

The Yellow God

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Ten minutes later the splendid, two thousand guinea motor brougham drew up at the offices of the "Judge," and the obsequious motor-footman bowed Major Vernon through its rather grimy doorway. Within, a small boy in a kind of box asked his business, and when he heard his name, said that the "Guv'nor" had sent down word that he was to go up at once—third floor, first to the right and second to the left. So up he went, and reached the indicated locality.

"Now, then, Alan, what is it? I have a quarter of an hour at your service."

"It is about that Sahara flotation, Mr. Jackson," he began, rather doubtfully.

The old editor's massive face darkened. "The Sahara flotation! That accursed—" and he ceased abruptly. "What have you, of all people in the world, got to do with it? Oh! I remember. Someone told me you had gone into partnership with Aylward, the company promoter, and that little beast, Champers-Haswell, who really is the clever one. Well, set it out, set it out."

"It seems, Mr. Jackson, that 'The Judge' has refused not only our article but also the advertisement of the company. I don't know much about this side of the affair myself, but Sir Robert asked me if I would come round and see if things couldn't be arranged."

"You mean that the man sent you to try and work on me because he knew that I used to be intimate with your family. Well, it is a poor errand and will have a poor end. You can't—no one on earth can, while I sit on this chair, not even my proprietors."

There was silence, broken at last by Alan, who remarked awkwardly:

"If that is so, I must not take up your time any longer."

"I said that I would give you a quarter of an hour, and you have only been here four minutes. Now, if you will take my advice, you'll go out of this business as soon as you can."

"Why?"

"Because, Alan Vernon, I am sure you don't want to see your name dragged in the dirt, any more than I do." He fumbled in a drawer and produced a typewritten sheet. "Take that," he said, "and study it at your leisure. It's a sketch of the financial career of Messrs. Aylward and Champers-Haswell, also of the companies which they have promoted and been connected with, and what has happened to them and to those who invested in them. A man got it out for me yesterday, and I'm going to use it. As regards this Sahara thing, you think it all right, and so it is from an engineering point of view, but you will never live to see that sea which the British public is going to be asked to find so many millions to make. Look here. We have only three minutes more, so I will come to the point at once. It's Turkish territory, isn't it? And putting aside everything else, the security for the whole thing is a Firman from the Sultan?"

"Yes, Sir Robert Aylward and Haswell procured it in Constantinople. I have seen the document."

"Indeed, and are you well acquainted with the Sultan's signature? I know when they were there last autumn that potentate was very ill—"

"You mean," said Major Vernon, looking up.

"I mean, Alan, that I like not the security. I won't say any more as there is a law of libel in this land. 'The Judge' has certain sources of information. It may be that no pro-

test will be made at once, for bak-sheesh can stop it for a while, but sooner or later the protest or repudiation will come, and perhaps some international bother; also much scandal."

CHAPTER II.

THE YELLOW GOD.

Alan Vernon walked thoughtfully down the lead-covered stairs, hustled by eager gentlemen hurrying up to see the great editor whose bell was already ringing furiously, and was duly ushered by the obsequious assistant-chauffeur back into the luxurious motor. There was an electric lamp in this motor, and by the light of it, his mind being perplexed, he began to read the typewritten document given to him by Mr. Jackson, which he still held in his hand.

As it chanced, they were blocked for a quarter of an hour near the Mansion House, so that he found time, if not to master it, at least to gather enough of its contents to make him open his brown eyes very wide before the motor pulled up at the granite doorway of his office. Alan descended silently, and with a firm step walked straight into Sir Robert Aylward's room.

"How did you get on with Jackson, Vernon?" Sir Robert asked.

"I did not get on at all. He will not touch the thing on any terms, and indeed means to oppose it tooth and nail."

"Then he will find himself in a minority when the articles come out to-morrow. Of course it is a bore, but we are strong enough to snap our fingers at him."

Alan felt that the crisis had come. He must speak now or for ever hold his peace; indeed, Aylward was already looking round for his hat.

"Sir Robert," he broke in rather nervously, "I have something to say to you, something unpleasant," and he paused.

"Then please say it at once, Vernon. I want to dress for dinner; I am going to the theatre to-night, and must dine early," replied Aylward, in a voice of the utmost unconcern.

"It is," went on Alan with a rush, "that I do not like the lines upon which this business is being worked, and I wish to give up my interest in it and retire from the firm, as I have a right to do under our deed of partnership."

"Perhaps, Vernon, you remember that you hold over 1,700 of the Syndicate shares which we have worked up to £18, and think it wise to capture the profit in sight; generally speaking, a very sound principle."

"You are mistaken, Sir Robert," replied Alan flushing. "The way that those shares have been artificially put up is one of the things to which I most object. I shall only ask for mine the face value of £1 which I paid for them."

What is called an awkward pause ensued; in fact, it was a very awkward pause.

Mr. Champers-Haswell, who was present, remarked that the weather was very cold for April, and Alan agreed with him, while Sir Robert found his hat and brushed it with his sleeve. Then Mr. Haswell, in desperation—for in minor matters he was a kindly sort of man who disliked scenes and unpleasantness—muttered something as to seeing him—Alan—at the Court in Hertfordshire from Saturday to Monday.

"That was the arrangement," answered Alan bluntly, "but possibly, after what has happened, you will not wish that it should be kept."

"Oh! why not, why not?" said Mr. Haswell. "Sunday is a day of rest, when we make it a rule not to talk business, and if we did, perhaps we

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