

Allan took Hobby's place. The silence was oppressive. The streets down below buzzed unceasingly. All eyes were turned towards the speaker. So this was the man who had the extraordinary proposal to put before them. Maud's lips were wide apart from suspense and anxiety. Allan allowed his gaze to wander round his audience quietly, and no one could have guessed from his outward demeanour how nervous he felt. It would be no easy matter to face such a group of listeners, and he was better at anything than at speaking. It was indeed the first time he had ever addressed a large and important gathering. But his voice rang out clear and strong when he began.

He started off by declaring that he was afraid, in view of the kind things Mr. Lloyd had said about his scheme, that they might be disappointed by what he had to put before them. His project did not deserve to be called a bigger thing than the Panama Canal or Sir William Rogers' Park Street Bridge, connecting India and Ceylon. In fact, it was really a simple project enough.

At this point he took a piece of chalk out of one of the pockets of his white trousers and drew two lines on a blackboard, standing just behind him. Here was America and here was Europe. He undertook within a period of fifteen years to construct a submarine tunnel between the two continents, through which trains could run from the one to the other in twenty-four hours. That was his scheme.

The photographers chose this moment for their first flash-light snapshots, and Allan had to pause for a few seconds before continuing. Exclamations came up from the streets—the crowds had realized that the battle had begun.

It seemed at first as though Allan's epoch-making proposal—sensational enough even in our go-ahead era—had not impressed his hearers in the slightest degree. Many of them were undoubtedly disappointed. This was no new idea to them—they had often heard it sketched out before. It was "in the air" like so many projects—and it was one which had never been put forward without evoking derision. Among these financiers there were some who earned more money while winding their watch than most men could earn in a