

BOULET THE MOON.

CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

To the north "Susquehanna" had been... CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

After the departure of Captain Blombery, the lieutenant and some officers were standing together on the poop.

At that moment it was seventeen minutes past one in the morning; Lieutenant Blombery was preparing to leave the watch and return to his cabin.

As the moon rose, the highest regions of the sky were lit up with a brilliant light.

"They have been gone ten days," said Lieutenant Blombery at last.

"What has become of them?"

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Some minutes later a fourth telegram was sent out—the first to the Naval Secretary at Washington.

The second to the Vice-President of the Gun Club, Baltimore; the third to the Hon. J. T. Maston, Long's Peak, Rocky Mountains; the fourth to the Sub-Director of the Cambridge Observatory, Massachusetts.

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Before six in the evening the different States of the Union had heard the great catastrophe, and after midnight, by the cable, the whole of Europe knew the result of the great American experiment.

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And they did go quick. They fitted up the "Susquehanna" for her new destination. Her powerful machinery was brought to bear upon the hauling-chains.

The aluminum projectile only weighed 19,250 lbs., a weight very inferior to that of the trans-atlantic cable which had been drawn up under similar conditions.

The only difficulty was in fishing up a cylindrical projectile, the walls of which were as smooth as ice, and had no hold for the hooks.

On that account engineer Murchison hastened to San Francisco, and had some enormous grappling-irons fixed on an automatic system, which would never let the projectile go if it once succeeded in seizing it in its powerful claws.

They were also prepared, which during this impetuous covering allowed the divers to observe the bottom of the sea.

He also had put on board an apparatus of compressed air very cleverly designed. There were perfect chambers provided with scuttles, which with water let down into great depths. These apparatuses were at San Francisco, where they had been used in the construction of a submarine break-water; and very fortunately it was so, for there was no time to construct any. But in spite of the perfection of the machinery, in spite of the ingenuity of the savants entrusted with the use of them, the success of the operation was far from being certain.

How great were the chances against them, the projectile being 20,000 feet under the water! And if even it was brought to the surface, how would the travelers have borne the terrible shock which 20,000 feet under water had perhaps not sufficiently broken? At any rate they must quicken. J. T. Maston hurried the workmen day and night. He was ready to don the diving-dress himself, or try his apparatus, in order to reconnoitre the situation of his courageous friends.

But in spite of all diligence displayed in preparing the different engines, in spite of the considerable sum placed at the disposal of the Gun Club by the Government of the Union, five days (six centuries) elapsed before the preparations were complete.

During this time public opinion was excited to the highest pitch. Telegrams were exchanged incessantly throughout the entire world by means of wires and electric cables.

The distinguished astronomer, Barbicane, Nichol, and Michel Ardan was an international affair. Every one who had subscribed to the Gun Club was directly interested in the welfare of the travelers.

At length the hauling-chains, the arch-anchors, and the automatic grappling-irons were put on board. J. T. Maston, Engineer Murchison, and the delegation of the Gun Club, were already in their cabins. They had but to start, which they did on the 21st of December, at eight o'clock at night, the corvette meeting with a beautiful sea, a north-easterly wind, and rather sharp cold.

The whole population of San Francisco was gathered on the quay, greatly excited but silent, reserving their hurrahs for the return. Steam was fully up, and the screws of the "Susquehanna" carried them briskly out of the bay.

It is needless to relate the conversations on board between the officers, sailors, and passengers. All these men had but one thought. All these hearts beat under the same emotion. While they were hastening to help them, what were Barbicane and his companions doing? What had become of them? Were they able to attempt any bold manoeuvre to regain their liberty? None could say. The truth is that every attempt must have failed! Immersed nearly four miles under the ocean, this metal prison defied every effort of its prisoners.

On the 23rd inst., at eight in the morning, after a rapid passage, the "Susquehanna" was due at the fatal spot. They must wait till twelve to take the reckoning exactly. The buoy to which the sounding line had been lashed had not yet been recognized.

At twelve, Captain Blombery, assisted by his officers who superintended the observations, took the reckoning in the presence of the delegates of the Gun Club. Then there was a moment of anxiety. Here position decides the fate of the "Susquehanna" was found to be some minutes to westward of the spot where the projectile had disappeared beneath the waves.

The ship's course was then changed so as to reach this exact point. At forty-seven minutes past twelve they reached the buoy, it was in perfect condition, and must have shifted but little.

"At last!" exclaimed J. T. Maston. "Shall we begin?" asked Captain Blombery.

"Without losing a second." "TO BE CONTINUED."

CHAPTER XVII. RECOVERED BY SEA.

The spot where the projectile sank under the waves was exactly known; but machinery to grasp it and bring it to the surface of the ocean was still wanting. It must first be invented, then made. American engineers could not be troubled with such trifles. The grappling-irons once fixed, it by their weight they were sure to rise in spite of its weight, which was lessened by the density of the liquid in which it was plunged.

But fishing up the projectile was not the only thing to be thought of. They must act promptly in the interest of the travelers. No one doubted that they were still living.

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