

CHAPTER II

THE YELLOW GOD

Alan Vernon walked thoughtfully down the lead-covered stairs, hustled by eager gentlemen hurrying up to see the great editor, whose bell was already ringing furiously, and was duly ushered by the obsequious assistant-chauffeur back into the luxurious motor. There was an electric lamp in this motor, and by the light of it, his mind being perplexed, he began to read the typewritten document given to him by Mr. Jackson, which he still held in his hand.

As it chanced they were blocked for a quarter of an hour near the Mansion House, so that he found time, if not to master it, at least to gather enough of its contents to make him open his brown eyes very wide before the motor pulled up at the granite doorway of his office. Alan descended from the machine, which departed silently, and stood for a moment wondering what he should do. His impulse was to jump into a bus and go straight to his rooms or his club, to which Sir Robert did not belong, but being no coward, he dismissed it from his mind.

His fate hung in the balance, of that he was well aware. Either he must disregard Mr. Jackson's warning, confirmed as it was by many secret fears and instincts of his own, and say nothing except that he had failed in his mission, or he must take the bull by the horns and break with the firm. To do the latter meant not only a good deal of moral

courage, but practical ruin, whereas if he chose the former course, probably within a fortnight he would find himself a rich man. Whatever Jackson and a few others might say in its depreciation, he was certain that the Sahara flotation would go through, for it was underwritten, of course upon terms, by responsible people, moreover the unissued preferred shares had already been dealt in at a heavy premium. Now to say nothing of the allotment to which he was entitled upon his holding in the parent Syndicate, the proportion of cash due to him as a partner, would amount to quite a hundred thousand pounds. In other words, he, who had so many reasons for desiring money, would be wealthy. After working so hard and undergoing so much that he felt to be humiliating and even degrading, why should he not take his reward and clear out afterwards?

This he remembered he could do, since probably by some oversight of Aylward's, who left such matters to his lawyers, his deed of partnership did not bind him to a fixed term. It could be broken at any moment. To this argument there was only one possible answer, that of his conscience. If once he were convinced that things were not right, it would be dishonest to participate in their profits. And he was convinced. Mr. Jackson's arguments and his damning document had thrown a flood of light upon many matters which he had suspected but never quite understood. He was the partner of, well, adventurers, and the money which he received would in fact be filched from the pockets of unsuspecting persons. He would vouch for that of which he was doubtful and receive the price of sharp practice. In other words he, Alan Vernon, who had never uttered a wilful untruth or taken a halfpenny that was not

his own, would before the tribunal of his own mind, stand convicted as a liar and a thief. The thing was not to be borne. At whatever cost it must be ended. If he were fated to be a beggar, at least he would be an honest beggar.

With a firm step and a high head he walked straight into Sir Robert's room, without even going through the formality of knocking, to find Mr. Champers-Haswell seated at the ebony desk by his partner's side examining some document through a reading-glass, which on his appearance, was folded over and presently thrust away into a drawer. It seemed, Alan noticed, to be of an unusual shape and written in some strange character.

Mr. Haswell, a stout, jovial-looking, little man with a florid complexion and white hair, rose at once to greet him.

"How do you do, Alan," he said in a cheerful voice, for as a cousin by marriage he called him by his Christian name. "I am just this minute back from Paris, and you will be glad to learn that they are going to support us very well there; in fact I may say that the Government has taken up the scheme, of course under the rose. You know the French have possessions all along that coast and they won't be sorry to find an opportunity of stretching out their hand a little further. Our difficulties as to capital are at an end, for a full third of it is guaranteed in Paris, and I expect that small investors and speculators for the rise will gobble a lot more. We shall plant £10,000,000 worth of

Sahara scrip in sunny France, my boy, and foggy England has underwritten the rest. It will be a case of 'letters of Allotment and regret,' and regret, Alan, financially the most successful issue of the last dozen years. What do you say to that?" and in his elation the little man puffed out his chest and pursing up his lips, blew through them, making a sound like that of wind among wires.

"I don't know, Mr. Haswell. If we are all alive I would prefer to answer the question twelve months hence, or later, when we see whether the company is going to be a practical success as well, or not."

Again Mr. Haswell made the sound of wind among wires, only this time there was a shriller note in it; its mellowness was gone, it was as though the air had suddenly been filled with frost.

"A practical success!" he repeated after him. "That is scarcely our affair, is it? Promoters should not bother themselves with long views, Alan. These may be left to the investing public, the speculative parson and the maiden lady who likes a flutter--those props of modern enterprise. But what do you mean? You originated this idea and always said that the profits should be great."

"Yes, Mr. Haswell, on a moderate capitalization and provided that we are sure of the co-operation of the Porte."

Mr. Haswell looked at him very searchingly and Sir Robert, who had been

listening, said in his cold voice:

"I think that we thrashed out these points long ago, and to tell you the truth I am rather tired of them, especially as it is too late to change anything. How did you get on with Jackson, Vernon?"

"I did not get on at all, Sir Robert. He will not touch the thing on any terms, and indeed means to oppose it tooth and nail."

"Then he will find himself in a minority when the articles come out to-morrow. Of course it is a bore, but we are strong enough to snap our fingers at him. You see they don't read *The Judge* in France, and no one has ever heard of it in Constantinople. Therefore we have nothing to fear--so long as we stick together," he added meaningly.

Alan felt that the crisis had come. He must speak now or for ever hold his peace; indeed Aylward was already looking round for his hat.

"Sir Robert and Mr. Haswell," he broke in rather nervously, "I have something to say to you, something unpleasant," and he paused.

"Then please say it at once, Vernon. I want to dress for dinner, I am going to the theatre to-night and must dine early," replied Aylward in a voice of the utmost unconcern.

"It is, Sir Robert," went on Alan with a rush, "that I do not like the

lines upon which this business is being worked, and I wish to give up my interest in it and retire from the firm, as I have a right to do under our deed of partnership."

"Have you?" said Aylward. "Really, I forget. But, my dear fellow, do not think that we should wish to keep you for one moment against your will. Only, might I ask, has that old puritan, Jackson, hypnotized you, or is it a case of sudden madness after influenza?"

"Neither," answered Alan sternly, for although he might be diffident on matters that he did not thoroughly understand, he was not a man to brook trifling or impertinence. "It is what I have said, no more nor less. I am not satisfied either as to the capitalization or as to the guarantee that the enterprise can be really carried out. Further"--and he paused,--"Further, I should like what I have never yet been able to obtain, more information as to that Firman under which the concession is granted."

For one moment a sort of tremor passed over Sir Robert's impassive countenance, while Mr. Haswell uttered his windy whistle, this time in a tone of plaintive remonstrance.

"As you have formally resigned your membership of the firm, I do not see that any useful purpose can be served by discussing such matters. The fullest explanations, of course, we should have been willing to give----"

"My dear Alan," broke in Mr. Champers-Haswell, who was quite upset, "I do implore you to reflect for one moment, for your own sake. In a single week you would have been a wealthy man; do you really mean to throw away everything for a whim?"

"Perhaps Vernon remembers that he holds over 1700 of the Syndicate shares which we have worked up to £18, and thinks it wiser to capture the profit in sight, generally speaking a very sound principle," interrupted Aylward sarcastically.

"You are mistaken, Sir Robert," replied Alan, flushing. "The way that those shares have been artificially put up is one of the things to which I most object. I shall only ask for mine the face value which I paid for them."

Now notwithstanding their experience, both of the senior partners did for a moment look rather scared. Such folly, or such honesty, was absolutely incredible to them. They felt that there must be much behind. Sir Robert, however, recovered instantly.

"Very well," he said; "it is not for us to dictate to you; you must make your own bed and lie on it. To argue or remonstrate would only be rude." He put out his hand and pushed the button of an electric bell, adding as he did so, "Of course we understand one thing, Vernon, namely, that as a gentleman and a man of honour you will make no public use of the

information which you have acquired during your stay in this office, either to our detriment, personal or financial, or to your own advantage."

"Certainly you may understand that," replied Vernon. "Unless my character is attacked and it becomes necessary for me to defend myself, my lips are sealed."

"That will never happen--why should it?" said Sir Robert with a polite bow.

The door opened and the head clerk, Jeffreys, appeared.

"Mr. Jeffreys," said Sir Robert, "please find us the deed of partnership between Major Vernon and ourselves, and bring it here. One moment. Please make out also a transfer of Major Vernon's parcel of Sahara Syndicate shares to Mr. Champers-Haswell and myself at par value, and fill in a cheque for the amount. Please remove also Major Vernon's name wherever it appears in the proof prospectus, and--yes--one thing more. Telephone to Specton--the Right Honourable the Earl of Specton, I mean, and say that after all I have been able to arrange that he shall have a seat on the Board and a block of shares at a very moderate figure, and that if he will wire his assent, his name shall be put into the prospectus. You approve, don't you, Haswell?--yes--then that is all, I think, Jeffreys, only please be as quick as you can, for I want to get away."

Jeffreys, the immaculate and the impassive, bowed, and casting one swift glance at Vernon out of the corner of his eye, departed.

What is called an awkward pause ensued; in fact it was a very awkward pause. The die was cast, the matter ended, and what were the principals to do until the ratifications had been exchanged or, a better simile perhaps, the decree nisi pronounced absolute. Mr. Champers-Haswell remarked that the weather was very cold for April, and Alan agreed with him, while Sir Robert found his hat and brushed it with his sleeve. Then Mr. Haswell, in desperation, for in minor matters he was a kindly sort of man who disliked scenes and unpleasantness, muttered something as to seeing him--Alan--at his house, The Court, in Hertfordshire, from Saturday to Monday.

"That was the arrangement," answered Alan bluntly, "but possibly after what has happened you will not wish that it should be kept."

"Oh! why not, why not?" said Mr. Haswell. "Sunday is a day of rest when we make it a rule not to talk business, and if we did, perhaps we might all change our minds about these matters. Sir Robert is coming, and I am sure that your cousin Barbara will be very disappointed if you do not turn up, for she understands nothing about these city things which are Greek to her."

At the mention of the name of Barbara Sir Robert Aylward looked up from

the papers which he affected to be tidying, and Alan thought that there was a kind of challenge in his eyes. A moment before he had made up his mind that no power on earth would induce him to spend a Sunday with his late partners at The Court. Now, acting upon some instinct or impulse, he reversed his opinion.

"Thanks," he said, "if that is understood, I shall be happy to come. I will drive over from Yarleys in time for dinner to-morrow. Perhaps you will say so to Barbara."

"She will be glad, I am sure," answered Mr. Haswell, "for she told me the other day that she wants to consult you about some outdoor theatricals that she means to get up in July."

"In July!" answered Alan with a little laugh. "I wonder where I shall be in July."

Then came another pause, which seemed to affect even Sir Robert's nerves, for abandoning the papers, he walked down the room till he came to the golden object that has been described, and for the second time that day stood there contemplating it.

"This thing is yours, Vernon," he said, "and now that our relations are at an end, I suppose that you will want to take it away. What is its history? You never told me."

"Oh! that's a long story," answered Alan in an absent voice. "My uncle, who was a missionary, brought it from West Africa. I rather forget the facts, but Jeekie, my negro servant, knows them all, for as a lad my uncle saved him from sacrifice, or something, in a place where they worship these things, and he has been with us ever since. It is a fetish with magical powers and all the rest of it. I believe they call it the Swimming Head and other names. If you look at it, you will see that it seems to swim between the shoulders, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Sir Robert, "and I admire the beautiful beast. She is cruel and artistic, like--like finance. Look here, Vernon, we have quarrelled, and of course henceforth are enemies, for it is no use mincing matters, only fools do that. But in a way you are being hardly treated. You could get £10 apiece to-day for those shares of yours in a block on the market, and I am paying you £1. I understand your scruples, but there is no reason why we should not square things. This fetish of yours has brought me luck, so let's do a deal. Leave it here, and instead of a check for £1700, I will make you one out for £17,000."

"That's a very liberal offer," said Vernon. "Give me a moment to think it over."

Then he also walked into the corner of the room and contemplated the golden mask that seemed to float between the frog-like shoulders. The shimmering eyes drew his eyes, though what he saw in them does not matter. Indeed he could never remember. Only when he straightened

himself again there was left on his mind a determination that not for seventeen or for seventy thousand pounds would he part with his ownership in this very unique fetish.

"No, thank you," he said presently. "I don't think I will sell the Yellow God, as Jeekie calls it. Perhaps you will kindly keep her here for a week or so, until I make up my mind where to stow her."

Again Mr. Champers-Haswell uttered his windy whistle. That a man should refuse £17,000 for a bit of African gold worth £100 or so, struck him as miraculous. But Sir Robert did not seem in the least surprised, only very disappointed.

"I quite understand your dislike to selling," he said. "Thank you for leaving it here for the present to see us through the flotation," and he laughed.

At that moment Jeffreys entered the room with the documents. Sir Robert handed the deed of partnership to Alan, and when he had identified it, took it from him again and threw it on the fire, saying that of course the formal letter of release would be posted and the dissolution notified in the Gazette. Then the transfer was signed and the cheque delivered.

"Well, good-bye till Saturday," said Alan when he had received the latter, and nodding to them both, he turned and left the room.

The passage ran past the little room in which Mr. Jeffreys, the head clerk, sat alone. Catching sight of him through the open door, Alan entered, shutting it behind him. Finding his key ring he removed from it the keys of his desk and of the office strongroom, and handed them to the clerk who, methodical in everything, proceeded to write a formal receipt.

"You are leaving us, Major Vernon?" he said interrogatively as he signed the paper.

"Yes, Jeffreys," answered Alan, then prompted by some impulse, added, "Are you sorry?"

Mr. Jeffreys looked up and there were traces of unwonted emotion upon his hard, regulated face.

"For myself, yes, Major--for you, on the whole, no."

"What do you mean, Jeffreys? I do not quite understand."

"I mean, Major, that I am sorry because you have never tried to shuffle off any shady business on to my back and leave me to bear the brunt of it; also because you have always treated me as a gentleman should, not as a machine to be used until a better can be found, and kicked aside when it goes out of order."

"It is very kind of you to say so, Jeffreys, but I can't remember having done anything particular."

"No, Major, you can't remember what comes natural to you. But I and the others remember, and that's why I am sorry. But for yourself I am glad, since although Aylward and Haswell have put a big thing through and are going to make a pot of money, this is no place for the likes of you, and now that you are going I will make bold to tell you that I always wondered what you were doing here. By and by, Major, the row will come, as it has come more than once in the past, before your time."

"And then?" said Alan, for he was anxious to get to the bottom of this man's mind, which hitherto he had always found so secret.

"And then, Major, it won't matter much to Messrs. Aylward and Champers-Haswell, who are used to that kind of thing and will probably dissolve partnership and lie quiet for a bit, and still less to folk like myself, who are only servants. But if you were still here it would have mattered a great deal to you, for it would blacken your name and break your heart, and then what's the good of the money? I tell you, Major," the clerk went on with quiet intensity, "though I am nobody and nothing, if I could afford it I would follow your example. But I can't, for I have a sick wife and a family of delicate children who have to live half the year on the south coast, to say nothing of my old mother, and--I was fool enough to be taken in and back Sir Robert's last little

venture, which cost me all I had saved. So you see I must make a bit before the machine is scrapped, Major. But I tell you this, that if I can get £5000 together, as I hope to do out of Saharas before I am a month older, for they had to give me a look-in, as I knew too much, I am off to the country, where I was born, to take a farm there. No more of Messrs. Aylward and Haswell for Thomas Jeffreys. That's my bell. Good-bye, Major, I'll take the liberty to write you a line sometimes, for I know you won't give me away. Good-bye and God bless you, as I am sure He will in the long run," and stretching out his hand, he took that of the astonished Alan and wrung it warmly.

When he was gone Alan went also, noticing that the clerks, whom some rumour of these events seemed to have reached, eyed him curiously through the glass screens behind which they sat at their desks, as he thought not without regret and a kind of admiration. Even the magnificent be-medalled porter at the door emerged from the carved teak box where he dwelt and touching his cap asked if he should call a cab.

"No, thank you, Sergeant," answered Alan, "I will take a bus, and, Sergeant, I think I forgot to give you a present last Xmas. Will you accept this?--I wish I could make it more," and he presented him with ten shillings.

The Sergeant drew himself up and saluted.

"Thank you kindly, Major," he said. "I'd rather take that from you than

£10 from the other gentlemen. But, Major, I wish we were out on the West Coast again together. It's a stinking, barbarous hole, but not so bad as this 'ere city."

For once these two had served as comrades, and it was through Alan that the sergeant obtained his present lucrative but somewhat uncongenial post.

He was outside at last. The massive granite portal vanished behind him in the evening mists, much as a nightmare vanishes. He, Alan Vernon, who for a year or more had been in bondage, was a free man again. All his dreams of wealth had departed; indeed if anything, save in experience, he was poorer than when first the shadow of yonder doorway fell upon him. But at least he was safe, safe. The deed of partnership which had been as a chain about his neck, was now white ashes; his name was erased from that fearful prospectus of Sahara Limited, wherein millions which someone would provide were spoken of like silver in the days of Solomon, as things of no account. The bitterest critic could not say that he had made a halfpenny out of the venture, in fact, if trouble came, his voluntary abandonment of the profits due to him must go to his credit. He had plunged into the icy waters of renunciation and come up clean if naked. Never since he was a boy could Alan remember feeling so utterly light-hearted and free from anxiety. Not for a million pounds would he have returned to gather gold in that mausoleum of reputations. As for the future, he did not in the least care what happened. There was no one dependent on him, and in this way or in that he could always earn a

crust, a nice, honest crust.

He ran down the street and danced for joy like a child, yes, and presented a crossing-sweeper against whom he butted with a whole sixpence in compensation. Thus he reached the Mansion House, not unsuspected of inebriety by the police, and clambered to the top of a bus crowded with weary and anxious-looking City clerks returning home after a long day's labour at starvation wage. In that cold company and a chilling atmosphere some of his enthusiasm evaporated. He remembered that this step of his meant that sooner or later, within a year or two at most, Yarleys, where his family had dwelt for centuries, must go to the hammer. Why had he not accepted Aylward's offer and sold that old fetish to him for £17,000? There was no question of share-dealing there, and if a very wealthy man chose to give a fancy price for a curiosity, he could take it without doubt or shame. At least it would have sufficed to save Yarleys, which after all was only mortgaged for £20,000. For the life of him he could not tell. He had acted on impulse, a very curious impulse, and there was an end of it perhaps; it might be because his uncle had told him as a boy that the thing was unique, or perhaps because old Jeekie, his negro servant, venerated it so much and swore that it was "lucky." At any rate he had declined and there was an end.

But another and a graver matter remained. He had desired wealth to save Yarleys, but he desired it still more for a different purpose. Above everything on earth he loved Barbara, his distant cousin and the niece of Mr. Champers-Haswell, who until an hour ago had been his partner.

Now she was a great heiress, and without fortune he could not marry her, even if she would marry him, which remained in doubt. For one thing her uncle and guardian Haswell, under her father's will, had absolute discretion in this matter until she reached the age of twenty-five, and for another he was too proud. Therefore it would seem that in abandoning his business, he had abandoned his chance of Barbara also, which was a truly dreadful thought.

Well, it was in order that he might see her, that he had agreed to visit The Court on the morrow, even though it meant a meeting with his late partners, who were the last people with whom he desired to foregather again so soon. Then and there he made up his mind that before he bade Barbara farewell, he would tell her the whole story, so that she might not misjudge him. After that he would go off somewhere--to Africa perhaps. Meanwhile he was quite tired out, as tired as though he had lain a week in the grip of fever. He must eat some food and get to bed. Sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof, yet on the whole he blessed the name of Jackson, editor of The Judge and his father's old friend.

When Alan had left the office Sir Robert turned to Mr. Champers-Haswell and asked him abruptly, "What the devil does this mean?"

Mr. Haswell looked up at the ceiling and whistled in his own peculiar

fashion, then answered:

"I cannot say for certain, but our young friend's strange conduct seems to suggest that he has smelt a rat, possibly even that Jackson, the old beast, has shown him a rat--of a large Turkish breed."

Sir Robert nodded.

"Vernon is a fellow who doesn't like rats; they seem to haunt his sleep," he said; "but do you think that having seen it, he will keep it in the bag?"

"Oh! certainly, certainly," answered Mr. Haswell with cheerfulness; "the man is the soul of honour; he will never give us away. Look how he behaved about those shares. Still, I think that perhaps we are well rid of him. Too much honour, like too much zeal, is a very dangerous quality in any business."

"I don't know that I agree with you," answered Sir Robert. "I am not sure that in the long run we should not do better for a little more of the article. For my part, although it will not hurt us publicly, for the thing will never be noticed, I am sorry that we have lost Vernon, very sorry indeed. I don't think him a fool, and awkward as they may be, I respect his qualities."

"So do I, so do I," answered Mr. Haswell, "and of course we have acted

against his advice throughout, which must have been annoying to him. The scheme as he suggested it was a fair business proposition that might have paid ten per cent. on a small capital, but what is the good of ten per cent. to you and me? We want millions and we are going to get them. Well, he is coming to The Court to-morrow, and perhaps after all we shall be able to arrange matters. I'll give Barbara a hint; she has great influence with him, and you might do the same, Aylward."

"Miss Champers has great influence with everyone who is fortunate enough to know her," answered Sir Robert courteously. "But even if she chooses to use it, I doubt if it will avail in this case. Vernon has been making up his mind for a long while. I have watched him and am sure of that. To-night he determined to take the plunge and I do not think that we shall see any more of him in this office. Haswell," he added with sudden energy, "I tell you that of late our luck has been too good to last. The boom, the real boom, came in with Vernon, and with Vernon I think that it will go."

"At any rate it must leave something pretty substantial behind it this time, Aylward, my friend. Whatever happens, within a week we shall be rich, really rich for life."

"For life, Haswell, yes, for life. But what is life? A bubble that any pin may prick. Oh! I know that you do not like the subject, but it is as well to look it in the face sometimes. I'm no church-goer, but if I remember right we were taught to pray the good Lord to deliver us

especially 'in all times of our wealth,' which is followed by something about tribulation and sudden death, for when they wrote that prayer the wheel of human fortune went round just as it does to-day. There, let's get out of this before I grow superstitious, as men who believe in nothing sometimes do, because after all they must believe in something, I suppose. Got your hat and coat? So have I, come on," and he switched off the light, so that the room was left in darkness except for the faint glimmering of the fire.

His partner grumbled audibly, for in turning he had knocked his hand against the desk.

"Leave me my only economy, Haswell," he answered with a hard little laugh. "Electricity is strength and I hate to see strength burning to waste. Why do you mind?" he went on as he stepped towards the door.

"Is it the contrast? In all times of our wealth, in all times of our tribulation, from sickness and from sudden death----"

"Good Lord deliver us," chimed in Mr. Haswell in a shaking voice behind him. "What the devil's that?"

Sir Robert looked round and saw, or thought that he saw, something very strange. From the pillar on which it stood the golden fetish with a woman's face, appeared to have floated. The firelight showed it gliding towards them across, but a few inches above the floor of the great room. It came very slowly, but it came. Now it reached them and paused,

and now it rose into the air until it attained the height of Mr. Champers-Haswell and stayed there, staring into his face and not a hand's breadth away, just as though it were a real woman glaring at him.

He uttered a sound, half whistle and half groan, and fell back, as it chanced on to a morocco-covered seat behind him. For a moment or two the gleaming, golden mask floated in the air. Then it turned very deliberately, rose a little way, and moving sidelong to where Sir Robert stood, hung in front of his face.

Presently Aylward staggered to the mantelpiece and began to fumble for the switch; in the silence his nails scratching at the panelling made a sound like to that of a gnawing mouse. He found it at last, and next instant the office broke into a blaze of light, showing Mr. Haswell, his rubicund face quite pale, his hat and umbrella on the floor, gasping like a dying man upon the couch, and Sir Robert himself clinging to the mantel-shelf as a person might do who had received a mortal wound, while the golden fetish reposed calmly on its pillar, to all appearance as immovable and undisturbed as the antique Venus which matched it at the other end of the room. For a while there was silence. Then Sir Robert, recovering himself, asked:

"Did you notice anything unusual just now, Haswell?"

"Yes," whispered his partner. "I thought that hideous African thing which Vernon brought here, came sliding across the floor and stared into

my face with its glittering eyes, and in the eyes----"

"Well, what was in the eyes?"

"I can't remember. It was a kind of picture and the meaning of it was Sudden Death--oh Lord! Sudden Death. Tell me it was a fancy bred of that ill-omened talk of yours?"

"I can't tell you anything of the sort," answered Aylward in a hollow voice, "for I saw something also."

"What?" asked his partner.

"Death that wasn't sudden, and other things."

Again the silence fell till it was broken by Aylward.

"Come," he said, "we have been over-working--too much strain, and now the reaction. Keep this rubbish to yourself, or they will lock you up in an asylum."

"Certainly, Aylward, certainly. But can't you get rid of that beastly image?"

"Not on any account, Haswell, even if it haunts us all day. Here it shall stop until the Saharas are floated on Monday, if I have to lock it

in the strongroom and throw the keys into the Thames. Afterwards Vernon can take it, as he has a right to do, and I am sure that with it will go our luck."

"Then the sooner our luck goes, the better," replied Haswell, with a mere ghost of his former whistle. "Life is better than luck, and--Aylward, that Yellow God you are so fond of means to murder us. We are being fatted for the sacrifice, that is all. I remember now, that was one of the things I saw written in its eyes!"