Sheba Blake Publishing

ACROSS THE ZODIAC

Percy Greg

Sheba Blake Publishing

ACROSS THE ZODIAC

Percy Greg

PERCY GREG

Across the Zodiac

First published by Sheba Blake Publishing Corp. 2021

Sheba Blake Publishing Corp.

2288 Crossrail Dr

Atlanta, GA 30349

support@shebablake.com

First edition

Cover art by Sheba Blake
Editing by Sheba Blake

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy
Find out more at reedsy.com

Contents

One

Shipwreck

Once only, in the occasional travelling of thirty years, did I lose any important article of luggage; and that loss occurred, not under the haphazard, devil-take-the-hindmost confusion of English, or the elaborate misrule of Continental journeys, but through the absolute perfection and democratic despotism of the American system. I had to give up a visit to the scenery of Cooper's best Indian novels—no slight sacrifice—and hasten at once to New York to repair the loss. This incident brought me, on an evening near the middle of September 1874, on board a river steamboat starting from Albany, the capital of the State, for the Empire City. The banks of the lower Hudson are as well worth seeing as those of the Rhine itself, but even America has not yet devised means of lighting them up at night, and consequently I had no amusement but such as I could find in the conversation of my fellow-travellers. With one of these, whose abstinence from personal questions led me to take him for an Englishman, I spoke of my visit to Niagara—the one wonder of the world that answers its warranty—and to Montreal. As I spoke of the strong and general Canadian feeling of loyalty to the English Crown and connection, a Yankee bystander observed—

"Wal, stranger, I reckon we could take 'em if we wanted tu!"

"Yes," I replied, "if you think them worth the price. But if you do, you rate them even more highly than they rate themselves; and English colonists are not much behind the citizens of the model Republic in honest self-esteem."

"Wal," he said, "how much du yew calc'late we shall hev to pay?"

"Not more, perhaps, than you can afford; only California, and every Atlantic seaport from Portland to Galveston."

"Reckon yew may be about right, stranger," he said, falling back with tolerable good-humour; and, to do them justice, the bystanders seemed to think the retort no worse than the provocation deserved.

"I am sorry," said my friend, "you should have fallen in with so unpleasant a specimen of the character your countrymen ascribe with too much reason to Americans. I have been long in England, and never met with such discourtesy from any one who recognised me as an American."

After this our conversation became less reserved; and I found that I was conversing with one of the most renowned officers of irregular cavalry in the late Confederate service—a service which, in the efficiency, brilliancy, and daring of that especial arm, has never been surpassed since Maharbal's African Light Horse were recognised by friends and foes as the finest corps in the small splendid army of Hannibal.

Colonel A—— (the reader will learn why I give neither his name nor real rank) spoke with some bitterness of the inquisitiveness which rendered it impossible, he said, to trust an American with a secret, and very difficult to keep one without lying. We were presently joined by Major B——, who had been employed during the war in the conduct of many critical communications, and had shown great ingenuity in devising and unravelling ciphers. On this subject a somewhat protracted discussion arose. I inclined to

the doctrine of Poe, that no cipher can be devised which cannot be detected by an experienced hand; my friends indicated simple methods of defeating the processes on which decipherers rely.

"Poe's theory," said the Major, "depends upon the frequent recurrence of certain letters, syllables, and brief words in any given language; for instance, of *e*'s and *t*'s, *tion* and *ed*, *a*, *and*, and *the* in English. Now it is perfectly easy to introduce abbreviations for each of the common short words and terminations, and equally easy to baffle the decipherer's reliance thereon by inserting meaningless symbols to separate the words; by employing two signs for a common letter, or so arranging your cipher that no one shall without extreme difficulty know which marks stand for single and which for several combined letters, where one letter ends and another begins."

After some debate, Colonel A—— wrote down and handed me two lines in a cipher whose character at once struck me as very remarkable.

"I grant," said I, "that these hieroglyphics might well puzzle a more practised decipherer than myself. Still, I can point out even here a clue which might help detection. There occur, even in these two lines, three or four symbols which, from their size and complication, are evidently abbreviations. Again, the distinct forms are very few, and have obviously been made to serve for different letters by some slight alterations devised upon a fixed rule. In a word, the cipher has been constructed upon a general principle; and though it may take a long time to find out what that principle is, it affords a clue which, carefully followed out, will probably lead to detection."

"You have perceived," said Colonel A——, "a fact which it took me very long to discover. I have not deciphered all the more difficult passages of the manuscript from which I took this example; but I have ascertained the meaning of all its simple characters, and your inference is certainly correct."

Here he stopped abruptly, as if he thought he had said too much, and the subject dropped.

We reached New York early in the morning and separated, having arranged to visit that afternoon a celebrated "spiritual" medium who was then giving *séances* in the Empire City, and of whom my friend had heard and repeated to me several more or less marvellous stories. Our visit, however, was unsatisfactory; and as we came away Colonel A—— said—

"Well, I suppose this experience confirms you in your disbelief?"

"No," said I. "My first visits have generally been failures, and I have more than once been told that my own temperament is most unfavourable to the success of a seance. Nevertheless, I have in some cases witnessed marvels perfectly inexplicable by known natural laws; and I have heard and read of others attested by evidence I certainly cannot consider inferior to my own."

"Why," he said, "I thought from your conversation last night you were a complete disbeliever."

"I believe," answered I, "in very little of what I have seen. But that little is quite sufficient to dispose of the theory of pure imposture. On the other hand, there is nothing spiritual and nothing very human in the pranks played by or in the presence of the mediums. They remind one more of the feats of traditionary goblins; mischievous, noisy, untrustworthy; insensible to ridicule, apparently delighting to make fools of men, and perfectly indifferent to having the tables turned upon themselves."

"But do you believe in goblins?"

"No," I replied; "no more than in table-turning ghosts, and less than in apparitions. I am not bound to find either sceptics or spiritualists in plausible explanations. But when they insist on an alternative to their respective theories, I suggest Puck as at least equally credible with Satan, Shakespeare, or

the parrot-cry of imposture. It is the very extravagance of illogical temper to call on me to furnish an explanation *because* I say 'we know far too little of the thing itself to guess at its causes;' but of the current guesses, imposture seems inconsistent with the evidence, and 'spiritual agency' with the character of the phenomena."

"That," replied Colonel A——, "sounds common sense, and sounds even more commonplace. And yet, no one seems really to draw a strong, clear line between non-belief and disbelief. And you are the first and only man I ever met who hesitates to affirm the impossibility of that which seems to him wildly improbable, contrary at once to received opinion and to his own experience, and contrary, moreover, to all known natural laws, and all inferences hitherto drawn from them. Your men of science dogmatise like divines, not only on things they have not seen, but on things they refuse to see; and your divines are half of them afraid of Satan, and the other half of science."

"The men of science have," I replied, "like every other class, their especial bias, their peculiar professional temptation. The anti-religious bigotry of Positivists is quite as bitter and irrational as the theological bigotry of religious fanatics. At present the two powers countervail and balance each other. But, as three hundred years ago I should certainly have been burnt for a heretic, so fifty or a hundred years hence, could I live so long, I should be in equal apprehension of being burnt by some successor of Mr. Congreve, Mr. Harrison, or Professor Huxley, for presuming to believe in Providential government."

"The intolerance of incredulity," returned Colonel A——, "is a sore subject with me. I once witnessed a phenomenon which was to me quite as extraordinary as any of the 'spiritual' performances. I have at this moment in my possession apparently irresistible evidence of the reality of what then took

place; and I am sure that there exists at a point on the earth's surface, which unluckily I cannot define, strong corroborative proof of my story. Nevertheless, the first persons who heard it utterly ridiculed it, and were disposed to treat me either as a madman, or at best as an audacious trespasser on that privilege of lying which belonged to them as mariners. I told it afterwards to three gentlemen of station, character, and intelligence, every one of whom had known me as soldier, and I hope as gentleman, for years; and in each case the result was a duel, which has silenced those who imputed to me an unworthy and purposeless falsehood, but has left a heavy burden on my conscience, and has prevented me ever since from repeating what I know to be true and believe to be of greater interest, and in some sense of greater importance, than any scientific discovery of the last century. Since the last occasion on which I told it seven years have elapsed, and I never have met any one but yourself to whom I have thought it possible to disclose it."

"I have," I answered, "an intense interest in all occult phenomena; believing in regard to alleged magic, as the scientists say of practical science, that every one branch of such knowledge throws light on others; and if there be nothing in your story which it is personally painful to relate, you need not be silenced by any apprehension of discourteous criticism on my part."

"I assure you," he said, "I have no such wish now to tell the story as I had at first. It is now associated with the most painful incident of my life, and I have lost altogether that natural desire for sympathy and human interest in a matter deeply interesting to myself, which, like every one else, I felt at first, and which is, I suppose, the motive that prompts us all to relate often and early any occurrence that has keenly affected us, in whatever manner. But I think that I have no right to suppress so remarkable a fact, if by telling it I can place it effectually on record for the benefit of men sensible enough to believe that it

may have occurred, especially since somewhere in the world there must yet exist proof that it did occur. If you will come to my rooms in —— Street tomorrow, Number 999, I will not promise, but I think that I shall have made up my mind to tell you what I have to tell, and to place in your hands that portion of the evidence which is still at my command—evidence that has a significance of its own, to which my experience is merely episodical."

I spent that evening with the family of a friend, one of several former officers of the Confederacy, whose friendship is the one permanent and valuable result of my American tour. I mentioned the Colonel's name, and my friend, the head of the family, having served with him through the Virginian campaigns, expressed the highest confidence in his character, the highest opinion of his honour and veracity; but spoke with bitter regret and pain of the duels in which he had been engaged, especially of one which had been fatal; remarking that the motive in each instance remained unknown even to the seconds. "I am sure," he said "that they were not, could not have been, fought for the one cause that would justify them and explain the secrecy of the quarrel—some question involving female honour or reputation. I can hardly conceive that any one of his adversaries could have called in question in any way the personal loyalty of Colonel A——; and, as you remarked of General M ——, it is too absurd for a man who had faced over and over again the fire of a whole brigade, who had led charges against fourfold numbers, to prove his personal courage with sword or pistol, or to think that any one would have doubted either his spirit or his nerve had he refused to fight, whatever the provocation. Moreover, in each case he was the challenger."

"Then these duels have injured him in Southern opinion, and have probably tended to isolate him from society?"

"No," he replied. "Deeply as they were regretted and disapproved, his services during the war were so brilliant, and his personal character stands so high, that nothing could have induced his fellow-soldiers to put any social stigma upon him. To me he must know that he would be most welcome. Yet, though we have lived in the same city for five years, I have only encountered him three or four times in the street, and then he has passed with the fewest possible words, and has neither given me his address nor accepted my urgent invitations to visit us here. I think that there is something in the story of those duels that will never be known, certainly something that has never been guessed yet. And I think that either the circumstances in which they must have had their origin, or the duels themselves, have so weighed upon his spirits, perhaps upon his conscience, that he has chosen to avoid his former friends, most of them also the friends of his antagonists. Though the war ruined him as utterly as any of the thousands of Southern gentlemen whom it has reduced from wealth to absolute poverty, he has refused every employment which would bring him before the public eye."

"Is there," I asked, "any point of honour on which you could suppose him to be so exceptionally sensitive that he would think it necessary to take the life of a man who touched him on that point, though afterwards his regret, if not repentance, might be keen enough to crush his spirit or break his heart?"

The General paused for a moment, and his son then interposed—

"I have heard it said that Colonel A—— was in general the least quarrelsome of Confederate officers; but that on more than one occasion, where his statement upon some point of fact had been challenged by a comrade, who did not intend to question his veracity but simply the accuracy of his observation, their brother officers had much trouble in preventing a serious difficulty."

The next day I called as agreed upon my new-found friend, and with some reluctance he commenced his story.

"During the last campaign, in February 1865, I was sent by General Lee with despatches for Kirby Smith, then commanding beyond the Mississippi. I was unable to return before the surrender, and, for reasons into which I need not enter, I believed myself to be marked out by the Federal Government for vengeance. If I had remained within their reach, I might have shared the fate of Wirz and other victims of calumnies which, once put in circulation during the war, their official authors dared not retract at its close. Now I and others, who, if captured in 1865, might probably have been hanged, are neither molested nor even suspected of any other offence than that of fighting, as our opponents fought, for the State to which our allegiance was due. However, I thought it necessary to escape before the final surrender of our forces beyond the Mississippi. I made my way to Mexico, and, like one or two Southern officers of greater distinction than myself, entered the service of the Emperor Maximilian, not as mere soldiers of fortune, but because, knowing better than any but her Southern neighbours knew it the miserable anarchy of Mexico under the Republic, we regarded conquest as the one chance of regeneration for that country, and the Emperor Maximilian as a hero who had devoted himself to a task heroic at once in its danger and difficulty—the restoration of a people with whom his house had a certain historical connection to a place among the nations of the civilised world. After his fall, I should certainly have been shot had I been caught by the Juarists in pursuit of me. I gained the Pacific coast, and got on board an English vessel, whose captain—loading for San Francisco—generously weighed anchor and sailed with but half a cargo to give me a chance of safety. He transferred me a few days afterwards to a Dutch vessel bound for Brisbane, for at that time I thought of settling in Queensland.

The crew was weak-handed, and consisted chiefly of Lascars, Malays, and two or three European desperadoes of all languages and of no country. Her master was barely competent to the ordinary duties of his command; and it was no surprise to me when the first storm that we encountered drove us completely out of our course, nor was I much astonished that the captain was for some days, partly from fright and partly from drink, incapable of using his sextant to ascertain the position of the ship. One night we were awakened by a tremendous shock; and, to spare you the details of a shipwreck, which have nothing to do with my story, we found ourselves when day broke fast on a coral reef, about a mile from an island of no great size, and out of sight of all other land. The sextant having been broken to pieces, I had no means of ascertaining the position of this island, nor do I now know anything of it except that it lay, in the month of August, within the region of the southeast trade winds. We pulled on shore, but, after exploring the island, it was found to yield nothing attractive to seamen except cocoa-nuts, with which our crew had soon supplied themselves as largely as they wished, and fish, which were abundant and easily caught, and of which they were soon tired. The captain, therefore, when he had recovered his sobriety and his courage, had no great difficulty in inducing them to return to the ship, and endeavour either to get her off or construct from her timbers a raft which, following the course of the winds, might, it was thought, bring them into the track of vessels. This would take some time, and I meanwhile was allowed to remain (my own wish) on *terra firma*; the noise, dirt, and foul smells of the vessel being, especially in that climate, intolerable.

"About ten o'clock in the morning of the 25th August 1867, I was lying towards the southern end of the island, on a little hillock tolerably clear of trees, and facing a sort of glade or avenue, covered only with brush and young

trees, which allowed me to see the sky within perhaps twenty degrees of the horizon. Suddenly, looking up, I saw what appeared at first like a brilliant star considerably higher than the sun. It increased in size with amazing rapidity, till, in a very few seconds after its first appearance, it had a very perceptible disc. For an instant it obscured the sun. In another moment a tremendous shock temporarily deprived me of my senses, and I think that more than an hour had elapsed before I recovered them. Sitting up, somewhat confused, and looking around me, I became aware that some strange accident had occurred. In every direction I saw such traces of havoc as I had witnessed more than once when a Confederate force holding an impenetrable woodland had been shelled at random for some hours with the largest guns that the enemy could bring into the field. Trees were torn and broken, branches scattered in all directions, fragments of stone, earth, and coral rock flung all around. Particularly I remember that a piece of metal of considerable size had cut off the tops of two or three trees, and fixed itself at last on what was now the summit of one about a third of whose length had been broken off and lay on the ground. I soon perceived that this miraculous bombardment had proceeded from a point to the north-eastward, the direction in which at that season and hour the sun was visible. Proceeding thitherward, the evidences of destruction became every minute more marked, I might say more universal. Trees had been thrown down, torn up by the roots, hurled against one another; rocks broken and flung to great distances, some even thrown up in the air, and so reversed in falling that, while again half buried in the soil, they exposed what had been their undermost surface. In a word, before I had gone two miles I saw that the island had sustained a shock which might have been that of an earthquake, which certainly equalled that of the most violent Central American earthquakes in severity, but which had none of the special

peculiarities of that kind of natural convulsion. Presently I came upon fragments of a shining pale yellow metal, generally small, but in one or two cases of remarkable size and shape, apparently torn from some sheet of great thickness. In one case I found embedded between two such jagged fragments a piece of remarkably hard impenetrable cement. At last I came to a point from which through the destruction of the trees the sea was visible in the direction in which the ship had lain; but the ship, as in a few moments I satisfied myself, had utterly disappeared. Reaching the beach, I found that the shock had driven the sea far up upon the land; fishes lying fifty yards inland, and everything drenched in salt water. At last, guided by the signs of ever-increasing devastation, I reached the point whence the mischief had proceeded. I can give no idea in words of what I there found. The earth had been torn open, rooted up as if by a gigantic explosion. In some places sharp-pointed fragments of the coral rock, which at a depth of several feet formed the bed of the island, were discernible far below the actual surface. At others, the surface itself was raised several feet by *dèbris* of every kind. What I may call the crater—though it was no actual hole, but rather a cavity torn and then filled up by falling fragments —was two or three hundred feet in circumference; and in this space I found considerable masses of the same metallic substance, attached generally to pieces of the cement. After examining and puzzling myself over this strange scene for some time, my next care was to seek traces of the ship and of her crew; and before long I saw just outside the coral reef what had been her bowsprit, and presently, floating on the sea, one of her masts, with the sail attached. There could be little doubt that the shock had extended to her, had driven her off the reef where she had been fixed into the deep water outside, where she must have sunk immediately, and had broken her spars. No traces of her crew were to be seen. They had probably been stunned at the same time

that they were thrown into deep water; and before I came in sight of the point where she had perished, whatever animal bodies were to be found must have been devoured by the sharks, which abounded in that neighbourhood. Dismay, perplexity, and horror prevented my doing anything to solve my doubts or relieve my astonishment before the sun went down; and during the night my sleep was broken by snatches of horrible dreams and intervals of waking, during which I marvelled over what I had seen, scarcely crediting my memory or my senses. In the morning, I went back to the crater, and with some tools that had been left on shore contrived to dig somewhat deeply among the *debris* with which it was filled. I found very little that could enlighten me except pieces of glass, of various metals, of wood, some of which seemed apparently to have been portions of furniture; and one damaged but still entire relic, which I preserved and brought away with me."

Here the Colonel removed a newspaper which had covered a portion of his table, and showed me a metallic case beaten out of all shape, but apparently of what had been a silvery colour, very little rusted, though much soiled. This he opened, and I saw at once that it was of enormous thickness and solidity, to which and to favouring circumstances it owed its preservation in the general ruin he described. That it had undergone some severe and violent shock there could be no question. Beside the box lay a less damaged though still seriously injured object, in which I recognised the resemblance of a book of considerable thickness, and bound in metal like that of the case. This I afterwards ascertained beyond doubt to be a metalloid alloy whereof the principal ingredient was aluminium, or some substance so closely resembling it as not to be distinguishable from it by simple chemical tests. A friend to whom I submitted a small portion broken off from the rest expressed no doubt that it was a kind of aluminium bronze, but inclined to believe that it

contained no inconsiderable proportion of a metal with which chemists are as yet imperfectly acquainted; perhaps, he said, silicon; certainly something which had given to the alloy a hardness and tenacity unknown to any familiar metallurgical compound.

"This," said my friend, opening the volume, "is a manuscript which was contained in this case when I took it from among the debris of the crater. I should have told you that I found there what I believed to be fragments of human flesh and bone, but so crushed and mangled that I could form no positive conclusion. My next care was to escape from the island, which I felt sure lay far from the ordinary course of merchant vessels. A boat which had brought me ashore—the smaller of the two belonging to the ship—had fortunately been left on the end of the island furthest from that on which the vessel had been driven, and had, owing to its remoteness, though damaged, not been fatally injured by the shock. I repaired this, made and fixed a mast, and with no little difficulty contrived to manufacture a sort of sail from strips of bark woven together. Knowing that, even if I could sustain life on the island, life under such circumstances would not be worth having, I was perfectly willing to embark upon a voyage in which I was well aware the chances of death were at least as five to one. I caught and contrived to smoke a quantity of fish sufficient to last me for a fortnight, and filled a small cask with brackish but still drinkable water. In this vessel, thus stored, I embarked about a fortnight after the day of the mysterious shock. On the second evening of my voyage I was caught by a gale which compelled me to lower the sail, and before which I was driven for three days and nights, in what direction I can hardly guess. On the fourth morning the wind had fallen, and by noon it was a perfect calm. I need not describe what has been described by so many shipwrecked sailors,—the sufferings of a solitary voyager in an open boat under a tropical

sun. The storm had supplied me with water more than enough; so that I was spared that arch-torture of thirst which seems, in the memory of such sufferers, to absorb all others. Towards evening a slight breeze sprang up, and by morning I came in sight of a vessel, which I contrived to board. Her crew, however, and even her captain, utterly discredited such part of my strange story as I told them. On that point, however, I will say no more than this: I will place this manuscript in your hands. I will give you the key to such of its ciphers as I have been able to make out. The language, I believe, for I am no scholar, is Latin of a mediæval type; but there are words which, if I rightly decipher them, are not Latin, and hardly seem to belong to any known language; most of them, I fancy, quasi-scientific terms, invented to describe various technical devices unknown to the world when the manuscript was written. I only make it a condition that you shall not publish the story during my life; that if you show the manuscript or mention the tale in confidence to any one, you will strictly keep my secret; and that if after my death, of which you shall be advised, you do publish it, you will afford no clue by which the donor could be confidently identified."

"I promise," said I. "But I should like to ask you one question. What do you conceive to have been the cause of the extraordinary shock you felt and of the havoc you witnessed? What, in short, the nature of the occurrence and the origin of the manuscript you entrust to my care?"

"Why need you ask me?" he returned. "You are as capable as myself of drawing a deduction from what I have told you, and I have told you everything, I believe, that could assist you. The manuscript will tell the rest."

"But," said I, "an actual eye-witness often receives from a number of little facts which he cannot remember, which are perhaps too minute to have been actually and individually noted by him, an impression which is more likely to

be correct than any that could be formed by a stranger on the fullest cross-questioning, on the closest examination of what remains in the witness's memory. I should like to hear, before opening the manuscript, what you believe to have been its origin.

"I can only say," he answered, "that what must be inferred from the manuscript is what I had inferred before I opened it. That same explanation was the only one that ever occurred to me, even in the first night. It then seemed to me utterly incredible, but it is still the only conceivable explanation that my mind can suggest."

"Did you," asked I, "connect the shock and the relics, which I presume you know were not on the island before the shock, with the meteor and the strange obscuration of the sun?"

"I certainly did," he said. "Having done so, there could be but one conclusion as to the quarter from which the shock was received."

The examination and transcription of the manuscript, with all the help afforded me by my friend's previous efforts, was the work of several years. There is, as the reader will see, more than one _hiatus valde deflendus_, as the scholiasts have it, and there are passages in which, whether from the illegibility of the manuscript or the employment of technical terms unknown to me, I cannot be certain of the correctness of my translation. Such, however, as it is, I give it to the world, having fulfilled, I believe, every one of the conditions imposed upon me by my late and deeply regretted friend.

The character of the manuscript is very curious, and its translation was exceedingly difficult. The material on which it is written resembles nothing used for such purposes on Earth. It is more like a very fine linen or silken web, but it is far closer in texture, and has never been woven in any kind of loom at all like those employed in any manufacture known to history or archaeology.

The letters, or more properly symbols, are minute, but executed with extraordinary clearness. I should fancy that something more like a pencil than a pen, but with a finer point than that of the finest pencil, was employed in the writing. Contractions and combinations are not merely frequent, but almost universal. There is scarcely an instance in which five consecutive letters are separately written, and there is no single line in which half a dozen contractions, often including from four to ten letters, do not occur. The pages are of the size of an ordinary duodecimo, but contain some fifty lines per page, and perhaps one hundred and fifty letters in each line. What were probably the first half dozen pages have been utterly destroyed, and the next half dozen are so mashed, tattered, and defaced, that only a few sentences here and there are legible. I have contrived, however, to combine these into what I believe to be a substantially correct representation of the author's meaning. The Latin is of a monastic—sometimes almost canine—quality, with many words which are not Latin at all. For the rest, though here and there pages are illegible, and though some symbols, especially those representing numbers or chemical compounds, are absolutely undecipherable, it has been possible to effect what I hope will be found a clear and coherent translation. I have condensed the narrative but have not altered or suppressed a line for fear of offending those who must be unreasonable, indeed, if they lay the offence to my charge.

One word more. It is possible, if not likely, that some of those friends of the narrator, for whom the account was evidently written, may still be living, and that these pages may meet their eyes. If so, they may be able to solve the few problems that have entirely baffled me, and to explain, if they so choose, the secrets to which, intentionally or through the destruction of its introductory portion, the manuscript affords no clue.

I must add that these volumes contain only the first section of the MS. record. The rest, relating the incidents of a second voyage and describing another world, remains in my hands; and, should this part of the work excite general attention, the conclusion will, by myself or by my executors, be given to the public. Otherwise, on my death, it will be placed in the library of some national or scientific institution.

Two

Outward Bound

For obvious reasons, those who possessed the secret of the Apergy [1] had never dreamed of applying it in the manner I proposed. It had seemed to them little more than a curious secret of nature, perhaps hardly so much, since the existence of a repulsive force in the atomic sphere had been long suspected and of late certainly ascertained, and its preponderance is held to be the characteristic of the gaseous as distinguished from the liquid or solid state of matter. Till lately, no means of generating or collecting this force in large quantity had been found. The progress of electrical science had solved this difficulty; and when the secret was communicated to me, it possessed a value which had never before belonged to it.

Ever since, in childhood, I learnt that the planets were worlds, a visit to one or more of the nearest of them had been my favourite day-dream. Treasuring every hint afforded by science or fancy that bore upon the subject, I felt confident that such a voyage would be one day achieved. Helped by one or two really ingenious romances on this theme, I had dreamed out my dream, realised every difficulty, ascertained every factor in the problem. I had satisfied myself that only one thing needful was as yet wholly beyond the reach and

even the proximate hopes of science. Human invention could furnish as yet no motive power that could fulfil the main requirement of the problem—uniform or constantly increasing motion *in vacuo*—motion through a region affording no resisting medium. This must be a *repulsive* energy capable of acting through an utter void. Man, animals, birds, fishes move by repulsion applied at every moment. In air or water, paddles, oars, sails, fins, wings act by repulsion exerted on the fluid element in which they work. But in space there is no such resisting element on which repulsion can operate. I needed a repulsion which would act like gravitation through an indefinite distance and in a void—act upon a remote fulcrum, such as might be the Earth in a voyage to the Moon, or the Sun in a more distant journey. As soon, then, as the character of the apergic force was made known to me, its application to this purpose seized on my mind. Experiment had proved it possible, by the method described at the commencement of this record, to generate and collect it in amounts practically unlimited. The other hindrances to a voyage through space were trivial in comparison with that thus overcome; there were difficulties to be surmounted, not absent or deficient powers in nature to be discovered. The chief of these, of course, concerned the conveyance of air sufficient for the needs of the traveller during the period of his journey. The construction of an air-tight vessel was easy enough; but however large the body of air conveyed, even though its oxygen should not be exhausted, the carbonic acid given out by breathing would very soon so contaminate the whole that life would be impossible. To eliminate this element it would only be necessary to carry a certain quantity of lime-water, easily calculated, and by means of a fan or similar instrument to drive the whole of the air periodically through the vessel containing it. The lime in solution combining with the noxious gas would show by the turbid whiteness of the water the absorption of the carbonic acid

and formation of carbonate of lime. But if the carbonic acid gas were merely to be removed, it is obvious that the oxygen of the air, which forms a part of that gas, would be constantly diminished and ultimately exhausted; and the effect of highly oxygenated air upon the circulation is notoriously too great to allow of any considerable increase at the outset in the proportion of this element. I might carry a fresh supply of oxygen, available at need, in some solid combination like chlorate of potash; but the electricity employed for the generation of the apergy might be also applied to the decomposition of carbonic acid and the restoration of its oxygen to the atmosphere.

But the vessel had to be steered as well as propelled; and in order to accomplish this it would be necessary to command the direction of the apergy at pleasure. My means of doing this depended on two of the best-established peculiarities of this strange force: its rectilinear direction and its conductibility. We found that it acts through air or in a vacuum in a single straight line, without deflection, and seemingly without diminution. Most solids, and especially metals, according to their electric condition, are more or less impervious to it—antapergic. Its power of penetration diminishes under a very obscure law, but so rapidly that no conceivable strength of current would affect an object protected by an intervening sheet half an inch in thickness. On the other hand, it prefers to all other lines the axis of a conductive bar, such as may be formed of [undecipherable] in an antapergic sheath. However such bar may be curved, bent, or divided, the current will fill and follow it, and pursue indefinitely, without divergence, diffusion, or loss, the direction in which it emerges. Therefore, by collecting the current from the generator in a vessel cased with antapergic material, and leaving no other aperture, its entire volume might be sent into a conductor. By cutting across this conductor, and causing the further part to rotate upon the nearer, I could divert the current

through any required angle. Thus I could turn the repulsion upon the resistant body (sun or planet), and so propel the vessel in any direction I pleased.

I had determined that my first attempt should be a visit to Mars. The Moon is a far less interesting body, since, on the hemisphere turned towards the Earth, the absence of an atmosphere and of water ensures the absence of any such life as is known to us—probably of any life that could be discerned by our senses—and would prevent landing; while nearly all the soundest astronomers agree in believing, on apparently sufficient grounds, that even the opposite hemisphere [of which small portions are from time to time rendered visible by the libration, though greatly foreshortened and consequently somewhat imperfectly seen] is equally devoid of the two primary necessaries of animal and vegetable life. That Mars has seas, clouds, and an atmosphere was generally admitted, and I held it to be beyond question. Of Venus, owing to her extraordinary brilliancy, to the fact that when nearest to the Earth a very small portion of her lighted surface is visible to us, and above all to her dense cloud-envelope, very little was known; and though I cherished the intention to visit her even more earnestly than my resolve to reach the probably less attractive planet Mars, I determined to begin with that voyage of which the conditions and the probable result were most obvious and certain. I preferred, moreover, in the first instance, to employ the apergy as a propelling rather than as a resisting force. Now, after passing beyond the immediate sphere of the Earth's attraction, it is plain that in going towards Mars I should be departing from the Sun, relying upon the apergy to overcome his attraction; whereas in seeking to attain Venus I should be approaching the Sun, relying for my main motive power upon that tremendous attraction, and employing the apergy only to moderate the rate of movement and control its direction. The latter appeared to me the more delicate, difficult, and perhaps dangerous