



By J. H. BROWN.

(CONCLUDED.)

"I think the great explorers have yet to be born. Oceans were measureless—they have been crossed. What has enabled man to do it? Science. Think you that if we had the knowledge there is aught that men could not do? First you have dreams, then thoughts about things, then man fulfils his dreams and acts out his thoughts. At present our thoughts travel beyond the fixed stars. Believe me, we shall one day follow them. Is that so very wonderful? What do we need to do it? A little knowledge! Nature, the Sphinx, stands ready to render up her secrets; but we must guess, we must enquire. You talk of the difficulties? Ah yes, difficulties are infinite, but so are conquests over them. Man is fated to go on. But his limited power of adaptation, I hear you remark. Is there any limit to his power of adaptation, I ask. To what varieties of circumstance and condition has he not already adapted himself? What is life but a continued process of adaptation. He cannot now breathe pure ether? He will learn to do so. A compromise will be effected. He must let science take him by the hand. She has made fire, water and electricity his servants. Think you the ether will prove less accommodating? The insoluble problem of sailing it, as you may see, I have solved. This bird that carries you has wings that would take us to Sirius. I am assure of this as Columbus was of his Western continent—as sure as were Adams and Leverrier of the existence of the undiscovered planet of Neptune.

"It is not so wonderful," continued Hermann. "In the infinite there is neither great nor small. Aided by their glimmering intelligence, our semi-savage ancestors learned to cross small, and then larger, streams; to move over hills and mountains; to extend their sway. Even the pathless ocean, with its far-scattered islands, could not shut them in. Braving danger and disaster they still journeyed on. It must always be so. I can as easily believe that mankind will again dwindle to a gipsy clan, as that the shores of earth can hold in their narrow compass this ever-yearning, ever-restless spirit."

"Now it must be time to descend," I said, starting and shaking myself from what seemed almost a dream. "What is our present attitude?"

"We are at this moment 15,000 miles from earth," said Hermann, quietly. "During the last half hour we have been going at the moderate pace of 10,000 miles an hour."

"I was aghast. Gertrude only smiled. "Do you mean to say," I cried, "that we are outside the earth's atmosphere and are still ascending?"

"Exactly so," he replied.

"Seeing my look of horror he went on,— 'You see you are perfectly comfortable—we are all perfectly comfortable. Why should we not have come? I have not broken faith with you, for I can still put you back at the spot we started from in three minutes. I knew the "Nautilus" could do it—and we have done it.'

"And have you no fear—no anxiety?" I asked. "Not a particle," he replied. "I know how much pressure the ship will stand. I know the element we travel, and that we are in all things provided for."

"We must return at once," I said, rising and seating myself at Gertrude's side.

"Are you not all afraid, dearest?" I asked her. "No, I feel quite happy and content," she answered. "I think I shall go to sleep."

"As to returning," said Hermann, "that shall be as you wish. We have, however, just doubled our rate of speed, and if you take my advice we shall continue our journey."

"Continue our journey! Continue our journey whither?" I demanded.

"To the goal of my ambition; to the glorious planet—to Mars."

"Surely you are mad," I declared.

"Look out," was his answer, "in that direction."

"We glanced downward, a little to our right. The sky was bright with stars.

"In the direction indicated was what seemed a large cloud, chiefly light, but dark in parts.

"What is that?" Gertrude and I asked together.

"That is the earth." And now look above. "Do you see that beautiful star? The large reddish one?"

"Yes."

"That is Mars. Now, you see you are far from the earth. But I can take you to it, as I said, in three minutes. I can take you to Mars in three hours. Don't you want to be the first to be caressed by its happy breezes, to look upon its hills and valleys, to meet the dwellers in that island of the blest?"

"I dare say they are no better off than ourselves," said Gertrude. "But it seems to me we may as well go on. Only a few hours—and how astonished, how delighted our friends will be! And how the world will be electrified. Only think of the newspapers! Don't you think we ought to go, Rudolph?"

"Of course we ought to go," said Hermann, breaking in,— "If you decide to return, I shall take you back, but to-morrow I shall start out alone. I am determined to do this thing. I can do it easily; but I should like you two, of all persons in the world, to step with we upon Mars."

"But you cannot possibly make this step," I urged. "The planet's attraction would draw us with such frightful velocity that we should all be dust as soon as we touched it."

"How did you suppose then that we could return to the earth?" asked Hermann in surprise. "Why, we can resist the attraction. That was one of the first things to be accomplished. O no, I don't run to destruction in that easy way."

"And you can reach Mars in three hours?" I said, wavering.

"In just two hours and forty-five minutes"—he looked at his watch—"you may have done what no one else has done."

"Say yes, Rudolph," Gertrude murmured. "She seemed very snug and comfortable, and was already half asleep. I felt that it would be almost unkind to oppose her."

"In heaven's name let us do it," I said, relapsing into my seat. "Not for our own sakes, but for the sake of advancing knowledge and the race to which we belong."

"That's the way to regard it," said Hermann, beaming with pleasure. "We shall be all right. If we don't like Mars we can start for home at once."

"And now, don't you too want a little nap?" he added. "Gertrude you see is slumbering peacefully. I shall keep watch. If you sleep long enough you may awake on the red planet."

"Drowsiness had been closing in upon me. I therefore acquiesced willingly in his suggestion, and settled myself in an easy position. A few minutes later I was in the land of dreams."

"It seemed to me that I had scarcely fallen asleep when I became conscious of a hand gently stroking my hair, and awaking, I found Gertrude at my side. Hermann was sitting peering through one of the circular glasses."

"We are almost there," said Gertrude, as I started to my feet. "I knew you would wish to witness our arrival, though Hermann wanted to land first and then surprise you."

"By this time we were both at Hermann's side and gazing eagerly out."

"There was the earth again below us, the same and yet not the same."

"Is this Mars?" I asked, rubbing my eyes and glancing at Hermann, who had not changed his position of keen observation."

"This is Mars—this is the new world," he answered, without moving a muscle."

"Our three faces were immediately glued to the glass. It was a beautiful morning, and we were not a mile from the planet. Each moment objects became more and more distinct. The region we were approaching seemed a fairly level, populous tract of country. Here were the familiar meandering streams, the wooded hills, the clustering villages and towns. There was a striking difference, however, from the earth we remembered. Here the air was suffused with an extremely delicate crimson, which when attenuated became blue. The fields seemed green, but it was not the greenness of our own planet. It was a colour which suggested the rosebush in crowded blossom. It was green with a curious blending of the rarest pink. It made us think of 'climes of the East and of lands of the sun.' It was strangely beautiful, but we could not at once prefer it to our own sweet harmony of emerald and azure."

"We appeared to be descending in the centre of a large city. Hermann steered for an open space