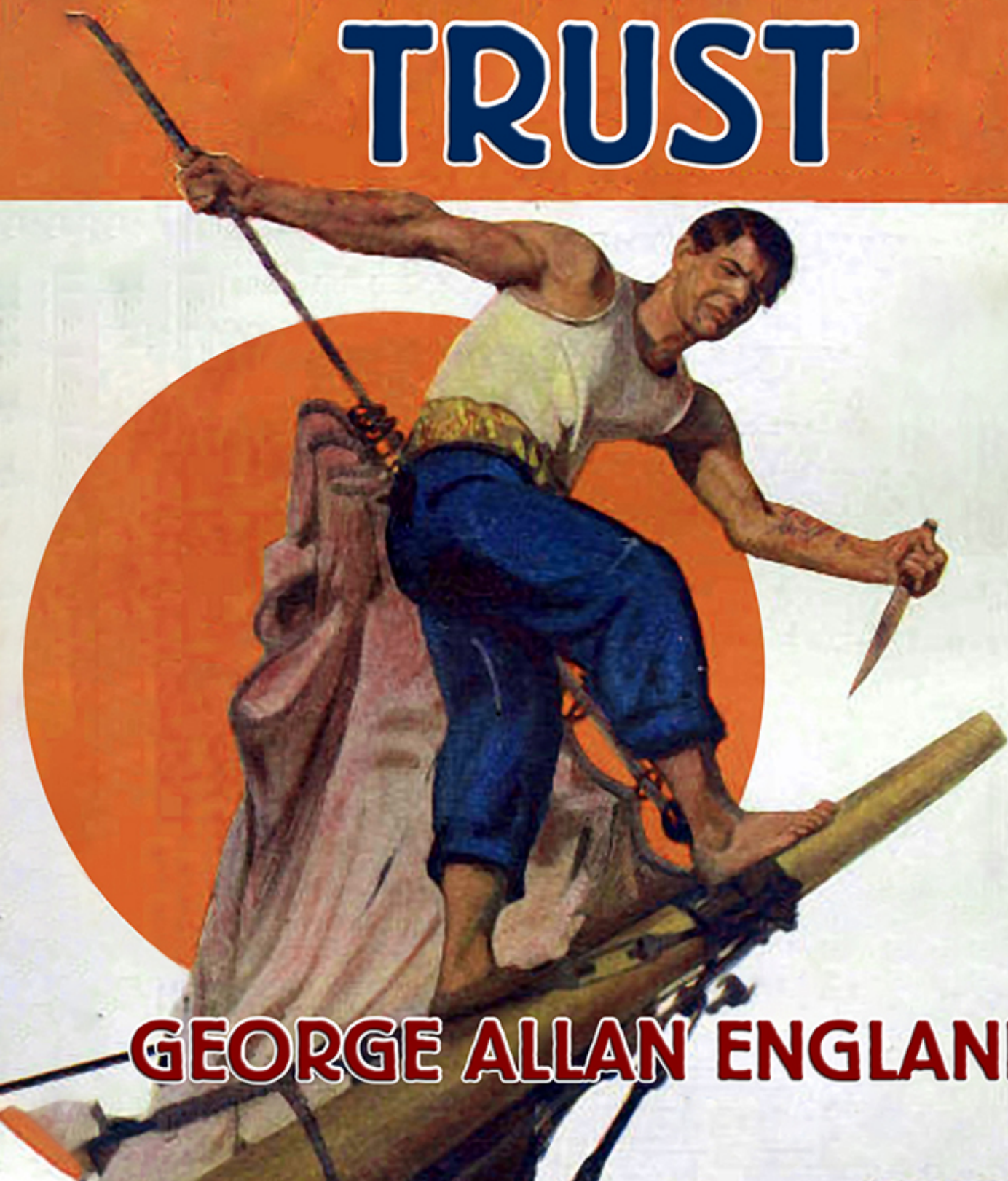


**CLASSICS TO GO**  
**THE AIR**  
**TRUST**



**GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND**

# **The Air Trust**

**George Allan England**



**"Visions!" She said softly, "Do you behold them too?"**

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## **CHAPTER I.**

### **THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA.**

Sunk far back in the huge leather cushions of his morris chair, old Isaac Flint was thinking, thinking hard. Between narrowed lids, his hard, gray eyes were blinking at the morning sunlight that poured into his private office, high up in the great building he had reared on Wall Street. From his thin lips now and then issued a coil of smoke from the costly cigar he was consuming. His bony legs were crossed, and one foot twitched impatiently. Now and again he tugged at his white mustache. A frown creased his hard brow; and, as he pondered, something of the glitter of a snake seemed reflected in his pupils.

"Not enough," he muttered, harshly. "It's not enough—there must be more, more, more! Some way must be found. Must be, and shall be!"

The sunlight of early spring, glad and warm over Manhattan, brought no message of cheer to the Billionaire. It bore no news of peace and joy to him. Its very brightness, as it flooded the metropolis and mellowed his luxurious inner office, seemed to offend the master of the world. And presently he arose, walked to the window and made as though to lower the shade. But for a moment he delayed this action. Standing there at the window, he peered out. Far below him, the restless, swarming life of the huge city crept and grovelled. Insects that were men and women crowded the clefts that were streets. Long lines of cars, toy-like, crept along the "L" structures. As far as the eye could reach, tufted plumes of smoke and steam wafted away on the April breeze. The East River glistened in the sunlight, its bosom vexed by myriad craft, by ocean liners, by tugs and barges,

by grim warships, by sailing-vessels, whose canvas gleamed, by snow-white fruitboats from the tropics, by hulls from every port. Over the bridges, long slow lines of traffic crawled. And, far beyond to the dim horizon, stretched out the hives of men, till the blue depths of distance swallowed all in haze.

And as Flint gazed on this marvel, all created and maintained by human toil, by sweat and skill and tireless patience of the workers, a hard smile curved his lips.

"All mine, more or less," said he to himself, puffing deep on his cigar. "All yielding tribute to me, even as the mines and mills and factories I cannot see yield tribute! Even as the oil-wells, the pipe-lines, the railroads and the subways yield—even as the whole world yields it. All this labor, all this busy strife, I have a hand in. The millions eat and drink and buy and sell; and I take toll of it—yet it is not enough. I hold them in my hand, yet the hand cannot close, completely. And until it does, it is not enough! No, not enough for me!"

He pondered a moment, standing there musing at the window, surveying "all the wonders of the earth" that in its fulness, in that year of grace, 1921, bore tribute to him who toiled not, neither spun; and though he smiled, the smile was bitter.

"Not enough, yet," he reflected. "And how—how shall I close my grip? How shall I master all this, absolutely and completely, till it be mine in truth? Through light? The mob can do with less, if I squeeze too hard! Through food? They can economize! Transportation? No, the traffic will bear only a certain load! How, then? What is it they all must have, or die, that I can control? What universal need, vital to rich and poor alike? To great and small? What absolute necessity which shall make my rivals in the Game as much my vassals as the meanest slave in my steel mills? What can it be? For



power I must have! Like Caesar, who preferred to be first in the smallest village, rather than be second at Rome, I can and will have no competitor. I must rule *all*, or the game is worthless! But how?"

Almost as in answer to his mental question, a sudden gust of air swayed the curtain and brushed it against his face. And, on the moment, inspiration struck him.

"What?" he exclaimed suddenly, his brows wrinkling, a strange and eager light burning in his hard eyes. "Eh, what? Can it—could it be possible? My God! If so—if it might be—the world would be my toy, to play with as I like!

"If *that* could happen, kings and emperors would have to cringe and crawl to me, like my hordes of serfs all over this broad land. Statesmen and diplomats, president and judges, lawmakers and captains of industry, all would fall into bondage; and for the first time in history one man would rule the earth, completely and absolutely—and *that man would be Isaac Flint!*"

Staggered by the very immensity of the bold thought, so vast that for a moment he could not realize it in its entirety, the Billionaire fell to pacing the floor of his office.

His cigar now hung dead and unnoticed between his thinly cruel lips. His hands were gripped behind his bent back, as he paced the priceless Shiraz rug, itself having cost the wage of a hundred workmen for a year's hard, grinding toil. And as he trod, up and down, up and down the rich apartments, a slow, grim smile curved his mouth.

"What editor could withstand me, then?" he was thinking. "What clergyman could raise his voice against my rule? Ah! Their 'high principles' they prate of so eloquently, their crack-brained economics, their rebellions and their strikes—the dogs!—would soon bow down before *that* power! Men

have starved for stiff-necked opposition's sake, and still may do so—but with my hand at the throat of the world, with the world's very life-breath in my grip, what then? Submission, or—ha! well, we shall see, we shall see!"

A subtle change came over his face, which had been growing paler for some minutes. Impatiently he flung away his cigar, and, turning to his desk, opened a drawer, took out a little vial and uncorked it. He shook out two small white tablets, on the big sheet of plate-glass that covered the desk, swallowed them eagerly, and replaced the vial in the desk again. For be it known that, master of the world though Flint was, he too had a master—morphine. Long years he had bowed beneath its whip, the veriest slave of the insidious drug. No three hours could pass, without that dosage. His immense native will power still managed to control the dose and not increase it; but years ago he had abandoned hope of ever diminishing or ceasing it. And now he thought no more of it than of—well, of breathing.

Breathing! As he stood up again and drew a deep breath, under the reviving influence of the drug, his inspiration once more recurred to him.

"Breath!" said he. "Breath is life. Without food and drink and shelter, men can live a while. Even without water, for some days. But without *air*—they die inevitably and at once. And if I make the air my own, then I am master of all life!"

And suddenly he burst into a harsh, jangling laugh.

"Air!" he cried exultantly, "An Air Trust! By God in Heaven, it can be! It shall be!—it must!"

His mind, somewhat sluggish before he had taken the morphine, now was working clearly and accurately again, with that fateful and undeviating precision which had made him master of billions of dollars and uncounted millions of

human lives; which had woven his network of possession all over the United States, Europe and Asia and even Africa; which had drawn, as into a spider's web, the world's railroads and steamship lines, its coal and copper and steel, its oil and grain and beef, its every need—save air!

And now, keen on the track of this last great inspiration, the Billionaire strode to his revolving book-case, whirled it round and from its shelves jerked a thick volume, a smaller book and some pamphlets.

"Let's have some facts!" said he, flinging them upon his desk, and seating himself before it in a costly chair of teak. "Once I get an outline of the facts and what I want to do, then my subordinates can carry out my plans. Before all, I must have facts!"

For half an hour he thumbed his references, noting all the salient points mentally, without taking a single note; for, so long as the drug still acted, his brain was an instrument of unsurpassed keenness and accuracy.

A sinister figure he made, as he sat there poring intently over the technical books before him, contrasting strangely with the beauty and the luxury of the office. On the mantel, over the fireplace of Carrara marble, ticked a Louis XIV clock, the price of which might have saved the lives of a thousand workingmen's children during the last summer's torment. Gold-woven tapestries from Rouen covered the walls, whereon hung etchings and rare prints. Old Flint's office, indeed, had more the air of an art gallery than a place where grim plots and deals innumerable had been put through, lawmakers corrupted past counting, and the destinies of nations bent beneath his corded, lean and nervous hand. And now, as the Billionaire sat there thinking, smiling a smile that boded no good to the world, the soft

spring air that had inspired his great plan still swayed the silken curtains.

Of a sudden, he slammed the big book shut, that he was studying, and rose to his feet with a hard laugh—the laugh that had presaged more than one calamity to mankind. Beneath the sweep of his mustache one caught the glint of a gold tooth, sharp and unpleasant.

A moment he stood there, keen, eager, dominant, his hands gripping the edge of the desk till the big knuckles whitened. He seemed the embodiment of harsh and unrelenting Power—power over men and things, over their laws and institutions; power which, like Alexander's, sought only new worlds to conquer; power which found all metes and bounds too narrow.

"Power!" he whispered, as though to voice the inner inclining of the picture. "Life, air, breath—the very breath of the world in my hands—power absolutely, at last!"

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PARTNERS.

Then, as was his habit, translating ideas into immediate action, he strode to a door at the far end of the office, flung it open and said:

"See here a minute, Wally!"

"Busy!" came an answering voice, from behind a huge roll-top desk.

"Of course! But drop it, drop it. I've got news for you."

"Urgent?" asked the voice, coldly.

"Very. Come in here, a minute. I've got to unload!"

From behind the big desk rose the figure of a man about five and forty, sandy-haired, long-faced and sallow, with a pair of the coldest, fishiest eyes—eyes set too close together—that ever looked out of a flat and ugly face. A man precisely dressed, something of a fop, with just a note of the "sport" in his get-up; a man to fear, a man cool, wary and dangerous—Maxim Waldron, in fact, the Billionaire's right-hand man and confidant. Waldron, for some time affianced to his eldest daughter. Waldron the arch-corruptionist; Waldron, who never yet had been "caught with the goods," but who had financed scores of industrial and political campaigns, with Flint's money and his own; Waldron, the smooth, the suave, the perilous.

"What now?" asked he, fixing his pale blue eyes on the Billionaire's face.

"Come in here, and I'll tell you."

"Right!" And Waldron, brushing an invisible speck of dust from the sleeve of his checked coat, strolled rather casually into the Billionaire's office.

Flint closed the door.

"Well?" asked Waldron, with something of a drawl. "What's the excitement?"

"See here," began the great financier, stimulated by the drug. "We've been wasting our time, all these years, with our petty monopolies of beef and coal and transportation and all such trifles!"

"So?" And Waldron drew from his pocket a gold cigar-case, monogrammed with diamonds. "Trifles, eh?" He carefully chose a perfecto. "Perhaps; but we've managed to rub along, eh? Well, if these are trifles, what's on?"

"Air!"

"Air?" Waldron's match poised a moment, as with a slight widening of the pale blue eyes he surveyed his partner. "Why—er—what do you mean, Flint?"

"The Air Trust!"

"Eh?" And Waldron lighted his cigar.

"A monopoly of breathing privileges!"

"Ha! Ha!" Waldron's laugh was as mirthful as a grave-yard raven's croak. "Nothing to it, old man. Forget it, and stick to —"

"Of course! I might have expected as much from you!" retorted the Billionaire tartly. "You've got neither imagination nor—"

"Nor any fancy for wild-goose chases," said Waldron, easily, as he sat down in the big leather chair. "Air? Hot air, Flint! No, no, it won't do! Nothing to it nothing at all."

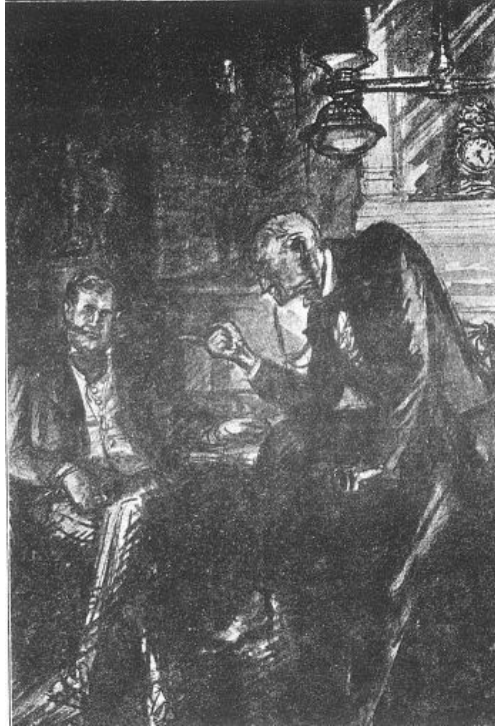
For a moment the Billionaire regarded him with a look of intense irritation. His thin lips moved, as though to emit some caustic answer; but he managed to keep silence. The two men looked at each other, a long minute; then Flint began again:

"Listen, now, and keep still! The idea came to me not an hour ago, this morning, looking over the city, here. We've got a finger on everything but the atmosphere, the most important thing of all. If we could control *that*—"

"Of course, I understand," interrupted the other, blowing a ring of smoke. "Unlimited power and so on. Looks very nice, and all. Only, it can't be done. Air's too big, too fluid, too universal. Human powers can't control it, any more than the ocean. Talk about monopolizing the Atlantic, if you will, Flint. But for heaven's sake, drop—"

"Can't be done, eh?" exclaimed Flint, warmly, sitting down on the desk-top and levelling a big-jointed forefinger at his partner. "That's what every new idea has had to meet. It's no argument! People scoffed at the idea of gas lighting when it was new. Called it 'burning smoke,' and made merry over it. That was as recently as 1832. But ten years later, gas-illumination was in full sway.

"Electric lighting met the same objection. And remember the objection to the telephone? When Congress, in 1843, granted Morse an appropriation of \$30,000 to run the first telegraph line from Baltimore to Washington, one would-be humorist in that supremely intelligent body tried to introduce an amendment that part of the sum should be spent in surveying a railroad to the moon! And—"



**"Can't be done, Eh?" said Flint.**

"Granted," put in Waldron, "that my objection is futile, just what's your idea?"

"This!" And Flint stabbed at him with his forefinger, while the other financier regarded him with a fishily amused eye. "Every human being in this world—and there are 1,900,000,000 of them now!—is breathing, on the average, 16 cubic feet of air every hour, or about 400 a day. The total amount of oxygen actually absorbed in the 24 hours by each person, is about 17 cubic feet, or *over 30 billions of cubic feet of oxygen*, each day, in the entire world. Get that?"

"Well?" drawled the other.

"Don't you see?" snapped Flint, irritably. "Imagine that we extract oxygen from the air. Then—"

"You might as well try to dip up the ocean with a spoon," said Waldron, "as try to vitiate the atmosphere of the whole



world, by any means whatsoever! But even if you could, what then?"

"Look here!" exclaimed the Billionaire. "It only needs a reduction of 10 per cent. in the atmospheric oxygen to make the air so bad that nobody can breathe it without discomfort and pain. Take out any more and people will die! We don't have to monopolize *all* the oxygen, but only a very small fraction, and the world will come gasping to us, like so many fish out of water, falling over each other to buy!"

"Possibly. But the details?"

"I haven't worked them out yet, naturally. I needn't. Herzog will take care of those. He and his staff. That's what they're for. Shall we put it up to him? What? My God, man! Think of the millions in it—the billions! The power! The—"

"Of course, of course!" interposed Waldron, calmly, eyeing his smoke. "Don't get excited, Flint. Rome wasn't built in a day. There may be something in this; possibly there may be the germ of an idea. I don't say it's impossible. It looks visionary to me; but then, as you well say, so has every new idea always looked. Let me think, now; let me think."

"Go ahead and think!" growled the Billionaire. "Think and be hanged to you! *I'm* going to act!"

Waldron vouchsafed no reply, but merely eyed his partner with cold interest, as though he were some biological specimen under a lens, and smoked the while.

Flint, however, turned to his telephone and pulled it toward him, over the big sheet of plate glass. Impatiently he took off the receiver and held it up to his ear.

"Hello, hello! 2438 John!" he exclaimed, in answer to the query of "Number, please?"

Silence, a moment, while Waldron slowly drew at his cigar and while the Billionaire tugged with impatience at his gray mustache.

"Hello! That you, Herzog?"

"All right. I want to see you at once. Immediately, understand?"

"Very well. And say, Herzog!"

"Bring whatever literature you have on liquid air, nitrogen extraction from the atmosphere, and so on. Understand? And come at once!"

"That's all! Good-bye!"

Smiling dourly, with satisfaction, he hung up and shoved the telephone away again, then turned to his still reflecting partner, who had now hoisted his patent leather boots to the window sill and seemed absorbed in regarding their gloss through a blue veil of nicotine.

"Herzog," announced the Billionaire, "will be here in ten minutes, and we'll get down to business."

"So?" languidly commented the immaculate Waldron. "Well, much as I'd like to flatter your astuteness, Flint, I'm bound to say you're barking up a false trail, this time! Beef, yes. Steel, yes. Railroads, steamships, coal, iron, wheat, yes. All tangible, all concrete, all susceptible of being weighed, measured, put in figures, fenced and bounded, legislated about and so on and so forth. But *air*—!"

He snapped his manicured fingers, to show his well-considered contempt for the Billionaire's scheme, and, throwing away his smoked-out cigar, chose a fresh one.

Flint made no reply, but with an angry grunt flung a look of scorn at the calm and placid one. Then, furtively opening his desk drawer, he once more sought the little vial and took two more pellets—an action which Waldron, without moving his head, complacently observed in a heavily-bevelled mirror that hung between the windows.

"Air," murmured Waldron, suavely. "Hot air, Flint?"

No answer, save another grunt and the slamming of the desk-drawer.

And thus, in silence, the two men, masters of the world, awaited the coming of the practical scientist, the proletarian, on whom they both, at last analysis, had to rely for most of their results.

## **CHAPTER III.**

### **THE BAITING OF HERZOG.**

Herzog was not long in arriving. To be summoned in haste by Isaac Flint, and to delay, was unthinkable. For eighteen years the chemist had lickspittled to the Billionaire. Keen though his mind was, his character and stamina were those of a jellyfish; and when the Master took snuff, as the saying is, Herzog never failed to sneeze.

He therefore appeared, now, in some ten minutes—a fat, rubicund, spectacled man, with a cast in his left eye and two fingers missing, to remind him of early days in experimental work on explosives. Under his arm he carried several tomes and pamphlets; and so, bowing first to one financier, then to the other, he stood there on the threshold, awaiting his masters' pleasure.

"Come in, Herzog," directed Flint. "Got some material there on liquid air, and nitrogen, and so on?"

"Yes, sir. Just what is it you want, sir?"

"Sit down, and I'll tell you,"—for the chemist, hat in hand, ventured not to seat himself unbidden in presence of these plutocrats.

Herzog, murmuring thanks for Flint's gracious permission, deposited his derby on top of the revolving book-case, sat down tentatively on the edge of a chair and clutched his books as though they had been so many shields against the redoubted power of his masters.

"See here, Herzog," Flint fired at him, without any preliminaries or beating around the bush, "what do you

know about the practical side of extracting nitrogen from atmospheric air? Or extracting oxygen, in liquid form? Can it be done—that is, on a commercial basis?"

"Why, no, sir—yes, that is—perhaps. I mean—"

"What the devil *do* you mean?" snapped Flint, while Waldron smiled maliciously as he smoked. "Yes, or no? I don't pay you to muddle things. I pay you to *know*, and to tell me! Get that? Now, how about it?"

"Well, sir—hm!—the fact is," and the unfortunate chemist blinked through his glasses with extreme uneasiness, "the fact of the matter is that the processes involved haven't been really perfected, as yet. Beginnings have been made, but no large-scale work has been done, so far. Still, the principle—"

"Is sound?"

"Yes, sir. I imagine—"

"Cut that! You aren't paid for imagining!" interrupted the Billionaire, stabbing at him with that characteristic gesture. "Just what do you know about it? No technicalities, mind! Essentials, that's all, and in a few words!"

"Well, sir," answered Herzog, plucking up a little courage under this pointed goading, "so far as the fixation of atmospheric nitrogen goes, more progress has been made in England and Scandinavia, than here. They're working on it, over there, to obtain cheap and plentiful fertilizer from the air. Nitrogen *can* be obtained from the air, even now, and made into fertilizers even cheaper than the Chili saltpeter. Oxygen is liberated as a by-product, and—"

"Oh, it is, eh? And could it be saved? In liquid form for instance?"

"I think so, sir. The Siemens & Halske interests, in Germany, are doing it already, on a limited scale. In Norway and Austria, nitrogen has been manufactured from air, for some years."

"On a paying, commercial basis?" demanded Flint, while Waldron, now a trifle less scornful, seemed to listen with more interest as his eyes rested on the rotund form of the scientist.

"Yes, sir, quite so," answered Herzog. "It's commercially feasible, though not a very profitable business at best. The gas is utilized in chemical combination with a substantial base, and—"

"No matter about that, just yet," interrupted Flint. "We can have details later. Do you know of any such business as yet, in the United States?"

"Well, sir, there's a plant building at Great Falls, South Carolina, for the purpose. It is to run by waterpower and will develop 5000 H.P."

"Hear that, Waldron?" demanded the Billionaire. "It's already beginning even here! But not one of these plants is working for what I see as the prime possibility. No imagination, no grasp on the subject! No wonder most inventors and scientists die poor! They incubate ideas and then lack the warmth to hatch them into general application. It takes men like us, Wally—practical men—to turn the trick!" He spoke a bit rapidly, almost feverishly, under the influence of the subtle drug. "Now if we take hold of this game, why, we can shake the world as it has never yet been shaken! Eh, Waldron? What do you think now?"

Waldron only grunted, non-committally. Flint with a hard glance at his unresponsive partner, once more turned to Herzog.

"See here, now," directed he. "What's the best process now in use?"

"For what, sir?" ventured the timid chemist.

"For the simultaneous production of nitrogen and oxygen, from the atmosphere!"

"Well, sir," he answered, deprecatingly, as though taking a great liberty even in informing his master on a point the master had expressly asked about, "there are three processes. But all operate only on a small scale."

"Who ever told you I wanted to work on a large scale?" demanded Flint, savagely.

"I—er—inferred—beg pardon, sir—I—" And Herzog quite lost himself and floundered hopelessly, while his mismated eyes wandered about the room as though seeking the assurance he so sadly lacked.

"Confine yourself to answering what I ask you," directed Flint, crisply. "You're not paid to infer. You're paid to answer questions on chemistry, and to get results. Remember *that!*"

"Yes, sir," meekly answered the chemist, while Waldron smiled with cynical amusement. He enjoyed nothing so delightedly as any grilling of an employee, whether miner, railroad man, clerk, ship's captain or what-not. This baiting, by Flint, was a rare treat to him.

"Go on," commanded the Billionaire, in a badgering tone. "What are the processes?" He eyed Herzog as though the man had been an ox, a dog or even some inanimate object, coldly and with narrow-lidded condescension. To him, in truth, men were no more than Shelley's "plow or sword or spade" for his own purpose—things to serve him and to be ruled—or broken—as best served his ends. "Go on! Tell me what you know; and no more!"

"Yes, sir," ventured Herzog. "There are three processes to extract nitrogen and oxygen from air. One is by means of what the German scientists call *Kalkstickstoff*, between calcium carbide and nitrogen, and the reaction-symbols are —"

"No matter," Flint waived him, promptly. "I don't care for formulas or details. What I want is results and general principles. Any other way to extract these substances, in commercial quantities, from the air we breathe?"

"Two others. But one of these operates at a prohibitive cost. The other—"

"Yes, yes. What is it?" Flint slid off the edge of the table and walked over to Herzog; stood there in front of him, and bored down at him with eager eyes, the pupils contracted by morphine, but very bright. "What's the best way?"

"With the electric arc, sir," answered the chemist, mopping his brow. This grilling method reminded him of what he had heard of "Third Degree" torments. "That's the best method, sir."

"Now in use, anywhere?"

"In Notodden, Norway. They have firebrick furnaces, you understand, sir, with an alternating current of 5000 volts between water-cooled copper electrodes. The resulting arc is spread by powerful electro-magnets, so." And he illustrated with his eight acid-stained fingers. "Spread out like a disk or sphere of flame, of electric fire, you see."

"Yes, and what then?" demanded Flint, while his partner, forgetting now to smile, sat there by the window scrutinizing him. One saw, now, the terribly keen and prehensile intellect at work under the mask of assumed foppishness and jesting



indifference—the quality, for the most part masked, which had earned Waldron the nickname of "Tiger" in Wall Street.

"What then?" repeated Flint, once more levelling that potent forefinger at the sweating Herzog.

"Well, sir, that gives a large reactive surface, through which the air is driven by powerful rotary fans. At the high temperature of the electric arc in air, the molecules of nitrogen and oxygen dissociate into their atoms. The air comes out of the arc, charged with about one per cent. of nitric oxide, and after that—"

"Jump the details, idiot! Can't you move faster than a paralytic snail? What's the final result?"

"The result is, sir," answered Herzog, meek and cowed under this harrying, "that calcium nitrate is produced, a very excellent fertilizer. It's a form of nitrogen, you see, directly obtained from air."

"At what cost?"

"One ton of fixed nitrogen in that form costs about \$150 or \$160."

"Indeed?" commented Flint. "The same amount, combined in Chile saltpeter, comes to—?"

"A little over \$300, sir."

"Hear that, Wally?" exclaimed the Billionaire, turning to his now interested associate. "Even if this idea never goes a step farther, there's a gold mine in just the production of fertilizer from air! But, after all, that will only be a by-product. It's the oxygen we're after, and must have!"

He faced Herzog again.

"Is any oxygen liberated, during the process?" he demanded.

"At one stage, yes, sir. But in the present process, it is absorbed, also."

Flint's eyebrows contracted nervously. For a moment he stood thinking, while Herzog eyed him with trepidation, and Waldron, almost forgetting to smoke, waited developments with interest. The Billionaire, however, wasted but scant time in consideration. It was not money now, he lusted for, but power. Money was, to him, no longer any great desideratum. At most, it could now mean no more to him than a figure on a check-book or a page of statistics in his private memoranda. But power, unlimited, indisputable power over the whole earth and the fulness thereof, power which none might dispute, power before which all humanity must bow—God! the lust of it now gripped and shook his soul.

Paling a little, but with eyes ablaze, he faced the anxious scientist.

"Herzog! See here!"

"Yes, sir?"

"I've got a job for you, understand?"

"Yes, sir. What is it?"

"A big job, and one on which your entire future depends. Put it through, and I'll do well by you. Fail, and by the Eternal, I'll break you! I can, and will, mark that! Do you get me?"

"I—yes, sir—that is, I'll do my best, and—"

"Listen! You go to work at once, immediately, understand? Work out for me some process, some practicable method by

which the nitrogen and oxygen can both be collected in large quantities from the air. Everything in my laboratories at Oakwood Heights is at your disposal. Money's no object. Nothing counts, now, but *results!*

"I want the process all mapped out and ready for me, in its essential outlines, two weeks from today. If it isn't—" His gesture was a menace. "If it is—well, you'll be suitably rewarded. And no leaks, now. Not a word of this to any one, understand? If it gets out, you know what I can do to you, and will! Remember Roswell; remember Parker Hayes. *They* let news get to the Dillingham-Saunders people, about the new Tezzoni radio-electric system—and one's dead, now, a suicide; the other's in Sing-Sing for eighteen years. Remember that—and keep your mouth shut!"

"Yes, sir. I understand."

"All right, then. A fortnight from today, report to me here. And mind you, have something to report, or—!"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well! Now, go!"

Thus dismissed, Herzog gathered together his books and papers, blinked a moment with those peculiar wall-eyes of his, arose and, bowing first to Flint and then to the keenly-watching Waldron, backed out of the office.

When the door had closed behind him, Flint turned to his partner with a nervous laugh.

"That's the way to get results, eh?" he exclaimed. "No dilly-dallying and no soft soap; but just lay the lash right on, hard—they jump then, the vermin! Results! That fellow will work his head off, the next two weeks; and there'll be something doing when he comes again. You'll see!"

Waldron laughed nonchalantly. Once more the mask of indifference had fallen over him, veiling the keen, incisive interest he had shown during the interview.

"Something doing, yes," he drawled, puffing his cigar to a glow. "Only I advise you to choose your men. Some day you'll try that on a real man—one of the rough-necks you know, and—"

Flint snapped his fingers contemptuously, gazed at Waldron a moment with unwinking eyes and tugged at his mustache.

"When I need advice on handling men, I'll ask for it," he rapped out. Then, glancing at the Louis XIV clock: "Past the time for that C.P.S. board-meeting, Wally. No more of this, now. We'll talk it over at the Country Club, tonight; but for the present, let's dismiss it from our minds."

"Right!" answered the other, and arose, yawning, as though the whole subject were of but indifferent interest to him. "It's all moonshine, Flint. All a pipe-dream. Defoe's philosophers, who spent their lives trying to extract sunshine from cucumbers, never entertained any more fantastic notion than this of yours. However, it's your funeral, not mine. You're paying for it. I decline to put in any funds for any such purpose. Amuse yourself; you've got to settle the bill."

Flint smiled sourly, his gold tooth glinting, but made no answer.

"Come along," said his partner, moving toward the door. "They're waiting for us, already, at the board meeting. And there's big business coming up, today—that strike situation, you remember. Slade's going to be on deck. We've got to decide, at once, whether or not we're going to turn him loose on the miners, to smash that gang of union thugs and Socialist fanatics, and do it right. *That's* a game worth

playing, Flint; but this Air Trust vagary of yours—stuff and nonsense!"

Flint, for all reply, merely cast a strange look at his partner, with those strongly-contracted pupils of his; and so the two vultures of prey betook themselves to the board room where already, round the long rosewood table, Walter Slade of the Cosmos Detective Company was laying out his strike-breaking plans to the attentive captains of industry.

## **CHAPTER IV.**

### **AN INTERLOPER.**

On the eleventh day after this interview between the two men who, between them, practically held the whole world in their grasp, Herzog telephoned up from Oakwood Heights and took the liberty of informing Flint that his experiments had reached a point of such success that he prayed Flint would condescend to visit the laboratories in person.

Flint, after some reflection, decided he would so condescend; and forthwith ordered his limousine from his private garage on William Street. Thereafter he called Waldron on the 'phone, at his Fifth Avenue address.

"Mr. Waldron is not up, yet, sir," a carefully-modulated voice answered over the wire. "Any message I can give him, sir?"

"Oh, hello! That you, Edwards?" Flint demanded, recognizing the suave tones of his partner's valet.

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Tell Waldron I'll call for him in half an hour with the limousine. And mind, now, I want him to be up and dressed! We're going down to Staten Island. Got that?"

"Yes, sir. Any other message, sir?"

"No. But be sure you get him up, for me! Good-bye!"

Thirty minutes later, Flint's chauffeur opened the door of the big limousine, in front of the huge Renaissance pile that Waldron's millions had raised on land which had cost him more than as though he had covered it with double eagles; and Flint himself ascended the steps of Pentelican marble.