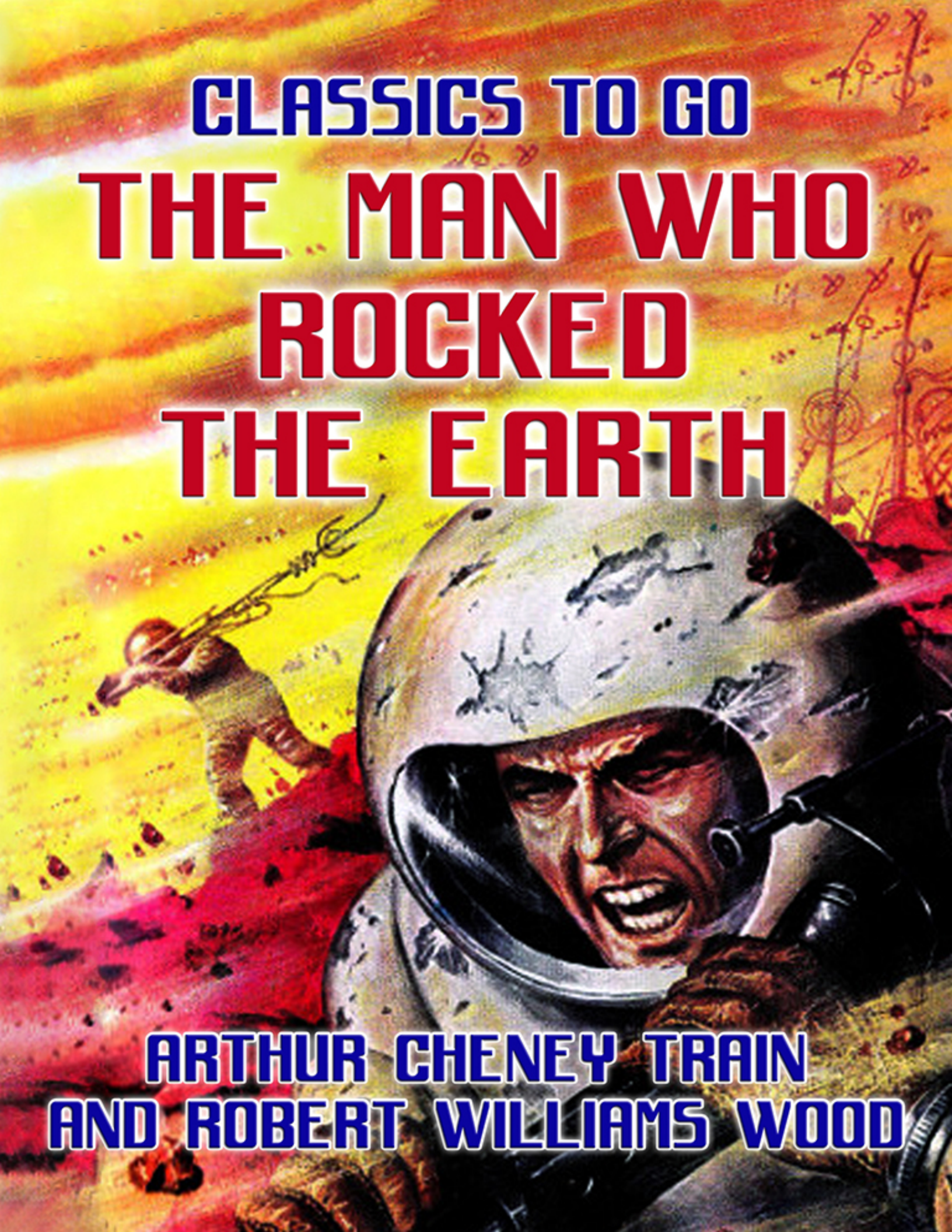
CLASSICS TO GO

THE MAN WHO ROCKED THE EARTH



ARTHUR CHENEY TRAIN
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"I thought, too, of the first and most significant realization which the reading of astronomy imposes: that of the exceeding delicacy of the world's position; how, indeed, we are dependent for life, and all that now is, upon the small matter of the tilt of the poles; and that we, as men, are products, as it were, not only of earth's precarious position, but of her more precarious tilt."—W. L. Comfort, Nov., 1914

INSTANTLY THE EARTH BLEW UP LIKE A CANNON—UP INTO THE AIR, A THOUSAND MILES UP

PROLOGUE

By July 1, 1916, the war had involved every civilized nation upon the globe except the United States of North and of South America, which had up to that time succeeded in maintaining their neutrality. Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Switzerland, Poland, Austria Hungary, Lombardy, and Servia, had been devastated. Five million adult male human beings had been exterminated by the machines of war, by disease, and by famine. Ten million had been crippled or invalided. Fifteen million women and children had been rendered widows or orphans. Industry there was none. No crops were harvested or sown. The ocean was devoid of sails. Throughout European Christendom women had taken the place of men as field hands, labourers, mechanics, merchants, and manufacturers. The amalgamated debt of the involved nations, amounting to more than $100,000,000,000, had bankrupted the world. Yet the starving armies continued to slaughter one another.

Siberia was a vast charnel-house of Tartars, Chinese, and Russians. Northern Africa was a holocaust. Within sixty miles of Paris lay an army of two million Germans, while three million Russians had invested Berlin. In Belgium an English army of eight hundred and fifty thousand men faced an equal force of Prussians and Austrians, neither daring to take the offensive.

The inventive genius of mankind, stimulated by the exigencies of war, had produced a multitude of death-dealing mechanisms, most of which had in turn been rendered ineffective by some counter-invention of another nation. Three of these products of the human brain, however, remained unneutralized and in large part

accounted for the impasse at which the hostile armies found themselves. One of these had revolutionized warfare in the field, and the other two had destroyed those two most important factors of the preliminary campaign—the aeroplane and the submarine. The German dirigibles had all been annihilated within the first ten months of the war in their great cross-channel raid by Pathé contact bombs trailed at the ends of wires by high-flying French planes. This, of course, had from the beginning been confidently predicted by the French War Department. But by November, 1915, both the allied and the German aerial fleets had been wiped from the clouds by Federston's vortex guns, which by projecting a whirling ring of air to a height of over five thousand feet crumpled the craft in mid-sky like so many butterflies in a simoon.

The second of these momentous inventions was Captain Barlow's device for destroying the periscopes of submarines, thus rendering them blind and helpless. Once they were forced to the surface such craft were easily destroyed by gun fire or driven to a sullen refuge in protecting harbours.

The third, and perhaps the most vital, invention was Dufay's nitrogen-iodide pellets, which when sown by pneumatic guns upon the slopes of a battlefield, the ground outside intrenchments, or round the glacis of a fortification made approach by an attacking army impossible and the position impregnable. These pellets, only the size of No. 4 bird shot and harmless out of contact with air, became highly explosive two minutes after they had been scattered broadcast upon the soil, and any friction would discharge them with sufficient force to fracture or dislocate the bones of the human foot or to put out of service the leg of a horse. The victim attempting to drag himself away inevitably sustained further and more serious injuries, and no aid

could be given to the injured, as it was impossible to reach them. A field well planted with such pellets was an impassable barrier to either infantry or cavalry, and thus any attack upon a fortified position was doomed to failure. By surprise alone could a general expect to achieve a victory. Offensive warfare had come almost to a standstill.

Germany had seized Holland, Denmark, and Switzerland. Italy had annexed Dalmatia and the Trentino; and a new Slav republic had arisen out of what had been Hungary, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Servia, Roumania, Montenegro, Albania, and Bulgaria. Turkey had vanished from the map of Europe; while the United States of South America, composed of the Spanish-speaking South American Republics, had been formed. The mortality continued at an average of two thousand a day, of which 75 per cent. was due to starvation and the plague. Maritime commerce had ceased entirely, and in consequence of this the merchant ships of all nations rotted at the docks.

The Emperor of Germany, and the kings of England and of Italy, had all voluntarily abdicated in favour of a republican form of government. Europe and Asia had run amuck, hysterical with fear and blood. As well try to pacify a pack of mad and fighting dogs as these frenzied myriads with their half-crazed generals. They lay, these armies, across the fair bosom of the earth like dying monsters, crimson in their own blood, yet still able to writhe upward and deal death to any other that might approach. They were at a deadlock, yet each feared to make the first overtures for peace. There was, in actuality, no longer even an English or a German nation. It was an orgy of homicide, in which the best of mankind were wantonly destroyed, leaving only the puny, the feeble-minded, the deformed, and the ineffectual to perpetuate the race.

I

It was three minutes past three postmeridian in the operating room of the new Wireless Station recently installed at the United States Naval Observatory at Georgetown. Bill Hood, the afternoon operator, was sitting in his shirt sleeves with his receivers at his ears, smoking a corncob pipe and awaiting a call from the flagship *Lincoln* of the North Atlantic Patrol with which, somewhere just off Hatteras, he had been in communication a few moments before. The air was quiet.

Hood was a fat man, and so of course good-natured; but he was serious about his work and hated all interfering amateurs. Of late these wireless pests had become particularly obnoxious, as practically everything was sent out in code and they had nothing with which to occupy themselves. But it was a hot day and none of them seemed to be at work. On one side of his desk a tall thermometer indicated that the temperature of the room was 91 degrees Fahrenheit; on the other a big clock, connected with some extraneous mechanism by a complicated system of brass rods and wires, ticked off the minutes and seconds with a peculiar metallic self-consciousness, as if aware of its own importance in being the official timepiece, as far as there was an official timepiece, for the entire United States of America.

Hood from time to time tested his converters and detector, and then resumed his non-official study of the adventures of a great detective who pursued the baffling criminal by the aid of all the latest scientific discoveries. Hood thought it was good stuff, although at the same time he knew, of course, that it was rot. He was a practical man of little

imagination, and, though the detective did not interest him particularly, he liked the scientific part of the stories. He was thrifty, of Scotch-Irish descent, and at two minutes past three had never had an adventure in his life. At three minutes past three he began his career as one of the celebrities of the world.

As the minute hand of the official clock dropped into its slot somebody called the Naval Observatory. The call was so faint as to be barely audible, in spite of the fact that Hood's instrument was tuned for a three-thousand-metre wave. Supposing quite naturally that the person calling had a shorter wave, he gradually cut out the inductance of his receiver; but the sound faded out entirely, and he returned to his original inductance and shunted in his condenser, upon which the call immediately increased in volume. Evidently the other chap was using a big wave, bigger than Georgetown.

Hood puckered his brows and looked about him. Lying on a shelf above his instrument was one of the new ballast coils that Henderson had used with the long waves from lightning flashes, and he leaned over and connected the heavy spiral of closely wound wire, throwing it into his circuit. Instantly the telephones spoke so loud that he could hear the shrill cry of the spark even from where the receivers lay beside him on the table. Quickly fastening them to his ears he listened. The sound was clear, sharp, and metallic, and vastly higher in pitch than a ship's call. It couldn't be the *Lincoln*.

"By gum!" muttered Hood. "That fellow must have a twelve-thousand-metre wave length with fifty kilowatts behind it, sure! There ain't another station in the world but this can pick him up!"

"NAA—NAA—NAA," came the call.

Throwing in his rheostat he sent an "O.K" in reply, and waited expectantly, pencil in hand. A moment more and he dropped his pencil in disgust.

"Just another bug!" he remarked aloud to the thermometer. "Ought to be poisoned! What a whale of a wave length, though!"

For several minutes he listened intently, for the amateur was sending insistently, repeating everything twice as if he meant business.

"He's a jolly joker all right," muttered Hood, this time to the clock. "Must be pretty hard up for something to do!"

Then he laughed out loud and took up the pencil again. This amateur, whoever he was, was almost as good as his detective story. The "bug" called the Naval Observatory once more and began repeating his entire message for the third time.

"To all mankind"—he addressed himself modestly—"To all mankind—To all mankind—I am the dictator—of human destiny—Through the earth's rotation—I control—day and night—summer and winter—I command the—cessation of hostilities and—the abolition of war upon the globe—I appoint the—United States—as my agent for this purpose—As evidence of my power I shall increase the length of the day—from midnight to midnight—of Thursday, July 22d, by the period of five minutes.—PAX."

The jolly joker, having repeated thus his extraordinary message to all mankind, stopped sending.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" gasped Bill Hood. Then he wound up his magnetic detector and sent an answering challenge into the ether.

"Can—the—funny—stuff!" he snapped. "And tune out—or—we'll revoke—your license!"

"What a gall!" he grunted, folding up the yellow sheet of pad paper upon which he had taken down the message to all mankind and thrusting it into his book for a marker. "All the fools aren't dead yet!"

Then he picked up the *Lincoln* and got down to real work. The "bug" and his message passed from memory.

II

The following Thursday afternoon a perspiring and dusty stranger from St. Louis, who, with the Metropolitan Art Museum as his objective, was trudging wearily through Central Park, New York City, at two o'clock, paused to gaze with some interest at the obelisk known as Cleopatra's Needle. The heat rose in shimmering waves from the asphalt of the roadway, but the stranger was used to heat and he was conscientiously engaged in the duty of seeing New York. Opposite the Museum he seated himself upon a bench in the shade of a faded dogwood and wiped the moisture from his eyes. The glare from the unprotected boulevards was terrific. Under these somewhat unfavourable conditions he was occupied in studying the monument of Egypt's past magnificence when he felt a slight dragging sensation. It was indefinable and had no visual concomitant. But it was as though the brakes were being gently applied to a Pullman train. He was the only human being in the neighbourhood; not even a policeman was visible; and the experience gave him a creepy feeling. Then to his amazement Cleopatra's Needle slowly toppled from its pedestal and fell with a crash across the roadway. At first he thought it an optical illusion and wiped his eyes again, but it was nothing of the kind. The monument, which had a moment before pointed to the zenith, now lay shattered in three pieces upon the softening concrete of the drive. The stranger arose and examined the fragments of the monolith, one of which lay squarely across the road, barring all passage. Round the pedestal were scattered small pieces of broken granite, and from these, after looking about cautiously, he chose one with care and placed it in his pocket.

"Gosh!" he whispered to himself as he hurried toward Fifth Avenue. "That'll just be something to tell 'em at home! Eh, Bill?"

The dragging sensation experienced by the tourist from St. Louis was felt by many millions of people all over the world, but, as in most countries it occurred coincidently with pronounced earthquake shocks and tremblings, for the most part it passed unnoticed as a specific, individual phenomenon.

Hood, in the wireless room at Georgetown, suddenly heard in his receivers a roar like that of Niagara and quickly removed them from his ears. He had never known such statics. He was familiar with electrical disturbances in the ether, but this was beyond anything in his experience. Moreover, when he next tried to use his instruments he discovered that something had put the whole apparatus out of commission. About an hour later he felt a pronounced pressure in his eardrums, which gradually passed off. The wireless refused to work for nearly eight hours, and it was still recalcitrant when he went off duty at seven o'clock. He had not felt the quivering of the earth round Washington, and being an unimaginative man he accepted the other facts of the situation philosophically. The statics would pass, and then Georgetown would be in communication with the rest of the world again, that was all. At seven o'clock the night shift came in, and Hood borrowed a pipeful of tobacco from him and put on his coat.

"Say, Bill, did you feel the shock?" asked the shift, hanging up his hat and taking a match from Hood.

"No," answered the latter, "but the statics have put the machine on the blink. She'll come round all right in an hour or so. The air's gummy with ions. Shock, did you say?"

"Sure. Had 'em all over the country. Say, the boys at the magnetic observatory claim their compass shifted east and west instead of north and south, and stayed that way for five minutes. Didn't you feel the air pressure? I should worry! And say, I just dropped into the Meteorological Department's office and looked at the barometer. She'd jumped up half an inch in about two seconds, wiggled round some, and then come back to normal. You can see the curve yourself if you ask Fraser to show you the self-registering barograph. Some doin's, I tell you!"

He nodded his head with an air of importance.

"Take your word for it," answered Hood without emotion, save for a slight annoyance at the other's arrogation of superior information. "'Tain't the first time there's been an earthquake since creation." And he strolled out, swinging to the doors behind him.

The night shift settled himself before the instruments with a look of dreary resignation.

"Say," he muttered aloud, "you couldn't jar that feller with a thirteen-inch bomb! He wouldn't even rub himself!"

Hood, meantime, bought an evening paper and walked slowly to the district where he lived. It was a fine night and there was no particular excitement in the streets. His wife opened the door.

"Well," she greeted him, "I'm glad you've come home at last. I was plumb scared something had happened to you. Such a shaking and rumbling and rattling I never did hear! Did you feel it?"

"I didn't feel nothin'!" answered Bill Hood. "Some one said there was a shock, that was all I heard about it. The machine's out of kilter."

"They won't blame you, will they?" she asked anxiously.

"You bet they won't!" he replied. "Look here, I'm hungry. Are the waffles ready?"

"Have 'em in a jiffy!" she smiled. "You go in and read your paper."

He did as he was directed, and seated himself in a rocker under the gaslight. After perusing the baseball news he turned back to the front page. The paper was a fairly late edition, containing up-to-the-minute telegraphic notes. In the centre column, alongside the announcement of the annihilation of three entire regiments of Silesians by the explosion of nitroglycerine concealed in dummy gun carriages, was the following:

CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE FALLS

Earthquake Destroys Famous Monument

Shocks Felt Here and All Over U. S.

Washington was visited by a succession of earthquake shocks early this afternoon, which, in varying force, were felt throughout the United States and Europe. Little damage was done, but those having offices in tall buildings had an unpleasant experience which they will not soon forget. A peculiar phenomenon accompanying this seismic disturbance was the variation of the magnetic needle by over eighty degrees from north to east and an extraordinary rise and fall of the barometer. All wireless communication had to be abandoned, owing to the ionizing of the atmosphere, and up to the time this edition went to press had not been resumed. Telegrams by way of Colon report similar disturbances in South America. In New York the

monument in Central Park known as Cleopatra's Needle was thrown from its pedestal and broken into three pieces. The contract for its repair and replacement has already been let. The famous monument was a present from the Khedive of Egypt to the United States, and formerly stood in Alexandria. The late William H. Vanderbilt defrayed the expense of transporting it to this country.

Bill Hood read this with scant interest. The Giants had knocked the Braves' pitcher out of the box, and an earthquake seemed a small matter. His mind did not once revert to the mysterious message from Pax the day before. He was thinking of something far more important.

"Say, Nellie," he demanded, tossing aside the paper impatiently, "ain't those waffles ready yet?"