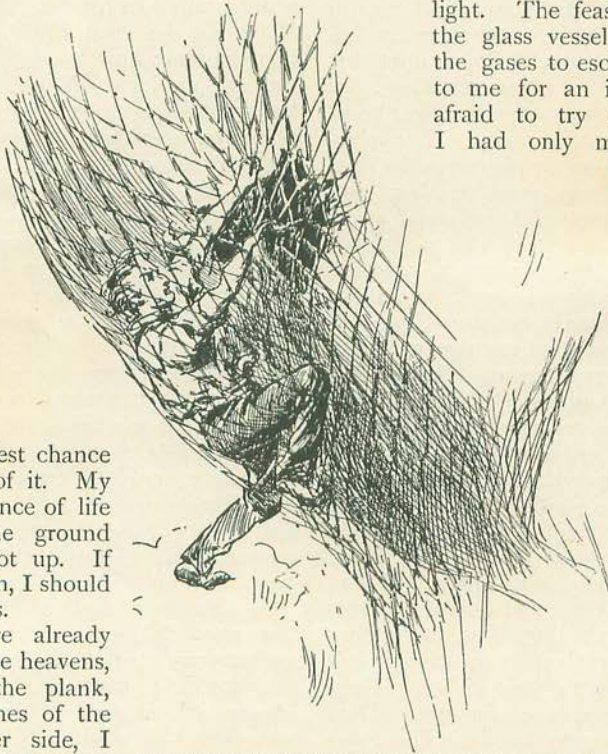
The stars were already growing faint in the heavens, and, sitting on the plank, holding the meshes of the balloon on either side, I ventured to look below me. I saw, with a slight feeling of relief, that the wind must have changed, for, instead of being blown seawards, as was doubtless the intention of my murderers, I had gone a considerable way inland. I

could see objects, trees, villages, solitary houses dotted in kaleidoscope pattern beneath me—it seemed to me as I gazed that the world was coming up to meet me. Each moment the trees, the houses, assumed more definite shape. Within a quarter of an hour I saw that I was only about six hundred feet from a large park into which I was descending.

A grey, pearly tint was now over everything—this, moment by moment, assumed a rose hue. I knew by past experience that in five minutes at the farthest the sun would rise, and striking its light across the glass vessel would hurl me into eternity. In an agony of mind, I once more directed all my attention to the terrible explosive. I knew that in this fearful race between me and the sun, the sun must win unless I could do something—but, what? That was the question which haunted me to the verge of madness. I was without my coat, having been lashed on to the plank in my shirt, or I might have tried to cover

the dumb-bell glass from the fatal light. The feasibility of breaking the glass vessel, and so allowing the gases to escape, also occurred to me for an instant, but I was afraid to try it—first, because I had only my fists to break

it with; and second, if I did, the blow might explode the nitro-glycerine. Suddenly I uttered a shout which was almost that of a crazy person. What a fool I was not to have noticed it before—there *was* a means of deliverance. By no possible method could I unfasten the iron chain which secured the infernal machine to the plank, but the plank itself might be un-



"I MADE A HUGE RENT IN THE SIDE OF THE BALLOON."

shipped. I observed that it was secured to the iron hoop by thick and clumsy knots of rope. With all the speed I could muster, for seconds were now precious, I gently worked the chain



along the plank till it and the infernal machine had reached one end. I noticed with joy that here the chain was loose, as the plank was thinner. Seating myself on the hoop and clinging to the meshes with one hand, I tore and tugged away at the knots which secured the plank with the other. Merciful God! they were giving way! In another instant the plank fell, hanging to the hoop at the opposite side, and as it did so, the infernal machine slipped from the free end and fell.

I was now within 300ft. of the earth, and, clinging for bare life to the meshes of the balloon, I looked below. There was a sudden flash and a deafening roar. In mid-air, as it fell, the machine exploded, for the sun had just risen. In another moment my feet had brushed the top of a huge elm tree, and I found myself close to the ground. Seizing the opportunity of open space I sprang from the balloon, falling heavily on the wet grass.

The instant I left it, the balloon, relieved from my weight, shot up again into space, and was lost to view behind the trees. I watched it disappear, and then consciousness forsook me.

I was picked up by a game-keeper, who conveyed me to his own cottage, where I was well and carefully nursed, for the exposure and

shock which I had undergone induced a somewhat severe illness. When the fever which had rendered me delirious abated, my memory came fully back, and I was able to give a faithful and circumstantial account of what had occurred to a neighbouring magistrate. Immediately on hearing my story, the superintendent of police in London was telegraphed to, and a detachment of his men went to Castle Lewin, but they found the place absolutely deserted. My would-be murderers had beyond doubt received news of my miraculous escape and had decamped.

I have only one thing more to say. On my return to London, amongst a pile of letters which awaited me, was one which I could not peruse without agitation; it ran as follows:—

“You acted on my hint, and have escaped truly as if by a miracle. We are about to leave the country, and you will in all probability never hear anything of us again. But it gives me pleasure even in this crucial moment to let you know how easily you can be duped. Have you ever guessed how we got possession of that secret which was all yours and never ours? Do you recall the lady

who, dressed as a nun, came to see you about six or seven months ago? You believed her story, did you not? May I give you one word of warning? In future, do not leave your alphabetically arranged note-books in a room to which strangers may possibly have access. Farewell.”



“I SPRANG FROM THE BALLOON.”