

## 10. How Rob Served a Mighty King

The new traveling machine was a distinct improvement over the old one, for it carried Rob with wonderful speed across the broad Atlantic.

He fell asleep soon after starting, and only awakened when the sun was high in the heavens. But he found himself whirling along at a good rate, with the greenish shimmer of the peaceful ocean waves spread beneath him far beyond his range of vision.

Being in the track of the ocean steamers it was not long before he found himself overtaking a magnificent vessel whose decks were crowded with passengers. He dropped down some distance, to enable him to see these people more plainly, and while he hovered near he could hear the excited exclamations of the passengers, who focused dozens of marine glasses upon his floating form. This inspection somewhat embarrassed him, and having no mind to be stared at he put on additional speed and soon left the steamer far behind him.

About noon the sky clouded over, and Rob feared a rainstorm was approaching. So he rose to a point considerably beyond the clouds, where the air was thin but remarkably pleasant to inhale and the rays of the sun were not so hot as when reflected by the surface of the water.

He could see the dark clouds rolling beneath him like volumes of smoke from a factory chimney, and knew the earth was catching a severe shower of rain; yet he congratulated himself on his foresight in not being burdened with umbrella or raincoat, since his elevated position rendered him secure from rain-clouds.

But, having cut himself off from the earth, there remained nothing to see except the clear sky overhead and the tumbling clouds beneath; so he took from his pocket the Automatic Record of Events, and watched with breathless interest the incidents occurring in different parts of the world. A big battle was being fought in the Philippines, and so fiercely was it contested that Rob watched its progress for hours, with rapt attention. Finally a brave rally by the Americans sent their foes to the cover of the woods, where they scattered in every direction, only to form again in a deep valley hidden by high hills.

"If only I was there," thought Rob, "I could show that captain where to find the rebels and capture them. But I guess the Philippines are rather out of my way, so our soldiers will never know how near they are to a complete victory."

The boy also found considerable amusement in watching the course of an insurrection in Venezuela, where opposing armies of well-armed men preferred to bluster and threaten rather than come to blows.

During the evening he found that an "important event" was Madame Bernhardt's production of a new play, and Rob followed it from beginning to end with great enjoyment, although he felt a bit guilty at not having purchased a ticket.

"But it's a crowded house, anyway," he reflected, "and I'm not taking up a reserved seat or keeping any one else from seeing the show. So where's the harm? Yet it seems to me if these Records get to be common, as the Demon wishes, people will all stay at home and see the shows, and the poor actors 'll starve to death."

The thought made him uneasy, and he began, for the first time, to entertain a doubt of the Demon's wisdom in forcing such devices upon humanity.

The clouds had now passed away and the moon sent her rays to turn the edges of the waves into glistening showers of jewels.

Rob closed the lid of the wonderful Record of Events and soon fell into a deep sleep that held him unconscious for many hours.

When he awoke he gave a start of surprise, for beneath him was land. How long it was since he had left the ocean behind him he could not guess, but his first thought was to set the indicator of the traveling machine to zero and to hover over the country until he could determine where he was.

This was no easy matter. He saw green fields, lakes, groves and villages; but these might exist in any country. Being still at a great elevation he descended gradually until he was about twenty feet from the surface of the earth, where he paused near the edge of a small village.

At once a crowd of excited people assembled, shouting to one another and pointing towards him in wonder. In order to be prepared for

emergencies Rob had taken the electric tube from his pocket, and now, as he examined the dress and features of the people below, the tube suddenly slipped from his grasp and fell to the ground, where one end stuck slantingly into the soft earth.

A man rushed eagerly towards it, but the next moment he threw up his hands and fell upon his back, unconscious. Others who ran to assist their fallen comrade quickly tumbled into a heap beside him.

It was evident to Rob that the tube had fallen in such a position that the button was being pressed continually and a current of electric fluid issued to shock whoever came near. Not wishing to injure these people he dropped to the ground and drew the tube from the earth, thus releasing the pressure upon the button.

But the villagers had now decided that the boy was their enemy, and no sooner had he touched the ground than a shower of stones and sticks rained about him. Not one reached his body, however, for the Garment of Repulsion stopped their flight and returned them to rattle with more or less force against those who had thrown them--"like regular boomerangs," thought Rob.

To receive their own blows in this fashion seemed so like magic to the simple folk that with roars of fear and pain they ran away in all directions.

"It's no use stopping here," remarked Rob, regretfully, "for I've spoiled my welcome by this accident. I think these people are Irish, by their looks and speech, so I must be somewhere in the Emerald Isle."

He consulted his map and decided upon the general direction he should take to reach England, after which he again rose into the air and before long was passing over the channel towards the shores of England.

Either his map or compass or his calculations proved wrong, for it was high noon before, having changed his direction a half dozen times, he came to the great city of London. He saw at a glance that it would never do to drop into the crowded streets, unless he wanted to become an object of public curiosity; so he looked around for a suitable place to alight.

Near by was a monstrous church that sent a sharp steeple far into the air. Rob examined this spire and saw a narrow opening in the masonry

that led to a small room where a chime of bells hung. He crept through the opening and, finding a ladder that connected the belfry with a platform below, began to descend.

There were three ladders, and then a winding flight of narrow, rickety stairs to be passed before Rob finally reached a small room in the body of the church. This room proved to have two doors, one connecting with the auditorium and the other letting into a side street. Both were locked, but Rob pointed the electric tube at the outside door and broke the lock in an instant. Then he walked into the street as composedly as if he had lived all his life in London.

There were plenty of sights to see, you may be sure, and Rob walked around until he was so tired that he was glad to rest upon one of the benches in a beautiful park. Here, half hidden by the trees, he amused himself by looking at the Record of Events.

"London's a great town, and no mistake," he said to himself; "but let's see what the British are doing in South Africa to-day."

He turned the cylinder to "South Africa," and, opening the lid, at once became interested. An English column, commanded by a brave but stubborn officer, was surrounded by the Boer forces and fighting desperately to avoid capture or annihilation.

"This would be interesting to King Edward," thought the boy. "Guess I'll hunt him up and tell him about it."

A few steps away stood a policeman. Rob approached him and asked:

"Where's the king to-day?"

The officer looked at him with mingled surprise and suspicion.

"'Is Majesty is sojournin' at Marlb'ro 'Ouse, just now," was the reply. "Per'aps you wants to make 'im a wissit," he continued, with lofty sarcasm.

"That's it, exactly," said Rob. "I'm an American, and thought while I was in London I'd drop in on His Royal Highness and say 'hello' to him."

The officer chuckled, as if much amused.

"Hamericans is bloomin' green," he remarked, "so youse can stand for Hamerican, right enough. No other wissitors is such blarsted fools. But yon's the palace, an' I s'pose 'is Majesty'll give ye a 'ot reception."

"Thanks; I'll look him up," said the boy, and left the officer convulsed with laughter.

He soon knew why. The palace was surrounded by a cordon of the king's own life guards, who admitted no one save those who presented proper credentials.

"There's only one thing to do;" thought Rob, "and that's to walk straight in, as I haven't any friends to give me a regular introduction."

So he boldly advanced to the gate, where he found himself stopped by crossed carbines and a cry of "Halt!"

"Excuse me," said Rob; "I'm in a hurry."

He pushed the carbines aside and marched on. The soldiers made thrusts at him with their weapons, and an officer jabbed at his breast with a glittering sword, but the Garment of Repulsion protected him from these dangers as well as from a hail of bullets that followed his advancing figure.

He reached the entrance of the palace only to face another group of guardsmen and a second order to halt, and as these soldiers were over six feet tall and stood shoulder to shoulder Rob saw that he could not hope to pass them without using his electric tube.

"Stand aside, you fellows!" he ordered.

There was no response. He extended the tube and, as he pressed the button, described a semi-circle with the instrument. Immediately the tall guardsmen toppled over like so many tenpins, and Rob stepped across their bodies and penetrated to the reception room, where a brilliant assemblage awaited, in hushed and anxious groups, for opportunity to obtain audience with the king.

"I hope his Majesty isn't busy," said Rob to a solemn-visaged official who confronted him. "I want to have a little talk with him."

"I--I--ah--beg pardon!" exclaimed the astounded master of ceremonies.

"What name, please?"

"Oh, never mind my name," replied Rob, and pushing the gentleman aside he entered the audience chamber of the great king.

King Edward was engaged in earnest consultation with one of his ministers, and after a look of surprise in Rob's direction and a grave bow he bestowed no further attention upon the intruder.

But Rob was not to be baffled now.

"Your Majesty," he interrupted, "I've important news for you. A big fight is taking place in South Africa and your soldiers will probably be cut into mince meat."

The minister strode towards the boy angrily.

"Explain this intrusion!" he cried.

"I have explained. The Boers are having a regular killing-bee. Here! take a look at it yourselves."

He drew the Record from his pocket, and at the movement the minister shrank back as if he suspected it was an infernal machine and might blow his head off; but the king stepped quietly to the boy's side and looked into the box when Rob threw open the lid.

As he comprehended the full wonder of the phenomenon he was observing Edward uttered a low cry of amazement, but thereafter he silently gazed upon the fierce battle that still raged far away upon the African VELD. Before long his keen eye recognized the troops engaged and realized their imminent danger.

"They'll be utterly annihilated!" he gasped. "What shall we do?"

"Oh, we can't do anything just now," answered Rob. "But it's curious to watch how bravely the poor fellows fight for their lives."

The minister, who by this time was also peering into the box, groaned aloud, and then all three forgot their surroundings in the tragedy they were beholding.

Hemmed in by vastly superior numbers, the English were calmly and stubbornly resisting every inch of advance and selling their lives as dearly as possible. Their leader fell pierced by a hundred bullets, and the king, who had known him from boyhood, passed his hand across his

eyes as if to shut out the awful sight. But the fascination of the battle forced him to look again, and the next moment he cried aloud:

"Look there! Look there!"

Over the edge of a line of hills appeared the helmets of a file of English soldiers. They reached the summit, followed by rank after rank, until the hillside was alive with them. And then, with a ringing cheer that came like a faint echo to the ears of the three watchers, they broke into a run and dashed forward to the rescue of their brave comrades. The Boers faltered, gave back, and the next moment fled precipitately, while the exhausted survivors of the courageous band fell sobbing into the arms of their rescuers.

Rob closed the lid of the Record with a sudden snap that betrayed his deep feeling, and the king pretended to cough behind his handkerchief and stealthily wiped his eyes.

"'Twasn't so bad, after all," remarked the boy, with assumed cheerfulness; "but it looked mighty ticklish for your men at one time."

King Edward regarded the boy curiously, remembering his abrupt entrance and the marvelous device he had exhibited.

"What do you call that?" he asked, pointing at the Record with a finger that trembled slightly from excitement.

"It is a new electrical invention," replied Rob, replacing it in his pocket, "and so constructed that events are reproduced at the exact moment they occur."

"Where can I purchase one?" demanded the king, eagerly.

"They're not for sale," said Rob. "This one of mine is the first that ever happened."

"Oh!"

"I really think," continued the boy, nodding sagely, "that it wouldn't be well to have these Records scattered around. Their use would give some folks unfair advantage over others, you know."

"Certainly."

"I only showed you this battle because I happened to be in London at the time and thought you'd be interested."

"It was very kind of you," said Edward; "but how did you gain admittance?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I was obliged to knock over a few of your tall life-guards. They seem to think you're a good thing and need looking after, like jam in a cupboard."

The king smiled.

"I hope you haven't killed my guards," said he.

"Oh, no; they'll come around all right."

"It is necessary," continued Edward, "that public men be protected from intrusion, no matter how democratic they may be personally. You would probably find it as difficult to approach the President of the United States as the King of England."

"Oh, I'm not complaining," said Rob. "It wasn't much trouble to break through."

"You seem quite young to have mastered such wonderful secrets of Nature," continued the king.

"So I am," replied Rob, modestly; "but these natural forces have really existed since the beginning of the world, and some one was sure to discover them in time." He was quoting the Demon, although unconsciously.

"You are an American, I suppose," said the minister, coming close to Rob and staring him in the face.

"Guessed right the first time," answered the boy, and drawing his Character Marking spectacles from his pocket, he put them on and stared at the minister in turn.

Upon the man's forehead appeared the letter "E."

"Your Majesty," said Rob, "I have here another queer invention. Will you please wear these spectacles for a few moments?"

The king at once put them on.



"They are called Character Markers," continued the boy, "because the lenses catch and concentrate the character vibrations radiating from every human individual and reflect the true character of the person upon his forehead. If a letter 'G' appears, you may be sure his disposition is good; if his forehead is marked with an 'E' his character is evil, and you must beware of treachery."

The king saw the "E" plainly marked upon his minister's forehead, but he said nothing except "Thank you," and returned the spectacles to Rob.

But the minister, who from the first had been ill at ease, now became positively angry.

"Do not believe him, your Majesty!" he cried. "It is a trick, and meant to deceive you."

"I did not accuse you," answered the king, sternly. Then he added: "I wish to be alone with this young gentleman."

The minister left the room with an anxious face and hanging head.

"Now," said Rob, "let's look over the record of the past day and see if that fellow has been up to any mischief."

He turned the cylinder of the Record to "England," and slowly the events of the last twenty-four hours were reproduced, one after the other, upon the polished plate.

Before long the king uttered an exclamation. The Record pictured a small room in which were seated three gentlemen engaged in earnest conversation. One of them was the accused minister.

"Those men," said the king in a low voice, while he pointed out the other two, "are my avowed enemies. This is proof that your wonderful spectacles indicated my minister's character with perfect truth. I am grateful to you for thus putting me upon my guard, for I have trusted the man fully."

"Oh, don't mention it," replied the boy, lightly; "I'm glad to have been of service to you. But it's time for me to go."

"I hope you will favor me with another interview," said the king, "for I am much interested in your electrical inventions. I will instruct my guards to admit you at any time, so you will not be obliged to fight your way in."

"All right. But it really doesn't matter," answered Rob. "It's no trouble at all to knock 'em over."

Then he remembered his manners and bowed low before the king, who seemed to him "a fine fellow and not a bit stuck up." And then he walked calmly from the palace.

The people in the outer room stared at him wonderingly and the officer of the guard saluted the boy respectfully. But Rob only smiled in an amused way as he marched past them with his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets and his straw hat tipped jauntily upon the back of his head.