

CLASSICS TO GO
**THE ANGEL OF
THE REVOLUTION**
A TALE OF THE COMING TERROR



The Angel of the Revolution

A Tale of the Coming Terror

George Chetwynd Griffith



Drawn by Edwin S. Hope.

NATASHA

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CHAPTER I.

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

"Victory! It flies! I am master of the Powers of the Air at last!"

They were strange words to be uttered, as they were, by a pale, haggard, half-starved looking young fellow in a dingy, comfortless room on the top floor of a South London tenement-house; and yet there was a triumphant ring in his voice, and a clear, bright flush on his thin cheeks that spoke at least for his own absolute belief in their truth.

Let us see how far he was justified in that belief.

To begin at the beginning, Richard Arnold was one of those men whom the world is wont to call dreamers and enthusiasts before they succeed, and heaven-born geniuses and benefactors of humanity afterwards.

He was twenty-six, and for nearly six years past he had devoted himself, soul and body, to a single idea—to the so far unsolved problem of aërial navigation.

This idea had haunted him ever since he had been able to think logically at all—first dimly at school, and then more clearly at college, where he had carried everything before him in mathematics and natural science, until it had at last become a ruling passion that crowded everything else out of his life, and made him, commercially speaking, that most useless of social units—a one-idea'd man, whose idea could not be put into working form.

He was an orphan, with hardly a blood relation in the world. He had started with plenty of friends, mostly made at college, who thought he had a brilliant future before him, and therefore looked upon him as a man whom it might be useful to know.

But as time went on, and no results came, these dropped off, and he got to be looked upon as an amiable lunatic, who was wasting his great talents and what money he had on impracticable fancies, when he might have been earning a handsome income if he had stuck to the beaten track, and gone in for practical work.

The distinctions that he had won at college, and the reputation he had gained as a wonderfully clever chemist and mechanic, had led to several offers of excellent positions in great engineering firms; but to the surprise and disgust of his friends he had declined them all. No one knew why, for he had kept his secret with the almost passionate jealousy of the true enthusiast, and so his refusals were put down to sheer foolishness, and he became numbered with the geniuses who are failures because they are not practical.

When he came of age he had inherited a couple of thousand pounds, which had been left in trust to him by his father. Had it not been for that two thousand pounds he would have been forced to employ his knowledge and his talents conventionally, and would probably have made a fortune. But it was just enough to relieve him from the necessity of earning his living for the time being, and to make it possible for him to devote himself entirely to the realisation of his life-dream—at any rate until the money was gone.

Of course he yielded to the temptation—nay, he never gave the other course a moment's thought. Two thousand pounds would last him for years; and no one could have persuaded

him that with complete leisure, freedom from all other concerns, and money for the necessary experiments, he would not have succeeded long before his capital was exhausted.

So he put the money into a bank whence he could draw it out as he chose, and withdrew himself from the world to work out the ideal of his life.

Year after year passed, and still success did not come. He found practice very different from theory, and in a hundred details he met with difficulties he had never seen on paper. Meanwhile his money melted away in costly experiments which only raised hopes that ended in bitter disappointment. His wonderful machine was a miracle of ingenuity, and was mechanically perfect in every detail save one—it would do no practical work.

Like every other inventor who had grappled with the problem, he had found himself constantly faced with that fatal ratio of weight to power. No engine that he could devise would do more than lift itself and the machine. Again and again he had made a toy that would fly, as others had done before him, but a machine that would navigate the air as a steamer or an electric vessel navigated the waters, carrying cargo and passengers, was still an impossibility while that terrible problem of weight and power remained unsolved.

In order to eke out his money to the uttermost, he had clothed and lodged himself meanly, and had denied himself everything but the barest necessities of life.

Thus he had prolonged the struggle for over five years of toil and privation and hope deferred, and now, when his last sovereign had been changed and nearly spent, success—real, tangible, practical success—had come to him, and the

discovery that was to be to the twentieth century what the steam-engine had been to the nineteenth was accomplished.

He had discovered the true motive power at last.

Two liquefied gases—which, when united, exploded spontaneously—were admitted by a clockwork escapement in minute quantities into the cylinders of his engine, and worked the pistons by the expansive force of the gases generated by the explosion. There was no weight but the engine itself and the cylinders containing the liquefied gases. Furnaces, boilers, condensers, accumulators, dynamos—all the ponderous apparatus of steam and electricity—were done away with, and he had a power at command greater than either of them.

There was no doubt about it. The moment that his trembling fingers set the escapement mechanism in motion, the model that embodied the thought and labour of years rose into the air as gracefully as a bird on the wing, and sailed round and round in obedience to its rudder, straining hard at the string which prevented it from striking the ceiling. It was weighted in strict proportion to the load that the full-sized air-ship would have to carry. To increase this was merely a matter of increasing the power of the engine and the size of the floats and fans.

The room was a large one, for the house had been built for a better fate than letting in tenements, and it ran from back to front with a window at each end. Out of doors there was a strong breeze blowing, and as soon as Arnold was sure that his ship was able to hold its own in still air, he threw both the windows open and let the wind blow straight through the room. Then he drew the air-ship down, straightened the rudder, and set it against the breeze.

In almost agonised suspense he watched it rise from the floor, float motionless for a moment, and then slowly forge ahead in the teeth of the wind, gathering speed as it went. It was then that he had uttered that triumphant cry of "Victory!" All the long years of privation and hope deferred vanished in that one supreme moment of innocent and bloodless conquest, and he saw himself master of a kingdom as wide as the world itself.

He let the model fly the length of the room before he stopped the clockwork and cut off the motive power, allowing it to sink gently to the floor. Then came the reaction. He looked steadfastly at his handiwork for several moments in silence, and then he turned and threw himself on to a shabby little bed that stood in one corner of the room and burst into a flood of tears.

Triumph had come, but had it not come too late? He knew the boundless possibilities of his invention—but they had still to be realised. To do this would cost thousands of pounds, and he had just one half-crown and a few coppers. Even these were not really his own, for he was already a week behind with his rent, and another payment fell due the next day. That would be twelve shillings in all, and if it was not paid he would be turned into the street.

As he raised himself from the bed he looked despairingly round the bare, shabby room. No; there was nothing there that he could pawn or sell. Everything saleable had gone already to keep up the struggle of hope against despair. The bed and wash-stand, the plain deal table, and the one chair that comprised the furniture of the room were not his. A little carpenter's bench, a few worn tools and odds and ends of scientific apparatus, and a dozen well-used books—these were all that he possessed in the world now, save the clothes on his back, and a plain painted sea-chest in which

he was wont to lock up his precious model when he had to go out.

His model! No, he could not sell that. At best it would fetch but the price of an ingenious toy, and without the secret of the two gases it was useless. But was not that worth something? Yes, if he did not starve to death before he could persuade any one that there was money in it. Besides, the chest and its priceless contents would be seized for the rent next day, and then—

"God help me! What *am* I to do?"

The words broke from him like a cry of physical pain, and ended in a sob, and for all answer there was the silence of the room and the inarticulate murmur of the streets below coming up through the open windows.

He was weak with hunger and sick with excitement, for he had lived for days on bread and cheese, and that day he had eaten nothing since the crust that had served him for breakfast. His nerves, too, were shattered by the intense strain of his final trial and triumph, and his head was getting light.

With a desperate effort he recovered himself, and the heroic resolution that had sustained him through his long struggle came to his aid again. He got up and poured some water from the ewer into a cracked cup and drank it. It refreshed him for the moment, and he poured the rest of the water over his head. That steadied his nerves and cleared his brain. He took up the model from the floor, laid it tenderly and lovingly in its usual resting-place in the chest. Then he locked the chest and sat down upon it to think the situation over.

Ten minutes later he rose to his feet and said aloud—

"It's no use. I can't think on an empty stomach. I'll go out and have one more good meal if it's the last I ever have in the world, and then perhaps some ideas will come."

So saying, he took down his hat, buttoned his shabby velveteen coat to conceal his lack of a waistcoat, and went out, locking the door behind him as he went.

Five minutes' walk brought him to the Blackfriars Road, and then he turned towards the river and crossed the bridge just as the motley stream of city workers was crossing it in the opposite direction on their homeward journey.

At Ludgate Circus he went into an eating-house and fared sumptuously on a plate of beef, some bread and butter, and a pint mug of coffee. As he was eating a paper-boy came in and laid an *Echo* on the table at which he was sitting. He took it up mechanically, and ran his eye carelessly over the columns. He was in no humour to be interested by the tattle of an evening paper, but in a paragraph under the heading of Foreign News a once familiar name caught his eye, and he read the paragraph through. It ran as follows:—

RAILWAY OUTRAGE IN RUSSIA.

When the Berlin-Petersburg express stopped last night at Kovno, the first stop after passing the Russian frontier, a shocking discovery was made in the smoking compartment of the palace car which has been on the train for the last few months. Colonel Dornovitch, of the Imperial Police, who is understood to have been on his return journey from a secret mission to Paris, was found stabbed to the heart and quite dead. In the centre of the forehead were two short straight cuts in the form of a T reaching to the bone. Not long ago Colonel Dornovitch was instrumental in unearthing a formidable Nihilist conspiracy, in connection with which over fifty men and

women of various social ranks were exiled for life to Siberia. The whole affair is wrapped in the deepest mystery, the only clue in the hands of the police being the fact that the cross cut on the forehead of the victim indicates that the crime is the work, not of the Nihilists proper, but of that unknown and mysterious society usually alluded to as the Terrorists, not one of whom has ever been seen save in his crimes. How the assassin managed to enter and leave the car unperceived while the train was going at full speed is an apparently insoluble riddle. Saving the victim and the attendants, the only passengers in the car who had not retired to rest were another officer in the Russian service and Lord Alanmere, who was travelling to St. Petersburg to resume, after leave of absence, the duties of the Secretaryship to the British Embassy, to which he was appointed some two years ago.

"Why, that must be the Lord Alanmere who was at Trinity in my time, or rather Viscount Tremayne, as he was then," mused Arnold, as he laid the paper down. "We were very good friends in those days. I wonder if he'd know me now, and lend me a ten-pound note to get me out of the infernal fix I'm in? I believe he would, for he was one of the few really good-hearted men I have so far met with.

"If he were in London I really think I should take courage from my desperation, and put my case before him and ask his help. However, he's not in London, and so it's no use wishing. Well, I feel more of a man for that shillingsworth of food and drink, and I'll go and wind up my dissipation with a pipe and a quiet think on the Embankment."

CHAPTER II.

AT WAR WITH SOCIETY.

When Richard Arnold reached the Embankment dusk had deepened into night, so far, at least, as nature was concerned. But in London in the beginning of the twentieth century there was but little night to speak of, save in the sense of a division of time. The date of the paper which contained the account of the tragedy on the Russian railway was September 3rd, 1903, and within the last ten years enormous progress had been made in electric lighting.

The ebb and flow in the Thames had at last been turned to account, and worked huge turbines which perpetually stored up electric power that was used not only for lighting, but for cooking in hotels and private houses, and for driving machinery. At all the great centres of traffic huge electric suns cast their rays far and wide along the streets, supplementing the light of the lesser lamps with which they were lined on each side.

The Embankment from Westminster to Blackfriars was bathed in a flood of soft white light from hundreds of great lamps running along both sides, and from the centre of each bridge a million candle-power sun cast rays upon the water that were continued in one unbroken stream of light from Chelsea to the Tower.

On the north side of the river the scene was one of brilliant and splendid opulence, that contrasted strongly with the half-lighted gloom of the murky wilderness of South London, dark and forbidding in its irredeemable ugliness.

From Blackfriars Arnold walked briskly towards Westminster, bitterly contrasting as he went the lavish display of wealth around him with the sordid and seemingly hopeless poverty of his own desperate condition.

He was the maker and possessor of a far greater marvel than anything that helped to make up this splendid scene, and yet the ragged tramps who were remorselessly moved on from one seat to another by the policemen as soon as they had settled themselves down for a rest and a doze, were hardly poorer than he was.

For nearly four hours he paced backwards and forwards, every now and then stopping to lean on the parapet, and once or twice to sit down, until the chill autumn wind pierced his scanty clothing, and compelled him to resume his walk in order to get warm again.

All the time he turned his miserable situation over and over again in his mind without avail. There seemed no way out of it; no way of obtaining the few pounds that would save him from homeless beggary and his splendid invention from being lost to him and the world, certainly for years, and perhaps for ever.

And then, as hour after hour went by, and still no cheering thought came, the misery of the present pressed closer and closer upon him. He dare not go home, for that would be to bring the inevitable disaster of the morrow nearer, and, besides, it was home no longer till the rent was paid. He had two shillings, and he owed at least twelve. He was also the maker of a machine for which the Tsar of Russia had made a standing offer of a million sterling. That million might have been his if he had possessed the money necessary to bring his invention under the notice of the great Autocrat.

That was the position he had turned over and over in his mind until its horrible contradictions maddened him. With a little money, riches and fame were his; without it he was a beggar in sight of starvation.

And yet he doubted whether, even in his present dire extremity, he could, had he had the chance, sell what might be made the most terrific engine of destruction ever thought of to the head and front of a despotism that he looked upon as the worst earthly enemy of mankind.

For the twentieth time he had paused in his weary walk to and fro to lean on the parapet close by Cleopatra's Needle. The Embankment was almost deserted now, save by the tramps and a few isolated wanderers like himself. For several minutes he looked out over the brightly glittering waters below him, wondering listlessly how long it would take him to drown if he dropped over, and whether he would be rescued before he was dead, and brought back to life, and prosecuted the next day for daring to try and leave the world save in the conventional and orthodox fashion.

Then his mind wandered back to the Tsar and his million, and he pictured to himself the awful part that a fleet of airships such as his would play in the general European war that people said could not now be put off for many months longer. As he thought of this the vision grew in distinctness, and he saw them hovering over armies and cities and fortresses, and raining irresistible death and destruction down upon them. The prospect appalled him, and he shuddered as he thought that it was now really within the possibility of realisation; and then his ideas began to translate themselves involuntarily into words which he spoke aloud, completely oblivious for the time being of his surroundings.

"No, I think I would rather destroy it, and then take my secret with me out of the world, than put such an awful power of destruction and slaughter into the hands of the Tsar, or, for the matter of that, any other of the rulers of the earth. Their subjects can butcher each other quite efficiently enough as it is. The next war will be the most frightful carnival of destruction that the world has ever seen; but what would it be like if I were to give one of the nations of Europe the power of raining death and desolation on its enemies from the skies! No, no! Such a power, if used at all, should only be used against and not for the despotisms that afflict the earth with the curse of war!"

"Then why not use it so, my friend, if you possess it, and would see mankind freed from its tyrants?" said a quiet voice at his elbow.

The sound instantly scattered his vision to the winds, and he turned round with a startled exclamation to see who had spoken. As he did so, a whiff of smoke from a very good cigar drifted past his nostrils, and the voice said again in the same quiet, even tones—

"You must forgive me for my bad manners in listening to what you were saying, and also for breaking in upon your reverie. My excuse must be the great interest that your words had for me. Your opinions would appear to be exactly my own, too, and perhaps you will accept that as another excuse for my rudeness."

It was the first really kindly, friendly voice that Richard Arnold had heard for many a long day, and the words were so well chosen and so politely uttered that it was impossible to feel any resentment, so he simply said in answer—

"There was no rudeness, sir; and, besides, why should a gentleman like you apologise for speaking to a"—

"Another gentleman," quickly interrupted his new acquaintance. "Because I transgressed the laws of politeness in doing so, and an apology was due. Your speech tells me that we are socially equals. Intellectually you look my superior. The rest is a difference only of money, and that any smart swindler can bury himself in nowadays if he chooses. But come, if you have no objection to make my better acquaintance, I have a great desire to make yours. If you will pardon my saying so, you are evidently not an ordinary man, or else, something tells me, you would be rich. Have a smoke and let us talk, since we apparently have a subject in common. Which way are you going?"

"Nowhere—and therefore anywhere," replied Arnold, with a laugh that had but little merriment in it. "I have reached a point from which all roads are one to me."

"That being the case I propose that you shall take the one that leads to my chambers in Savoy Mansions yonder. We shall find a bit of supper ready, I expect, and then I shall ask you to talk. Come along!"

There was no more mistaking the genuine kindness and sincerity of the invitation than the delicacy with which it was given. To have refused would not only have been churlish, but it would have been for a drowning man to knock aside a kindly hand held out to help him; so Arnold accepted, and the two new strangely met and strangely assorted friends walked away together in the direction of the Savoy.

The suite of rooms occupied by Arnold's new acquaintance was the beau ideal of a wealthy bachelor's abode. Small, compact, cosy, and richly furnished, yet in the best of taste withal, the rooms looked like an indoor paradise to him after the bare squalor of the one room that had been his own home for over two years.

His host took him first into a dainty little bath-room to wash his hands, and by the time he had performed his scanty toilet supper was already on the table in the sitting-room. Nothing melts reserve like a good well-cooked meal washed down by appropriate liquids, and before supper was half over Arnold and his host were chatting together as easily as though they stood on perfectly equal terms and had known each other for years. His new friend seemed purposely to keep the conversation to general subjects until the meal was over and his pattern man-servant had removed the cloth and left them together with the wine and cigars on the table.

As soon as he had closed the door behind him his host motioned Arnold to an easy-chair on one side of the fireplace, threw himself into another on the other side, and said—

"Now, my friend, plant yourself, as they say across the water, help yourself to what there is as the spirit moves you, and talk—the more about yourself the better. But stop. I forgot that we do not even know each other's name yet. Let me introduce myself first.

"My name is Maurice Colston; I am a bachelor, as you see. For the rest, in practice I am an idler, a dilettante, and a good deal else that is pleasant and utterly useless. In theory, let me tell you, I am a Socialist, or something of the sort, with a lively conviction as to the injustice and absurdity of the social and economic conditions which enable me to have such a good time on earth without having done anything to deserve it beyond having managed to be born the son of my father."

He stopped and looked at his guest through the wreaths of his cigar smoke as much as to say: "And now who are you?"

Arnold took the silent hint, and opened his mouth and his heart at the same time. Quite apart from the good turn he had done him, there was a genial frankness about his unconventional host that chimed in so well with his own nature that he cast all reserve aside, and told plainly and simply the story of his life and its master passion, his dreams and hopes and failures, and his final triumph in the hour when triumph itself was defeat.

His host heard him through without a word, but towards the end of his story his face betrayed an interest, or rather an expectant anxiety, to hear what was coming next that no mere friendly concern of the moment for one less fortunate than himself could adequately account for. At length, when Arnold had completed his story with a brief but graphic description of the last successful trial of his model, he leant forward in his chair, and, fixing his dark, steady eyes on his guest's face, said in a voice from which every trace of his former good-humoured levity had vanished—

"A strange story, and truer, I think, than the one I told you. Now tell me on your honour as a gentleman: Were you really in earnest when I heard you say on the embankment that you would rather smash up your model and take the secret with you into the next world, than sell your discovery to the Tsar for the million that he has offered for such an air-ship as yours?"

"Absolutely in earnest," was the reply. "I have seen enough of the seamy side of this much-boasted civilisation of ours to know that it is the most awful mockery that man ever insulted his Maker with. It is based on fraud, and sustained by force—force that ruthlessly crushes all who do not bow the knee to Mammon. I am the enemy of a society that does not permit a man to be honest and live, unless he has money and can defy it. I have just two shillings in the world, and I would rather throw them into the Thames and myself

after them than take that million from the Tsar in exchange for an engine of destruction that would make him master of the world."

"Those are brave words," said Colston, with a smile. "Forgive me for saying so, but I wonder whether you would repeat them if I told you that I am a servant of his Majesty the Tsar, and that you shall have that million for your model and your secret the moment that you convince me that what you have told me is true."

Before he had finished speaking Arnold had risen to his feet. He heard him out, and then he said, slowly and steadily—

"I should not take the trouble to repeat them; I should only tell you that I am sorry that I have eaten salt with a man who could take advantage of my poverty to insult me. Good night."

He was moving towards the door when Colston jumped up from his chair, strode round the table, and got in front of him. Then he put his two hands on his shoulders, and, looking straight into his eyes, said in a tone that vibrated with emotion—

"Thank God, I have found an honest man at last! Go and sit down again, my friend, my comrade, as I hope you soon will be. Forgive me for the foolishness that I spoke! I am no servant of the Tsar. He and all like him have no more devoted enemy on earth than I am. Look! I will soon prove it to you."

As he said the last words, Colston let go Arnold's shoulders, flung off his coat and waistcoat, slipped his braces off his shoulders, and pulled his shirt up to his neck. Then he turned his bare back to his guest, and said—

"That is the sign-manual of Russian tyranny—the mark of the knout!"

Arnold shrank back with a cry of horror at the sight. From waist to neck Colston's back was a mass of hideous scars and wheals, crossing each other and rising up into purple lumps, with livid blue and grey spaces between them. As he stood, there was not an inch of naturally-coloured skin to be seen. It was like the back of a man who had been flayed alive, and then flogged with a cat-o'-nine-tails.

Before Arnold had overcome his horror his host had re-adjusted his clothing. Then he turned to him and said—

"That was my reward for telling the governor of a petty Russian town that he was a brute-beast for flogging a poor decrepit old Jewess to death. Do you believe me now when I say that I am no servant or friend of the Tsar?"

"Yes, I do," replied Arnold, holding out his hand, "you were right to try me, and I was wrong to be so hasty. It is a failing of mine that has done me plenty of harm before now. I think I know now what you are without your telling me. Give me a piece of paper and you shall have my address, so that you can come to-morrow and see the model—only I warn you that you will have to pay my rent to keep my landlord's hands off it. And then I must be off, for I see it's past twelve."

"You are not going out again to-night, my friend, while I have a sofa and plenty of rugs at your disposal," said his host. "You will sleep here, and in the morning we will go together and see this marvel of yours. Meanwhile sit down and make yourself at home with another cigar. We have only just begun to know each other—we two enemies of Society!"

CHAPTER III.

A FRIENDLY CHAT.

Soon after eight the next morning Colston came into the sitting-room where Arnold had slept on the sofa, and dreamt dreams of war and world-revolts and battles fought in mid-air between aërial navies built on the plan of his own model. When Colston came in he was just awake enough to be wondering whether the events of the previous night were a reality or part of his dreams—a doubt that was speedily set at rest by his host drawing back the curtains and pulling up the blinds.

The moment his eyes were properly open he saw that he was anywhere but in his own shabby room in Southwark, and the rest was made clear by Colston saying—

"Well, comrade Arnold, Lord High Admiral of the Air, how have you slept? I hope you found the sofa big and soft enough, and that the last cigar has left no evil effects behind it."

"Eh? Oh, good morning! I don't know whether it was the whisky or the cigars, or what it was; but do you know I have been dreaming all sorts of absurd things about battles in the air and dropping explosives on fortresses and turning them into small volcanoes. When you came in just now I hadn't the remotest idea where I was. It's time to get up, I suppose?"

"Yes, it's after eight a good bit. I've had my tub, so the bath-room is at your service. Meanwhile, Burrows will be laying the table for breakfast. When you have finished your tub,

come into my dressing-room, and let me rig you out. We are about of a size, and I think I shall be able to meet your most fastidious taste. In fact, I could rig you out as anything—from a tramp to an officer of the Guards."

"It wouldn't take much change to accomplish the former, I'm afraid. But, really, I couldn't think of trespassing so far on your hospitality as to take your very clothes from you. I'm deep enough in your debt already."

"Don't talk nonsense, Richard Arnold. The tone in which those last words were said shows me that you have not duly laid to heart what I said last night. There is no such thing as private property in the Brotherhood, of which I hope, by this time to-morrow, you will be an initiate."

"What I have here is mine only for the purposes of the Cause, wherefore it is as much yours as mine, for to-day we are going on the Brotherhood's business. Why, then, should you have any scruples about wearing the Brotherhood's clothes? Now clear out and get tubbed, and wash some of those absurd ideas out of your head."

"Well, as you put it that way, I don't mind, only remember that I don't necessarily put on the principles of the Brotherhood with its clothes."

So saying, Arnold got up from the sofa, stretched himself, and went off to make his toilet.

When he sat down to breakfast with his host half an hour later, very few who had seen him on the Embankment the night before would have recognised him as the same man. The tailor, after all, does a good deal to make the man, externally at least, and the change of clothes in Arnold's case had transformed him from a superior looking tramp into an aristocratic and decidedly good-looking man, in the

prime of his youth, saving only for the thinness and pallor of his face, and a perceptible stoop in the shoulders.

During breakfast they chatted about their plans for the day, and then drifted into generalities, chiefly of a political nature.

The better Arnold came to know Maurice Colston the more remarkable his character appeared to him; and it was his growing wonder at the contradictions that it exhibited that made him say towards the end of the meal—

"I must say you're a queer sort of conspirator, Colston. My idea of Nihilists and members of revolutionary societies has always taken the form of silent, stealthy, cautious beings, with a lively distrust and hatred of the whole human race outside their own circles. And yet here are you, an active member of the most terrible secret society in existence, pledged to the destruction of nearly every institution on earth, and carrying your life in your hand, opening your heart like a schoolboy to a man you have literally not known for twenty-four hours.

"Suppose you had made a mistake in me. What would there be to prevent me telling the police who you are, and having you locked up with a view to extradition to Russia?"

"In the first place," replied Colston quietly, "you would not do so, because I am not mistaken in you, and because, in your heart, whether you fully know it or not, you believe as I do about the destruction that is about to fall upon Society.

"In the second place, if you did betray my confidence, I should be able to bring such an overwhelming array of the most respectable evidence to show that I was nothing like what I really am, that you would be laughed at for a madman; and, in the third place, there would be an inquest on you within twenty-four hours after you had told your

story. Do you remember the death of Inspector Ainsworth, of the Criminal Investigation Department, about six months ago?"

"Yes, of course I do. Hermit and all as I was, I could hardly help hearing about that, considering what a noise it made. But I thought that was cleared up. Didn't one of that gang of garotters that was broken up in South London a couple of months later confess to strangling him in the statement that he made before he was executed?"

"Yes, and his widow is now getting ten shillings a week for life on account of that confession. Birkett no more killed Ainsworth than you did; but he had killed two or three others, and so the confession didn't do him very much harm.

"No; Ainsworth met his death in quite another way. He accepted from the Russian secret police bureau in London a bribe of £250 down and the promise of another £250 if he succeeded in manufacturing enough evidence against a member of our Outer Circle to get him extradited to Russia on a trumped-up charge of murder.

"The Inner Circle learnt of this from one of our spies in the Russian London police, and——, well, Ainsworth was found dead with the mark of the Terror upon his forehead before he had time to put his treachery into action. He was executed by two of the Brotherhood, who are members of the Metropolitan police force, and who were afterwards complimented by the magistrate for the intelligent efforts they had made in bringing the murderers to justice."

Colston told the dark story in the most careless of tones between the puffs of his after-breakfast cigarette. Arnold stifled his horror as well as he was able, but he could not help saying, when his host had done—

"This Brotherhood of yours is well named the Terror; but was not that rather a murder than an execution?"

"By no means," replied Colston, a trifle coldly. "Society hangs or beheads a man who kills another. Ainsworth knew as well as we did that if the man he tried to betray by false evidence had once set foot in Russia, the torments of a hundred deaths would have been his before he had been allowed to die.

"He betrayed his office and his faith to his English masters in order to commit this vile crime, and so he was killed as a murderous and treacherous reptile that was not fit to live. We of the Terror are not lawyers, and so we make no distinctions between deliberate plotting for money to kill and the act of killing itself. Our law is closer akin to justice than the hair-splitting fraud that is tolerated by Society."

Either from emotional or logical reasons Arnold made no reply to this reasoning, and, seeing he remained silent, Colston resumed his ordinary nonchalant, good-humoured tone, and went on—

"But come, that will be horrors enough for to-day. We have other business in hand, and we may as well get to it at once. About this wonderful invention of yours. Of course I believe all you have told me about it, but you must remember that I am only an agent, and that I am inexorably bound by certain rules, in accordance with which I must act.

"Now, to be perfectly plain with you, and in order that we may thoroughly understand each other before either of us commits himself to anything, I must tell you that I want to see this model flying ship of yours in order to be able to report on it to-night to the Executive of the Inner Circle, to whom I shall also want to introduce you. If you will not allow

me to do that say so at once, and, for the present at least, our negotiations must come to a sudden stop."

"Go on," said Arnold quietly; "so far I consent. For the rest I would rather hear you to the end."

"Very well. Then if the Executive approve of the invention, you will be asked to join the Inner Circle at once, and to devote yourself body and soul to the Society and the accomplishment of the objects that will be explained to you. If you refuse there will be an end of the matter, and you will simply be asked to give your word of honour to reveal nothing that you have seen or heard, and then allowed to depart in peace.

"If, on the other hand, you consent, in consideration of the immense importance of your secret—which there is no need to disguise from you—to the Brotherhood, the usual condition of passing through the Outer Circle will be dispensed with, and you will be trusted as absolutely as we shall expect you to trust us.

"Whatever funds you then require to manufacture an airship on the plan of your model will be placed at your disposal, and a suitable place will be selected for the works that you will have to build. When the ship is ready to take the air you will, of course, be appointed to the command of her, and you will pick your crew from among the workmen who will act under your orders in the building of the vessel.

"They will all be members of the Outer Circle, who will not understand your orders, but simply obey them blindly, even to the death. One member of the Inner Circle will act as your second in command, and he will be as perfectly trusted as you will be, so that in unforeseen emergencies you will be able to consult with him with perfect confidence. Now I think I have told you all. What do you say?"

Arnold was silent for a few minutes, too busy for speech with the rush of thoughts that had crowded through his brain as Colston was speaking. Then he looked up at his host and said—

"May I make conditions?"

"You may state them," replied he, with a smile, "but, of course, I don't undertake to accept them without consultation with my—I mean with the Executive."

"Of course not," said Arnold. "Well, the conditions that I should feel myself obliged to make with your Executive would be, briefly speaking, these: I would not reveal to any one the composition of the gases from which I derive my motive force. I should manufacture them myself in given quantities, and keep them always under my own charge.

"At the first attempt to break faith with me in this respect I would blow the air-ship and all her crew, including myself, into such fragments as it would be difficult to find one of them. I have and wish for no life apart from my invention, and I would not survive it."

"Good!" interrupted Colston. "There spoke the true enthusiast. Go on."

"Secondly, I would use the machine only in open warfare—when the Brotherhood is fighting openly for the attainment of a definite end. Once the appeal to force has been made I will employ a force such as no nation on earth can use without me, and I will use it as unsparingly as the armies and fleets engaged will employ their own engines of destruction on one another. But I will be no party to the destruction of defenceless towns and people who are not in arms against us. If I am ordered to do that I tell you candidly that I will not do it. I will blow the air-ship itself up first."