

Alas, All Thinking
A new theory of the end of the world in which we contact a human baroque!
by HARRY BATES

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. (This is dynamite! Be careful who sees it!) *Front:* Charles Wayland.

To. Harold C. Pendleton, Chairman of the Human Salvage Section of the National Lunacy Commission.

Subject: Report on the conversations and actions of Harlan T. Frick on the night of June 7, 1963.

Method: I used the silent pocket dictograph you gave me; and my report is a literal transcription of the record obtained, with only such additions of my own as are needed to make it fully intelligible.

Special Notes: (a) The report, backed by the dictograph record, may be considered as one third of the proof that your "amateur neurosis detective" Wayland is not himself a subject for psychopathic observation, since this fantastic report can be corroborated in all its details by Miles Matson, who was with us that night, and would be, I think, by Frick himself.

(b) Pending any action by you, I have cautioned both Matson and Frick to maintain absolute silence with regard to the conversation and events covered. They may be trusted to comply.

(c) So that you may follow the report more intelligently, I feel that it is necessary to say here, in advance, that Frick will be proved to be wholly sane, that never again may his tremendous gifts be utilized for the advancement of science. As his friend, I have to recommend that you give up all hope of salvaging him, and leave him to go his prodigal, pleasure-seeking way alone. You might think of him as a great scientist who has died. He is reasonable, but human, and I see his waste of his life as humanly reasonable. You will see, too.

Report: The amazing events of the evening started in a manner commonplace enough at the Lotus Gardens, where I had made a dinner engagement with Frick and our old mutual friend, Miles Matson, chemist and recent author of an amusing mathematical theory of inverse variables as applied to feminine curves, which Frick had expressed a desire to hear. I should have preferred to observe Frick alone, but was not sure that alone I would be able to hold the interest of his restless, vigorous mind for a third time within two weeks. Ten minutes of boredom and my psychological observations would come to a sudden end, and you would have to find and impress some one else to do your psychological sleuthing.

I got to our reserved table fifteen minutes early, to get settled, set up the dictograph in my pocket, and review for the last time my plans. I had three valuable leads. I had discovered (see my reports of May 26th and May 30th) peculiar, invariable, marked emotional reactions in him when the words "brains," "human progress," and "love" were mentioned. I was sure that this was symptomatic. And I hoped to get nearer the roots of his altered behavior pattern by the common method of using a prepared and memorized list of words, remarks, and questions, which I would spring on him from time to time.

I could only trust that Frick was not too familiar with psychoanalysis, and so would not notice what I was doing.

I confess that for a moment while waiting I was swept with the feeling that it was hopeless, but I soon roused from that. One can do no more than try, and I was going to try my hardest. With another I might have been tempted to renege, but never with Frick. For he was my old friend of college days, and so eminently worth saving! He was still so young; had so much to give to mankind!

I guessed once more at the things that might have altered his pattern so. A physicist, perhaps the most brilliant and certainly the most promising in the world, enters his laboratory after his graduation from college and for eleven years hardly so much as sticks his nose outside its door. All the while he sends from it a stream of discoveries, new theories, and integrations of old laws the like of which has never before been equaled; and then this same physicist walks out of his laboratory, locks the door, shuns the place, and for two years devotes himself with casual abandon to such trivialisms of the modern idler as

golfing, clothes, travel, fishing, night clubs, and so on. Astounding is a weak word for this spectacle. I could think of nothing that would remotely suit.

MILES MATSON arrived a minute early—which was, for him, a phenomenon, and showed how the anticipation of dining with Frick had affected him. Miles is forty-five, short, solid, bald—but then I needn't describe him.

"He'll come?" were his first words, before seating himself on the other side of the table.

"I think." I assured him, smiling a little at his apparent anxiety. He looked a little relieved, and fished from the jacket of his dinner clothes that abominable pipe he smokes whenever and wherever he pleases, and be damned to frowning head waiters. He lighted it, took a few quick puffs, then leaned back, smiled, and volunteered frankly:

"Charles, I feel like a little boy about to have dinner with the principal of his school."

I could understand that, for most scientists would feel that way where Frick was concerned. I smiled, too, and chaffed him.

"What—you and that pipe intimidated by a mere playboy?"

"No—by the mystery behind the playboy," was his serious rejoinder. "What's your guess at the solution? Quick, before he comes," he asked earnestly.

I shrugged my shoulders. Miles, of course, was not in my confidence.

"Could it be a woman?" he went on. "I haven't heard of any one woman. A disappointment in his work? Some spoiled-child reaction? Is he crazy? What's made the change?"

If I only knew!

"Frick, further than any man alive, has touched out to the infinite unknowable," he continued almost grumbling; "and I want to know how such a man can trade his tremendous future for a suit of evening clothes!"

"Perhaps he is just relaxing a little," I suggested with a smile.

"Ah, of course—relaxing," he answered sarcastically. "For two years!"

I knew at once Frick had heard what we had been saying, for at that moment I looked up and around just in time to see him, lean and graceful in his dinner clothes, his mouth twisted with amusement, stepping past the head waiter to his place at the table. Miles and I rose; and we must have shown our confusion, for one simply did not mention that topic in Frick's hearing. But he showed no offense—indeed, he seemed in unusually good spirits—for he lightly acknowledged our greeting, waved us back in our places, and, seating himself, added to our dialogue:

"Yes, for two years. And will for forty-two more!"

This opening of the conversation threw me unexpectedly off stride, but I remembered to switch on the dictograph, and then seized the opportunity to ask what otherwise I would never have dared.

"Why?"

Still he showed no offense, but instead, surprisingly, indulged in a long low chuckle that seemed to swell up as from a spring of inexhaustible deliciousness. He answered cryptically, bubblingly, enjoying our puzzlement with every word.

"Because Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. Because thought is withering, and sensation sweet. Because I've recovered my sense of humor. Because 'why' is a dangerous word, and makes people unhappy. Because I have had a glimpse of the most horrible cerebral future. Yes!" He laughed, paused for a moment, then said in a lower voice with dramatic impressiveness, "Would you believe it? I have terminated the genus Homo Sapiens."

II.

HE WAS not drunk, and, as you will see, not crazy—though I would not have bet any money on it just then. His mood was only one of extraordinary good humor. Vastly amused at our reaction to his wild words, he allowed himself to shock us, and did it again and again. I might say here that it is my opinion that all the revelations of the night were, in the main, the result of Frick's sudden notion to shock us, and

that no credit whatever is due me and my intended plan of psychological attack.

Miles' face showed blank dismay. Frick ceased chuckling, and, his gray eyes gleaming, enjoyed our discomfiture in quiet for a moment. Then he added:

"No. Strictly speaking, there is one piece of unfinished business. A matter of one murder. I was sort of dallying with the idea of committing it tonight, and finishing off the whole affair. Would you two like to be in on it?"

Miles looked as if he would like to excuse himself. He coughed, smiled unhappily, glanced doubtfully at me. I at once decided that if Frick was going to attempt murder, I was going to be on hand to prevent it. I suppose that the desperate resolution showed in my face, for Frick, looking at me, laughed outright. Miles then revived enough to smile wanly at Frick and suggest he was joking. He added:

"I'm surprised that any one with the brains you have should make so feeble a joke!"

At the word "brains" Frick almost exploded.

"Brains!" he exclaimed. "Not Me! I'm dumb! Dumb as the greasy-haired saxophone player over there! I understand that I used to have brains, but that's all over; it's horrible; let's not think about it. I tell you I'm dumb, now—normally, contentedly dumb!"

Miles did not know how to understand Frick any more than did I. He reminded him:

"You used to have an I. Q. of 248!"

"I've changed!" Frick interrupted. He was still vehement, but I could see that he was full of internal amusement.

"But no healthy person's intelligence can drop much in the course of a few years," Miles objected strongly.

"Yes—I'm dumb!" Frick reiterated.

My opportunities lay in keeping him on the subject. I asked him:

"Why have you come to consider the possession of brains such an awful thing?"

"Ah, to have seen what I have seen, know what I know!" he quoted.

Miles showed irritation. "Well, then, let's call him dumb!" he said, looking at me. "To insist on such a stupid jest!"

I took another turn at arousing Frick. "You are, of course, speaking ironically out of some cryptic notion that exists only in your own head; but whatever this notion, it is absurd. Brains in quantity are the exclusive possession of the human race. They have inspired all human progress; they have made us what we are today, masters of the whole animal kingdom, lords of creation. Two other things have helped—the human hand and human love; but even above these ranks the human brain. You are only ridiculous when you scoff at its value."

"Oh, love and human progress!" Frick exclaimed, laughing. "Charles, I tell you brains will be the ruination of the human race," he answered with great delight.

"Brains will be the salvation of the human race!" Miles contradicted with heat.

"You make a mistake, a very common mistake, Miles," Frick declared, more seriously. "Charles is of course right in placing man at the top of creation, but you're very wrong in assuming he will always remain there. Consider. Nature made the cell, and after a time the cell became a fish; and that fish was the lord of creation. The very top. For a while. For just a few million years. Because one day a fish crawled out of the sea and set about becoming a reptile. He became a magnificent one. Tyrannosaurus Rex was fifty feet long, twenty high; he had teeth half a foot long, and feet armed with claws that were terrible. No other creature could stand against him; he had speed, size, power and ferocity; *he* became the lord of creation.

"What happened to the fish? He had been the lord of creation, but, well, he never got anywhere. What of Tyrannosaurus Rex? He, too, was the lord of creation, but he, alas, is quite, quite extinct.

"Nature tried speed with the fish, then size with the saurians. Neither worked; the fish got stuck, the saurian died off. But did she quit experimenting at that? Not at all—she tried mobility, and we got the monkey. The first monkey swung from limb to limb screeching, 'I am the lord of creation!' and, by Jove, he was! But he could not know that one day, after a few millions of years, one of his poor relations would go down on the ground, find fire, invent writing, assume clothing, devise modern inconveniences,

discover he had lost his tail, and crow, 'Behold, I am the lord of creation !'

"Why did this tailless monkey have his turn? Because his make-up featured brains? You will bellow yes—but I hear Mother Nature laughing at you. For you are only her *latest* experiment! The lord of creation! That you are—but only for a little while! Only for a few million years!"

Frick paused, his eyes flashed, his nostrils distended contemptuously. "How dare man be so impertinent as to assume nature has stopped experimenting!" he exclaimed at length.

IN THE quiet which followed this surprising outburst I could see Miles putting two and two together. But he took his time before speaking. He relighted his pipe and gave it a good, fiery start before removing it from his mouth and saying, almost in a drawl;

"It amounts to this, then. Anticipating that nature is about to scrap brains and try again along new lines, you choose to attempt immortality by denying your own undoubted brains and trying to be the first to jump in the new direction."

Frick only laughed. "Wrong again, Miles," he said. "I'm just standing *pat*."

"To go back a little," I said to Frick; "it seems to me you're assuming far too much when you tell us that the human race is not the last, but only the most recent of nature's experiments."

The man acted almost shocked. "But have you forgotten what I told you just a little while ago? I said I have *terminated* the genus Homo Sapiens!"

Miles snorted with disgust. I was alarmed. Miles tried sarcasm.

"Have you and Mother Nature already decided, then, what the next lord of creation is to be?"

"I myself have nothing to say about it," Frick replied with assumed naivete, "nor do I know what it will be. I could find out, but I doubt if I ever shall. It's much more fun not to know —don't you think? Though, if I had to guess," he added, "I should say she will feature instinct."

This was too much for Miles. He started to rise, saying, as he pushed his chair back, "This is enough. You're either crazy or else you're a conceited fool! Personally, I think it's both!"

But Frick held him with a gesture, and in a voice wholly sincere said:

"Sit down, Miles; keep your shirt on. You know very well I neither lie nor boast. I promise to prove everything I have said."

Miles resumed his seat and looked at Frick almost sneeringly as he went on:

"You're quite right about my being a fool, though. I was one; oh, a most gorgeous fool! But I am not conceited. I am so little conceited that I offer to show you myself in what must surely be the most ridiculous situation that a jackass or a monkey without a tail has ever been in. I'll exchange my dignity for your good opinion; you'll see that I'm not crazy; and then we'll have the best intelligent good laugh possible to Genus Homo. Yes? Shall we?"

Miles gave me a look which clearly expressed his doubt of Frick's sanity.

Frick, seeing, chuckled and offered another inducement.

"And I'll throw in, incidentally, a most interesting murder!"

Our friend was completely disgusted. "We came here to eat," he said. "Let's get it over with." And with the words he picked up the menu which had been lying in front of him all this time. Frick looked at me.

"I'm not hungry," he said. "Are you?"

I wasn't. I shook my head.

"Shall we two go, then?"

I hesitated. I was not overanxious to accompany, alone, a madman on a mission of murder. But I caught Miles' eye, and like the noble he is, he said he'd come too. Frick smiled softly.

III

TEN MINUTES later we had made the short flight along the north shore to Glen Cove, where Frick has his estate, and were escorted by him into a small, bare room on the second floor of the laboratory building which adjoins his beautiful home.

While we stood there wondering, Frick went into an adjoining room and returned with two chairs, and then, in two more trips, with a third chair and a tray on which rested a large thermos bottle and a tea service for three. The chairs he arranged facing each other in an intimate group, and the tray he set on the floor by the chair he was to take himself.

"First I have to tell a rather long story," he explained. "The house would be more comfortable, but this room will be more convenient."

Frick was now a changed man. His levity of before was gone; tense, serious lines appeared on his rugged face; his great head lowered with the struggle to arrange thoughts that were difficult, and perhaps painful, to him. When he spoke, it was softly, in a voice likewise changed.

My dictograph was still turned on.

"Charles, Miles," Frick began, "forgive me for my conduct back in the Gardens. I had so much on my mind, and you were so smugly skeptical, that the inclination to overpower you with what I know was irresistible. I had not expected to make any of these revelations to you. I offered to on impulse; but do not fear, I shall not regret it. I think—I see now that I have been carrying a very heavy load—

"What I have to say would fill a large book, but I will make it as short as I can. You will not believe me at first, but please be patient, for proof will eventually be forthcoming. Every single thing I said to you is true, even to the murder I must commit—

He paused, and seemed to relax, as if tired. Unknown black shadows closed over my heart. Miles watched him closely, quite motionless. We waited. Frick rubbed the flat of his hand slowly over his eyes and forehead, then let it drop.

"No," he said at length, "I have never been conceited. I don't think so. But there was a time when I was very proud of my intelligence. I worked; I accomplished things that seemed to be important; I felt myself a leader in the rush of events. Work was enough, I thought; brain was the prime tool of life; and with my brain I dared try anything. Anything! I dared try to assemble the equation of a device that would enable me to peer into the future! And when I thought I had it, I started the construction of that device! I never finished it, and I never shall, now; but the attempt brought Pearl to me—

"Yes," he added, as if necessary that he convince himself, "I am certain that had I not attempted that, Pearl would not have come. Back through the ages she had somehow felt me out—don't ask me how, for I don't know—and through me chose to enter for a brief space this, our time.

"I was as surprised as you would have been. I was working in this very room, though then it was twice as large and fairly cluttered with clumsy apparatus I have since had removed. I had been working feverishly for months; I was unshaven, red-eyed and dirty—and there, suddenly, she was. Over there, beyond that door at which I'm pointing. She was in a golden-glowing cylinder whose bottom hung two feet off the floor. For a moment she stood suspended there; and then the glow disappeared and she stepped through to the floor.

"You do not believe me? Well, of course, I don't expect you to. But there will be proof. There will be proof.

"I was surprised, but somehow I wasn't much frightened. The person of my visitor was not intimidating. She was just a barefooted young woman, very slender, of average height, clad in a shiny black shift which reached her knees. I cannot say she was well formed. Her body was too thin, her hips too narrow, her head too large. And she was miles from being pretty. Her hair and eyes were all right; they were brown; but her face was plain and flat, with an extraordinary and forbidding expression of dry intellectuality. The whole effect of her was not normal, yet certainly not weird; she was just peculiar, different—baroque.

"She spoke to me in English! In nonidiomatic English with the words run together and an accent that was atrocious! She asked severely:

"`Do you mind too much this intrusion of mine?"

"`Why—why no!' I said when I had recovered from the shock of the sound of her speech. 'But are you real, or just an illusion?"

"`I do not know,' she replied. 'That is a tremendous problem. It has occupied the attention of our greatest minds for ages. Excuse me, sir.' And with these last words she calmly sat herself down on the

floor, right where she was, and appeared to go off into deep thought!

"YOU CAN imagine my astonishment! She sat there for a full two minutes, while I gaped at her in wonder. When she rose again to her feet she finished with:

" 'I do not know. It is a tremendous problem.'

"I began to suspect that a trick was being played on me, for all this was done with the greatest seriousness.

" 'Perhaps there is a magician outside,' I suggested.

" 'I am the magician,' she informed me.

" 'Oh!' I said ironically. 'I understand everything now.'

" 'Or no, fate is the magician,' she went on as if in doubt. 'Or no, I am—A very deep problem' Whereupon she sat down on the floor and again went off into meditation!

"I stepped around her, examining her from all angles, and, since she was oblivious to everything outside of herself, I made a cursory examination of the thing she had come in on. It looked simple enough—a flat, plain, circular box, maybe four feet in diameter and six inches deep, made of a some sort of dull-green metal. Fixed to its center, and sticking vertically upward, was a post of the same stuff capped with a plate containing a number of dials and levers. Around the edge of the upper surface of the box was a two-inch bevel of what seemed to be yellow glass. And that was all—except that the thing continued to remain fixed in the air two feet off the floor!

"I began to get a little scared. I turned back to the girl and again looked her over from all sides. She was so deep in her thoughts that I dared to touch her. She was real, all right! "My touch brought her to her feet again.

" 'You have a larger head than most men,' she informed me.

" 'Who are you, anyway ?' I asked with increasing amazement. She gave me a name that it took me two days to memorize, so horrible was its jumble of sounds. I'll just say here that I soon gave her another—Pearl—because she was such a baroque—and by that name I always think of her.

" 'How did you get in?' I demanded. "She pointed to the box.

" 'But what is it?' I wanted to know.

" 'You have no name,' she replied. 'It goes to yesterday, to last year, to last thousand years—like that.'

" 'You mean it's a time traveler?' I asked, astounded. 'That you can go back and forth in time?'

" 'Yes,' she answered. 'I stopped to see you, for you are something like me.'

" 'You wouldn't misinform me?' I asked sarcastically, feeling I must surely be the victim of some colossal practical joke.

" 'Oh, no, I would not misinform you,' she replied aridly.

" 'I was very skeptical. 'What do you want here ?' I asked.

" 'I should like you to show me the New York of your time. Will you, a little?'

" 'If you'll take me for a ride on that thing, and it works, I'll show you anything you want,' I answered, still more skeptical.

" 'She was glad to do it.

" 'Come,' she commanded. I stepped gingerly up on the box. 'Stand here, and hold on to this,' she went on, indicating the rod in the center. I did so, and she stepped up to position just opposite me, and very close. I was conscious of how vulnerable I was if a joke was intended.

" 'You must not move,' she warned me. I assured her I would not. 'Then, when do you want to go?'

" 'A week back,' I said at random, with, in spite of everything, a creeping sensation going up and down my spine.

" 'That will do,' she decided ; and again she warned me not to move. Then her hands went to the controls.

"A golden veil sprang up around us and the room grew dim through it, then disappeared. A peculiar silence came over me, a silence that seemed not so much outside of me as within. There was just a second of this; and then I was again looking into the room through the golden veil. Though it dimmed, the

light I could clearly make out the figure of a man stretched full length on the floor working on the under part of a piece of apparatus there.

"It's I!" I exclaimed, and every cell in my body leaped at the miracle of it. That this could be! That I could be standing outside of myself looking at myself! That last week had come back, and that I, who already belonged to a later time, could be back there again in it! As I peered, thoughts and emotions all out of control, I saw happen a thing that stilled the last thin voice of inward doubt.

"The man on the floor rolled over, sat up, turned his face—my face—toward us, and, deep in thought, gently fingered a sore place on his head—from a bump that no one, positively, knew anything about. Trickery seemed excluded.

"But a contradictory thing occurred to me. I asked Pearl, 'Why doesn't he see us, since he's looking right this way? I never saw anything at the time.'

"It is only in the next stage toward arriving that we can be seen,' she explained with her hands still on the controls. 'At this moment I'm keeping us unmaterialized. This stage is extremely important. If we tried to materialize within some solid, and not in free space, we should explode,

"Now, let us return,' she said. 'Hold still.'

"The room disappeared; the peculiar silence returned; then I saw the room again, dim through the golden veil. Abruptly the veil vanished and the room came clear; and we stepped down on the floor on the day we had left.

"My legs were trembling so as to be unreliable. I leaned against a table, and my amazing visitor, as it seemed her habit, sat down on the floor.

"That was my introduction to Pearl."

IV

FRICK rose and walked to the far corner of the room and back. The thoughts in his mind were causing some internal disturbance, that was obvious.

I prayed that my dictograph was working properly!

When Frick sat down again he was calmer. Not for long could any emotion sweep out of control his fine mind and dominating will. With a faint smile and an outflung gesture of his arm he said:

"That was the beginning!"

Again he paused, and ended it with one of his old chuckles. "I showed Pearl New York. I showed her!

"Charles, Miles, there is just too much," he resumed at a tangent, shaking his head. "There is the tendency to go off into details, but I'll try to avoid it. Maybe some other time. I want to be brief, just now.

"Well, I got her some clothes and showed her New York City. It was a major experience. For she was not your ordinary out-of-towner, but a baroque out of far future time. She had learned our language and many of our customs; she was most amazingly mental; and yet, under the difficult task of orienting herself to what she called our crudeness, she exhibited a most delicious naivete.

"I showed her my laboratory and explained the things I had done. She was not much interested in that. I showed her my house, others too, and explained how we of the twentieth century live.

"Why do you waste your time acquiring and operating gadgets?' she would ask. She liked that word 'gadgets'; it became her favorite. By it she meant electricity, changes of clothing, flying, meals in courses, cigarettes, variety of furniture, even the number of rooms in our homes. She'd say, 'You are a superior man for this time; why don't you throw out all your material luxuries so as to live more completely in the realms of the mind?'

"I would ask her what standard she judged our civilization against; but whenever I did that she'd always go obscure, and say she guessed we were too primitive to appreciate the higher values. She consistently refused to describe the sort of civilization she had come from; though, toward the end, she began promising me that if I were a good guide, and answered all her questions, she might—only might—take me there to see it. You can imagine I was a good guide!

"But meanwhile, I got nothing but my own inferences; and what an extraordinary set I acquired from her questions and reactions! You make your own set as I go along!

"I showed her New York. She'd say, 'But why do the people hurry so? Is it really necessary for all those automobiles to keep going and coming? Do the people *like* to live in layers? If the United States is as big as you say it is, why do you build such high buildings? What is your reason for having so few people rich, so many people poor?' it was like that. And endless.

"I took her to restaurants. 'Why *does* everybody take a whole hour just to eat?' I told her that people enjoyed eating; it seemed not to have occurred to her. 'But if they spent only a few minutes at it they'd have that much more time for meditation!' I couldn't but agree.

"I took her to a night club. 'Why do all those men do all the carrying, and those others all the eating?' I explained that the first were waiters, the latter guests. 'Will the guests have a turn at carrying?' I told her I thought so, some day.

" 'Is that man a singing waiter?'

" 'No, only a crooner.'

" 'Why do those men with the things make such an awful noise?'

" 'Because dance bands get paid for making it.'

" 'It must be awfully hard on them.' I told her I hoped so. 'Are those people doing what you call dancing?'

'Yes.'

" 'Do they like to do it?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'The old ones, too?'

" 'I doubt it.'

" 'Then why do they do it?' I didn't know. At the end she asked me almost poignantly, 'Don't they *ever* spend any time in meditation?' and I had to express my doubts.

"IN OUR little jaunts it became increasingly clear, to her that there was very little meditation being done in New York. It was the biggest surprise that our civilisation gave her.

"However, she continued to indulge her peculiar habit of going off into meditation when something profound, or interesting, or puzzling came to her attention; and the most extraordinary thing about it was that she had to sit down at it, no matter where she was. If there was a chair handy, all right, but if not, she would plunk right down on the floor, or, outside, even in the street! This was not so bad when we were alone, but once it happened under Murphy's flagpole in Union Square as we stood observing the bellowings of a soap-box orator, and once again in Macy's, where we lingered a moment listening to a demonstrator with the last word possible in beauty preparations. It was quite embarrassing! Toward the end I grew adept in detecting signs of the coming descent and was fairly successful in holding her up!

"In all the six days I spent showing Pearl New York, not once did she show any emotion other than that of intellectual curiosity ; not once did she smile; not once did she so much as alter the dry expression on her face. And *this*, my friends, was the creature who became a student and an exponent of love!

"It bears on my main theme, so I will tell you in some detail about her experiences with love, or what she thought was love.

"During the first three days she did not mention the word; and from what I know of her now, I can say with surety that she was holding herself back. During those three days she had seen one performance of 'Romeo and Juliet,' had read two romantic novels containing overwhelming love themes, had observed everywhere the instinct for young people to seek each other out, had seen two couples kiss while dancing, had seen the fleet come in and the sailors make for Riverside Drive, and had heard I don't know how many hours of crooning on radio broadcasts.

"After all this, one day in my drawing-room, she suddenly asked me, 'What is this love that every one is always talking about?'

"Never dreaming of the part love was to play between us, I answered simply that it was nature's device to make mature humans attractive to each other and insure the arrival of offspring and the

maintenance of the race. That, it seems, is what she thought it was, but what she couldn't understand was why everybody made such a to-do about it. Take kissing, for instance. That was when a male and a female pushed each other on the lips. Did they like that? I assured her they did. Was it, since they held it so long, a kind of meditation? Well, no, not exactly. Would I try it with her?

"Don't smile yet, you two—that's nothing! Wait! Anyway, you wouldn't want me to spoil my chances of being taken for a visit to her own time, would you?"

"Well, we kissed. She stood on tiptoe, her dry face looking up at mine, her arms stiffly at her sides, while I bent down, my sober face looking down at hers, and my arms stiffly at my sides. We both pushed; our lips met; and we stayed that way a little. Then, almost maintaining contact, Pearl asked me, 'Is it supposed to sort of scrape?' I assured her it was—something like a scrape. After a moment she said, 'Then there's a great mystery here, somewhere—' And damned if she didn't squat right down on the floor and go off into a think! I couldn't keep a straight face, so I bounced out of the room; and when I returned several minutes later there she was still meditating on her kiss. *O temporal*

"That kiss happened on the third day, and she stayed six, and for the remainder of her visit in our time she said not one thing more about this thing called love—which told me it was a mystery always on her mind, for—she asked questions by the score about every other conceivable thing.

"But I also knew from another thing. For the three days following that kiss she went innumerable times to my radio and tuned in dance and vocal programs whose songs would, of course, inevitably be about love. She fairly saturated herself with love's and above's, star's and are's, blue's and you's, June's and moon's. What a horrible flock of mangy cliches must have come to flap around in her mental—all too mental—mind! What peculiar notions about love they must have given her!

"But enough of that phase. You have an idea. You have seen Pearl in New York, tasting of love. Six nights to the very hour after she first appeared to me I stood again on the round base of the time traveler, and this time I accompanied her forward to her time. I do not know how far in the future that was, but I estimate it to be around three million years."

V

FRICK PAUSED, rose, and, without asking us if we wanted any, served some cold tea from the thermos bottle by his chair. This time we were glad to have it.

By then I was as close to fully believing as was, I think, Miles. We wasted little time over the tea, but, considerably refreshed and extremely eager with anticipations of what would follow, leaned forward and were again lost in Frick's extraordinary story.

"The trip forward took what seemed to be only half a minute, and I believe it might have been instantaneous but for the time needed to bring the machine to a stop on exactly the right day. As before, the passage was a period of ineffable silence; but I was aware that all the time Pearl fingered the controls. Very suddenly I saw we were in a dimly-lighted room; with equal suddenness the golden screen vanished and normal daylight took its place. We had arrived.

"I stepped off the traveler and looked curiously about. We were in a small place, the walls of which were partitions which projected perhaps ten feet up toward a very high ceiling. Everything I could see was made of an ugly, mud-yellow metallic substance, and everything seemed to be built on the square. Light entered from large windows on all sides. The section of the great room in which we had arrived was bare of everything but our traveler. I saw that this time it rested firmly on the floor—a very dirty floor.

"I suppose it would be superfluous to point the tremendous state of excitement and curiosity I was in. To be the only man of our time to have voyaged forward! To be the only one allowed to see the human race in marvelous maturity! What honor, glory, luck, that such an unmerited distinction should fall upon me! Every atom of my body was living and tingling at that moment. I was going to drink in and remember everything that crossed my senses.

"I was full of questions at once, but Pearl had warned me not to talk. She had told me that there were several caretakers from whose sight I was to remain hidden; and now the first thing she did was to put

her finger to her lips and peer down the corridor outside. She listened a moment, then stepped out and beckoned me to follow.

"I did—and all but exclaimed out loud to see that the corridor was carpeted with fine dust fully an inch deep!

"How could this be in an important building of so advanced an age? For surely that building was important, to house, as it did, so marvelous a device as the traveler!

"But I had no time for wonderment, for Pearl led me rapidly toward the far side of the great room. At our every step clouds of dust billowed out on each side, so that a hasty glance behind showed such diffusion of it that all there was hidden. The corridor was quite wide, and ran lengthwise of the building on one side of the center. At varying distances we passed doorways, all of them closed, and at the end we turned to the left, to come quickly to a high, wide door. It was open, and golden sunlight was shining through. For a second Pearl held me back while she peered around the edge, then, taking me by the hand, she led me out into our world of the future.

"What would you have expected to see, Charles? You, Miles? Towering buildings, perhaps, transversed on their higher levels by aerial traffic ways? And crowds of people strangely mannered and curiously dressed? And mysterious-powered aerial carriers? And parks? And flowers? And much use of metal and synthetic marble? Well, of these there was nothing. My eyes looked out over a common, ordinary, flat, 1963 field. In the distance were some patches of trees; near by were some wild grass, low bushes, and millions of daisies; and that was all!

"My first thought was that Pearl had made some mistake in our time of destination, and when I sought her face, and saw that this was only what she expected, I grew alarmed. She misread my thoughts, though, and saying 'Don't be afraid,' led me along a wide walk to a corner of the building, where she peeped around the edge, and, apparently satisfied with what she found, stepped forth and motioned me to follow. Then she spoke:

"'Here we are,' she said.

"BEFORE ME stretched the same sort of landscape as on the other quarter, except that here the immediate field was tenanted with a square block of large metallic boxes, six on a side, and each separated by about ten yards from its neighbors.

"I suppose I stood there and gaped. I didn't understand, and I told Pearl as much. Her tone in replying came as near surprise as I ever heard it.

" 'Not understand?' she asked. 'What do you mean? Isn't this just about what you expected?'

"Eventually I found words. 'But where is your city?' I asked.

" 'There,' she answered, with a gesture of her arm toward the boxes.

" 'But the people!' I exclaimed. " 'They are inside.'

" 'But I—I—there's something wrong!' I stammered. 'Those things are no city, and they couldn't hold ten people apiece!'

" 'They hold only one apiece,' she informed me with dignity.

"I was completely flabbergasted. 'Then—then your total population is —9

" 'Just thirty-six, out here; or, rather, thirty-five, for one of us has just died.'

"I thought I saw the catch. But how many have you that aren't out here?'

" 'Just us younger ones—four, including myself,' she answered simply. She added, 'And, of course, the two who are not yet born.'

"All before this had turned my head; her last statement came near turning my stomach. Clutching at straws, I blurted out:

" But this is just a small community ; the chief centers of your population lie elsewhere ?"

" 'No,' she corrected levelly, 'this is the only center of our civilization. All human beings are gathered here.' She fixed me with her dry gaze. 'How primitive you are!' she said, as a zoologist might, looking at a threadworm. 'I see that you expected numbers, mere numbers. But I suppose that a comparative savage like you might be expected to prefer quantity of life to quality of life.'

" 'We have here quality,' she went on with noble utterance, '—the finest of the finest, for ten thousand generations. Nature has need of quantity in her lower orders, but in allowing the perfection of such towering supermen as are my friends out here she has indulged in the final luxury of quality.'

" 'Nor is that all. With quality we have at last achieved simplicity; and in the apotheosis of humanity these two things are the ultimates.'

"All I could do was mumble that simplicity was too weak a word."

Frick stopped here, laughed, and rose. "She had my mind down and its shoulders touching! And from that moment—I assure you, my friends—the whole thing began to amuse me."

He took a few steps about the room, laughing silently; then, leaning with one shoulder against the wall, he went on:

"Pearl was on an awfully high horse, there, for a moment, but she soon dismounted and considered what she might offer for my entertainment. She expressed polite regret that her civilization contained so little for me to see with my eyes. She implied that the vast quantities of intellectual activity going on would be far past my understanding.

"I asked, then, if there was any way I might have a peep at their quality group in action; and to this she replied that her countrymen never came together in groups, and neither did they indulge in actions, but that it would be easy to show me one or two of the leading citizens.

"I of course told her I did not want her to run a risk of getting in trouble, but she assured me there was no danger of that. The guardians of the place—they were the three other 'younger ones' she had just mentioned—were quiet somewhere, and as for the adults, 'They,' she said, 'will be able neither to see nor hear you.'

"Well, she showed me two. And merciful heavens!"

FRICK laughed so that for a moment he could not go on. Miles by now was reflecting Frick's every mood, and would smile in anticipation when he laughed. I suppose I was doing the same. We were both completely under Frick's spell.

"She escorted me openly across the field to the nearest box, and I remember that on the way I got a bur in my ankle which I stopped to remove. I found from close up that the boxes were about ten feet square and made of the same ugly yellow metal used in the big building. The upper part of each -side had a double row of narrow horizontal slits, and in the middle of each front side there was a closely-fitted door. I was remembering Pearl's promise that they would be able neither to see nor hear me, so I was alarmed when without ceremony she opened the door and half pushed me in.

"What I saw! I was so shocked that, as Pearl told me later, I gasped out an involuntary 'Oh!' and fairly jumped backward. Had she not been right behind and held me, I might have run. As it was I remained, hypnotized by sight of what met my eyes, trembling, and I think gagging.

"I saw a man; or some kind of a man. He sat right in front of me, nude from the waist up, and covered as the floor was covered from the waist down. How shall I adequately describe him!

"He was in some ways like an unwrapped mummy, except that a fallen-in mummy presents a fairly respectable appearance. And then he was something like a spider—a spider with only three legs. And again, looking quickly, he was all one gigantic head, or at least a great mass on whose parchment surface appeared a little round two-holed knoll where the nose customarily is, lidded caverns where the eyes belong, small craters where the ears commonly are, and, on the under side, a horrible, wrinkled, half-inch slit, below which more parchment backed almost horizontally to a three-inch striated and, in places, bumpy pipe.

"By not the slightest movement of any kind did the monster show he knew I was there. He sat on a high dais; his arms were only bones converging downward; his body, only half the usual thickness,

showed every rib and even, I think, the front side of some of his vertebrae; and his pipe of a neck, unable alone to support his head, gave most of that job to two curved metal pieces that came out of the wall.

"He had a musty smell.

"And, final horror, the stuff that covered him to the waist was dust; and there were two inches of dust on the top of his head and lesser piles of it on every little upper surface!

VI

"IT WAS horrible; but I swear that as I stood there goggling at him he began to strike me funny. It grew on me, until I think I should have laughed in the old gent's face had I not been restrained by a slight fear that he might in some way be dangerous.

"Goodness knows what all I thought of as I stood there. I know I eventually asked Pearl, for caution's sake:

" 'You're sure he can't see or hear me?'

"She told me he could not.

"I was not surprised; he looked too old for such strenuous activities. I scrutinized him, inch by inch. After a little I announced with conviction:

" 'He's dead! I'm sure of it!'

"She assured me he was not.

"But look at the dust! He can't have moved for years!"

" 'Why should he move?' she asked. "That stopped me for a little.

" 'But—but,' I stammered eventually, 'he's as good as dead! He's not doing anything!'

" 'He certainly is doing something,' was her dignified correction. 'He's meditating.'

"All I could think to say was 'Goodnight!'

"At that, Pearl turned on me reproachfully. 'Your attitude is bestial,' she said. 'I have done you the honor of bringing you to witness the highest flowering of the human race, and you act like a pig. Life can hold nothing more beautiful than this man you see here ; he is the ultimate in human progress, one who is in truth perfection, whose every taint of animal desire has been cleaned away, who is the very limit in the simplicity of his life and the purity of his thoughts and intentions.'

"Not to miss anything she added, 'He embodies the extension of every quality that makes for civilization; he's reached the logical end of man's ambitious climb up from the monkey.'

" 'My Lord!' I said. 'Here's a dead end!'

" 'For myself, I sum it all in five words,' she went on nobly : 'He leads the mental life.'

"After a little my emotions suddenly got out of control. 'Does—does he *like* it?' I blurted out. But that was a mistake. I tried: 'Do you mean to imply he spends his life sitting here and thinking?'

" 'Pure living and high thinking,' put it.

" 'No living, I'm thinking!' I retorted. 'What does he think of?'

" 'He is probably our greatest *aesthete*,' she answered proudly. 'It's a pity you can't know the truth and beauty of his formulations.'

" 'How do you know they are beautiful?' I asked with my primitive skepticism.

" 'I can hear his thoughts, of course,' was the answer.

"This surprising statement started me on another string of questions, and when I got through I had learned the following: This old bird and the others could not hear me think because my intellectual wave length was too short for their receivers; that Pearl, when talking and thinking with me, was for the same reason below their range; and that Pearl shared with the old guys the power of tuning in or out of such private meditations or general conversations as might be going on.

" 'We utilize this telepathic faculty,' Pearl added, 'in the education of our young. Especially the babies, while they are still unborn. The adults take turns in tutoring them for their cells. I, it happens, was a premature baby—only eleven months—so I missed most of my prenatal instruction. That's why I'm different from the others here, and inferior. Though they say I was bad material all the way back from conception.'

"Her words made my stomach turn over, and the sight of that disproportioned cadaver didn't help it any, either. Still I stood my ground and did my best to absorb every single detail.

"While so engaged I saw one of the most fantastic things yet. The nasty little slit of a mouth under our host's head slowly separated until it revealed a dark and gummy opening; and as it reached its maximum I heard a click behind my back and jumped to one side just in time to see a small gray object shoot from a box fastened to the wall, and, after a wide arc through the air, make a perfect landing in the old gentleman's mouth!

" 'He felt the need for some sustenance,' Pearl explained. 'Those pellets contain his food and water. Naturally he needs very little. They are ejected by a mechanism sensitive to the force of his mind waves.'

" 'Let me out,' I said.

"We went out into the clean, warm sunshine. How sweet that homely field looked! I sat down on the grass and picked a daisy. It was not one whit different from those of my own time, at home.

"Pearl sat down beside me.

" 'We now have an empty cell,' she said, 'but one of our younger men is ready to fill it. He has been waiting until we installed a new and larger food receptacle—one that will hold enough for seventy-five years without refilling. We've just finished. It is, of course, the young of our community who take care of the elders by preparing the food pellets and doing what other few chores are necessary. They do this until they outgrow the strength of their bodies and can no longer get around—when they have the honor of maturity and may take their place in one of the cells.'

" 'But how in the devil do creatures like—like that in there, manage to have children ?' I had to ask.

"Oh, I know what you mean, but you've got the wrong idea,' came her instant explanation. 'That matter is attended to while they are still comparatively young. From the very beginning the young are raised in incubators.'

"I have always had a quick stomach—and she insisted on trying to prove it !

" 'With us, it takes fifteen months,' she went along. 'We have two under way at present. Would you like to see them?'

"I told her that I would see them, but that I would not like it. 'But first,' I asked, 'if you don't mind, show me one other of these adults of yours. II—I can't get over it. I still can't quite believe it.'

"She said she would. A woman. And at that we got up and she led me to the next cell.

"I did not go in. I stood outside and took one look at the inmate through the door. Horrible! Female that she was, it was at that moment I first thought what a decent thing it would be—yes, and how pleasant—to hold each one of the necks of those cartoons of humankind in the ring of my two strong hands for a moment

"But I was a trusted visitor, and such thoughts were not to be encouraged. I asked Pearl to lead on to the incubators.

"We had left the block of cells and were rounding the corner of the building when Pearl stopped and pulled me back. Apparently she had gotten some thought warning just in time, for in a moment three outlandish figures filed out of the very door of the big building that we had been making for. All wore black shiny shifts like Pearl's, and they were, very obviously, young flowers of Genus Homo in full perfection.

"THE FIRST was the size, but had not nearly the emaciated proportions, of the old aesthete, and his great bald head wobbled precariously on his outrageous neck as he made his uncertain way along. The second—a girl, I think—was smaller, younger, stronger, but she followed her elder at a respectful distance in the same awful manner. The third in the procession was a male, little more than a baby, and he half stumbled after the others in his own version of their caricature of a walk.

"They walked straight out into the field; and do you know, that little fellow, pure monster in appearance, ugly as ultimate sin, did a thing that brought tears to my eyes. As he came to the edge of the walk and stepped off into the grass, he bent laboriously over and plucked a daisy—and looked at it in preoccupied fashion as he toddled on after the others!

"I was much relieved that they had not discovered us, and so was Pearl. As soon as they were a safe

distance away, she whispered to me:

"I had to be careful. They all can see, and the two younger ones still can hear."

"What are they going to do out there?" I asked.

"Take a lesson in metaphysics," she answered, and almost with her words the first one sat down thoughtfully out in the middle of the field—to be followed in turn by the second and even the little fellow!

"The tallest one," Pearl informed me, "is the one who is to take a place in the vacant cell. He had better do it soon. It's becoming dangerous for him to walk about. His neck's too weak."

"With care we edged our way up and into the building, but this time Pearl conducted me along the corridor on the other side. The dust there was as thick as in the first, except along the middle, where many footprints testified to much use. We came to the incubators.

"There I saw them. I saw them; I made myself look at them; but I tell you it was an effort! I—I think, if you don't mind, I won't describe them. You know—my personal peculiarity. They were wonderful. Curvings of glass and tubes. Two, in them. Different stages. I left right away; went back to the front door; and in a few minutes felt better.

"Pearl, of course, had to come after me and try to take me back; and I noticed an amusing thing. The sight of those coming babies had had a sort of maternal effect on her! I swear it! For she *would* talk about them; and before long she timidly—ah, but as dryly, as ever!—suggested that we attempt a kiss!—only she, forgot the word and called it a scrape. Ye gods! Well, we scraped—exactly as before—and that, my friends, was the incident which led straight and terribly to the termination of the genus *Homo Sapiens*!

"You could never imagine what happened. It was this, like one-two-three: Pearl and I touched lips; I heard a soft, weird cry behind me; I wheeled; saw, in the entrance, side by side, the three creatures I had thought were safely out in the field getting tutored; saw the eldest's face contort, his head wobble; heard a sharp snap; and then in a twinkling he had fallen over on the other two; and when the dust had settled we saw the young flowers of perfect humanity in an ugly pile, and they lay still, quite still, with, each one, a broken neck!

"They represented the total stock of the race, and they were dead, and I had been the innocent cause!

"I was scared; but how do you think their death affected Pearl? Do you think she showed any sign of emotion? She did not. She ratiocinated. She was sorry, of course—so her words said—the tallest guy had been such a beautiful soul!—a born philosopher!—but it had happened; there was nothing to do about it except remove the bodies, and now it was up to her alone to look after the incubators and that cemetery of thinkers.

"But first," she said; "I'd better take you back to your time."

"But no!" I said, and I invented lots of reasons why I'd better stay a little. Now that there was no one to discover my presence I more than ever did not want to go. There were a hundred things I wanted to study—the old men, how they functioned, the conditions of the outside world, and so on—but particularly, I confess, I wanted to examine the contents of that building. If it could produce a time traveler, it must contain other marvels, the secrets of which I might be able to learn and take back home with me.

"We went out into the sun and argued, and my guide did a lot of squatting and meditating, and in the end I won out. I could stay three days.

"On the afternoon of the first day something went wrong with the incubators, and Pearl came hurrying to tell me in her abstracted fashion that the two occupants, the last hopes of the human race, were dead.

"She did not know it, but I had done things to the mechanisms of the incubators.

"I had murdered those unborn monsters

"Charles, Miles, let's have some more tea."

VII

FRICK went over to the thermos bottle, poured for us, returned it to the floor, and resumed his

chair. We rested for several minutes, and my dictograph shows that again not a word was spoken. I will not try to describe my thoughts except to say that the break in the tension had found me in need of the stimulation I was given.

When Frick resumed, it was suddenly, with unexpected bitterness and vehemence.

"Homo Sapiens had become a caricature and an abomination!" he exclaimed. "I did not murder those unborn babies on impulse, nor did I commit my later murders on impulse. My actions were considered; my decisions were reached after hours of the calmest, clearest thinking I have ever done; I accepted full responsibility, and I still accept it!

"I want now to make a statement which above all I want you to believe. It is this. At the time I made up my mind to destroy those little monsters, and so terminate Genus Homo, I expected to bring Pearl back to live out her years in our time. That was the disposition I had planned for her. Her future did not work out that way. To put it baldly, Mother Nature made the most ridiculous ass of all time out of me; but remember, in justice to die, that the current of events got changed *after* my decision.

"I have said that Pearl took the death of the race's only young stock in her usual arid manner. She certainly did; but, as I think back over those days, it seems to me she did show a tiny bit, oh, a most infinitesimal amount, of feeling. That feeling was directed wholly toward me. You may ask how she could differ temperamentally—and physically—from those others, but I can only suggest that the enigma of her personal equation was bound up in the unique conditions of her birth. As she said, she may have been 'bad material' to start with. Then, something had gone wrong with an incubator; she was born after only eleven months ; was four months premature ; had received remote prenatal tutoring for that much less time ; and had functioned in a different and far more physical manner much earlier, and with fewer built-in restraints, than the others.

"It was this difference in her, this independence and initiative, that caused her to find the time traveler, the unused and forgotten achievement of a far previous age. It was this difference that allowed her to dare use it in the way we know. And it was this difference—now I am speaking chiefly of her *physical* difference—that gave rise in me to the cosmic ambitions which took me from farce to horror, and which I will now try to describe.

"Toward the evening of the second day we sat out on the wold grass before that corroboree of static philosophers and discussed the remaining future of the human race.

"I argued, since there was no one else to look after them now, and since they could live only as long as she lived, it was clear that the best thing—and, in the event of accident to her, the most humane thing—would be for me to kill them all as painlessly as possible and take her back to my time to live.

"I need not mention the impossibility of there being any more descendants from them.

"But for the only time during all the period I knew her she refused to face the facts. She wouldn't, admit a single thing; I got nowhere; argue and plead as I would, all she would say, over and over, was that it was a pity that the human race had to come to an end. I see now that I was dense to take so long to get what she was driving at. When I did finally get it I nearly fell over backward in the grass.

"My friends, she was delicately hinting that I was acceptable to her as the father of a future race!

"Oh, that was gorgeous! I simply couldn't restrain my laughter; I had to turn my back ; and I had a devil of a time explaining what I was doing, and why my shoulders shook so. To let her down easily, I told her I would think it over that night and give her my decision in the morning. And that was all there was to it at the time.

"Now comes the joke; now comes the beginning of my elevation to the supreme heights of asshood, and you are at liberty to laugh as much as you please. That night, under the low-hung stars of that far future world, I *did* decide to become the father of a future race! Yes—the single father of ultimate humanity!

"That night was perhaps the most tremendous experience of my life. The wide thinking I did! The abandoned planning! What were not the possibilities of my union with Pearl! She, on her side, had superb intellectuality, was the product of millions of years' culture; while I had emotion, vitality, the physicalness that she and the withered remains of her people so lacked! Who might guess what renaissance of degenerated humanity our posterity might bring! I walked, that night; I shouted; I laughed;

I cried. I was to become a latter-day god! I spent emotion terrifically; it could not last till dawn; morning found Pearl waking me, quite wet with dew, far out in the hills.

"I had settled everything in my mind. Pearl and I would mate, and nature would take her course; but there was one prime condition. There would have to be a house cleaning, first. Those cartoons of humanity would have to be destroyed. They represented all that was absurd and decadent; they were utterly without value; they were a stench and an abomination. Death to the old, and on with the new!

"I told Pearl of my decision. She was not exactly torrid with gratitude when she heard me say I would make her my wife, but she did give some severely logical approval, and that was something. She balked, however, at my plan to exterminate her redoubtable exponents of the mental life. She was quite stubborn.

"All that day I tried to convince her. I pointed out the old folks' uselessness; but she argued they were otherwise; that usefulness gives birth to the notion of beauty; that, therefore, beauty accompanies usefulness; and that because the old gentlemen were such paragons of subjective beauty they were, therefore, paragons of usefulness. I got lost on that airy plane of reasoning. I informed her that I, too, was something of an aesthete, and that I had proved to myself they smelled bad and were intolerable; and how easy it would be to exterminate them!—how slender their hold on life!

"Nothing doing. At one time I made the mistake of trying vile humor. Here's a splendid solution of the in-law problem! As if she could be made to smile! She made me explain what I had meant! And this seemed to give her new thinking material, and resulted in her going down into squat-thinks so often that I was almost ready to run amuck.

"I suppose there must be a great unconscious loyalty to race in humans, for even in that attenuated time Pearl, unsentimental as she always was, doggedly insisted that they be allowed to live out their unnatural lives.

"I never did persuade her. I forced her. Either they had to go or I would. Late that night she gave me her permission.

"I AWOKE the morning of the fourth day in glorious high spirits. This was the day that was to leave me the lord of creation! I was not at all disturbed that it entailed my first assuming the office of high executioner. I went gayly to meet Pearl and asked her if she had settled her mind for the work of the day. She had. As we breakfasted on some damn-able stuff like sawdust we talked over various methods of extermination.

"Oh, I was in splendid spirits! To prove to Pearl that I was a just executioner, I offered to consider the case of each philostatician separately and to spare any for whom extenuating circumstances could be found. We started on the male monster of my first day. Standing before him in his cell I asked Pearl:

" 'What good can you say of this alleged zesthetician?'

" 'He has a beautiful soul,' she claimed.

" 'But look at his body !'

" 'You are no judge,' she retorted. 'And what if his body does decay?—his mind is eternal.'

" 'What's he meditating on?'

"Pearl went into a think. After a moment she said, 'A hole in the ground.'

" 'Can you interpret his thoughts for me?' I asked.

" 'It is difficult, but I'll try,' she said. After a little she began tonelessly, 'It's a hole. There is something—a certain something about it— Once caught my leg in one I pulled. Yes, there is something—ineffable— So-called matter around—air within— Holes—depth — moisture — leaks — juice—Yes, it is the *idea* of a hole— Hole—inverse infinity—holiness—'

" 'That'll do!' I said—and pulled the receptacle of all this wisdom suddenly forward.. There was a sharp crack, like the breaking of a dry stick, and the receptacle hung swaying pendulously against his ribs. 'Justice !' I cried.

"The old woman was next. 'What's there good about her?' I asked.

" 'She is a mother,' Pearl replied.

" 'Enough!' I cried, and the flip of my arm was followed by another sharp crack. Justice to the

mother who bore Homo Sapiens! Next!

"The next was an awful-looking wreck—worse than the first. `What good can you say of him?' I asked.

"`He is a great scientist.'

"`Can you interpret his thoughts?'

"Pearl sunk and thunk. `Mind force —' she said tonelessly. "How powerful—mm—yes, powerful—Basis of everything living—mm—really is everything—no living, all thinking—in direct proportion as it is not, there is nothing Mm, yes, everything is relative, but everything together makes unity—therefore, we have a relative unit—or, since the reverse is the other half of the obverse, the two together equal another unity, and we get the equation: a relative unit equals a unit of relativity

Sounds as if it might mean something. Einstein was a primitive. I agree with Wlyxzso. He was a greater mind than Yutwlxi. And so it is proved that mind always triumphs over matter -'

"`Proved!' I said—and crack went his neck! `Justice!' I cried. `Next!'

"The next, Pearl told me, was a metaphysician. `Ye gods' I cried; `don't tell me that among this lot of supermetaphysicians there is a specialist and an ultra. What's he thinking?'

"But this time poor Pearl was in doubt. `To tell the truth we're not sure whether he thinks or not,' she said, `or whether he is alive or dead. Sometimes we seem to get ideas so faint that we doubt if we really hear them; at others there is a pure blank.'

"`Try,' I ordered. `Try hard. Every last dead one must have his chance to be killed.'

"She tried. Eventually she said, 'I really think he is alive— Truth—air —truth firmly rooted high in air—ah, branching luxuriantly down toward earth—but never touching, so I cannot quite reach the branches, though I so easily grasp the roots—'

"Crack! went his neck.

"I cracked a dozen others. It got easier all the time. Then Pearl presented me to the prize of the collection. He had a head the size of a bushel basket.

"`What good can you say of him?'

"`He is the greatest of us all, and I do beg that you will spare him,' was her reply. 'I don't know what his specialty is, but every one here regarded him so highly!'

"`What is he thinking?' I asked.

"`That's it,' she replied. `No one knows. From birth he has never spoken; he used to drool at the mouth; no one has been able to detect any sign of cerebration. We put him in a cell very early. One of us gave an opinion that he was a congenital hydrocephalic idiot, but that was an error of judgment, for the rest of us have always been sure that his blankness is only apparent. His meditations are simply beyond our gross sensibilities. He no doubt ponders the uttermost problems of infinity.'

"`Try,' I said. 'Even he gets his chance.'

"Pearl tried, and got nothing. Crack! went his neck.

"And so it went. One by one, with rapid dispatch, and with a gusto that still surprises me when I think of it, I rid the earth of its public enemies. By the time the sun was high in the heavens the job was complete, and I had become the next lord of creation!

VIII

"THE EFFECT of the morning's work sent Pearl into a meditation that lasted for hours. When she came out of it she seemed her usual self; but inside, as I know now, something was changed, or, let us say, accelerated; and when this acceleration had reached a certain point my goosish ambition was ignominiously cooked. Ah, and very well cooked! Humorous and serious—I was well done on both sides!

"But realization of my final humiliation came late and suddenly. My thoughts were not at all on any danger like that, but on millions of darling descendants in whose every parlor would hang my picture, when Pearl came out of her extended trance.

"I had decided to be awfully nice to her—a model father even if not the perfect lover—so it was

almost like a courtier that I escorted her out on the field and handed her over to a large stone, where she promptly sat and efficiently asked what I wanted. I imagined she showed a trace of disappointment when I told her I only wished to talk over some arrangements relative to our coming civilization; but she made no remark, let me paint a glowing picture of the possibilities, and agreed with me on the outlines of the various plans I had formed.

"I was in a hurry. I asked her if she desired to slip back to my time to have the ceremony performed.

"This offer was, I thought, a delicate gesture on, my part. She came back with what amounted to a terrific right to the heart. She said severely:

" 'Yes, Frick, I will marry you, but first, you must court me.'

"Observe, now, Miles, and you, Charles, my rapid ascent to ashood's most sublime peak. Countless other men have spent their lives trying to attain that dizzy height; a few have almost reached its summit, but it remained for me, the acting lord of creation, to achieve it. For—there was nothing else to do about it—I began to-court her!

" 'Hold my hand,' she said—and I held her hand. She thought. 'Tell me that you love me,' she required. I told her that I loved her. 'But look at me when you say it,' she demanded—and I looked into her fleshless face with the thin lips' that always reminded me of alum and said again that I loved her. Again she took thought, and I got the impression that she was inspecting her sensations. 'Kiss me,' she ordered; and when I did she slid to the ground in a think!

" 'There are mysteries in there somewhere,' she said when I pulled her up. 'I shall have to give a great deal of thought to them.'

"I was in a hurry! I told her—Lord forgive me!—that she was clearly falling in love with me! And within herself she found something—I can't imagine what—that encouraged the idea. I struck while the iron was—well, not at absolute zero.

" 'Oh, come on,' I urged her. 'You see how we love each other; let's get married and get it over with.'

" 'No, you'll have to court me,' she answered, and I'll swear she was being coy. 'And court me for a long time, too,' she added. 'I found out all about it, in your time. It takes months.'

"This was terrible! 'But why wait? Why? We love each other. Look at Romeo and Juliet! Remember?'

" 'I liked that young man Rudy better,' she came back at a tangent.

" 'You mean the man in the night club?' I asked.

" 'Yes,' she answered. 'He seemed to be singing just to me.'

" 'Not singing—crooning!' I corrected irritably.

" 'Yes, crooning,' she allowed. 'You croon to me, Frick.'

"Imagine it! Me, of all people; she, of all people; and out in the middle of that field in broad daylight!

"But did I croon? I crooned. You have not seen me at the heights yet!

'More,' she said abstractedly. 'I think I feel something.'

"I crooned some more.

" 'Something with love and above in it,' she ordered.

"I made up something with love and above in it.

" 'And something with you and true,' she went on.

"I did it.

" 'Now kiss me again.'

"And I did that!

"Thank Heaven she flopped into another think! I escaped to the woods while she was unconscious, and did not see her again till the next day.

"My friends, this was the ignoble pattern of my life for the two weeks that followed.

"I suffered; how I suffered! There I was, all a-burning to be the author of a new civilization, luxuriating in advance at thought of titanic tasks complete; and there she was, surely the most extraordinary block to superhuman ambition that ever was, forever chilling my ardor, ruthlessly demanding to be courted! I held hands with her all over that portion of time; I gazed into her eyes at the

tomb of old Hydrocephalus himself; I crooned to her at midnight; and I'll bet that neighborhood was pitted for years in the places she suddenly sat down to meditate on in the midst of a kiss!

"She had observed closely—all too closely—the technique of love overtures here in our time, and noted particularly the effect on the woman, so she must needs always be going off into a personal huddle to see if, perhaps, she was beginning to react in the desired manner!

"Ah, there was brains! How glad I am that I'm dumb!

"I BEGAN to lose weight and go around tired. I saw that our courtship could go on forever. But she saved me with an idea she got out of one of those novels she had read. She told me one rainy morning, brightly, that it might be a good thing if we did not see each other for a couple of months. She had so very, very much to think over, and, incidentally, how sorry she was for her poor countrymen who had died without dreaming life could hold such wealth of emotional experience as she had accumulated from me!

"By then I was as much as ever in a rush to get my revised race off under their own power, but I was physically so exhausted that my protests lacked force, and I had to give in. So we made all arrangements and had our last talk. It was fully understood that I was to come back in two months and take her as my bride. She showed me how to operate the traveler. I set the controls, and in a matter of a minute I was back here in this room.

"But I tricked her. That is, in a sense. For I didn't wait two months. The idea occurred to me to straddle that period in the traveler—so in only another minute I was materializing in the time two months away that I was to call back and claim her! I was thankful for that machine, for the long ordeal had left my body weak and my nerves frazzled, and I don't know how I could have stood so long a delay. You see, I was in such a hurry!

"Ah, had I known! The catastrophe was already upon me! Note its terrible, brief acceleration!

"When I arrived, all was exactly as before. The great building was as dusty, the community as deserted, the block of cells just as morbid as when I left. Only the fields had changed. I found Pearl sitting before the tomb of Hydrocephalus, meditating.

" 'I'm surprised to find you back so soon,' were her words of greeting. 'It seemed only a week.'

"Did you have a good time, my Pearl-of-great-price?' I asked tenderly. (She had come to insist on that name. Once, near despair, I had used it with a different meaning, and afterward she required me to lash myself with it whenever I addressed her.)

" 'It was a period of most interesting integration,' she replied. 'In fact, it has been a precious experience. But I have come to realize that we were hasty in terminating the noble lives of my fellow men.'

"This was ominous! I made her go for a walk in the fields with me. Three times on the way out she found things I lightly mentioned to be problems requiring immediate squatting and meditating!

"I sensed that this was the crisis, and it was. I threw all my resources into an attempt to force immediate victory. I held her hands with one of mine, hooked my free arm around her waist, placed my lips to hers and crooned, 'Marry me right now, darling! I can't wait! I love you, I adore you, I am quite mad over you!'—and damn it, at the word mad she squatted!

"I picked her up and tried it again, but like clockwork, on the word mad she went down again. Oh, I was mad over her, all right!

"I was boiling! You see, I had to hurry so! She was changing right under my nose!

"I fairly flew back to the time machine. I was going to learn once and for all what my future with regard to a potential human race was to be. I set its dials one year ahead.

"This time I found Pearl in the vacant cell. She was distinctly older, dryer, thinner, and her head was larger in size. She sat on the dais as had the others ; and there was a light dust on her clothing--

" 'It is strange that you should come at this moment,' she said in a rusty voice. 'I was thinking of you.'

"With the last word she closed her eyes—so she should not see me, only think of me. I saw that the food box was full. Despair in my heart, I went back to the traveler.

"For a long time I hesitated in front of it. I was close to the bottom. The change had happened so

quickly! To Pearl it took a year, to me, only an hour; yet her acts were as fixed, her character as immutable, as if they had been petrified under the weight of a millennium.

"I nerved myself for what I had to do. Suddenly, recklessly, I jumped on the traveler, set it for seventy years ahead, and shot forth into time.

"I saw Pearl once more. I hardly recognized her in the monster who sat on the dais in her cell. Her body was shriveled. Her head had grown huge. Her nose had subsided. Her mouth was a nasty, crooked slit. She sat in thick dust; and there was an inch of it where there had once been brown hair, and more on every little upper surface.

"She had a musty smell!

"She had reverted to type. She had overcome the differentness of her start and was already far down the nauseating road which over-brained humanity has yet to go.

"As I stood looking at her, her eyelids trembled a little, and I felt she knew I was there. It was horrible; but worse was to come. The mouth, too, moved; it twisted; opened; and out of it came an awful creak.

"Tell me that you love me.'

"I fled back to my time!"

IX

FRICK'S long narrative had come to a close, but its end effect was of such sudden horror that Miles and I could not move from the edges of our chairs. In the silence Frick's voice still seemed to go on, exuberant, laughing, bitter, flexing with changing moods. The man himself sat slumped back in his chair, head low, drained of energy.

We sat this way long minutes, each with his thoughts, and each one's thoughts fixing terribly on the thing we knew Frick was going to do and which we would not ask him not to do. Frick raised his head and spoke, and I quivered at the implication of his words.

"The last time she had food for only five years," he said.

Out of the depths of me came a voice, answering:

"It will be an act of mercy."

"For you," Frick said. "I shall do it because she is the loathsome last."

He got up; fixed us in turn with bitter eyes.

"You will come?" he asked.

We did not answer. He must have read our assent in our eyes. He smiled sardonically.

He went over to the door he had pointed out, unlocked it with a key from his pocket, pulled its heavy weight open, entered, switched on a light. I got up and followed, trembling, Miles after me.

"I had the traveler walled up," Frick said. "I have never used it since."

I saw the machine. It was as he had described it. It hung in nothingness two feet off the floor! For a moment I lacked the courage to step on, and Frick pushed me up roughly. He was beginning to show the excitement which was to gather such momentum.

Miles stepped up promptly, and then Frick himself was up, hands on the controls. "Don't move!" he cried—and then the room was dim goldenness, then nothing at all, and I felt permeated with fathomless silence.

Suddenly there was the goldenness again, and just as suddenly it left. We were in a small dark room. It was night.

I wondered if she knew we were coming.

We went to her silently, prowlers in infinity, our carpet the dust of ages. A turn, a door—and there was field—and asleep under the pale wash of a gibbous moon. A walk, a turn—and there were the thirty-six sepulchers of the degenerate dead. One, not quite dead.

I was as in a dream.

Through the tall grass we struck, stealthily, Frick in the van like a swift stalking animal. Straight through the wet grass he led us, though it clung to our legs as if to restrain us from our single purpose.

Straight in among those silent sepulchers we went. Nature was nodding; her earth stretched out everywhere oblivious; and the ages to come, they did not care. Nor cared the mummied tenants of each tomb around us. Not now, with their heads resting on their ribs. Only Frick did, very much. He was a young humanity's agent before an old one's degradation. Splendidly, he was judge and executioner.

He slowed down before the sepulcher where was one who was yet alive. He paused there ; and I prayed. An intake of breath, and he pulled open the door and entered. Dreadfully, Miles, then I, edged in after.

The door swung closed.

The tomb was a well of ink. Unseen dust rose to finger my throat. There was a musty smell! I held my breath, but my heart pounded on furiously. Ever so faintly through the pressing silence I heard the pounding of two others.

Could it be possible that a fourth heart was weakly beating there?

Faint sounds of movement came from my left. An arm brushed my side, groping. . I heard a smothered gasp; I think it was from Miles. Soon I had to have air, and breathed, in catches. I waited, straining, my eyes toward where, ahead, there might have been a deeper blackness through the incessant gloom.

Silence. Was Frick gathering courage? I could feel him peering beside me there, afraid of what he had to see.

I knew a moment when the suspense became intolerable, and in that moment it was all over. There was a movement, a scratch, a match sputtered into light; for one eternal second I looked through a dim haze of dust on a mummied monstrosity whose eyelids moved!—and then darkness swept over us again, and there was a sharp crack, as of a broken stick, and I was running wildly with Death itself at my heels through that graveyard of a race to the building where lay our traveler.

In minutes we were back in our own time; in a few more Frick had blown up the traveler and I was out of the laboratory making for the Sound, sharp on my mind, as I went, the never-to-be-forgotten picture of Miles as he had raced behind me blurting, "She blinked! Oh, she blinked!" and that other, striding godlike in the rear, a little out of his head at the moment, who waved his arms over that fulfilled cemetery and thundered:

"Sic transit gloria minedit"