

Amazing Stories, December, 1926

The LORD of the WINDS

By Augusto Bissiri



He was flung back over the ground as if he had been hit, and found himself with an excruciating pain in his back, which the wind of the storm beat with terrific force.

A Puzzling Companion

MY companion had three peculiarities that puzzled me. The first was the sharp contrast between his refined manners and his shabby outfit, which made me suspect he was not an ordinary prospector any more than I, although he surely seemed to feel more comfortable in those clothes and in such a place. It entered my mind that his disguise had the same purpose as mine—and that we were both engaged in the same adventure. Such a possibility both amused and irritated me.

I watched him swinging from one side of the saddle to the other, as his horse, just ahead of mine, cautiously went down the dangerous slope.

His second peculiarity was the sack bound to his back. This sack was small but heavy, as I judged from the effort he displayed, now and then, in arranging it on his shoulders. What puzzled me was the fact that he carried this burden on his back, when he could easily have tied it to the saddle.

His third peculiarity, which had been first to strike me, was his remarkably long upper lip. I was sure I had seen that gorilla lip once before. But where and when?

We had met a couple of miles from Rhyolite. There I had exchanged my automobile for a horse—not because a motor car would have failed to travel the sixteen miles of Boundary Canyon, from the summit of the Funeral Range down to the Desert Valley, but because a horse was more suitable to my disguise. Finding that we were bound to the same place, we had agreed to travel together.

When we reached “Hole-in-the-Rock,” a little spring making its way out of the Canyon, we dismounted to water the horses and refill our canteens. Then we sat down to rest awhile on a malpais boulder shaded by a

giant cactus.

“We’ve been riding two hours,” he said, looking at his watch.

An Old Acquaintance

HIS watch had a fob, and the fob carried a pendant with the emblem of a fraternal lodge.

There flashed across my memory a name.

“Is your name Wells?” I asked.

“Yes,” he answered in amazement. “How do you know?”

“Three years ago I went for a week from San Francisco to Los Angeles. One night I visited your lodge. You were one of the two appointed to examine my credentials and give me the ritual examination before I could gain entrance.”

“You are right”; and he shook my hand cordially.

As soon as he was satisfied that he could trust me, Wells became so communicative that his bag ceased to be a mystery. He said with a smile:

“If I had told you that I was a prospector, a gold hunter, when you saw me in my evening dress at the lodge, you would have doubted me.”

“It is true, my idea of a miner is somewhat different.”

“Well,” he explained, “mining for me is a sport, a hobby, a passion. California has gold in every hill, once a man gets a glance at the yellow stuff in the bottom of the pan, he is a miner for life. The gold mania gets more of a grip on the mind than does alcohol or morphine.”

“At times I’d return to the city—to the real estate business; but presently my old passion would master me. Again I would find myself roaming in these mountains, searching, thinking, hoping, dreaming nothing but gold,

gold, gold. But this time, thank God, I can quit for good.”

“Lost your courage?”

“No, I made a find.”

“Gold vein?”

“No, gems—rubies—just look!”

A Bag-Full of Great Rubies

HE unstrapped his bag from his shoulders, placed it on his lap, and opened it, showing the contents. I saw a quantity of stones, both large and small. Wells picked out two of the largest stones, each as big as an egg.

“You see these? These two alone may be worth \$100,000. Altogether in this bag, I think I have more than \$400,000.”

“Is that possible?” I returned, with an accent that betrayed my skepticism.

“Do you know anything about gems?” he asked.

I confessed that I did not.

“Well, I do, and rubies are rarer than diamonds. The largest imported into this country do not reach the size of the smallest one in this bag.

“Of course, when they are faceted and polished, they will be much more brilliant. But look at this one as it is.” He held a large stone against the light, close to my eyes. “You will never find other rubies so transparent and of a red so rich.”

I expressed my admiration. “And you said the value of this collection is—?”

“At least \$400,000. Maybe twice as much—this sack contains my fortune.”

“But why do you carry it on your shoulders? It must be heavy.”

“Heavy! Say, did you ever hear a mother say her baby was heavy? I love to feel the weight against my back. Besides it is safer. This bag has not left my shoulders for three days, not even during my sleep, and it shan’t until I reach my home in Los Angeles.”

But you are going in a quite different direction.”

“I am doing that to see Professor Matheson.”

“The Lord of the Winds?”

“That’s what they call him. He knows more geology than any one else in the world. I want to see what he thinks of these stones of mine. But why do you look at me like that?”

Wells could not understand my sudden exultation mixed with surprise.

“You know Professor Matheson well?” I asked.

“Yes. Why?”

“Since you have trusted me by showing your treasure, I will tell you my secret. I am only disguised as a prospector.”

“I knew it,” Wells rejoined laughing.

A Newspaper Man Disguised

“I’M a newspaper man, working for the San Francisco *Tribune*, on my way to get an interview with Professor Matheson.”

“You might as well say that you are going to interview your horse.”

“I know it. No reporter ever got a word from him, and for these last six months no reporter has been able even to approach him.”

“Do you blame him, after they have all called him a lunatic?”

“The press of this country was in his favor till Sir Oliver Lodge in London, and Professor Brillouin in Paris, almost at the same time declared that Matheson’s theories were wrong.”

“I stake my rubies he is not.”

“Perhaps not, but you will agree with me that Matheson’s claims are of such stupendous magnitude as to stagger the wildest imagination.”

“Yes, but that’s no reason why he should be ridiculed. They should wait at least until the experiments are over.”

“Well, some papers take his side, my

paper for instance. But nevertheless, when one of our editors tried to have a talk with him, all he could get from him was: "Facts will convince more than words." So, when it became known that the experiments were going to start in a few days, I asked leave to attempt the Impossible—to interview the unapproachable Matheson. The interest of the public is intense. But, to tell you the truth, I have no definite plans of attack. I am just relying on luck."

"You can rely on me," Wells promised, smiling.

Mounting our horses, we continued our descent into the canyon. The sun had set, a dark orange disc in a sea of pulverized gold. In the narrow strip of skies that the deep canyon permitted me to see, some stars began to twinkle, and the summits of the high cliffs, in shadowy outline, assumed fantastic shapes.

"What is your scheme?" I inquired, keeping my horse close to Wells.

"A very simple one—you are my partner. We found the treasure together and come to him together for advice. I will make him talk about his invention also, and you will listen and note."

"Every word of the conversation tomorrow will be wired to my paper. Meanwhile I wish you would tell me all you know about him."

A Wonderful Project and Its Creator

"**I** DOUBT," Wells said, "if I know more than has already been published in the papers. They have even printed his picture several times, but it does not look like him. You must see that little fellow's eyes, like electric sparks, brilliant, restless and irresistible. He must be fifty, but there are times when he looks twenty-five. I happened to be there two months ago, when his three hundred men were erecting the steel towers that you will see as we reach the Desert

Valley. You should have seen him. I doubt if he weighs 130 pounds, whiskers and all; but he showed the energy of a giant. He was everywhere, giving commands like a general. And when you see what has been done there in less than a year, you will marvel at the prodigy of that wizard."

"He must have overcome great difficulties."

"Great? Look at this road, if we may call it that. Over it Matheson had sixteen motor trucks going back and forth from Rhyolite to Wind City, as they call his works in the valley. He transported more than three thousand tons of steel bars, seventy-five tons of cement, two tons of copper wire, lumber for twenty-five bungalows, provisions and tools, a thousand other things. Then he had a water pipe laid from the Ermita Mine to Windville."

"But why did he come to this forsaken place, so difficult to reach?"

"I never asked him, but I imagine he needed a place where the air would be still for long periods of time, also perhaps a region quite deserted."

"Imagine the expense!"

"I've heard there are more than two million dollars invested in this—which is but an experiment in diminutive proportions."

"Two million dollars for an experiment is a proof of strong faith on the part of the stockholders."

"There are no stockholders," Wells declared. "One man has financed Matheson—a multi-millionaire."

"I surely remember having read of a tremendous corporation behind Matheson."

"Yes, I understand that if these trials prove the soundness of the idea, the largest corporation that the world has ever known will invest some billions of dollars to put the scheme into action. Enough money to buy all the railroad lines and the Panama Canal, with plenty left over to buy the United States Navy. But they say it will be the best investment any

country can make. Matheson claims he will transform the whole globe, producing more real wealth than all the world's industries."

"Don't forget the opinion of Sir Oliver Lodge and the two great meteorologists."

"Their skepticism will have an interesting set back, I'm sure, before the week is over. Look! There is the Ermite Mine."

A One-Man Mine and Its Strange Owner

I COULD not see any signs of a camp.

"Is it really a mine?" I inquired.

"Yes, a mine that has no equal in the world—a one-man mine. You will be interested to see this man Davy—the 'Hermit,' as they usually call him. Tall and massive as one of these boulders, he has a neck as large as my horse's neck, and eyebrows so black and thick that you cannot see his eyes. He lives alone in his mine, a gold mine that he discovered six years ago. He operates it himself, with only the aid of a mule."

"A rich mine?"

"Very poor ground. He tried to sell it several times; nobody would give him enough, so he thought that he would exploit it himself. He has been living here these six years, and he has done wonders. Should you pass this way in the daytime you would see what a lone man can do. He has bored two tunnels, and constructed a mining plant that crushes two tons of rocks daily. Of course, the whole outfit is the simplest that one can imagine. Once a month he goes to town with his mule, to deposit his little treasure and to get provisions for another month."

"Does he make much?"

"Nobody knows; but I'm sure he makes very little out of it. He told me once that his idea was to get enough money to operate the mine on a larger scale with modern machinery; but I wonder how long he will have to wait. He is more than fifty now."

"And isn't he afraid of keeping gold in

this solitude?"

"The Hermit afraid? Wait until you see him!"

By this time we had left the main road and taken to a narrow path at the left of the canyon, which ascended a slight hill. When he had gone a hundred yards, Wells shouted, "Davy," and stopped his horse. He repeated his call. A voice very near us answered, "Hello there!" My eyes spotted the silhouette of a man in front of a hut.

I remember little of the few minutes that we spent in that small, bare, one-room cabin, faintly illuminated by a sooty lamp. About the man I remember only his eyes, the eyes that Wells found hard to see under those thick eyebrows. I always scoffed at such things as presentment; but those savage, rapacious eyes had a sinister meaning to me.

I remembered afterward that when Wells, in a general way, asserted that he had "struck rich," the eyes of the Hermit assumed a strange expression, fearful and repulsive. Of this much I was certain then: his attention was abnormally attracted by the sack on Wells' back.

The Hermit insisted that we spend the night with him, but we declined.

"Thanks old man," said Wells. "We must hustle along. We have chosen this time of day to escape the heat, and expect to reach the valley by nine o'clock. My friend will start back by twelve. It is moonlight tonight, and by five he will be in Rhyolite again. I will sleep in camp in the stone house."

"Where the machinery is?" inquired the Hermit.

"Yes; one of the overseers who has his bed there, is away tonight."

We bade the Hermit good-bye. He did not answer.

First View of the Great Station

HALF an hour later we were out of the canyon. The valley appeared before us. The moon was high and its glow inundated the plain, transforming it into an ocean of dead calmness. Wells pointed toward the north. A tower as slim as the steeple of a Gothic Church rose against the sky to a great height.

During my journalistic career, I have had to cover many exciting stories, filled with pathos or danger. But never have I been so thrilled as when I stopped my horse, for a minute, to gaze at that shadowy tower. I felt sure that I was going to witness a prodigious achievement, which, for its arduousness, its gigantic possibilities and its sublimity, had no equal in the history of the world. I exulted over the opportunity that was so soon to be mine—to meet the man who, by the power of his genius, was going to transform the earth almost like a God.

As we came nearer, I distinguished other constructions besides the tower. There were five or six houses of different shapes and dimensions. One of them was lighted. Toward that one Wells went. I examined the tower as carefully as I could in the scanty light of the moon. It was a skeleton tower of steel bars, built on a massive concrete base that covered a surface about four hundred feet square. Tapering, as the height increased, it ended almost in a point, supporting a large sphere, which by the way it reflected the rays of the moon, appeared to be made of glass. Innumerable wire cables, parting from the tower at regular intervals and fastened to the ground, insured the stability of the construction, which I judged to be fully five hundred feet high.

“Some work!” I exclaimed in admiration,

“Yes, when you think that they built thirty of these spires in the valley. See another one over there?”

I discerned, a couple of miles away, a narrow shadow rising from the flat horizon,

brilliant at its extremity, like a lighthouse in the ocean.

We did not need to rap at the door of the one story house; it was open, as were all the windows. We went in, to find ourselves face to face with Professor Matheson.

His personality did not lend itself to a picturesque description. He had the ordinary appearance of a middle aged man, with a calm and cheerful face, as if he had never been troubled by any problem. But I had not been five minutes in the room before I realized that I was in the presence of an extraordinary man.

Wells made his introduction as planned, mentioning me as his partner. Then without delay he put into the hands of the Professor two of the largest gems of his collection.

Meanwhile I looked around the spacious room, illuminated by two electric lights. The confusion, the multitude, and the variety of the objects scattered about made of that place a strange combination of library, draughting room, work-shop, museum, laboratory and storehouse. A wooden partition separated the room from the other part of the building, accessible through a large doorway which was wide open. Desirous of finding out what the next room contained, I gradually reached the doorway and looked inside. The place was dark, but the moonlight, entering through the open window, allowed me to see that the floor was covered with boxes, all of one dimension three feet long by two feet wide, placed six inches apart, and each connected to the next by wires. The boxes were placed in parallel rows, with room enough for a person to step between the rows. I figured that there must be fully forty boxes in each row—in all more than one thousand boxes. I could not see anything else in that vast room.

Examining the Rubies—Explanation of the Project

MY conjectures did not lead me to any plausible explanation of the nature of what I was seeing so I turned to the two men, who were still talking about the precious stones.

The Professor was holding one against the bulb of the electric light.

"These are star rubies," he said with profound conviction, "See the asterism that is so marked in this stone? It is produced by crystals of extreme minuteness parallel to the crystalline axis. I know of only two other rubies as nearly perfect as this one, but they are not so large. One is a Bohemian ruby preserved in the imperial treasury at Vienna; the other one is in Dresden."

"Then you really believe I have something valuable?" asked Wells.

"Something of a remarkable value, I am sure," said the other adding to the words a vigorous shake of his head.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Wells, and picked from his bag a stone of medium size, which he offered to the Professor, who thanked him warmly.

"I shall be glad to keep it as a rare specimen," he concluded. "And speaking of gems, you will be interested in seeing a beautiful tourmaline that one of my men found while digging for the foundation of the tower."

"Where is it?" Wells inquired.

"In the third building where two of my men have made their quarters. I will take you there. Very likely they are all in by this time." And he started for the door.

He had not reached the middle of the room, when I inquired with a voice that I strove to make indifferent, "Would you mind, professor, telling me what you keep in that room?" The look that Wells sent me clearly indicated that I was guilty of a serious imprudence. But the Professor turned his head, smiling.

"Those are the batteries, the electric

batteries that will furnish the current to the thirty towers."

And instead of proceeding toward the door, he walked back to the partition, turned a switch, and illuminated the second room. I noticed then something I had not seen before. That room, besides the rows of boxes, contained a very large bench to which the wires of the batteries ran, and which had a number of electrometers and two very conspicuous switches. I noticed also (and this detail had the most important bearing on the events that succeeded) that the bench ran along the wall, directly under the open window.

"Over there you shift the electric current?" I asked.

"Right," answered the Professor. And he smiled again at my curiosity.

A hundred questions crowded my mind at once; but Wells came to my rescue. Seeing that the Professor was unusually communicative, he thought the time was at hand to try the effect of the story he had concocted for my benefit.

"Professor," he began, endeavoring to make his voice sound indifferent. "I wish you would tell my friend something about your work. I explained it all to him, but I must have done a poor job, because he couldn't make head or tail of my account. You can go into details, because he has some education. He went to college before the mining bug got him. Am I right, Pal?"

I answered with a nod. I was so anxious about the Professor's reaction that I could not utter a word.

Wells noticed my confusion. To save the situation he added:

The Project Is Explained by the Inventor

"OF course, there is one thing he has understood—that you are the greatest genius of this and of any other generation, and

that your invention is the most astonishing thing—”

“Now, now,” interrupted the Professor, laughing at the earnestness of Wells’ enthusiasm. “Let us not exaggerate. I have found nothing new; I have only applied old and well known discoveries to a practical and useful purpose.” Then, addressing himself to me, “Young man, do you know much about Roentgen rays?”

Did I know! Before starting on my adventure, I had gone through all the books that could enlighten me on the subject of Professor Matheson’s invention. But I answered hesitatingly.

“Well, I remember they are produced by an electrical discharge passed through a tube from which the air has been exhausted.”

“Exactly! Now, I have found a new application of these rays. I have found a practical way of electrifying the air of a vast area with a single tube which does not differ much from the one introduced by Porter. There is nothing essentially new in my invention.”

“Professor, you are too modest,” interrupted Wells.

“I am telling you the truth, and I can prove it. Come over here, and I will show you something.”

We returned to the front room. The Professor directed our attention to two spherical glasses, of about six inches in diameter and four feet apart, mounted on pedestals.

“These are the miniatures of the apparatus that I have placed in the towers—nothing but a Porter tube, with one or two changes. As you can see, the cathode is the same: a segment of a hollow sphere. The anti-cathode is also connected with the anode; but instead of platinum or tantalum I use a composition of my invention which is not affected by the extreme heat of the discharge. The tube, instead of being exhausted as usual,

contains a gaseous substance, about which I keep silent. And the common induction coil, with a mercury interrupter, produces the discharge. The usual ionization of a gas is due to the splitting up of ‘some’ of the atoms of that gas, resulting in the detachment of electrons, constituents of the atoms. Each electron carries a constant negative charge, while the part of the atom that is left behaves like a positive ion, with the units charged positively, but with a mass that is large compared with that of the negative ions. Do you follow me?”

“Yes,” I answered, while Wells stared at me to find out if I meant it.

Perhaps my “yes” was not as convincing as it could have been. Even the Professor seemed to have noticed this.

The Artificial Production and Control of Winds

“YOU may not be up to date in the recent researches in this field,” he resumed. “But I can tell you now, in one word, what my application is. One of these tubes ionizes the surrounding air, and the positive nuclei are attracted by the second tube which ionizes the air, not with a smaller but with a larger proportion of negative electrons. That is absolutely all.”

The Professor stopped as if he had finished. I looked at him in suspense, and Wells kept staring at the Professor and at me with evident confusion. At length Wells spoke.

“But what about the winds?”

“Here, place your hand here,” said the inventor, holding the hand of the miner at the level of the Roentgen tubes, and midway between them.

The Professor turned a switch on the table. A bluish glare appeared in both tubes, sparkling, dancing, while the crisp, short discharges sounded in rapid succession. Wells

pulled out his hand brusquely.

"I feel a breeze," he exclaimed.

I placed my hand where he had held his, and I, too, felt a gentle breeze blowing against my palm.

"It is the air electrified by the tube on the left, and violently attracted by the tube on the right," explained the Professor. "Here is the basis of my invention."

"And the towers you have erected?"

"They serve to produce this same experiment on a larger scale. Each tower supports a Roentgen tube large enough to ionize the air within a radius of two miles, if my calculations are correct."

"And what do you intend to do with them?" I asked.

"I want to try their maximum efficiency. I have erected thirty towers in this desert, at two mile intervals, covering thus fifty-eight miles, in a straight line across the plains."

"Is the work all done?"

"Yes, it was completed a week ago, but we have had to delay our test until everything and everybody are out of the way. We shall have to demolish all the huts we have built for the workmen, all the small houses you have seen around here, except this one that has been purposely built with massive stone walls and low roof. You see, I must take every precaution, because it is hard to foresee the velocity of the wind that will be produced during the trials. In a couple of days more, all will be cleared away, and all the men and animals will go to a safe place in the canyons. I will remain here with Carter, my chief engineer and will begin the tests."

"Do you need anybody at the towers?"

"No, I have absolute control of them from this house—from that bench in the next room."

We went again into the room of the storage batteries, and I saw again the bench under the open window.

The Mystery Explained—What Wind Can Do

"YOU see these switches?" asked the Professor, pointing to the bench. "With these I regulate the discharge to all the towers."

"And why are you doing all this?" I asked.

"To produce wind, of course."

"Wind?"

"Yes."

"You don't expect to sell wind, do you?"

"I surely do."

"God knows there is plenty of free wind in the world."

"Yes, but not always the kind of wind you want, nor when you want it. If the trials I am going to start here in a couple of days are successful, as I am sure they will be, in five years' time the whole United States will be thickly dotted with my towers, in lines that will run in all directions from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Canada to Mexico, in innumerable parallel rows that will cover the whole country—and eventually will cover all the other continents, and the whole globe from the poles to the equator."

"Just to make wind?"

"Yes, to produce winds artificially."

"For any practical good?"

"For the greatest good that man ever dreamed," exclaimed the inventor, sweeping the air with both extended arms, and smiling triumphantly. Then he resumed: "When I succeed in forcing at will a current of air from any place to any place. I shall have under my control the winds, and, with the winds, the clouds, and, with the clouds, the rain. Do you see now? I will regulate the seasons. I will regulate the climates. Do you know what that means? It means transforming the earth into a veritable paradise. I will make cold regions warm, pumping hot winds from the south, and

I will make hot places cool, sending fresh air from the north. The temperature will be made even throughout the year. Yuma, in Arizona will not roast any more at 120 degrees in the shade, and Havre in Montana will not freeze at 48 degrees below zero."

"But there is more than temperature. Do you know how many people in our country, in the Orient, in Africa, some everywhere, suffer unspeakable tortures for the lack of a little water, and with dried throats pray for months for a cloud from the burning skies—and when at last the cloud, blessed as a deliverer, rises in the horizon, and the rain comes, the little water gathered with great care in wells, in hides, in vases, hot, muddy, noisome and full of microbes, will have to last God knows how long? Those people will cease to suffer. A telegram to my central meteorologic office will cause me to send them from the north all the rain they need, and when they have enough, another telegram—and the clouds will be pumped back and the skies will be clear again."

Weather and Temperature Supplied to Order

"I'LL tell you what you can do, Professor," interrupted Wells. "In the summer, when the people of New York, Chicago, Boston and Philadelphia are prostrated by the heat, you ask them how much they will be willing to give you for every nice cool day. Do the same when the thermometer is going below zero, and you will get your expenses back in less than a year, and pile up a fortune besides."

"There is something in that," I said. "But, Professor, have you figured out what will be the cost of installing your towers everywhere?"

"No, not with accuracy; but I estimate that for the United States alone it will be necessary to invest about two billion dollars."

"Two thousand millions! It is enormous."

"It is; but look here, young man. Do you know the amount of farm produce of this country? Eight and one-half billion dollars a year. I can double that amount. I can more than double the fertility of the country. Even considering the land that is now being cultivated, have you an idea of the economic values of a normal season? Last year on account of abnormal weather—with frosts in April, and no rain in June and July—the crops were cut practically in two, with a tremendous loss. Yes, the installation of my towers will require a huge capital; but it will pay. It will pay, not in comfort and crops alone, but it will pay in other ways besides. When Siberia as well as the Sahara desert, and Congo as well as Alaska, have perpetual spring, and the peoples of the earth find in the tilling of the soil, where they were born, a sure, unailing source of wealth, and the differences of climates and products are eliminated, we will see the disappearance of all the other differences that separate nations from nations; and all men, saved from famine and strife, will hasten in harmony on the road of a glorious progress."

"Good!" Wells and I exclaimed.

"And at last we shall realize the dream of all ages. Wars will be made impossible. All the nations will have to obey the verdicts of the International Supreme Court, and no people will dare to rebel. They would have to face my wrath. Do not smile gentlemen. Think how the winds in my hands may become weapons, the most dreadful weapons. The gentle breeze, if I choose, may be turned into a violent storm, and the beneficent rain, if I wish, may become a deluge. Woe to that nation that will dare disturb universal peace! I will thrust upon them with full force my means of destruction, against which whole armies will be powerless—the hurricane!"

"You will be mightier than a king," I

exclaimed.

**The Earth His Kingdom by His Power Over
the Air**

“**Y**ES, because my kingdom, the air, covering all the kingdoms of the earth, will be as vast as the earth.”

The inventor said these words calmly, with his perpetual smile; but the expression of his eyes revealed how well he appreciated the full significance of that assertion.

“Are you sure the apparatus will work?” I inquired.

“I am positive of it. What I am not certain about is the degree of power that it will develop. You see, the problem consists, not only in originating the winds, but also in fighting back the winds that, formed by the difference of atmospheric pressures, may be contrary to my pre-arranged plan. We must be able to develop a current strong enough to win the strongest winds.”

“That is to say?”

“In St. Paul, Minnesota, there has been recorded a wind of the velocity of 102 miles an hour, the maximum observed in this country. I expect to reach and surpass that speed, if everything goes well.”

“That is a terrific speed,” said Wells.

“And the effects are in proportion,” added the inventor. “The pressure of a hurricane of 100 miles an hour is 49,200 pounds per square foot. You understand now why I have chosen this desert place for my experiments, and why I must wait to begin the tests until all the wooden houses built by my helpers are demolished, and men and animals sent to a safe distance.”

“Professor,” I ventured with some hesitancy, “I had planned to go back tonight; but if you would let me, I should like to stay and see your towers work.”

“I have no objections; but I warn you there may be some risk, and you must take

upon yourself all the responsibility.”

“I will,” I assented with enthusiasm.

“Now, Professor,” interrupted Wells, “you have satisfied my friend’s curiosity; I wish you would satisfy mine.”

“Oh, about the tourmaline that I told you Andrews keeps in his cabin?”

“Yes.”

“Well, let us go there. It is just half past nine. Andrews must be in; perhaps he is in bed already.”

We turned off all the lights and went out. The night was balmy, the air still, and the moon high in the sky.

Andrews’ cabin was only fifty to sixty steps from the stone house. Nobody was in.

“I know where he keeps that stone,” said the Professor. “Come in gentlemen.”

We entered. The cabin was not more than nine feet square, and the slanting roof was so low that I could almost reach it with my outstretched arm.

As we entered, the Professor proved his familiarity with the place by finding the electric switch in the dark.

“The powerful batteries we have stored,” he explained, “allow us the luxury of a good light. I will find the tourmaline for you, Mr. Wells.”

A Catastrophe—Disaster at Large

THE inventor had scarcely ended his sentence, when a sudden roaring noise broke the stillness of the night. The sound clearly resembled the coming of a mighty storm. We looked at one another in great astonishment. The wind was blowing against the back of the cabin with violence. We had to shout at the top of our voices to be heard.

We went to the door, looked outside.

The Professor pointed into the air. The summit of the tower was illuminated. The large glass globe was glittering with green and blue sparks.

I looked at the Professor, and trembled. I had never before seen a like expression of stupor and dismay. He held his head with both hands—then, as if struck by a sudden idea, he made for the open. I caught him by his coat, and pulled him back.

“It is folly to go out,” I yelled; but I could not hear my own voice, as the wind, increasing in violence, had increased its roaring.

The Professor, turning quickly, struck me a powerful blow in the chest, then freeing his coat from my grip, leaped toward the stone house.

The Inventor Perishes in the Wind of His Creation

WHAT I had expected happened. The ill-fated man had scarcely taken ten steps, when, once out of protection of the shielding cabin, he was seized by the wind and thrown to the ground. There he struggled frantically, while the wind rolled, knocked and tossed him. A little farther on I saw him stop: perhaps he had succeeded in getting hold of some rock protruding from the sand. I saw him rising again, and then, (the moon was so bright that I could distinguish everything) he was lifted bodily from the ground, as if he had been a rag, and blown along with such violence that his body struck the wall of the stone house with a terrific impact.

I closed my eyes in horror. But presently I realized the danger that I too was facing. The cabin was about to be smashed; the boards were coming apart. Evidently Wells shared my fears.

What were we to do?

I quickly analyzed the situation. If the towers were in action, the electric power of the storage batteries must have been turned on by something or somebody. The breaking of the current would stop that cyclone and save us from destruction.

But how could we reach the stone house to open the switches when a sally from the cabin meant sure death?

As if he had read that fearful question in my mind, Wells answered it in an unexpected way. He grabbed a rope lying in a corner, and showed it to me. To talk was useless; so he acted. First he counted the rope by arm lengths. I counted at the same time, and figured out that there were fully 75 yards of strong rope, more than the distance from the cabin to the stone house.

Then with gestures, Wells asked me to tie one end of the rope around his body, under his shoulders, as he could not do it himself, because of his inseparable sack of precious gems. To the knots I made, Wells added one more, then took the other end of the rope, passed it around one of the main supporting posts of the hut, pulled until all the rope had passed through, and handed it to me.

His plan was clear. Securely tied he would venture outside, and I would let the rope slide easily until he could reach the stone house.

He lay on the ground, face down, and moving like a turtle, began his perilous journey. I seated myself on the floor, my back to the door, my feet against the boards of the wall, my hands holding the rope.

A Ray of Hope But No More

THIS unexpected chance of salvation gave me such joy that I heard no more of the rushing of the hurricane, nor the cracking of the cabin: all my attention was concentrated on my task of letting the rope slide out inch by inch.

Of a sudden there was a tremendous crash, and I found myself lying on my back with the moonlight shining in my face. The cabin had gone; the rope had slipped out of my hands.

When I recovered from my stupor, I

wondered at two things—why I had not been hurt when the cabin went to pieces and why I was still in the same place, not the prey of the devastating wind.

I explained the first by a mere miracle—and the second by looking in the direction of my feet. The sand, blown up in great quantity by the wind, had gathered against the back of the cabin; and now that the cabin was gone, this sand formed a dune, nine feet long and two feet high, which shielded me from the full force of the hurricane.

I decided to take a still safer position. Crawling on my back, I placed myself lengthwise close to the dune. Now I could see the tower and the stone house; but of the half dozen huts I saw not a sign.

I was by no means at ease; the shelter was uncomfortable, and not fully reassuring, but I could do nothing except wait for that inferno to come to a stop.

“The batteries will become exhausted sooner or later,” I said to myself, “but when? In an hour, in a day, or in a week?”

With horror, I soon discovered the presence of a more imminent danger. I should say two dangers, one as deadly as the other; I discovered that the height of the little hilt of sand was gradually becoming lower, and that the time was not far off when it would become so low that the wind could get its mighty grip on my body.

I discovered also that the sand carried in large clouds by the tornado was accumulating in the hollow where I lay, and threatened to cover me. Of course, I was greatly frightened, yet my mind was clear, and, strange, as it may sound, I immediately began to calculate which of the two deaths would get me first—to be buried alive in the sand, or to be caught by the wind and smashed against the walls of the stone house. I even tried to speculate which of the two was less terrible.

The hurricane now held full sway. It

seemed that the whole earth was trembling. The roaring and shrilling and shrieking lacerated my ears. It was like the thundering of a hundred tempests over an infuriated ocean, or the crashing of a cataract a thousand times larger than Niagara.

Now and then, I even seemed to distinguish some special sounds in that unbelievable noise. Yes, there was the discordant dissonance of a million violins and 'cellos played in seven different keys, and accompanied by a gigantic organ with all the pipes wide open. And then it sounded like the moaning of infinite herds caught in a forest fire, and the screams and groans of distress of all the mobs of the world threatened by unavoidable destruction.

The Wind Bridled and Wreaking Destruction

BUT above all this, I heard the enraged voices of the wind—of the wind that, free since the beginning of creation, free to roam over the immensities of the seas, free to dominate over the wild forests, free to speed over the boundless deserts and over the mountain peaks, free to come and go in the infinite vastness of the earth, was feeling now for the first time the touch of the bridle suddenly imposed by the genius of man, and with desperate convulsions was in vain rebelling against that conquering power.

My God! its revolt was horrible beyond words! What was passing above my head? I could not be mistaken; those were bodies of men, of horses and cattle, some tumbling to the ground and rising up again in clouds of sand, then fast disappearing from my sight.

Strange as it may seem, even in the agitation of all my nerves, the magnitude and horror of that scene brought some verses to my memory. I was viewing what Dante saw, in the second Circle of the Inferno, while he

was witnessing the punishment of carnal sinners, where:

“...bellowing there groaned
A noise, as of a sea in tempest torn,
By warring winds. The stormy blast of
Hell
With restless fury drove the spirits on
Whirl'd round and dash'd amain...”

The gruesome fascination of that maddening scene was abruptly interrupted. The dune of sand was now almost as low as my head.

I pressed myself more tightly to the ground, and laid my head sideways on my left ear. I could not now see the edge of the dune, but I was “feeling” the little grains of sand puffed away every flying second.

How to describe the agony of those moments that seemed an eternity? Oh, anything except that uncertainty, as to what the hurricane would do with me, before death came! Suddenly a thought flashed through ray mind. There was one way out of this mental torture—my gun. I felt the “joy” of meeting a milder death, and of cheating my cruel executioner. I composed myself to die as a man, and bringing the gun to my temple, I raised my head a little.

**The Wind Ceases—One Only Survivor
Tells This Story**

WHEN I regained consciousness, the first thing I felt was a severe pain in my head. I recollected everything in a flash; but I could not remember having fired any shot, and could find no trace of blood. A piece of timber lying on my legs gave me the answer.

And, to my astonishment and exultation, the wind was no more. The air was still and the moon shone even more brightly.

I looked at the top of the tower. The green and blue flashings had disappeared, and the large glass bulb itself was no longer there. I was saved.

It was not difficult for me to imagine what had put the tower, and thus the whole system, out of action. Some flying piece of wreckage must have hit the top, smashing the bulb where the Roentgen rays were formed.

But what had put on the current and started that havoc?

I found the solution when I entered the stone house. Lying dead on the bench where the batteries were, his body resting on the largest switch, his right hand still holding a pistol, was the Hermit.

Evidently the miner, determined to rob Wells, had followed us. Planning to hide in the stone house, he had entered through the open window. But, having to jump over the long bench, his hands searching for support, had pressed the largest switch, sending the full charge of the current to the towers, and, at the same time, electrocuting him.