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THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND

JULES VERNE

Introduction by
Raymond R. Canon

Complete
and Unabridged

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JULES VERNE

Introduction

Thanks to television and the movies, Jules Verne has become in our century the most popularized of all French authors. It may be safe to say that many people, even while reading him, are not aware of his being French at all, so universal is his appeal. But it did not take twentieth-century interest in science to bring him into the limelight, for Verne was world famous during half of his lifetime, and people flocked from all over to see him. This was complicated by the fact that he was not the most approachable of men, and quite often simply refused to meet callers, even though they had come from halfway round the world.

There are many anecdotes of his elusiveness, which was demonstrated to royalty and peasant alike. One day he happened to be with his yacht in English waters while a regatta was in progress. On learning of this, the Royal Yacht Squadron sent him an invitation to attend a reception which was being given by the Prince of Wales. Verne at once hoisted anchor and set sail, muttering that if he were going to get any peace and quiet, he would have to register the boat in a false name. The future King of England meant absolutely nothing to him.

Jules was born in Nantes on Feb. 8, 1828, the first child of Pierre and Sophie Verne. His father was a magistrate's son who had just acquired a legal position in Nantes.

There is an interesting story about Jules's first home. In the middle of the river at Nantes lies a small sandy island. This had been bought in 1723 by twenty-four rich merchants who wanted to construct ornate homes to match their wealth. In time, twenty-four lovely homes could be seen from the mainland, and the owners were, for a time, able to live an idyllic life. The collapse of their businesses brought financial ruin to them all, and so the homes were gradually allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. They were, however, never entirely abandoned. Later they were bought cheaply by shopkeepers and craftsmen, who set up their businesses there, and the whole island became a middle-class domain. It was on this island that Pierre Verne met Sophie, fell in love with her, and married her. Sophie's parents lived on the island, and as Pierre was not well off, the couple set up housekeeping with the bride's parents. It was on this island that Jules was born and dreamed his first dreams.

The romantic nature of the little island contributed to Verne's already fertile mind to produce numerous daydreams, which he never forgot, but stored up for future use. He filled his schoolbooks with designs for ships and flying machines, and even reached the point of stowing away on a boat bound for the Indies. Luckily for the Verne family, the boat had to make one more call in France before crossing the ocean, and it was during this call that an angry father caught up with his son, took him back home, and sentenced him to a period of bread and water.

After completing high school, Jules was sent off to Paris to study law. Even while studying, he was intrigued by writing, and his first efforts were in the field of drama. In 1850, he succeeded in having one of his plays, "Broken Straws," performed. The play was well received, although it suffered from a weak plot. He dedicated it to Dumas, whose friendship he had cultivated, and was justifiably pleased when it was arranged to have a presentation in his own home town. The critics were varied in their praise, but on the whole liked it. And anybody who was anybody turned out to see it.

Jules's next production, "A Balloon Journey," was something out of E. A. Poe, but it did at least set him on the track he was to follow in his later novels. More important at this time was the fact that he obtained a position as secretary to the "Theatre Lyrique" and was able for the first time to feel free of financial worry.

His next stories—*Martin Paz* and *Master Zacharias*—gave

his readers an excellent insight into Verne's mind at work. He would take some little incident of the day's work, relate it with facility to some idea that had been circulating in his mind, and come out with a most intriguing, if melodramatic story.

Verne became more and more preoccupied with the desire to find a wife. To this end, he returned to Nantes where his first effort ended in failure. Not even the girl's parents liked him and he went back to Paris broken-hearted. The task of carrying on a full-time job and writing was also too much for him, and he began to suffer from a nervous condition which was to remain with him to a certain degree for the rest of his life.

He was, however, more successful in his next attempt to find a wife, for on January 10, 1857, he was married to a young widow from Amiens. He traveled to the British Isles with her and while in England saw the *Great Eastern* under construction in a Thames shipyard. He resolved to make a crossing of the Atlantic in this ship as soon as his literary works had brought him fame and fortune. To this end he continued to carry on a double existence—this time, as stockbroker and writer. His literary efforts consisted of both novels and plays, which were successfully performed, and brought him increased fame and wealth. For this reason, he was able to afford a trip to Norway, but had to hurry home to be present at the birth of his son in 1861. This was to be his only child.

In spite of the additional fame and fortune, Verne was still not satisfied. Here chance stepped in and played a part. He showed his works to a new publisher, who happened to be fascinated by the same things as Verne. A contract was signed and in five weeks Jules was ready with a manuscript, "Five Weeks in a Balloon." The publisher, Hetzel, was so impressed he accepted the work at once. It is interesting to note that the first contract was altered five times at Hetzel's request, each time with terms more advantageous to Verne. It was the turning point in his life.

Five Weeks in a Balloon was translated into many languages and read all over the world. This was the first of a series of remarkable voyages that Verne was to describe in the next forty years.

Nothing could hold him back now. Financially secure, Verne was able to exploit all his interests which had been stored up for so long. He had been attracted by the great depths of the earth and the sea, and out of this interest came *Journey to the*

Center of the Earth. In this story two explorers descend to the center of our planet by means of an extinct volcano, and are finally returned to the surface through a very active one: Stromboli. Once again, Verne showed an uncanny knack of writing about things which have appeared in the news this century.

It is in these books that we see Verne at his best. He leads his readers—young and old—wherever it pleases him to take them. It is not Lidenbrock and Axel who descend into the volcano but the reader himself. Their dangers are his dangers, their excitement his. And is this not the real reason for Verne's popularity, even in remote countries?

In 1865, he produced *A Trip to the Moon* and *From the Earth to the Moon,* again anticipating our twentieth-century interests. They were both eagerly devoured by his readers, and Verne, already well off, was made that much richer.

When not writing, Verne followed his one other passion—sailing. He bought himself a boat, spent innumerable hours sailing up and down the English Channel. In 1866, he also realized his dream of traveling on the *Great Eastern* to the United States. Before returning to Europe, he visited New York and proceeded inland as far as Niagara Falls, which he utilized later in a story.

Very little need be said about some of his subsequent stories, *Around the World in Eighty days,* or *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea.* These are already familiar enough to most readers, and have never ceased to be popular.

With more leisure time on his hands, Verne turned his interests to other fields. His first choice was politics, and much to the surprise of everyone, including his wife, he was elected to the Amiens City Council as a candidate of the extreme left. He proved to be an able administrator, and having gained some confidence in such matters, he branched into other affairs. The result of all this was that he was made an officer in the Légion d'Honneur. He also profited from his political experience to write a novel, *A Family without a Name,* a story concerning the uprising in Quebec in 1837 when French Canadians tried to rid themselves of English control.

Verne followed with intense interest the scientific discoveries which were related to the themes he had described in his books. At the same time, he went on writing about new ideas until his hand was stilled by a stroke early in 1905. He died on March 24 of that year. The arrangements for the funeral can best be left to the reader's imagination.

The Mysterious Island, while not one of Verne's best-known works, has all the characteristics of his work, and was written in 1874 shortly after a stage production of "Around the World in 80 Days." It was about this time that Verne used to be flooded with letters from female admirers, letters which often contained locks of hair. Jules would answer the letters, but would throw the hair into the fire. He would often remark, after reading one of these declarations of love, that the mermaids of *The Mysterious Island* were his only love. If mermaids represented far-off places, then he spoke the truth.

RAYMOND R. CANON, M.A.
Oakridge Secondary School
London, Ontario, Canada

Part One
DROPPED FROM THE CLOUDS

CHAPTER 1

"Are we rising again?" "No. On the contrary." "Are we descending?" "Worse than that, captain! we are falling!" "For Heaven's sake heave out the ballast!" "There! the last sack is empty!" "Does the balloon rise?" "No!" "I hear a noise like the dashing of waves!" "The sea is below the car! It cannot be more than 500 feet from us!" "Overboard with every weight! . . . everything!"

Such were the loud and startling words which resounded through the air, above the vast watery desert of the Pacific, about four o'clock in the evening of the 23rd of March, 1865.

Few can possibly have forgotten the terrible storm from the northeast, in the middle of the equinox of that year. The tempest raged without intermission from the 18th to the 26th of March. Its ravages were terrible in America, Europe, and Asia, covering a distance of eighteen hundred miles, and extending obliquely to the equator from the thirty-fifth north parallel to the fortieth south parallel. Towns were overthrown, forests uprooted, coasts devastated by the mountains of water which were precipitated on them, vessels cast on the shore, which the published accounts numbered by hundreds, whole districts leveled by waterspouts which destroyed everything they passed over, several thousand people crushed on land or drowned at sea; such were the traces of its fury, left by this devastating tempest. It surpassed in disasters those which so frightfully ravaged Havana and Guadalupe, one on the 25th of October, 1810, the other on the 26th of July, 1825.

But while so many catastrophes were taking place on land and at sea, a drama not less exciting was being enacted in the agitated air.

In fact, a balloon, as a ball might be carried on the summit of a waterspout, had been taken into the circling movement of a column of air and had traversed space at the rate of ninety miles an hour, turning round and round as if seized by some aerial maëlstrom.

Beneath the lower point of the balloon swung a car, containing five passengers, scarcely visible in the midst of the thick

vapor mingled with spray which hung over the surface of the ocean.

Whence, it may be asked, had come that plaything of the tempest? From what part of the world did it rise? It surely could not have started during the storm. But the storm had raged five days already, and the first symptoms were manifested on the 18th. It cannot be doubted that the balloon came from a great distance, for it could not have traveled less than two thousand miles in twenty-four hours.

At any rate the passengers, destitute of all marks for their guidance, could not have possessed the means of reckoning the route traversed since their departure. It was a remarkable fact that, although in the very midst of the furious tempest, they did not suffer from it. They were thrown about and whirled round and round without feeling the rotation in the slightest degree, or being sensible that they were removed from a horizontal position.

Their eyes could not pierce through the thick mist which had gathered beneath the car. Dark vapor was all around them. Such was the density of the atmosphere that they could not be certain whether it was day or night. No reflection of light, no sound from inhabited land, no roaring of the ocean could have reached them, through the obscurity, while suspended in those elevated zones. Their rapid descent alone had informed them of the dangers which they ran from the waves. However, the balloon, lightened of heavy articles, such as ammunition, arms, and provisions, had risen into the higher layers of the atmosphere, to a height of 4,500 feet. The voyagers, after having discovered that the sea extended beneath them, and thinking the dangers above less dreadful than those below, did not hesitate to throw overboard even their most useful articles, while they endeavored to lose no more of that fluid, the life of their enterprise, which sustained them above the abyss.

The night passed in the midst of alarms which would have been death to less energetic souls. Again the day appeared and with it the tempest began to moderate. From the beginning of that day, the 24th of March, it showed symptoms of abating. At dawn, some of the lighter clouds had risen into the more lofty regions of the air. In a few hours the wind had changed from a hurricane to a fresh breeze, that is to say, the rate of the transit of the atmospheric layers was diminished by half. It was still what sailors call "a close-reefed topsail breeze," but the commotion in the elements had none the less considerably diminished.

Towards eleven o'clock, the lower region of the air was sensibly clearer. The atmosphere threw off that chilly dampness which is felt after the passage of a great meteor. The storm did not seem to have gone farther to the west. It appeared to have exhausted itself. Could it have passed away in electric sheets, as is sometimes the case with regard to the typhoons of the Indian Ocean?

But at the same time, it was also evident that the balloon was again slowly descending with a regular movement. It appeared as if it were, little by little, collapsing, and that its case was lengthening and extending, passing from a spherical to an oval form. Towards midday the balloon was hovering above the sea at a height of only 2,000 feet. It contained 50,000 cubic feet of gas, and, thanks to its capacity, it could maintain itself a long time in the air, although it should reach a great altitude or might be thrown into a horizontal position.

Perceiving their danger, the passengers cast away the last articles which still weighed down the car, the few provisions they had kept, everything, even to their pocket-knives, and one of them, having hoisted himself on to the circles which united the cords of the net, tried to secure more firmly the lower point of the balloon.

It was, however, evident to the voyagers that the gas was failing, and that the balloon could no longer be sustained in the higher regions. They must infallibly perish!

There was not a continent, nor even an island, visible beneath them. The watery expanse did not present a single speck of land, not a solid surface upon which their anchor could hold.

It was the open sea, whose waves were still dashing with tremendous violence! It was the ocean, without any visible limits, even for those whose gaze, from their commanding position, extended over a radius of forty miles. The vast liquid plain, lashed without mercy by the storm, appeared as if covered with herds of furious chargers, whose white and disheveled crests were streaming in the wind. No land was in sight, not a solitary ship could be seen. It was necessary at any cost to arrest their downward course, and to prevent the balloon from being engulfed in the waves. The voyagers directed all their energies to this urgent work. But, notwithstanding their efforts, the balloon still fell, and at the same time shifted with the greatest rapidity, following the direction of the wind, that is to say, from the northeast to the southwest.

Frightful indeed was the situation of these unfortunate men. They were evidently no longer masters of the machine. All their attempts were useless. The case of the balloon collapsed more and more. The gas escaped without any possibility of retaining it. Their descent was visibly accelerated, and soon after midday the car hung within 600 feet of the ocean.

It was impossible to prevent the escape of gas, which rushed through a large rent in the silk. By lightening the car of all the articles which it contained, the passengers had been able to prolong their suspension in the air for a few hours. But the inevitable catastrophe could only be retarded, and if land did not appear before night, voyagers, car, and balloon must to a certainty vanish beneath the waves.

They now resorted to the only remaining expedient. They were truly dauntless men, who knew how to look death in the

face. Not a single murmur escaped from their lips. They were determined to struggle to the last minute, to do anything to retard their fall. The car was only a sort of willow basket, unable to float, and there was not the slightest possibility of maintaining it on the surface of the sea.

Two more hours passed and the balloon was scarcely 400 feet above the water.

At that moment a loud voice, the voice of a man whose heart was inaccessible to fear, was heard. To this voice responded others not less determined. "Is everything thrown out?" "No, here are still 2,000 dollars in gold." A heavy bag immediately plunged into the sea. "Does the balloon rise?" "A little, but it will not be long before it falls again." "What still remains to be thrown out?" "Nothing." "Yes! the car!" "Let us catch hold of the net, and into the sea with the car."

This was, in fact, the last and only mode of lightening the balloon. The ropes which held the car were cut, and the balloon, after its fall, mounted 2,000 feet. The five voyagers had hoisted themselves into the net, and clung to the meshes, gazing at the abyss.

The delicate sensibility of balloons is well known. It is sufficient to throw out the lightest article to produce a difference in its vertical position. The apparatus in the air is like a balance of mathematical precision. It can be thus easily understood that when it is lightened of any considerable weight its movement will be impetuous and sudden. So it happened on this occasion. But after being suspended for an instant aloft, the balloon began to redescend, the gas escaping by the rent which it was impossible to repair.

The men had done all that men could do. No human efforts could save them now.

They must trust to the mercy of Him who rules the elements.

At four o'clock the balloon was only 500 feet above the surface of the water.

A loud barking was heard. A dog accompanied the voyagers, and was held pressed close to his master in the meshes of the net.

"Top has seen something," cried one of the men. Then immediately a loud voice shouted,—

"Land! land!" The balloon, which the wind still drove towards the southwest, had since daybreak gone a considerable distance, which might be reckoned by hundreds of miles, and a tolerably high land had, in fact, appeared in that direction. But this land was still thirty miles off. It would not take less than an hour to get to it, and then there was the chance of falling to leeward.

An hour! Might not the balloon before that be emptied of all the fluid it yet retained?

Such was the terrible question! The voyagers could distinctly see that solid spot which they must reach at any cost. They were ignorant of what it was, whether an island or a continent,

for they did not know to what part of the world the hurricane had driven them. But they must reach this land, whether inhabited or desolate, whether hospitable or not.

It was evident that the balloon could no longer support itself! Several times already had the crests of the enormous billows licked the bottom of the net, making it still heavier, and the balloon only half rose, like a bird with a wounded wing. Half an hour later the land was not more than a mile off, but the balloon, exhausted, flabby, hanging in great folds, had gas in its upper part alone. The voyagers, clinging to the net, were still too heavy for it, and soon, half plunged into the sea, they were beaten by the furious waves. The balloon-case bulged out again, and the wind, taking it, drove it along like a vessel. Might it not possibly thus each the land?

But, when only two fathoms off, terrible cries resounded from four pairs of lungs at once. The balloon, which had appeared as if it would never again rise, suddenly made an unexpected bound, after having been struck by a tremendous sea. As if it had been at that instant relieved of a new part of its weight, it mounted to a height of 1,500 feet, and here it met a current of wind, which instead of taking it directly to the coast, carried it in a nearly parallel direction.

At last, two minutes later, it reapproached obliquely, and finally fell on a sandy beach, out of the reach of the waves.

The voyagers, aiding each other, managed to disengage themselves from the meshes of the net. The balloon, relieved of their weight, was taken by the wind, and like a wounded bird which revives for an instant, disappeared into space.

But the car had contained five passengers, with a dog, and the balloon only left four on the shore.

The missing person had evidently been swept off by the sea, which had just struck the net, and it was owing to this circumstance that the lightened balloon rose the last time, and then soon after reached the land. Scarcely had the four castaways set foot on firm ground, than they all, thinking of the absent one, simultaneously exclaimed, "Perhaps he will try to swim to land! Let us save him! let us save him!"

CHAPTER 2

Those whom the hurricane had just thrown on this coast were neither aeronauts by profession nor amateurs. They were prisoners of war whose boldness had induced them to escape in this extraordinary manner.

A hundred times they had almost perished! A hundred times had they almost fallen from their torn balloon into the depths of the ocean. But Heaven had reserved them for a strange destiny, and after having, on the 20th of March, escaped from Richmond, besieged by the troops of General Ulysses Grant,

they found themselves seven thousand miles from the capital of Virginia, which was the principal stronghold of the South, during the terrible War of Secession. Their aerial voyage had lasted five days.

The curious circumstances which led to the escape of the prisoners were as follows:

That same year, in the month of February, 1865, in one of the *coups de main* by which General Grant attempted, though in vain, to possess himself of Richmond, several of his officers fell into the power of the enemy and were detained in the town. One of the most distinguished was Captain Cyrus Harding. He was a native of Massachusetts, a first-class engineer, to whom the government had confided, during the war, the direction of the railways, which were so important at that time. A true Northerner, thin, bony, lean, about forty-five years of age; his close-cut hair and his beard, of which he only kept a thick mustache, were already getting gray. He had one of those finely-developed heads which appear made to be struck on a medal, piercing eyes, a serious mouth, the physiognomy of a clever man of the military school. He was one of those engineers who began by handling the hammer and pickaxe, like generals who first act as common soldiers. Besides mental power, he also possessed great manual dexterity. His muscles exhibited remarkable proofs of tenacity. A man of action as well as a man of thought, all he did was without effort to one of his vigorous and sanguine temperament. Learned, clear-headed, and practical, he fulfilled in all emergencies those three conditions which united ought to insure human success—activity of mind and body, impetuous wishes, and powerful will. He might have taken for his motto that of William of Orange in the 17th century: "I can undertake and persevere even without hope of success." Cyrus Harding was courage personified. He had been in all the battles of that war. After having begun as a volunteer at Illinois, under Ulysses Grant, he fought at Paducah, Belmont, Pittsburg Landing, at the siege of Corinth, Port Gibson, Black River, Chattanooga, the Wilderness, on the Potomac, everywhere and valiantly, a soldier worthy of the general who said, "I never count my dead!" And hundreds of times Captain Harding had almost been among those who were not counted by the terrible Grant; but in these combats where he never spared himself, fortune favored him till the moment when he was wounded and taken prisoner on the field of battle near Richmond. At the same time and on the same day another important personage fell into the hands of the Southerners. This was no other than Gideon Spilett, a reporter for the *New York Herald*, who had been ordered to follow the changes of the war in the midst of the Northern armies.

Gideon Spilett was one of that race of indomitable English or American chroniclers, like Stanley and others, who stop at nothing to obtain exact information, and transmit it to their journal in the shortest possible time. The newspapers of the

Union, such as the *New York Herald*, are genuine powers, and their reporters are men to be reckoned with. Gideon Spilett ranked among the first of those reporters: a man of great merit, energetic, prompt and ready for anything, full of ideas, having traveled over the whole world, soldier and artist, enthusiastic in council, resolute in action, caring neither for trouble, fatigue, nor danger, when in pursuit of information, for himself first, and then for his journal, a perfect treasury of knowledge on all sorts of curious subjects, of the unpublished, of the unknown, and of the impossible. He wass one of those intrepid observers who write under fire, "reporting" among bullets, and to whom every danger is welcome.

He also had been in all the battles, in the first rank, revolver in one hand, note-book in the other; grape-shot never made his pencil tremble. He did not fatigue the wires with incessant telegrams, like those who speak when they have nothing to say, but each of his notes, short, decisive, and clear, threw light on some important point. Besides, he was not wanting in humor. It was he who, after the affair of the Black River, determined at any cost to keep his place at the wicket of the telegraph office, and after having announced to his journal the result of the battle, telegraphed for two hours the first chapters of the Bible. It cost the *New York Herald* two thousand dollars, but the *New York Herald* published the first intelligence.

Gideon Spilett was tall. He was rather more than forty years of age. Light whiskers bordering on red surrounded his face. His eye was steady, lively, rapid in its changes. It was the eye of a man accustomed to take in at a glance all the details of a scene. Well built, he was inured to all climates, like a bar of steel hardened in cold water.

For ten years Gideon Spilett had been the reporter of the *New York Herald*, which he enriched by his letters and drawings, for he was as skilful in the use of the pencil as of the pen. When he was captured, he was in the act of making a description and sketch of the battle. The last words in his note-book were these: "A Southern rifleman has just taken aim at me, but—" The Southerner notwithstanding missed Gideon Spilett, who, with his usual fortune, came out of this affair without a scratch.

Cyrus Harding and Gideon Spilett, who did not know each other except by reputation, had both been carried to Richmond. The engineer's wounds rapidly healed, and it was during his convalescence that he made acquaintance with the reporter. The two men then learned to appreciate each other. Soon their common aim had but one object, that of escaping, rejoining Grant's army, and fighting together in the ranks of the Federals.

The two Americans had from the first determined to seize every chance; but although they were allowed to wander at liberty in the town, Richmond was so strictly guarded, that escape appeared impossible. In the meanwhile Captain Harding

was rejoined by a servant who was devoted to him in life and in death. This intrepid fellow was a Negro born on the engineer's estate, of a slave father and mother, but to whom Cyrus, who was an Abolitionist from conviction and heart, had long since given his freedom. The once slave, though free, would not leave his master. He would have died for him. He was a man of about thirty, vigorous, active, clever, intelligent, gentle, and calm, sometimes naive, always merry, obliging, and honest. His name was Nebuchadnezzar, but he only answered to the familiar abbreviation of Neb.

When Neb heard that his master had been made prisoner, he left Massachusetts without hesitating an instant, arrived before Richmond, and by dint of stratagem and shrewdness, after having risked his life twenty times over, managed to penetrate into the besieged town. The pleasure of Harding on seeing his servant, and the joy of Neb at finding his master, can scarcely be described.

But though Neb had been able to make his way into Richmond, it was quite another thing to get out again, for the Northern prisoners were very strictly watched. Some extraordinary opportunity was needed to make the attempt with any chance of success, and this opportunity not only did not present itself, but was very difficult to find.

Meanwhile Grant continued his energetic operations. The victory of Petersburg had been very dearly bought. His forces, united to those of Butler, had as yet been unsuccessful before Richmond, and nothing gave the prisoners any hope of a speedy deliverance.

The reporter, to whom his tedious captivity did not offer a single incident worthy of note, could stand it no longer. His usually active mind was occupied with one sole thought—how he might get out of Richmond at any cost. Several times had he even made the attempt, but was stopped by some insurmountable obstacle. However, the siege continued; and if the prisoners were anxious to escape and join Grant's army, certain of the besieged were no less anxious to join the Southern forces. Among them was one Jonathan Forster, a determined Southerner. The truth was, that if the prisoners of the Secessionists could not leave the town, neither could the Secessionists themselves while the Northern army invested it. The Governor of Richmond for a long time had been unable to communicate with General Lee, and he very much wished to make known to him the situation of the town, so as to hasten the march of the army to their relief. Thus Jonathan Forster accordingly conceived the idea of rising in a balloon, so as to pass over the besieging lines, and in that way reach the Secessionist camp.

The Governor authorized the attempt. A balloon was manufactured and placed at the disposal of Forster, who was to be accompanied by five other persons. They were furnished with arms in case they might have to defend themselves when they