

THE ETERNAL MAN

A novelette by D.D. Sharp

Zulerich Learned to Live Forever, but Even the Far Future Was Not Ready for His Gift!

CHAPTER I

HE WHO LIVED

HERBERT Zulerich was a big heavy-framed man with a tangled mop of shaggy hair which lay back from his sloping forehead and clustered about the collar of his dark coat. His nose was big and prominent, jutting like a huge peak upon his face, and his mouth was a deep-lined canyon between that peak and the bulge of his chin.

Zulerich's habits were as strange as his face, ponderous as his big body. How he lived no one knew and no one knew either how he managed to maintain his formidable array of test tubes and retorts. In his laboratory was every conceivable kind of peculiar glass, holding liquids of all colors.

Zulerich had been at one time a chemist of more than local fame but of late years he had become a recluse, staying alone most of the time in his big stone house, just back of the highway where the constant stream of autos seemed to disturb him but little.

In truth they disturbed him a great deal. Some days he would watch them in their hurry as they drove furiously along the straight line of paved roadway and into his face would come gloom and melancholy. Into his large blue eyes would come a hurt look, and an odd feeling of sympathy for those who seemed so full of life, so gay, so thoughtless, would creep into his heart.

"Death! Death!" the old man would whisper. "Man goes through long years of preparation for the few days of accomplishment before the conqueror destroys all."

"So much preparation," he would whisper as he shook his big head. "So many brilliant minds polished and blazing for an hour, like roses grown and tended to be cut for an evening's bloom. Hands so skillfully trained and so soon folded quietly at rest."

That the old man was in quest of some great secret everyone who knew him had long ago suspected. But what that secret was no one knew and few could hazard even a guess.

THE truth was that Zulerich was obsessed by the single thought—the appalling waste of death. And since science and invention were conquering the other enemies of man's existence Zulerich had set out, after the example of Ponce de Leon, to discover the elements which might be combined to give man eternal life.

A fantastic quest, seemingly hopeless, yet Zulerich felt that he was making progress. He had discovered things which had astonished even him. Some of his experiments had awed and stupefied him and then he made a discovery which gave him a decided fright.

He had been experimenting with unicellular organisms and had found that they did not behave as inorganic chemicals did. He knew that the reaction of these animalcules was distinctly physiological, not merely physical, organic, not purely chemical.

They did not resemble any known chemicals, for they reacted as individuals and not as mere materials. This discovery, he found, was confirmed by Jennings in his book "Behavior of Unicellular Organisms."

Old Zulerich had studied the intricate processes of cellular division and multiplication, hoping to penetrate the law of the organism and discover what it was that, at the peak of growth, prevented further cleavage of cells.

In short he wanted to find the principle which confined the limits of size and growth. Find what it was that caused the cells of a living body to increase and multiply until maturity and then cease growing except

when incited by a cut or other accident to the tissue.

Why should a cell become active to replace wounded flesh, yet balk at rebuilding vital tissues, such as the lungs? Or refuse to replace a lost tooth more than once?

He experimented in numerous ways to provoke cell growth, trying to divine whether they had individualities of their own or whether they were bounded by the individuality of the whole. He wanted to find whether cells had an intelligence which caused them to do the remarkable things necessary to their coordination in the body.

Zulerich found out many things—mystifying things which no amount of scientific theory could possibly explain. He perfected chemicals which, applied to a rabbit's head, caused its hair to grow so long as to make it necessary for him to gather it into a bag.

And even then the weight of it grew so great that the rabbit could no longer drag its load and he killed the animal out of mercy. But still its hair grew and grew.

His high-walled backyard soon held some monstrous freaks produced by his chemicals—dogs with heads as big as water barrels and bodies of normal size—rats with bodies as big as cows and heads no bigger than peanuts.

And one day he applied a chemical to a horse's eyes and the eyes grew out of their sockets like long ropes of white sinew with great knobs of gelatin-like iris—limp flabby canes that dragged upon the ground.

The effect of this last experiment so cut the kind soul of Zulerich that he killed all the monstrosities and recoiled from the thought of making more. Then he looked again from his window over the wide world where death laid waste, sighed, tightened his lips and plunged into his work again.

It was not growth that Zulerich wanted. He was quite content that man should retain his present stature. What he desired was to increase man's years.

And then he discovered it. He did not need to wait and watch until the end of time to determine whether or not cells would eventually die. He knew that they would *not* die.

A few drops of the pale green fluid in the graduating glass he held in his hand would permit any man to live eternally. For he had at last found the combination he sought—the chemical which continued life without the necessity of decay.

AFTER a year of experiment upon his cells he tried a drop upon a rat. He caught the rat in one hand and held his medicine dropper with its pale green fluid in the other.

But as the dropper released its globule the rat moved its head and the drop hit the side of its face, trickled down and spread about its throat. It left a scar upon the hair, a peculiar scar like a question mark. Zulerich tried again with a second drop with better success. The rat swallowed it.

Zulerich watched carefully. The animal's heart seemed to cease beating. The lungs became motionless. And yet the rat lived with the fire of life in its pink eyes. It lived on, day after day, week after week, month after month, without the slightest loss of weight or sign of hunger or thirst. It lived with its tiny soul imprisoned inside it.

Yet even then Zulerich dared not himself drink the elixir, though his work was exhausting his strength and

his heart was growing weak—its flutterings made him take fright at times. For there was a flaw in his experiment.

True, the animal lived without breath, food or water. But it was entirely *unable to move!* Looking at it one would take it for dead, except for the glow in its fierce little eyes and the entire absence of decay.

Zulerich set out to mend the flaw. He worked feverishly, knowing his time was short. He did not want to die with success just within his reach. He did not want to come so near offering mankind the boon it craved most of all only to fail when in sight of his goal.

A year passed before Zulerich found the ingredient lacking in his pale greenish drops. The very simplicity of the thing had caused him to overlook it in the beginning and his discovery of it was almost ludicrously accidental.

One day he had a pail containing a solution of cleansing soda near the windows and was washing down the dusty glass so that he might see out over the blighted world and gain strength from its curse to continue his work. He would allow no one else in his laboratory and washed the windows himself.

A few spattering drops fell into the motionless upturned mouth of the rat where it stood upon the casement. Its mouth was open in the same position it had held when Zulerich had forced it to receive the life preserving drops. It had stood there, a tiny paralyzed living statue, while the four seasons of the year had gone by.

Today Zulerich had thought to remove the animal from the windows before beginning to wash them. But as he had grown older he had grown more absent-minded, less able to use the care and forethought of former times. And this time his carelessness produced an amazing result.

No sooner had the soda dropped into the rat's mouth than it squealed and scurried for cover. The very next instant it was out, nibbling a crust of cracker the parrot had dropped upon the floor.

Overjoyed, Zulerich watched the rat regain the use of its muscles. But anxiety soon crept into his joy. The rat developed hunger. Hunger foreboded decay. Decay meant death.

Pondering them he trembled. He was old, he had not much time to watch and wait. Even now, as a result of his suspense and relief over the new discovery of the soda drops, his heart was fluttering alarmingly.

And there was something new, frightening, in its flutterings. Had his time come at last, now, when his precious experiment was almost completed, perhaps perfected, but not yet given to the life-hungry world?

All the legends he had ever read of the discovery of elixirs of life had had their fruits frosted just before the eating. Was it to be so with him? Was this the end?

He thought of his drops! Quickly he stepped over to the table. He snatched up the pale green vial, dusty from long idleness on the shelf. He measured off the drops. His hand trembled so that the vial itself dropped to the floor and spilt its precious fluid. But he drank the drops in the measuring glass. Then he reached for the soda water sitting just within reach of the touch of his hand.

HE COULD not move! He had forgotten, forgotten that he would be unable to bring the soda to his mouth. He had overlooked a very vital thing. What was to be done? Nothing. There was nothing he could do but sit and wait—a neighbor might pass. He sat immovable as though cut in stone. He could not move even an eyelid. He was frightened.

No neighbor passed who saw him. A week went by.

The rat played all over the room. It came out mockingly upon the table before him. Zulerich regarded it closely. It was not breathing.

Another week passed before anyone came into the house. The rat had become bolder and Zulerich had used his enforced leisure to observe it. He knew his experiment had been a success. The rat only consumed food to replace its physical energy. It needed fuel only for movement, running about the room, which of course was a method of decay.

But the rat needed no food to support its life. Zulerich knew he had discovered the great secret. He had attained perpetual life, life which needed food only for its physical energies, for movement, not for life itself.

Then a neighbor peeped in. His first look of uneasiness gave way to one of pained sorrow. His face became melancholy as he saw old Zulerich sitting motionless upon his stool beside his chemicals. Such lack of motion could mean only one thing.

Zulerich tried to cry out but his voice, like his limbs, was paralyzed. He tried to croak, even to whisper, but there was no noise at all. Finally he put all his appeal into the fierce cold fire of his living eyes. The man saw those eyes, bright and living. He slammed the door and fled the room.

Zulerich became a world wonder. No one knew what had happened to him. They thought he was dead. They surmised that he had spilled some mysterious compound over him which had embalmed him with the look of life still in his eyes.

Undertakers came from long distances to study him as he sat in his laboratory. They pried and tested the fluids in the bottles. Time passed—months, years—and still old Zulerich sat, a corpse but unburied, motionless but alive. Yet they did not think he was alive. They believed he had discovered some marvelous embalming fluid. His house became a kind of museum in which he was the only exhibit.

Old Zulerich, growing no older at all, knew all this. He sat there, in a glass case now, hearing all they said and seeing before his eyes all that was done.

And in the dead of night the rat with its selfishness and eternal life and the unselfish chemist in his glass case would meet again. The rat would scamper across the top of the glass case in which Zulerich sat as stiffly as though sculptured in stone.

It would sit upon the table before him and stare at him with red spiteful eyes. And Zulerich always knew it by the peculiar scar upon its neck. The rat had what he lacked. For one long year the rat had been frozen as the man was now and the man had then given it movement as well as life.

Could the rat do as much for the man? Would it if it could? It hated him. It never brought him the few drops of alkali he craved.

And one day they packed Zulerich carefully in a case and took him away from the place that had been his home. When the case was opened he found himself in a lofty building with the mummy of a Pharaoh on one side of him and musty relics of other ages all around him. He recognized the old building for in other days he had loved to visit it, letting his fancies wander over these fragments of a vanished age.

As he sat there upon his stool, protected within his glass case, the unalterable line of his vision vaulted the narrow aisles below him and gazed through the great glass of a tall window in the opposite wall.

OUT there he watched the throngs passing. People of a day—men who yesterday were babes in mothers' arms, today fighting up the long and difficult ladder for their fragment of success, to leap tomorrow into oblivion from their allotted rung.

Things changed, manners, customs, techniques, ways of life. But Zulerich grew no older, Zulerich did not change. And the rat—the rat to which Zulerich had given the gift of movement—it too, wherever it was, lived on also.

In all their years upon earth it was bound that these two, rat and man, should meet again, the rat with its selfish greed and the chemist with his unselfish dream. Had the rat been seeking him so that it might gloat over him as it used to do? So that it might scamper upon his case and deride him with its motion? The night roundsman of the museum saw the rat, beat it with his broom, mangled it with his big heel, left it upon the floor until morning so that the cleaners might take it away.

But before the cleaners came the next morning one of the scientists who was studying Zulerich saw the rat lying there upon the floor before the case, its body mangled, its eyes so bright and full of pain.

He stooped, examined it. An exclamation broke from him. The rat's heart and lungs were quiet, it seemed quite dead, yet its eyes had the same living look of the man Zulerich in the glass case.

Thus it came about that the rat too was placed under observation, set in a tiny case upon a perch just in front of the glass tomb in which old Zulerich sat looking out upon the great world through the big window.

The rat cut off part of the vision of the old man. His vision in frozen focus, he had perforce to gaze straight into the eyes of the creature to which he had given eternal life and to which, mangled now by broom and heel, had been given eternal pain as well.

Life streamed by under the old man's gaze, burning up with decay. Yet he held the secret all people so much desired. He held the connecting link between them and eternal life, a few drops of alkaline water. The wires of communication were down and none had the wisdom or the wit to raise them up. He had the secret, they had the power—*if* they only knew.

Eager and anxious, weary and bowed down, discouraged and broken, the people of the world tramped by in torrents of wasted motion. The undying man and the undying rat stared hatefully at each other. The undying man's mind kept on working, everlastingly seeking some means of breaking the paralysis of his body so that he might give eternal life to humanity.

Then he learned a great lesson from a small child.

The child, entering the museum with her father, saw the mangled rat, saw the pain and the desire for death in its eyes. And the child begged her father to kill the little rat as he had killed her little dog after the automobile had run over it. The father had smiled down on the child tenderly.

That night Zulerich's eyes softened as he regarded the rat under the bright glow of the electric lights. In his heart was remorse and a newfound wisdom. He was glad now that he had been unable to give mankind his magic formula.

For he knew now, past all doubt and deep down in the living soul within his undying body, what the true answer was to all his dreams. He knew that one should improve life before trying to lengthen it.

CHAPTER II

REVIVAL

YEARS and years passed over Zulerich, sitting in his glass case entirely unable to move, even to raise an eyebrow or lift a finger. He grew no older. However, with the years there came a change in the manners and moods of the human beings who passed him every day as they wandered curiously about the museum.

Sentiment warmed and grew so that it had a great influence over the minds and actions of the people.

They became more and more easily swayed by soft gush of unthinking folk. They became wrought up over old Zulerich and demanded that he be buried. Some of them sobbed a bit over what they called the desecration of an old man's dead body.

The scientists who controlled the museum protested the maudlin sentiment. They almost guessed that Zulerich was still alive, needed but some secret potion to revive him, though they had no idea what that potion might be.

Zulerich heard the whispers and speeches and discovered that a movement was under way to have him buried. Naturally in his condition he became terrified for he could not speak. He could not move. He could make no protesting outcry at all. He could only stare straight before him and feel very much afraid.

As months passed the movement gained support. Zulerich thought day and night, trying to think of some way to beg the leaders of the new movement to let him alone. But he could think of no way at all.

He stared at the cleaners as they washed down his case with great dousing swabs of alkali water from their sloshing pails. A few drops of that liquid would release him. Yet there was no way to hint that he wanted a drink of the suds.

Terrifying hours he spent. He listened fearfully to every footstep which came down the narrow aisle. He watched every solemn face. He feared every approach. Every man in black seemed to him to be the undertaker who would remove him from the brightly lighted museum and take him to the darkness of an eternal grave.

Finally the hour came. Two men entered the room briskly. Zulerich did not guess their mission until they opened his case and took him out. The keeper of the museum watched wistfully and turned his back upon them as they took him down. He felt their warm hands upon him and they chilled him with terror.

After he had been put in the ambulance and driven away to the morgue he was placed in a cheap steel casket and rumbled out to the cemetery. Fright grew in his kindly old soul as he felt them remove his box and sink it into the grave. Then he heard the sullen fall of spaded earth.

Every nerve was taut and strained, trying to command his voice to cry out, yet not a whisper left his lips. He tried to rise, to pound a hand against the lid, but he could not make the slightest move. The thudding became fainter and fainter until black silence crept in to keep him company. Silence rang in his ears. Darkness spread like a great void all about.

SO HE lay, day on day, night on night, and both were the same in the black grave. And he grew used to the darkness and the silence and his thoughts quieted and ripened like old wine in a dark place. He became very wise in meditating upon things he had observed while on the earth.

His thoughts were of bright sunshine upon bright flowers, of the warm moist earth at springtime when buried seeds burst their prison to send up their shoots. Seeds that were so like him, seemingly dead but with eternal life prisoned in them.

He recalled poems and scanned them line by line to dwell upon their beauty and mull upon their thought. He reasoned out theories. He pondered facts. He dreamed dreams.

Then, when he could think of nothing new at all, he would begin all over and retrace his thought again. Over and over his fancy circled the unending memory of old days and wove into them new imaginings. Still black silent night held reign.

Eternity is a long time and much can happen in it.

Even the steel box in which old Zulerich lay rusted and grew weak and thin. There came the rains of the great wet years. Water trickled into the sod and found the mouldy cavity where rusted the steel box.

A tiny leak came through a rusted hole in the casket lid and water dripped upon his forehead all night. All night or all day, he could not tell which, for day was as night in that grave.

On and on the drip continued. Tap, tap, tap, tap, like the tick of a clock almost run down. It broke in a new place and dripped upon his chest, his limbs and finally into his upturned mouth.

His nerves were tortured with the constant drip of it. He tried to move just a little. He wanted to let the splatter of it fall in a new place. He tried to move though he knew from experience that he could not.

But he did move! After more than a hundred years of stiff hypnosis he moved! He stretched his legs. He closed his muddy wide open eyes and then he fought furiously to get out.

The drip through the gypsum clay had carried in it the small amount of alkali he needed to get back the use of his muscles!

Squirming about against the steel lid ripped it loose and a strip of it broke off in his hand. With that as a spade it did not take long for him to work his way out and poke his grizzled half-bald head into the gray light of a rainy day. He crawled naked into the fresh sweet rain for his clothes were as ash and had fallen from him while he worked his way out.

Out on top of the earth again! He had not dared dream of it as he lay paralyzed with earth spaded upon him. Such a miracle had not occurred to him at all!

He smelled the moist clean freshness of a rain-washed earth. The fragrance of new blossoming flowers, the sweet meadows which spread green and luscious all about him.

The pain and misery of his long dark wait below was behind him. It was forgotten in his joy at being above the earth again, able to move again. He was in a new century and the scientist in him was alert as he hurried down from the top of the little hill where he had been buried.

He wondered what he would find in the old town. Had mankind advanced? Had they continued the unparalleled progress he had witnessed during the twentieth century or had that been merely a mushroom growth already decayed? He hurried down to see.

IF POPULATION were any answer man had certainly progressed. The old home town had swelled out beyond the forested hills and it seemed to have been remade. It glowed with a white beauty undulled

even by the dreary day.

Light glowed from every wall and tower, soft and radiant like the glow of a firefly. The whole city seemed painted with some luminous enamel which glowed more brightly with the passing of dark clouds and dimmed with the rifling of them.

There were no streets as he knew them in the old days. Instead there were crescents and stars and circles landscaped off for the setting of stately buildings. Many people were about but they were high in the air, traveling here and there very rapidly in small planes which were of a peculiar butterfly pattern. They were tinted and exquisitely lighted.

Zulerich dared not enter the city for he was naked. Still, those above seemed not to notice him at all as he crouched behind a statue of white marble.

Finally a plane dropped vertically from the sky. He drew away, expecting to see it dashed upon the base of the statue near which he crouched. But as it dived toward the earth the beautiful butterfly wings began to revolve around and around and it came down as lightly as a bird upon a twig.

A man crawled from the plane and stared at Zulerich in astonishment. "What are you doing out here naked, old man?" he asked.

Zulerich was staring a bit himself, studying every feature of man and plane. So this was a product of the twenty-third or twenty-fourth century. Zulerich's interest was alert as to what changes had taken place in man and mechanics since his time on earth.

The man seemed rather more feminine than men used to be. He had soft delicate features, slim, perfectly-cared-for hands, a low well-controlled voice. The plane was seemingly made to please the eye as well as to be of service.

"Where did you come from?" the man asked, piqued by Zulerich's close observation.

"I dug myself from my grave," Zulerich answered, knowing the surprise he must awake. "My box rusted from me and I dug through the wet clay."

The man frowned. Zulerich shook a little in the drizzle of chill rain. The man's tone changed when he spoke again. It became indulgent. "Sure, sure," he said consolingly, "but who are your people, old man?"

"There must be none alive," Zulerich answered with nostalgia in his tone. "There will be no one, I am sure, none who know me, for I have been buried for so long a time. I had no way to number the years but I must have lain there in the grave for centuries.

"Still you may have a written remembrance of me, for I was a great marvel in my day. I found the compound which would perpetuate body cells, the pale green drops of eternal life!"

"Sure, sure," the man said indulgently, "but where is your home? With whom do you stay? I will take you there. Can't you remember where you live?"

"I am not insane, sir," Zulerich said, looking the man straight in the eye. "The story I tell is strange but I can prove the most marvelous part of what I saw. I still remember my formula and I can give any man who drinks of it eternal life."

"You don't expect me to believe that?"

"Yes."

"Old man, you're crazy as a bolo. You'd better let me take you home or else go there yourself. Get on some clothes. You must know it's been a hundred years since people were allowed naked in the streets! The new rule won't stand for naked men, you ought to know that!"

"I know nothing of your rule, son. I have just come out of the grave. I have not seen the good light of day since the year of Our Lord two thousand and thirty-nine."

"You act well," the man admitted. "You have taken on the old form of speech, you dare walk naked in the street and you hint that you reckon time by the old Julian calendar, which has been in disuse for more than a hundred years. You act too well to be entirely insane."

The man stared straight into old Zulerich's clear eyes. His face lighted as he seemed to arrive at a conclusion.

"Prove that you can give eternal life! By all the truth of science it will open a place for us both in the chamber of the Rulers."

"Give me some clothes," Zulerich demanded, "take me where we can talk. Allow me yet a little time so that I may see that man is ready for them and I will give to every one that wishes the pale green drops which will cause him to never die!"

TURNING, the man opened the tinselled door of the little plane.

"Come," he decided. "I'll give you clothes. I'd do that much for anyone. Not that I believe a thing you say, not a bit of it."

"I will prove what I say," Zulerich affirmed. "I will give my secret freely to you and all the people. I have always loved them, felt a deep pity for them all, sorrowed at the waste death laid upon their lives, regretted that when man was just learning how to live it was ordained as time he should die."

"The earth is already filled with a new race. They seem to have the secret of perfect health and luxurious life. I will add the last and greatest gift. They shall have time to work into their years the pattern of their dreams! They shall never know again the fear of death!"

Into the man's face crept a glowing avidity. Zulerich knew it was a hunger of eternal life, a desire to outwit eternal death!

"Lord!" the man whispered, "If you were only not crazy after all?" He stared in dumb silence as though the possibilities of such a dream were too much for speech. There came a measured, rumbling tread from somewhere below the earth. The man drew rigidly erect and stared about. He grabbed Zulerich by the arm.

"Get in," he urged, "the telecops must not sense you. They would have you before the Rulers!"

Zulerich slid his naked body into the seat and sank into soft satin cushions against the far door. There were many strange switches and lights and knobs he did not understand. Certainly in this age mechanics seemed perfected.

The man slid in beside him. The butterfly wings began to whirl around and around over the cab and sucked the plane straight into the sky. Far above the city the wings ceased whirling and the propeller ahead began to spin. The wings spread rigidly from either side of the fuselage and they sped away much as planes had when Zulerich lived before upon the earth.

It would take volumes to recount half of the mechanical marvels Zulerich saw in that one city. It seemed to him the world had become an Aladdin's lamp where the slightest touch yielded satisfaction to the greatest desires.

There was one thing he remarked more than all the others and that was this—though all work that man desired was done through power broadcast by radio over the whole city, not one smoking chimney told of a power house, not one river was harnessed and not one gasoline engine sputtered in plane or factory. Zulerich asked his companion about this and was told that man had long ago learned to use energy from the great source itself. The sun furnished all power through a series of intensifiers which caught the sunlight and brought it into one startling blaze of incandescent heat.

This beam was shot downward like a searchlight to the engines, which ran all day and stored power for the night. On occasions power could be transmitted by radio from stations with a surplus to those that needed it. Power could even be drawn from the other side of the earth should it be required.

CHAPTER III

A NEW WORLD

THE man's name proved to be Rhuh, which, in accordance with the new system of naming men, gave his vocation, his race, his town and his standing in the community.

Rhuh took Zulerich to his home and gave him clothes. He was invited to dinner and, being very hungry and without an idea where else to obtain food, Zulerich accepted.

The meal was almost wholly of synthetic foods, manufactured, so Rhuh stated, from sunlight, gases and minerals, without recourse to the slow growth of plant life. There were also fresh figs from Smyrna, grapes from California and a new tartly flavored fruit from southern Texas.

Zulerich had seen no railways or freight planes and expressed a wonder how these fruits had come so fresh from so long a distance. Rhuh explained all food and other freight was sent into the cities through great tubes where compressed air shot the containers along at the rate of hundreds of miles an hour.

"The cities are much overcrowded," Rhuh complained. "Men pile upon each other like bees in a swarm. There has been no war for two hundred years and no pestilence in more than half a century.

"There are no longer guns or spears or lethal weapons of any kind. There are not even sporting arms for there has been no wild game for generations. The few animals left are in zoos or laboratories. Meat as diet is looked at as barbaric."

Rhuh made a pellet of a waxlike substance and rolled it between his finger and thumb, then dropped it into a little bronze vessel where glowed a jet of purple flame. Immediately there came an aroma which filled the whole room. The smell was rather heady but pleasant.

"Carteesh," Rhuh explained. "It has become a national habit, much like cigar and cigarette smoking in other days."

"Rather nice-smelling stuff," Zulerich commented.

They sat breathing the peculiar incense, relaxed, day dreaming. Finally Zulerich asked, "Is the whole earth

as overpopulated as this city seems to be?"

Rhuh drew himself from his fancies, snapped a switch and pointed toward what before had been a tall white wall. Now it seemed a large window, looking out upon an untamed jungle.

He touched another switch and the jungle seemed to flow back like fields beyond the window of a railway coach. Zulerich leaped to his feet. It seemed the whole house was in motion, flowing over a tropical jungle. He sat down again, slightly embarrassed, smiled and watched.

"Television, I suppose," he commented.

Rhuh nodded and said, "The foibles of human nature have always puzzled me but here is one which exceeds all the rest for lack of explanation. Men are packed in our cities until the subways are cleared by oxygenized air and yet the most fertile and picturesque sections of our globe are totally uninhabited. "This would not seem queer were transportation a matter of discomfort. There is absolutely no reason why we should pack up in certain spots as though there were no standing room anywhere else.

"Yet ye do and were it not for our excellent medical service and our very efficient *telecops* we would be exterminated by our own gregariousness."

"But surely," Zulerich exclaimed, pointing to the intense tropical growth, "there are animals in these forests."

Rhuh twisted the little brass knob under his fingers. The forest seemed to rush closer until the long palmlike foliage spread thick and Jumbled before them. The tropics were there for all Zulerich could tell, dense, luxuriant and still.

He peered into the undergrowth and scrutinized the foliage and tree trunks, as they passed very slowly now. He could not find a bug, or a bird, an animal or a snake.

"Why?" he asked.

"It was not always that men were lazy as they are now. There was a time, nearly a century ago, when everyone, male and female, vied with others in activity of brain and body. At that time scientists had learned that disease was due almost entirely to parasitic life and parasitic life was fostered mainly by the lower animals. That was the age of gas.

"The age of electricity had just passed and men having exhausted its resources were turning to gas for study and accomplishment. New gases were found almost daily and new uses for gases. Gas carried men about, composed more than half their foods, heated them, cooled their cities and their foods, healed them, entertained them.

"Acting upon the common impulse to rid life of disease a great student of gas discovered *tertopelium*. It was brought from far above the earth by suction to the cylinders and forced into tanks by compression. It is still the lightest known gas, being found high above the earth's atmosphere.

"This student found that *tertopelium* would destroy all lower animal and microscopic life but would not harm man at all. I believe even as far back as the twentieth century of the old Julian calendar chemists had discovered powders that were poisonous to insects but entirely harmless to man.

"Not to bore you with details *tertopelium* was condensed and mixed with a heavier gas to give it weight. Then the entire surface of the earth was flooded with it from planes. Since that time there has been no parasitic or animal life in our forests.

"*Tertopelium* did a very efficient job. Whether nature will evolve the like again can not be proved or even guessed for a good many thousands of years."

WHILE the topic of conversation was life and death Zulerich asked Rhuh what ideas prevailed as to the ultimate future. It seemed that man had abandoned hope of eternal life upon this planet or any other, though the very fact that progress had always been toward perfection should have strengthened rather than weakened faith in future life. And because of this doubt as to life beyond the grave Rhuh was all the more eager to prove the hope Zulerich now dangled before him. But as Zulerich questioned and studied he was not so enthusiastic about his promise to give life to the people. He was a man of deep faith. He knew that faith had fostered and mothered every accomplishment and he doubted the wisdom of giving men eternal life when they had no faith and no vision. So he talked on, letting his mind run along one channel and his words another.

He told how he had discovered the secret of the mangled rat which had so upset him with the pain in its eyes, of the scientists who had studied him and of the sentiment which had buried him. And Rhuh in turn told of many new and incredible marvels which Zulerich had never thought to be possible.

Rhuh finally seemed convinced that after all he was talking with a very old and very remarkable man and admitted that he really believed that Zulerich might have discovered the elixir of life. In those days there were so many new and wonderful things that men had long since ceased to hoot at anything.

Zulerich commended the spirit of progress so evident all about but Rhuh did not seem to possess any of his enthusiasm.

"Yes," he admitted, "we have made incredible progress over the old age of invention of two hundred and more years ago. There is no need now that anyone should be in want or be denied the luxuries of life."

But in the days that followed Zulerich found that the masses were in want. The Rulers had become insane with power, and ridden with a lust for accumulation of wealth. They took with a greedy hand for they no longer feared any uprising of the people or any embezzlement by employees.

The *telecops*, which guarded their treasure and maintained their power, were strictly mechanical and operated by a secret code that was known only to the owners. Political and social relations had in no wise kept pace with the progress of mechanical invention.

All advancement had been material. Politicians openly abused their government. Humility, charity, idealism, self-sacrifice—these were traits unknown. Love had a new definition and the new life beneath its mechanical perfection was a hollow thing.

So Zulerich told Rhuh finally that he would not give the secret of life to the people or to any one until some semblance of justice was done, man to man.

Rhuh stared at him for a moment with the corners of his mouth drawn awry. Then he grasped his guest's arm and snarled, "Old man, you make good. If you've been lying to me, dangling a hope before me that is a hoax, if—" His lips twitched and jerked but no sound passed them for awhile. He was too angry and disappointed to complete his threat. Instead he jabbed at a button beside the table.

There came a hum above the house. A big plane dropped past the window. Zulerich looked out as it landed, light as a bird upon a twig. Its door opened. Three grotesque imitations of men got out.

They were giant fellows. They must have been ten feet tall with angular arms as thick as a man's thigh,

legs in proportion with the arms. They walked forward with a stiff mechanical lockstep.

They reached the door, wheeled in perfect unison and came tramping in, bowing their heads to clear the doors. The whole inside of the house reverberated with the pulse of their measured tread. They filed in and Zulerich shrank involuntarily from them as they marched to where he sat.

Their heads were not round but boxlike and to make them more horrible they were fitted with great glass eyes which stared at one with wide greenish pupils as though they were dead. Of course they could not see for they were not live things, just mechanical police, but Zulerich learned later that they sensed a man or an object by the shadow thrown upon their eyes.

This operated an electrical device which guided them. In the back of each steel body was a hinged door, which looked to be a way of entering the mechanical chamber to mend any defects.

One of the *telecops* stood back at the door. The other two advanced and Zulerich sat as stiffly as if he were back in his glass case, wondering what they were about to do to him.

Long stiff arms reached out with jerky moves and seized him with hard iron fingers.

"We arrest you in the name of the Rulers. Come!"

ZULERICH had thought the silent oncoming *telecops* were terrible enough but the mechanical voice had an impersonal tone which gave him a feeling of the utter futility of protesting or begging for consideration. He abandoned hope and made no resistance. He knew any protest or defense would be useless.

He rose and followed the man who had seized his arms, running to keep up, but in spite of all he could do he could not hold pace with the long legs of the mechanical giant and was dragged towards the plane.

He passed Rhuh at the door. There was neither pity nor leniency in the glare Rhuh gave him.

He was taken out and placed in the rear cab of the large plane. It was indeed a large plane in comparison with the small ones which flew all about. Under its wings and upon its fuselage was the triangular insigne of the police.

They rose into the air. Through the glass of the cab he could see a real man at the wheel. The three *telecops* rode in the rear cab with him.

A thousand feet above the city their course was set toward the east. They traveled all day and shortly before dark they came to a very large city, which was the capital of the world.

There he was placed in prison. The prison showed none of the advancement of the day, for the Rulers had little or no consideration for those who fell into their hands. The next day he was brought to trial.

Rhuh appeared against him, testifying that Zulerich had told him of a secret elixir of eternal life and had promised it to him for a suit of clothes and that Zulerich had taken the clothes but had not disclosed the secret.

The Judge of the court was indignant that such a case should be brought before him. He dismissed Zulerich and lectured Rhuh for believing in such foolishness. But later in the night the Judge sought out Zulerich and talked with him and tried to bargain for a portion of the pale green drops.

Zulerich was amazed at the cringing attitude of the Judge and said, "You ridicule me in your Court, yet

you seek me in the night. Judges of even my day would not be so bold as this."

So he refused to bargain with him and was called before a council of the high Rulers. They made much over him at first, inviting him to the palace as though he were a guest. They engaged him with sly questions and finally prepared a feast for him. Every one of the Council of Ten was there.

He was a little awed as he ate and drank with them for Zulerich had always been an humble man, investigating for the sake of truth and not coveting honor.

When the feast was over every man sat a while in silence and watched him closely. Zulerich felt somewhat uncomfortable under their scrutiny and sat in silence, wondering just what their gravity could mean.

One of them finally asked, "Has there been time?"

A short dark man with a Vandyke, who had watched Zulerich even more closely and more carefully than the rest of them, nodded soberly.

Then he turned to those about the table and said, "There is something strange about this man Zulerich. He drank the poison. Each of you saw me pour it into his glass. Yet he seems entirely unharmed!"

"Do you think he is as he claims?" the Chairman asked.

"I do not know," the Vandyke answered, shaking his knotty head. "By all the laws of nature this man should be dead, yet he lives!"

Zulerich grew bolder then. They had tested the truth of his claim and were about convinced.

"I have the secret of eternal life," he vowed, "and I am one who loves his fellow man. When you shall do justice and be content one man to rule himself rather than another I will give it freely to you and to all the people."

They laughed at his speech, calling him sentimental and impractical. And when their ridicule had no effect they began to bargain with him for the secret.

But Zulerich in turn laughed at them, deriding them for offering so little for so great a thing as the secret of immortality.

FINDING they had made no headway they reduced their demands to one portion for each of the rulers but Zulerich shook his grizzled old head and muttered, "You are not fit for eternal life."

"We are nearly perfect," the Chairman insisted. "We lack but this one thing. We have subdued the earth. We have mastered all natural law except this law of life and death. Men and all of nature serve us.

"We will give you a place in our authority, allow you to share equally in our power, though we have bought this good thing with daring and danger and you have risked nothing at all. Give us so that we may live always and we will give you power over the earth."

Still Zulerich shook his head and speaking to the Chairman of the Council he said sternly:

"Your lack is greater than any of you know."

The trace of a fine sneer touched the Chairman's lips and he asked, "What is it, old man, that *we* lack

except this secret of life and death? Tell us."

"Imagination," Zulerich said slowly, dwelling upon each syllable. "You cannot think beyond your own selves!"

CHAPTER IV

ZULERICH RELENTS

THE Chairman pointed a long white finger at him and said acridly, "I have no patience with your chatter. We offer no more bargains. We will have the secret out of you, old man!"

At the right of the Chairman sat a big bullnecked blond man of about forty. He shouted so that his bellowing voice filled the hall, "That *is* what I wanted to do at first!

"Have the old dodderer's secret from him or give him the garrotte!"

"Checkmate, gentlemen !" the Vandyke objected. "If this old man really has the secret of eternal life he cannot die. We are frustrated by the very thing we most desire!"

A bushy black-eyed man beside Zulerich reached over and grasped the scientist's ear. He gave it a violent twist.

Zulerich winced involuntarily with pain.

The bushy man chuckled and spoke in a deep bass, "Gentlemen, I have shown you a way. Torture him! He can still feel pain."

The whole council smiled with relief. The bullnecked man shouted boisterously, "Have it out of him!"

The Chairman said very quietly, "Come old man, give us the secret or you'll have a mangled body to drag about."

Zulerich shuddered. For the moment he wished he had never clawed himself from his peaceful grave. He was a conscientious man and would rather have endured that everlasting night than to give these brutal men everlasting life in which to exploit the earth.

He remembered the mangled rat, the fiery pain in its eyes. He knew that wherever it was, it still endured the pain of the blow it had received that day at the museum more than two hundred years before. If they mangled him he would carry his agony into the eternal years ahead. He did not feel that he could submit to it, yet he knew also that death was the only enemy these tyrants feared.

Death alone could conquer them and raise up new rulers with kinder hearts. Should he reveal to them his secret he would betray all men forever into their power. Still he felt he could not submit to eternal pain. It was too great a price to pay for other people's comfort.

The Chairman called out something in a peculiar tongue.

There came a measured tramping from outside the hall. The whole palace seemed to throb with the sound of it. The *telecops* were coming! He would be given over to them that they might mangle him!

The great oaken doors at the end of the hall swung back. Zulerich hitched upward from his chair as the square-headed giants with their set hideous eyes came marching through with a measured precision which shook the tiled floor. No one paid him any attention. They were smiling with certitude as to what would transpire.

With six-foot strides the giants came bearing down upon old Zulerich, who stood erect and determined to meet his fate bravely. They were hideous things, men without brains, without feeling, without souls! They were more dreadful than a firing squad or an army with fixed bayonets.

Iron hands reached to grasp him. Iron fingers clutched his arms. Iron arms raised him from the floor. The giants whirled and struck off toward the still open doors.

"*Wait!*" Zulerich begged, turning his big eyes upon the Chairman of the Council. "Give me a minute. I relent. I will give you each a portion of the secret drug!"

The Chairman gave a sharp command in a peculiar tongue. The iron fingers held him but the *telecops* halted and stood at attention.

"I will give you each a portion that will give to you eternal life," Zulerich repeated. "Stop this horrible procedure."

"Very well," the Chairman answered. "But do not play with us or attempt any sly schemes."

Another command was given and Zulerich was let to the floor, still surrounded by the mechanical giants.

"Have five bottles brought to me together with the quantity of each chemical that I shall write down. I shall then mix them in my secret proportions and from the brew I shall give each of you a vial of this solution and a vial for each of the governors of the provinces of the world. This you must take at the first peep of the sun on the first day of the week following the new year. Then you shall have eternal life!"

The Rulers were in great spirits. But one more caution suggested that they put upon his pulse a new machine which could detect by the quiver of red ink lines upon its tape whether a man lied or spoke the truth.

So they brought the lie detector and put its band upon his arm and its finger upon his pulse and then they asked him again, "Will the secret portion which you shall give us render unto us eternal life if we take it in the manner you have said?"

"Yes, it will certainly give you eternal life," Zulerich answered. And as they looked at the register upon the tape they knew that he had spoken the truth.

THEY brought him the chemicals and the bottles were put in the laboratory they furnished him. And when he had mixed the solution and bottled it he gave it to the Rulers, who sent vials to each Ruler of the provinces throughout the world, retaining a large portion for themselves and their friends and families.

So it happened that, at the peep of the sun on the first day of the week following the new year, all the Rulers and their friends and families throughout the whole world drank of the pale green drops and sat or stood or lay in whatever position they were when they drank their drops. For like Zulerich when he first drank the pale green drops they lived *but they were entirely unable to move!*

But then Zulerich entirely lost his head in his joy over his success. Now that the tyrants were helpless and deposed he should have been wise enough gradually to release control to the masses.

Instead he published broadcast the news and proclaimed that all men should take the rewards of their own labor and live peacefully with one another. He invited them to drink of his pale green drops of eternal life and promised them additional drops which would give freedom of movement.

The people were quick to claim control of affairs but they were afraid of him and his drops, which had stricken their rulers in such a perplexing way. Even Rhuh, who had followed Zulerich to the palace, eyed him with a new awe and would not drink of the drops he had tried so hard to obtain.

Things rocked along in this way a few months. Zulerich, having no other home, stayed in the palace and Rhuh, curious as to what the scientist was about, stayed to watch him.

Some of the stronger labor societies and more intelligent men and women met in the courts and organized a new republic somewhat on the order of the old United States of America. People everywhere hailed the United States of the World as a Utopia which was to fill every need and wish.

But they leaned upon it too heavily and it gave way. Even in an age of perfected mechanics they learned that one's government depends chiefly upon what he puts into it himself.

Riots started in the assembly rooms and spread from city to city.

Men fought in the plazas and the disturbance was quickly scattered over the whole earth. There was soon no safety or peace in any city of the whole world.

Anarchy followed. Industries became idle through lack of labor and fear of pillage. The fighting was savage—tooth and fist, cudgel and stone, with fire set to anything that would take flame.

Soft cultured men suddenly slipped their veneer and became wolves through rage and fear. Weakened by a life of mechanical efficiency they had not fighting strength, yet they were as fiercely bloodthirsty as any of their savage forebears.

Zulerich heard with growing sadness the tales Rhuh brought to the palace. Works of art, chemical formulae that had been perfected by lifetimes of patient experiment, machinery which had been constructed through years of tireless labor, were being mutilated and destroyed.

Men had gone mad with too much freedom. They had no control over themselves. They had been too long dependent upon stronger wills than their own. And Zulerich became wiser through his second great mistake.

He knew that he had overthrown one evil and spread a greater one. He found out most certainly that any government, no matter how despotic or rotten it might be, was far better than no government at all!

He faced a new problem. He mulled over it as the progress of a thousand years was being pushed backward into oblivion.

Should he revive the tyrants? Should he return the selfish despots to power? Should he allow them again to take control and grind the people forever, now that they had eternal life?

Before he reached the solution to these questions Rhuh betrayed his hiding place to the people. Zulerich did not learn of this until it was too late for him to run if he had wanted to do so. The first inkling he had that the mob wanted to kill him came from the drone of its planes above the palace. He could not believe they would hate him because he had taken away their Rulers from them.

He peered from the palace door as he heard the noise of planes and raised voices. The sky was swarming with the small highly-colored planes. Every landing place in the park was crowded with them.

One lighted on top of another.

Men leaped from them to pack the court. They pushed forward toward the palace, storming it with sheer force of numbers. They were in a frenzy and seemed to acknowledge no leader.

ZULERICH stood alone. There were no soldiers, no police. The *telecops* which guarded the place were useless to him. But he was courageous with a self-forgetful superiority that ignored the menace about him. His one thought was of right and reconstruction, of stopping the senseless destruction.

He pushed open the big glazed doors which opened from the vestibule upon the outside steps, hoping with words of reason and a calm bearing to shame the crowd and give them a new vision.

But these restless men below him were not to be shamed by self-sacrifice and heroism. They were used only to obedience to iron wills. They respected nothing but the law of force. They had no code, no standard, except the desire to get while the getting was good.

They charged up the broad sweeping steps which spread a marble cascade below the doors. He felt the passion of their clawing hands, the hoarse bellow of their hate and lust, saw their dancing bloodshot eyes as they hissed and snarled.

The fury of it swelled until the very walls of the palace seemed shaken. The contagion passed from court to court. It seethed and boiled over to spread out through the city.

The sound and sight of such Babel almost drained old Zulerich's resolves. But he stood his ground for a moment, daring them to be as brave and sane as he. He stopped them in a semicircle of hesitating wrath, like beasts crouching before a whip.

He might have reasoned with them then, might have brought them to themselves and a knowledge of their senseless mania, but a sound grew behind the palace walls as silence spread before the palace steps.

New howls now had the swelling throb of unrestrained passion—the chilling thrill of unreasoning lust, the terrifying swing of irresistible force.

Zulerich had heard that cry of rebellion before. It had chilled him then to think of what the sleeping giant of revolt could do if it awoke. And it was awake now!

The swelling rhythm surged and grew, pulse on pulse, throb on throb, wave on wave. He turned and ran. Who could reason with this insanity? Terror had hold of the earth!

He plunged headlong down the palace hall, stopping only to shut and lock the big oak doors. He reached the marble stairs and took them with his long agile leaps. He passed rank on rank of rigid *telecops* as they stood at stiff mechanical attention against the wall. He passed their motionless eyes staring straight before them.

Those eyes sickened him as they burned on him with life. He knew what fear clutched the one-time fearless despots as they lay helpless before the trampling mob which howled down upon them.

But he had no time for pity. Palace doors were being splintered, furnishings wrecked and borne down as men clawed and crushed each other and beat across the tile with the drum of angry feet, while over all the palace swelled the rhythm of trampling feet!

"Fools! Fools!" Zulerich sobbed as he leaped ahead, "*Fools!*" he shouted as he reached the next floor.

"You are pulling down your own protection. Why must you always destroy that which you do not understand!"

But his words were as useless as the line of tall *telecops* which stood with infinite patience against the palace walls. The masses were as ignorant of controlling themselves as he was of controlling the *telecops*.

There stood the iron soldiers who knew only how to obey. They were the perfect soldiers without initiative or fear, waiting only the proper word, but he did not know how to command.

CHAPTER V

FLAME AND FIRE!

THE masses piled into the halls like medieval peasants storming a castle. There were no firearms. Men wielded sticks, chairs, missiles, any weapon they could find.

Zulerich ran swiftly and with endurance. The pale green drops had restored the agility of his early youth. But there was no escape. Men already were upon the stairs and swarming from the elevators overhead.

He was surrounded. There was no way past them at all. Hoarse bellows which cried for his destruction rose above the incessant howl. He made a turn about the second floor and took the next flight of stairs.

At the third floor men were also swarming. He turned down the hall toward the end of the building. Expansive windows made up most of the outer walls. Through these Zulerich saw a flash of the dreaded heat ray. It whipped here and there over the city like the blade of a great searchlight.

The brightness of it was such that it cut daylight as an electric torch does night. It raked the city, found the palace and shot a broad blade of incandescence through the windows and down the hall.

Fire burst from it and furnishings flamed as paper thrown into an electric furnace. It was no billowy roaring flame which trailed lurid clouds of smoke. It was a quiet, intense heat, which blinded him and burned down the struggling men with the suddenness of an explosion.

A frightful sight, that blazing tongue consuming and leaving ash of everything combustible. It cracked the white marble walls and left them a red blaze of heat. It ate woodwork like a spreading acid.

Down in the lower floors of the palace rose shrieks and moans as the flashes leaped from top to bottom of the big palace. Zulerich darted into a nearby vault, stricken and almost overcome. He knew what had happened. The sun-reflectors of the municipal towers had been turned upon the palace. The mob inside was attacked by men of different political beliefs.

Zulerich lay panting in the open vault. He had fallen exhausted upon the floor, burned by the reflection of the flashes against the wall. As the blade swirled about like the flash of an ancient searchlight he saw it strike downward into the court.

Cries and panic sounded but the destruction went on. Shrieks drowned it now and then but it did not die. It rose again and again with new and lusty vigor as men crowded into the ashes of those just burned.

Though it was bright day outside the vault the hall seemed dim and hazy, much as a room will after one has stared into the naked sun. Zulerich got up and stumbled out the door, determined to leave the palace and to escape to some far land. There he might possibly gather around him a little band of men to organize a government of sanity and restraint.

He stumbled over something near the door inside of the vault. The glaring search of the gunfire came swinging up the palace walls again and gave him a fleeting glimpse of what lay there.

It was the man with the Vandyke beard. One *of the Rulers was still alive!

Zulerich stopped and shook him, shouting, "Wake up, man. Wake up! The palace is aflame!"

He had forgotten that the man could not move, that he was one of the tyrants who had tried to worm the secret of eternal life from him. But when the man stared up at him with fire in his eyes, his body rigid as though frozen, he remembered that Vandyke had drunk of his pale green drops and he remembered too that he must know the code which worked the *telecops*.

All he lacked was a few drops of alkali to give him speech and movement. If he could only get down to the basement, where he had his vials of alkali, he could revive this man and bring order out of chaos. The invulnerable police, which once had stricken fear into the hearts of the people, could again be about their jobs. -

He picked up Vandyke in his arms and ran out into the hall. Even as he ran hurriedly for the lower floors he noticed that the *telecops* were as good as ever despite the terrific heat which had been thrown upon them.

They were evidently made to stand intense heat as well as any other mode of attack. But the vials of alkali were not for Zulerich just then. They were far below and he could hear men already crowding back into the palace, singing their dread song of rebellion.

The glare of the diabolical heat ray came traveling back again. Zulerich had reached the stairs and stumbled down them, falling heavily upon the landing, where a fountain spurted a jet of water and steam from its cracked and blistered marble base.

The glare grew swiftly. The heat ray was sweeping upon him like an ancient machine-gun seeking out a nest. He twisted about and pulled himself from under the helpless man in his arms, who had fallen across his thighs.

He got to his feet with one leg wobbly and hurt and tried to hobble away but his kindly old eyes caught the upright stare of the man who could not move. He thought of the time he also had been helpless and had waited for men to come and put him in a grave.

His big heart would not let him leave the paralyzed man to be consumed. He reached down and dragged the stiff length of him to his feet and balanced him as he strove to make his wounded leg obey his will.

ALREADY little waves of heat were quivering from the walls and stung his hands and face unbearably. It began blistering long before the blade of fire reached them.

Zulerich dragged Vandyke over to the fountain, hoping that by some miracle the blade of flame would miss them and he could cool its reflection with the warm water. Yet it came steadily on, traveling upon them like sunshine across the earth through a rift of fast-moving cloud.

His whole thought then was of the alkali drops. If there were only some way to revive Vandyke they could run back to the vault and both be saved. But there was no way to revive him at all that Zulerich knew. Without alkali the rigid man was as helpless as an image of stone.

His own leg badly hurt, Zulerich stared about the palace like a trapped wolf. His eyes swept the burned furnishings, the brick-red blisters upon the white marble walls, the little heaps of ash which had been lounges, tapestries, pictures and doors. Then he looked again into the upstaring eyes of the only living thing beside himself in that charnel house.

Again he begged of heaven and earth some way to put movement into Vandyke. True the man was a tyrant, a selfish brute who had sought to torture him.

Still Vandyke was the last link old Zulerich knew which might control the *telecops*. He had to save him, not through pity so much as to find the key to the mechanical men for they alone could restore order to an unrestrained race.

He splashed water over himself and then over Vandyke. It steamed as it soaked the hot clothing. The steam of it seemed to scald him. This must surely be the end, he thought. He must either abandon Vandyke and the key to power over the mob or be consumed in the flame himself.

He let Vandyke fall and turned to run. His feet crunched fallen ash of the thick carpet which had threaded the stairs. And that gave him his solution! *Ashes were alkali!*

He turned back to the man, who lay across the marble parapet of the dazzling pool. He stooped and raked a handful of ashes from the stair and crammed them into the open mouth. He dipped up a handful of water and washed them down.

Vandyke lay tense for a moment, much *as* he had through all the months since Zulerich had given him the drops of eternal life. Then he quivered a little. He seemed to realize what had happened to him. He leaped to his feet and shouted in a tongue that was hissing and strange.

There came a rumbling down the hall. It grew and reverberated throughout the heated place. A weird Phoenix life seemed roused within the blistered halls. It was the measured tread of iron men as they came marching from their position against the seared walls.

Vandyke turned and fled for the vault, leaving old Zulerich alone!

Zulerich stared helplessly at the back of the fleeing man. There was little use in trying to follow. His leg was badly hurt and he had delayed to revive Vandyke. He could not run fast enough to reach the vault before being overtaken by that speeding blade of the heat rays.

Vandyke darted about the wall at the head of the stair. He would certainly make the vault in time. He would live on and on, alone. King of earth, ruler of *telecops*, master of men. King of earth, czar of ruthless control that asked no favors and feared no odds.

It would be a tyranny a thousandfold more unendurable than that Zulerich had sought to overthrow. Before, there were many Rulers, each suspicious of the others. Now there would be no check at all on the power of this new emperor.

Zulerich flung himself into the fountain pool. He did not expect the water, which was already almost too hot to bear, to protect him from the heat ray but with all his eternal life old Zulerich was human and he postponed dreadful fate as long as he possibly could.

A *telecop* came clanging by with ironshod heels that bit into the blistered marble. Zulerich reached from

the pool and caught the mechanical man around the calf of his leg with arms that were strong with fear.

He twined his own legs around that iron one and was carried down the stairs with six-foot strides which took four steps at a time. The *telecop* made no effort at all to shake him loose. It was obeying an order which sent it straight to its duty and paid no attention to what it might trample or thrust aside.

Old Zulerich held on with no idea at all where the thing was taking him. He hardly cared just so he got away from the barrage of oncoming rays. But one floor down he saw with dull hopelessness that the *telecop* was striding straight toward the advancing fire.

He let go of the leg and fell beside a door. The *telecop* ran on, unmindful of him. He got painfully to his feet and opened the door.

Then he went down on all fours and crawled into the room. It was a large sunny room with big windows lining the east and south. Zulerich stared at them helplessly. There was no protection here.

Before he could crawl away he found he had no more need to fear the flash for it was stricken from the palace and snapped out. Evidently Vandyke's command had been broadcast to *telecops* much nearer the power controls than the palace.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT THE BOOK REVEALED

WITH intense relief Zulerich halted and dragged himself into a chair. Then for a time the scientific curiosity of his nature was stronger than the pain of his wound. He was in one of the famed experiment rooms, where machines of various types were perfected.

All around him was a bewildering array of strange contrivances. There were great vacuum tubes taller than a man, induction coils as large as an ordinary room, wet and dry batteries as large as the vault in which he had escaped the sunflame, other batteries as small as thimbles.

Electrical charges were running through the tubes with violet, green and blue fires and one of them glowed with a flame that was almost black. There were electrodes with knobs as large as footballs which reflected his half-bald head in their polished brass. Wires ran here and there while buttons and switches crowded the table.

Zulerich got up from his chair and hobbled around, looking curiously at the complicated mechanism. He found his way behind a panel of switches and sat upon a stool to examine his leg. There seemed to be an incomplete fracture of the shinbone but it was not as bad as it was painful. He thought it would heal with a few weeks in bed.

He lost interest in his wound when he found *a* book lying open upon the table before him, where a scientist had probably last written in it before going down to join the Rulers when they drank their pale green drops.

The book proved to be a tabulation of experiments which the scientist had been making. Zulerich became so interested in it he forgot that Vandyke was alive and would probably try to destroy him.

He forgot his blistered hands and face, forgot the destroyed Rulers and the nightmare of horrible

sun-flame. He forgot everything except the marvel of scientific data before him and the audacity of the scientist's claim.

It seemed that the man believed all matter, all life, all energy, everything in the universe, was electricity in various forms. Furthermore the man had proved it.

The paper dealt with molecules, atoms, electrons and protons. Of course old Zulerich knew of these long ago. The marvel was what this man claimed to have done with these tiny components of the universe.

He claimed that, by placing a strip of metal between the electrodes of a machine at Zulerich's right hand and turning a dial upon the table, an electron or proton could be taken or added at will, which would change the metal into any substance desired, according to the formula given.

The book also claimed that the switch upon the panel behind him controlled a current to the tall vacuum tubes and that any substance placed between the electrodes and the switch thrown would have its electrons stuck close to its protons and form an inert mass which Zulerich had once known in theory as a neutron.

Material could thus be shrunk either completely into a neutronic mass or partially, by narrowing the orbit of the electron around its proton. The scientist claimed to have shrunk foot-thick pieces of metal until they seemed to disappear though in truth they were still in existence as infinitesimal particles of the same metal.

A mass of steel weighing sixty million tons, if shrunk until its protons and electrons latched and formed a neutron, would fill a space of no more than a cubic inch.

This all sounded impossible to Zulerich though in reason he could not see why it could not be done if there were as much space between the electron and its proton as he had always believed.

One paragraph particularly interested him. It read:

"My conclusion is that it is quite possible for a properly equipped scientist to now expand or shrink metals at will by narrowing or expanding the orbit of its electrons. At the command of the Imperial Council of Ten I have placed electrodes at equal intervals about the palace as an added precaution in case the people should ever discover the secret code which governs the police and turn them against us.

By switching the current through the knife of the center switch of the panel the palace may be contracted to the size of a drop of water and by reversing the switch expanded again to its present size. One should be careful not to contract fully the orbit of its electrons so as to form the new substance neutron. This shrinking of the palace I have been afraid to try out as yet.

Zulerich was so interested he did not hear the door close behind him. He read the incredible assertions unmindful that Vandyke had entered.

"Come out from back there, old man. You can't hide from me! Every place in the city can be searched through a visoscone!" Vandyke snarled. Zulerich hobbled to Ms feet and looked over the table.

Vandyke studied him coldly. Zulerich stood and returned the stare but did not say a word.

"You can't die," Vandyke asserted with a slow deliberate emphasis on each word as he smiled sardonically. "Neither can I, old man. But we can be consumed by heat easily.

"Really it is ungrateful of me to crisp you after you saved me as you did. But you have fool ideas and some day, perhaps when I am asleep, you—well, you might be near the suntower and you might—I don't say you would but you might."

He gave a hissing sound—that strange tongue which controlled the iron men.

FROM down the hall came the sound of lockstep tread marching toward the laboratory.

"What are you going to do?" old Zulerich cried, remembering the power of the sunflame, the shrieking men who had died in the palace, the way they had exploded in the heat. Vandyke did not answer. *Telecops* flung open the door.

Zulerich stood helplessly before the giant square-faced men. Now they were reddened a little by the flame which gave them a grotesque clownlike appearance. Otherwise the intense heat seemed not to have harmed them at all.

They surrounded the table and clutched at him with their six-foot arms outstretched.

As the iron fingers reached after him Zulerich remembered the switch which would shrink the palace to the size of a drop of water. He would be crushed to a Jelly, perhaps mangled and left alive forever like the little rat at the museum.

But, he remembered, it would crush Vandyke also and the *telecops* which had set upon him. The armies of iron soldiers in the city had commands to keep the people restrained. Order would be restored and the world would go ahead in peace and productiveness.

Some day when men learned the secret code of the *telecops* they would make the steel men their slaves. Perhaps by that time they would have learned how to govern themselves. He flung the switch, half doubting whether anything would happen, but it was a last chance.

"Don't!" Vandyke shouted as Zulerich closed the switch and cringed, expecting to feel the walls rushing together to smash him.

But nothing seemed to happen. The *telecops* came on. Vandyke stared out of the big windows and Zulerich, seeing the astonishment upon his face, looked also.

The whole earth beyond the windows seemed to be swelling up. It was inflating like a boy balloon blown by the breath of a lusty boy! Tall buildings swelled to mountain height. The small planes down in the court grew and reached instantaneously above the third story of the palace. Men grew tall as towers and reached far above the palace. Palaces towered up like high hills.

Zulerich, the scientist, marveled at the strange phenomenon of a world popping like a grain of corn. What had happened? Quite suddenly it occurred to him. He was not to be crushed at all. He, Vandyke and the *telecops* were unharmed, shrinking with the palace, growing smaller and smaller, so that the world outside seemed to be puffing up.

The men down in the court seemed to shoot skyward. The nearest man's shoes were all that could be seen of him now. They were much larger than the palace, their laces seemed great cotton cables entering eyelets as large as tunnels. Why, he could not be larger than a flea!

Then the shoes too ran up toward the sky and spread wide toward the horizon. Soon the soles of the shoes were higher than the palace.

FOR a minute he was glad. He and Vandyke were not dead but they could now have no possible influence over the peace and comfort of men. But then he recalled that if the switch were reversed they would grow back to normal again.

He was still in Vandyke's power for the *telecops* were as large and powerful in proportion to his size as they had ever been. When the shock of the new experience had faded Vandyke would certainly reverse the switch and they would grow back to their old proportions. He cudgeled his brain for a way out. If he could only crash the tube its power would be broken and they would remain always small.

He reached for a bar of steel which lay upon the table. Vandyke saw his purpose and shouted something to the *telecops*. They leaped forward and caught his struggling arms. His strongest efforts were of no avail. He was like a fly under a man's thumb. Vandyke walked to the switch which would return the palace to its normal size.

"Brave of you, old man," he taunted. "But I am king now—and I, not you, am the Eternal Man!"

Zulerich turned away from the leering triumph in Vandyke's face. He stared out the windows where the earth was quickly growing more and more enormous. He expected to see it begin shrinking back with the reversed current.

There came a jar. It felt as though something which supported the palace had given away.

Darkness shot into the windows. Not a ray of sunshine, not a star or a glow of any kind relieved the gloom. Blackness closed in.

Immediately the automatic lights came on -softly against the white walls and glowed until the room was bright as day. They cast a reflection upon the windows.

Rock and dirt shot past, breaking the glass and scattering debris upon the floor. They seemed falling down the length of an unending shaft.

Zulerich knew what had happened. He *knew!*

All the weight of the palace had been contracted within the bulk of a drop of water—thousands of tons of it! The earth's crust was not strong enough to hold it. They were sinking to the earth's center like a bullet dropped into the sea!