

A VISIT TO THE MOON

BY

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When the Astronef rose from the ground to commence her marvellous voyage through the hitherto untraversed realms of Space, Lord Redgrave and his bride were standing at the forward-end of a raised deck which ran along about two-thirds of the length of the cylindrical body of the vessel. The walls of this compartment, which was about fifty feet long by twenty broad, were formed of thick, but perfectly transparent, toughened glass, over which, in cases of necessity, curtains of ribbed steel could be drawn from the floor, which was of teak and slightly convex. A light steel rail ran round it and two stairways ran up from the other deck of the vessel to two hatches, one fore and one aft, destined to be hermetically closed when the Astronef had soared beyond breathable atmosphere and was crossing the airless, heatless wastes of interplanetary space.

Lord and Lady Redgrave and Andrew Murgatroyd were the only members of the crew of the Star-navigator. No more were needed, for on board this marvellous craft nearly everything was done by machinery; warming, lighting, cooking, distillation and re-distillation of water, constant and automatic purification of the air, everything, in fact, but the regulation of the mysterious "R. Force" could be done with a minimum of human attention. This, however, had to be minutely and carefully regulated, and her commander usually performed this duty himself.

The developing engines were in the lowest part of the vessel amidships. Their minimum power just sufficed to make the Astronef a little lighter than her own bulk of air, so that when she visited a planet possessing an atmosphere sufficiently dense, the two propellers at her stern would be capable of driving her through the air at the rate of about a hundred miles an hour. The maximum power would have sufficed to hurl the vessel beyond the limits of the earth's atmosphere in a few minutes.

When they had risen to the height of about a mile above New York, her ladyship, who had been gazing in silent wonder and admiration at the strange and marvellous scene, pointed suddenly towards the East and said: "Look, there's the moon! Just fancy—our first stopping-place! Well, it doesn't look so very far off at present."

Redgrave turned and saw the pale yellow crescent of the new moon just rising above the eastern edge of the Atlantic Ocean.

"It almost looks as if we could steer straight to it right over the water, only, of course, it wouldn't wait there for us," she went on.

"Oh, it'll be there when we want it, never fear," laughed his lordship, "and, after all, it's only a mere matter of about two hundred and forty thousand miles away, and what's that in a trip that will cover hundreds of millions? It will just be a sort of jumping-off place into space for us."

"Still I shouldn't like to miss seeing it," she said. "I want to know what there is on that other side which nobody has ever seen yet, and settle that question about air and water. Won't it just be heavenly to be able to come back and tell them all about it at home? But fancy me talking stuff like this when we are going, perhaps, to solve some of the hidden mysteries of Creation and, maybe, to look upon things that human eyes were never meant to see," she went on, with a sudden change in her voice.

He felt a little shiver in the arm that was resting upon his, and his hand went down and caught hers.

"Well, we shall see a good many marvels, and, perhaps, miracles, before we come back, but I hardly think we shall see anything that is forbidden. Still, there's one thing we shall do, I hope. We shall solve once and for all the great problem of the worlds—whether they are inhabited or not. By the way," he went on, "I may remind your ladyship that you are just now drawing the last breaths of earthly air which you will taste for some time, in fact until we get back! You may as well take your last look at earth as earth, for the next time you see it, it will be a planet."

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She went to the rail and looked over into the enormous void beneath, for all this time the Astronef had been mounting towards the zenith. She could see, by the growing moonlight, vast, vague shapes of land and sea. The myriad lights of New York and Brooklyn were mingled in a tiny patch of dimly luminous haze. The air about her had suddenly grown bitterly cold, and she saw that the stars and planets were shining with a brilliancy she had never seen before. Her husband came to her side, and, laying his arm across her shoulder, said:

"Well, have you said goodbye to your native world? It is a bit solemn, isn't it, saying goodbye to a world that you have been born on; which contains everything that has made up your life, everything that is dear to you?"

"Not quite everything!" she said, looking up at him. "At least, I don't think so."

He immediately made the only reply which was appropriate under the circumstances; and then he said, drawing her towards the staircase: "Well, for the present this is our world; a world travelling among worlds, and as I have been able to bring the most delightful of the Daughters of Terra with me, I, at any rate, am perfectly happy. Now, I think it's getting on to supper time, so if your ladyship will go to your household duties, I'll have a look at my engines and make everything snug for the voyage."

The first thing he did when he got on to the main deck, was to hermetically close the two companion-ways; then he went and carefully inspected the apparatus for purifying the air and supplying it with fresh oxygen from the tanks in which it was stored in liquid form. Lastly he descended into the lower hold of the ship and turned on the energy of repulsion to its full extent, at the same time stopping the engines which had been working the propellers.

It was now no longer necessary or even possible to steer the Astronef. She was directed solely by the repulsive force which would carry her with ever-increasing swiftness, as the attraction of the earth became diminished, towards that neutral point some two hundred thousand miles away, at which the attraction of the earth is exactly balanced by the moon. Her momentum would carry her past this point, and then the "R. Force" would be gradually brought into play in order to avert the unpleasant consequences of a fall of some forty odd thousand miles.

Andrew Murgatroyd, relieved from his duties in the wheelhouse, made a careful inspection of the auxiliary machinery, which was under his special charge, and then retired to his quarters forward to prepare his own evening meal. Meanwhile her ladyship, with the help of the ingenious contrivances with which the kitchen of the Astronef was stocked, and with the use of which she had already made herself quite familiar, had prepared a dainty little souper a deux. Her husband opened a bottle of the finest champagne that the cellars of New York could supply, to drink at once to the prosperity of the voyage, and the health of his beautiful fellow-voyager.

When supper was over and the coffee made he carried the apparatus up the stairs on to the glass-domed upper deck. Then he came back and said:

"You'd better wrap yourself up as warmly as you can, dear, for it's a good deal chillier up there than it is here."

When she reached the deck and took her first glance about her, Zaidie seemed suddenly to lapse into a state of somnambulism. The whole heavens

above and around were strewn with thick clusters of stars which she had never seen before. The stars she remembered seeing from the earth were only little pinpoints in the darkness compared with the myriads of blazing orbs which were now shooting their rays across the silent void of Space. So many millions of new ones had come into view that she looked in vain for the familiar constellations. She saw only vast clusters of living gems of all colours crowding the heavens on every side of her. She walked slowly round the deck, looking to right and left and above, incapable for the moment either of thought or speech, but only of dumb wonder, mingled with a dim sense of overwhelming awe. Presently she craned her neck backwards and looked straight up to the zenith. A huge silver crescent, supporting, as it were, a dim, greenish coloured body in its arms stretched overhead across nearly a sixth of the heavens.

Her husband came to her side, took her in his arms, lifted her as if she had been a little child, so feeble had the earth's attraction now become, and laid her in a long, low deck-chair, so that she could look at it without inconvenience. The splendid crescent grew swiftly larger and more distinct, and as she lay there in a trance of wonder and admiration she saw point after point of dazzlingly white light flash out on to the dark portions, and then begin to send out rays as though they were gigantic volcanoes in full eruption, and were pouring torrents of living fire from their blazing craters.

"Sunrise on the moon!" said Redgrave, who had stretched himself on another chair beside her. "A glorious sight, isn't it! But nothing to what we shall see tomorrow morning—only there doesn't happen to be any morning just about here."

"Yes," she said dreamily, "glorious, isn't it? That and all the stars—but I can't think of anything yet, Lenox! It's all too mighty and too marvellous. It doesn't seem as though human eyes were meant to look upon things like this. But where's the earth? We must be able to see that still."

"Not from here," he said, "because it's underneath us. Come below, and you shall see Mother Earth as you have never seen her yet."

They went down into the lower part of the vessel, and to the after-end behind the engine-room. Redgrave switched on a couple of electric lights, and then pulled a lever attached to one of the side-walls. A part of the flooring, about 6ft. square, slid noiselessly away; then he pulled another lever on the opposite side and a similar piece disappeared, leaving a large space covered only by absolutely transparent glass. He switched off the lights again and led her to the edge of it, and said:

"There is your native world, dear; that is the earth!"

Wonderful as the moon had seemed, the gorgeous spectacle, which lay seemingly at her feet, was infinitely more magnificent. A vast disc of silver grey, streaked and dotted with lines and points of dazzling light, and more than half covered with vast, glittering, greyish-green expanses, seemed to form, as it were the floor of the great gulf of space beneath them. They were not yet too far away to make out the general features of the continents and oceans, and fortunately the hemisphere presented to them happened to be singularly free from clouds.

Zaidie stood gazing for nearly an hour at this marvellous vision of the home-world which she had left so far behind her before she could tear herself away and allow her husband to shut the slides again. The greatly diminished weight of her body almost entirely destroyed the fatigue of standing. In fact, at present on board the Astronef it was almost as easy to stand as it was to lie down.

There was of course very little sleep for any of the travellers on this first night of their adventurous voyage, but towards the sixth hour after leaving the earth her ladyship, overcome as much by the emotions which had been awakened within her as by physical fatigue, went to bed, after making her husband promise that he would wake her in good time to see the descent upon the moon. Two hours later she was awake and drinking the coffee which Redgrave had prepared for her. Then she went on to the upper deck.

To her astonishment she found on one hand, day more brilliant than she had ever seen it before, and on the other hand, darkness blacker than the blackest earthly night. On the right hand was an intensely brilliant orb, about half as large again as the full moon seen from earth, shining with inconceivable brightness out of a sky black as midnight and thronged with stars. It was the sun, the sun shining in the midst of airless space.

The tiny atmosphere inclosed in the glass-domed space was lighted brilliantly, but it was not perceptibly warmer, though Redgrave warned her ladyship not to touch anything upon which the sun's rays fell directly as she would find it uncomfortably hot. On the other side was the same black immensity of space which she had seen the night before, an ocean of darkness clustered with islands of light. High above in the zenith floated the great silver-grey disc of earth, a good deal smaller now, and there was another object beneath which was at present of far more interest to her. Looking down to the left she saw a vast semi-luminous area in which not a

star was to be seen. It was the earth-lit portion of the long familiar and yet mysterious orb which was to be their resting-place for the next few hours.

"The sun hasn't risen over there yet," said Redgrave, as she was peering down into the void. "It's earth-light still. Now look at the other side."

She crossed the deck and saw the strangest scene she had yet beheld. Apparently only a few miles below her was a huge crescent-shaped plain arching away for hundreds of miles on either side. The outer edge had a ragged look, and little excrescences, which soon took the shape of flat-topped mountains projected from it and stood out bright and sharp against the black void beneath, out of which the stars shone up, as it seemed, sharp and bright above the edge of the disc.

The plain itself was a scene of the most awful and utter desolation that even the sombre fancy of a Dante could imagine. Huge mountain walls, towering to immense heights and inclosing great circular and oval plains, one side of them blazing with intolerable light, and the other side black with impenetrable obscurity; enormous valleys reaching down from brilliant day into rayless night—perhaps down into the empty bowels of the dead world itself; vast, grey-white plains lying round the mountains, crossed by little ridges and by long, black lines which could only be immense fissures with perpendicular sides—but all hard grey-white and black, all intolerable brightness or repulsive darkness; not a sign of life anywhere, no shady forests, no green fields, no broad, glittering oceans; only a ghastly wilderness of dead mountains and dead plains.

"What an awful place!" said Zaidie, in a slowly spoken whisper. "Surely we can't land there. How far are we from it?". "About fifteen hundred miles," replied Redgrave, who was sweeping the scene below him with one of the two powerful telescopes which stood on the deck. "No, it doesn't look very cheerful, does it; but it's a marvellous sight for all that, and one that a good many people on earth would give their ears to see from here. I'm letting her drop pretty fast, and we shall probably land in a couple of hours or so. Meanwhile, you may as well get out your moon atlas and your Jules Verne and Flammarion, and study your lunography. I'm going to turn the power a bit astern so that we shall go down obliquely and see more of the lighted disc. We started at new moon so that you should have a look at the full earth, and also so that we could get round to the invisible side while it is lighted up."

They both went below, he to deflect the repulsive force so that one set of engines should give them a somewhat oblique direction, while the other,

acting directly on the surface of the moon, simply retarded their fall; and she to get her maps and the ever-fascinating works of Jules Verne and Flammarion. When they got back, the Astronef had changed her apparent position, and, instead of falling directly on to the moon, was descending towards it in a slanting direction. The result of this was that the sunlit crescent rapidly grew in breadth, whilst peak after peak and range after range rose up swiftly out of the black gulf beyond. The sun climbed quickly up through the star—strewn, mid-day heavens, and the full earth sank more swiftly still behind them.

Another hour of silent, entranced wonder and admiration followed, and then Lenox remarked to Zaidie: "Don't you think it's about time we were beginning to think of breakfast, dear, or do you think you can wait till we land?"

"Breakfast on the moon!" she exclaimed, "That would be just too lovely for words! Of course we'll wait."

"Very well," he said, "you see that big, black ring nearly below us, that, as I suppose you know, is the celebrated Mount Tycho. I'll try and find a convenient spot on the top of the ring to drop on, and then you will be able to survey the scenery from seventeen or eighteen thousand feet above the plains."

About two hours later a slight jarring tremor ran through the frame of the vessel, and the first stage of the voyage was ended. After a passage of less than twelve hours the Astronef had crossed a gulf of nearly two hundred and fifty thousand miles and rested quietly on the untrodden surface of the lunar world.

"We certainly shan't find any atmosphere here," said Redgrave, when they had finished breakfast, "although we may in the deeper parts, so if your ladyship would like a walk we'd better go and put on our breathing dresses."

These were not unlike diving dresses, save that they were much lighter. The helmets were smaller, and made of aluminium covered with asbestos. A sort of knapsack fitted on to the back, and below this was a cylinder of liquefied air which, when passed through the expanding apparatus, would furnish pure air for a practically indefinite period, as the respired air passed into another portion of the upper chamber, where it was forced through a chemical solution which deprived it of its poisonous gases and made it fit to breathe again.

The pressure of air inside the helmet automatically regulated the supply, which was not permitted to circulate into the dress, as the absence of air-pressure on the moon would cause it to instantly expand and probably tear the material, which was a cloth woven chiefly of asbestos fibre. The two helmets could be connected for talking purposes by a light wire communicating with a little telephonic apparatus inside the helmet.

They passed out of the Astronef through an air-tight chamber in the wall of her lowest compartment, Murgatroyd closing the first door behind them. Redgrave opened the next one and dropped a short ladder on to the grey, loose, sand-strewn rock of the little plain on which they had stopped. Then he stood aside and motioned for Zaidie to go down first.

She understood him, and, taking his hand, descended the four easy steps. And so hers was the first human foot which, in all the ages since its creation, had rested on the surface of the World that Had Been. Redgrave followed her with a little spring which landed him gently beside her, then he took both her hands and pressed them hard in his. He would have kissed her if he could; but that of course was out of the question.

Then he connected the telephone wire, and hand in hand they crossed the little plateau towards the edge of the tremendous gulf, fifty-four miles across, and nearly twenty thousand feet deep. In the middle of it rose a conical mountain about five thousand feet high, the summit of which was just beginning to catch the solar rays. Half of the vast plain was already brilliantly illuminated, but round the central cone was a vast semi-circle of shadow impenetrable in its blackness.

"Day and night in this same valley, actually side by side!" said Zaidie. Then she stopped, and pointed down into the brightly lit distance, and went on hurriedly: "Look, Lenox, look at the foot of the mountain there! Doesn't that seem like the ruins of a city?"

"It does," he said, "and there's no reason why it shouldn't be. I've always thought that, as the air and water disappeared from the upper parts of the moon, the inhabitants, whoever they were, must have been driven down into the deeper parts. Shall we go down and see?"

"But how?" she said. He pointed towards the Astronef. She nodded her helmeted head, and they went back to the vessel. A few minutes later the Astronef had risen from her resting-place with a spring which rapidly carried her over half of the vast crater, and then she began to drop slowly into the depths. She grounded as gently as before, and presently they were standing

on the lunar surface about a mile from the central cone. This time, however, Redgrave had taken the precaution to bring a magazine rifle and a couple of revolvers with him in case any strange monsters, relics of the vanished fauna of the moon, might still be taking refuge in these mysterious depths. Zaidie, although like a good many American girls, she could shoot excellently well, carried no weapon more offensive than a whole-plate camera and a tripod, which here, of course, only weighed a sixth of their earthly weight.

The first thing that Redgrave did when they stepped out on to the sandy surface of the plain was to stoop down and strike a wax match; there was a tiny glimmer of light which was immediately extinguished.

"No air here," he said "so we shall find no living beings—at any rate, none like ourselves."

They found the walking exceedingly easy although their boots were purposely weighted in order to counteract to some extent the great difference in gravity. A few minutes' sharp walking brought them to the outskirts of the city. It had no walls, and in fact exhibited no signs of preparations for defence. Its streets were broad and well-paved; and the houses, built of great blocks of grey stone joined together with white cement, looked as fresh and unworn as though they had only been built a few months, whereas they had probably stood for hundreds of thousands of years. They were flat roofed, all of one storey and practically of one type.

There were very few public buildings, and absolutely no attempt at ornamentation was visible. Round some of the houses were spaces which might once have been gardens. In the midst of the city, which appeared to cover an area of about four square miles, was an enormous square paved with flag stones, which were covered to the depth of a couple of inches with a light grey dust, and, as they walked across it, this remained perfectly still save for the disturbance caused by their footsteps. There was no air to support it, otherwise it might have risen in clouds about them.

From the centre of this square rose a huge Pyramid nearly a thousand feet in height, the sole building in the great, silent city which appeared to have been raised as a monument, or, possibly, a temple by the hands of its vanished inhabitants. As they approached this they saw a curious white fringe lying round the steps by which it was approached. When they got nearer they found that this fringe was composed of millions of white-bleached bones and skulls, shaped very much like those of terrestrial men except that the ribs were out of all proportion to the rest of the bones.

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They stopped awe-stricken before this strange spectacle. Redgrave stooped down and took hold of one of the bones, a huge thigh bone. It broke in two as he tried to lift it, and the piece which remained in his hand crumbled instantly to white powder.

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"Whoever they were," said Redgrave "they were giants. When air and water failed above they came down here by some means and built this city. You see what enormous chests they must have had. That would be Nature's last struggle to enable them to breathe the diminishing atmosphere. These, of course, will be the last descendants of the fittest to breathe it; this was their temple, I suppose, and here they came to die—I wonder how many thousand years ago—perishing of heat, and cold, and hunger, and thirst, the last tragedy of a race, which, after all, must have been something like our own."

"It is just too awful for words," said Zaidie. "Shall we go into the temple? That seems one of the entrances up there, only I don't like walking over all those bones."

Her voice sounded very strange over the wire which connected their helmets.

"I don't suppose they'll mind if we do," replied Redgrave, "only we mustn't go far in. It may be full of cross passages and mazes, and we might never get out. Our lamps won't be much use in there, you know, for there's no air. They'll just be points of light, and we shan't see anything but them. It's very aggravating, but I'm afraid there's no help for it. Come along!"

They ascended the steps, crushing the bones and skulls to powder beneath their feet, and entered the huge, square doorway, which looked like a rectangle of blackness against the grey-white of the wall. Even through their asbestos-woven clothing they felt a sudden shock of icy cold. In those few steps they had passed from a temperature of tenfold summer heat into one far below that of the coldest spots on earth. They turned on the electric lamps which were fitted to the breast-plates of their dresses, but they could see nothing save the glow of the lamps. All about them was darkness

impenetrable, and so they reluctantly turned back to the doorway, leaving all the mysteries which the vast temple might contain to remain mysteries to the end of time. They passed down the steps again and crossed the square, and for the next half hour Zaidie, who was photographer to the expedition, was busy taking photographs of the Pyramid with its ghastly surroundings, and a few general views of this strange City of the dead.

Then they went back to the Astronef. They found Murgatroyd pacing up and down under the dome looking about him with serious eyes, but yet betraying no particular curiosity. The wonderful vessel was at once his home and his idol, and nothing but the direct orders of his master would have induced him to leave her even in a world in which there was probably not a living human being to dispute possession of her.

When they had resumed their ordinary clothing, she rose rapidly from the surface of the plain, crossed the encircling wall at the height of a few hundred feet, and made her way at a speed of about fifty miles an hour towards the regions of the South Pole. Behind them to the north-west they could see from their elevation of nearly thirty thousand feet the vast expanse of the Sea of Clouds. Dotted here and there were the shining points and ridges of light, marking the peaks and crater walls which the rays of the rising sun had already touched. Before them and to right and left of them rose a vast maze of crater-rings and huge ramparts of mountain-walls inclosing plains so far below their summits that the light of neither sun nor earth ever reached them.

By directing the force exerted by what might now be called the propelling part of the engines against the mountain masses, which they crossed to right and left and behind, Redgrave was able to take a zigzag course which carried him over many of the walled plains which were wholly or partially lit up by the sun, and in nearly all of the deepest their telescopes revealed what they had found within the crater of Tycho. At length, pointing to a gigantic circle of white light fringing an abyss of utter darkness, he said:

"There is Newton, the greatest mystery of the moon. Those inner walls are twenty-four thousand feet high; that means that the bottom, which has never been seen by human eyes, is about five thousand feet below the surface of the moon. What do you say, dear—shall we go down and see if the searchlight will show us anything? There may be air there.!"

"Certainly!" replied Zaidie decisively, "haven't we come to see things that nobody else has ever seen?"

Redgrave signalled to the engine-room, and presently the Astronef changed her course, and in a few minutes was hanging, bathed in sunlight, like a star suspended over the unfathomable gulf of darkness below.

As they sank beyond the sunlight, Murgatroyd turned on both the head and stern searchlights. They dropped down ever slowly and more slowly until gradually the two long, thin streams of light began to spread themselves out, and by the time the Astronef came gently to a rest they were swinging round her in broad fans of diffused light over a dark, marshy surface, with scattered patches of moss and reeds which showed dull gleams of stagnant water between them.

"Air and water at last!" said Redgrave, as he rejoined his wife on the upper deck, "air and water and eternal darkness! Well, we shall find life on the moon here if anywhere. Shall we go?"

"Of course," replied her ladyship, "what else have we come for? Must we put on the breathing-dresses?"

"Certainly," he replied, "because, although there's air we don't know yet whether it is breathable. It may be half carbon-dioxide for all we know; but a few matches will soon tell us that."

Within a quarter of an hour they were again standing on the surface. Murgatroyd had orders to follow them as far as possible with the head searchlight, which, in the comparatively rarefied atmosphere, appeared to have a range of several miles. Redgrave struck a match, and held it up level with his head. It burnt with a clear, steady, yellow flame.

"Where a match will burn a man can breathe," he said. "I'm going to see what lunar air is like."

"For Heaven's sake be careful, dear," came the reply in pleading tones across the wire.

"All right, but don't open your helmet till I tell you."

He then raised the hermetically-closed slide of glass, which formed the front of the helmets half an inch or so. Instantly he felt a sensation like the drawing of a red-hot iron across his skin. He snapped the visor down and clasped it in its place. For a moment or two he gasped for breath and then he said rather faintly:

"It's no good, it's too cold, it would freeze the blood in our veins. I think we'd better go back and explore this valley under cover. We can't do anything in the dark, and we can see just as well from the upper deck with the searchlights. Besides, as there's air and water here, there's no telling but there may be Inhabitants of sorts such as we shouldn't care to meet."

He took her hand, and, to Murgatroyd's intense relief, they went back to the vessel.

Redgrave then raised the Astronef a couple of hundred feet and, by directing the repulsive force against the mountain walls, developed just sufficient energy to keep them moving at about twelve miles an hour.

They began to cross the plain with their searchlights flashing out in all directions. They had scarcely gone a mile before the headlight fell upon a moving form half walking, half crawling among some stunted brown-leaved bushes by the side of a broad, stagnant stream.

"Look!" said Zaidie, clasping her husband's arm, "is that a gorilla, or —no, it can't be a man."

The light was turned full upon the object. If it had been covered with hair it might have passed for some strange type of the ape tribe, but its skin was smooth and of a livid grey. Its lower limbs were evidently more powerful than its upper; its chest was enormously developed, but the stomach was small. The head was big and round and smooth. As they came nearer they saw that in place of finger-nails it had long white feelers which it kept extended and constantly waving about as it groped its way towards the water. As the intense light flashed full on it, it turned its head towards them. It had a nose and a mouth. The nose was long and thick, with huge mobile nostrils, and the mouth formed an angle something like a fish's lips, and of teeth there seemed none. At either side of the upper part of the nose there were two little sunken holes, in which this thing's ancestors of countless thousand years ago had possessed eyes.

As she looked upon this awful parody of what had once perhaps been a human face, Zaidie covered hers with her hands and uttered a little moan of horror.

"Horrible, isn't it?" said Redgrave. "I suppose that's what the last remnants of the lunarians have come to, evidently once men and women something like ourselves. I daresay the ancestors of that thing have lived here in

coldness and darkness for hundreds of generations. It shows how tremendously tenacious nature is of life.

"Ages ago that awful thing's ancestors lived up yonder when there were seas and rivers, fields and forests just as we have them on earth; men and women who could see and breath and enjoy everything in life and had built up civilisations like ours. Look, it's going to fish or something. Now we shall see what it feeds on. I wonder why that water isn't frozen. I suppose there must be some internal heat left still, split up into patches, I daresay, and lakes of lava. Perhaps this valley is just over one of them, and that's why these creatures have managed to survive. Ah, there's another of them, smaller not so strongly formed. That thing's mate, I suppose, female of the species. Ugh, I wonder how many hundreds of thousands of years it will take for our descendants to come to that."

"I hope our dear old earth will hit something else and be smashed to atoms before that happens!" exclaimed Zaidie, whose curiosity had now partly overcome her horror. "Look, it's trying to catch something."

The larger of the two creatures had groped its way to the edge of the sluggish, foetid water and dropped or rather rolled quietly into it. It was evidently cold-blooded or nearly so, for no warm-blooded animal could have withstood that more than glacial cold. Presently the other dropped in, too, and both disappeared for some minutes. Then suddenly there was a violent commotion in the water a few yards away; and the two creatures rose to the surface of the water, one with a wriggling eel-like fish between its jaws.

They both groped their way towards the edge, and had just reached it and were pulling themselves out when a hideous shape rose out of the water behind them. It was like the head of an octopus joined to the body of a boa-constrictor, but head and neck were both of the same ghastly, livid grey as the other two bodies. It was evidently blind, too, for it took no notice of the brilliant glare of the searchlight. Still it moved rapidly towards the two scrambling forms, its long white feelers trembling out in all directions. Then one of them touched the smaller of the two creatures. Instantly the rest shot out and closed round it, and with scarcely a struggle it was dragged beneath the water and vanished.

Zaidie uttered a little low scream and covered her face again, and Redgrave said: "The same old brutal law again. Life preying upon life even on a dying world, a world that is more than half dead itself. Well, I think we've seen enough of this place. I suppose those are about the only types of life we

should meet anywhere, and one acquaintance with them satisfies me completely. I vote we go and see what the invisible hemisphere is like."

"I have had all I want of this side," said Zaidie, looking away from the scene of the hideous conflict, "so the sooner the better."

A few minutes later the Astronef was again rising towards the stars with her searchlights still flashing down into the Valley of Expiring Life, which seemed worse than the Valley of Death. As he followed the rays with a pair of powerful field glasses, Redgrave fancied that he saw huge, dim shapes moving about the stunted shrubbery and through the slimy pools of the stagnant rivers, and once or twice he got a glimpse of what might well have been the ruins of towns and cities; but the gloom soon became too deep and dense for the searchlights to pierce and he was glad when the Astronef soared up into the brilliant sunlight once more. Even the ghastly wilderness of the lunar landscape was welcome after the nameless horrors of that hideous abyss.

After a couple of hours rapid travelling, Redgrave pointed down to a comparatively small, deep crater, and said:

"There, that is Malapert. It is almost exactly at the south pole of the moon, and there," he went on pointing ahead, "is the horizon of the hemisphere which no earthborn eyes but ours and Murgatroyd's have ever seen."

Contrary to certain ingenious speculations which have been indulged in, they found that the hemisphere, which for countless ages has never been turned towards the earth, was almost an exact replica of the visible one. Fully three- fourths of it was brilliantly illuminated by the sun, and the scene which presented itself to their eyes was practically the same which they had beheld on the earthward side; huge groups of enormous craters and ringed mountains, long, irregular chains crowned with sharp, splintery peaks, and between these vast, deeply depressed areas, ranging in colour from dazzling white to grey- brown, marking the beds of the vanished lunar seas.

As they crossed one of these, Redgrave allowed the Astronef to sink to within a few thousand feet of the surface, and then he and Zaidie swept it with their telescopes. Their chance search was rewarded by what they had not seen in the sea-beds of the other hemisphere. These depressions were far deeper than the others, evidently many thousands of feet deep, but the sun's rays were blazing full into this one, and, dotted round its slopes at

varying elevations, they made out little patches which seemed to differ from the general surface.

"I wonder if those are the remains of cities," said Zaidie. "Isn't it possible that the populations might have built their cities along the seas, and that their descendants may have followed the waters as they retreated, I mean as they either dried up or disappeared into the centre?"

"Very probable indeed, dear," he said, "we'll go down and see."

He diminished the vertically repulsive force a little, and the Astronef dropped slantingly towards the bed of what might once have been the Pacific of the Moon. When they were within about a couple of thousand feet of the surface it became quite plain that Zaidie was correct in her hypothesis. The vast sea-floor was literally strewn with the ruins of countless cities and towns, which had been inhabited by an equally countless series of generations of men and women, who had, perhaps, lived in the days when our own world was a glowing mass of molten rock, surrounded by the envelope of vapours which has since condensed to form its oceans.

The nearer they approached to the central and deepest depression the more perfect the buildings became until, down in the lowest depth, they found a collection of low-built square edifices, scarcely better than huts which had clustered round the little lake into which ages before the ocean had dwindled. But where the lake had been there was now only a depression covered with grey sand and brown rock.

Into this they descended and touched the lunar soil for the last time. A couple of hours' excursion among the houses proved that they had been the last refuge of the last descendants of a dying race, a race which had steadily degenerated just as the successions of cities had done, as the bitter fight for mere existence had become keener and keener until the two last essentials air and water, had failed and then the end had come.

The streets, like the square of the great temple of Tycho, were strewn with myriads and myriads of bones, and there were myriads more scattered round what had once been the shores of the dwindling lake. Here, as elsewhere, there was not a sign or a record of any kind—carving or sculpture.

Inside the great Pyramid of the City of Tycho they might, perhaps, have found something—some stone or tablet which bore the mark of the artist's hand; elsewhere, perhaps, they might have found cities reared by older

ances, which might have rivalled the creations of Egypt and Babylon, but there was no time to look for these. All that they had seen of the dead World had only sickened and saddened them. The untravelled regions of Space peopled by living worlds more akin to their own were before them, and the red disc of Mars was glowing in the zenith among the diamond-white clusters which gemmed the black sky behind him.

More than a hundred millions of miles had to be traversed before they would be able to set foot on his surface, and so, after one last look round the Valley of Death about them Redgrave turned on the full energy of the repulsive force in a vertical direction, and the Astronef leapt upwards in a straight line for her new destination. The unknown hemisphere spread out in a vast plain beneath them, the blazing sun rose on their left, and the brilliant silver orb of the Earth on their right, and so, full of wonder, and yet without regret, they bade farewell to the World that Was The Moon.

A lunar photograph

Photograph illustrating "A Visit To The Moon"

THE END