AVON Fantasy READER

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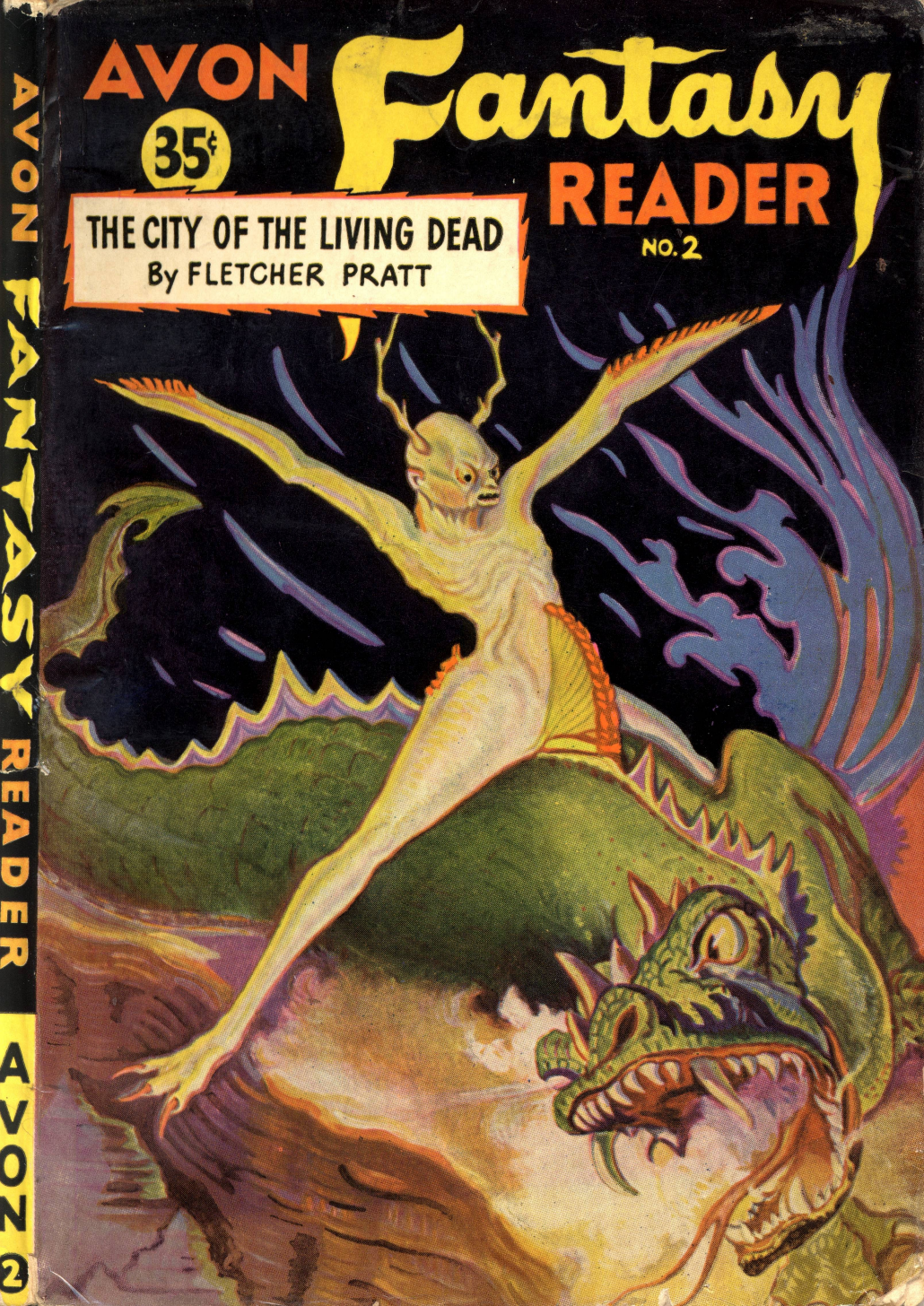
NO. 2

THE CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD

By FLETCHER PRATT



AVON FANTASY READER A VOZ 2

Past, Present, and Future

Past, present, and future. In those three words are embodied the be-all and end-all of imagination, of knowledge, of existence. The present cannot be understood without knowing the past. The future cannot be foreseen without understanding the present. All three are dependent upon each other and cannot be truly separated.

The fluid in which man is enabled to synthesize his knowledge of these states of being is the fluid of the imagination, of fantasy. Before an inventor can construct in the present for operation in the future he must learn what he can *of the past in his field of work*. Before he can lay a finger on a tool he must project his mind into the future and determine what he shall have produced when his work shall have been accomplished . . . and even further, what his invention in turn may create, what changes it will make in the world, what new environment it will wrest for its makers from the past. Fantasy is the implement that permits progress, that permits invention, that raises man above all other creatures. We alone can imagine change.

So it is only logical that in the course of all history the imaginative story will always be found, will always be prevalent. Use of the imagination in creation of far-fetched fantasy is merely an extension of the natural talents of men. It is part of all of us to create fantasies, to be able to enjoy fantasies.

In the AVON FANTASY READER we *try to bring you* outstanding gems of these imaginative projections. We seek to show you the past and the present, as so wonderfully tied together by Robert E. Howard's MIRRORS OF TUZUN THUNE, or so frighteningly conjured up by the fictional necromancy of THE DAY OF THE DRAGON by Guy Endore.

We have sought out and brought together for your delectation David H. Keller's vision of "perfection," STENOGRAPHERS' HANDS, and the other, weirdly contrasting glimpse of a mechanical paradise, AUTOMATA by S. Fowler Wright.

And, so as to allow no margins to our fantasy realms, we have brought back THE CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD by Laurence Manning and Fletcher Pratt with its eerie portrayal, and added THE STRANGE CASE OF LEMUEL JENKINS to round out in the present the voyages in "secret worlds incredible" we promised in this periodical's initial issue.

Finally, if this second number of the AVON FANTASY READER piques your imagination or starts that delightful little chill racing up and down your spine, we hope you'll write and tell us about it.

—DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

Authors' Acknowledgements

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AVON FANTASY READER

Edited By
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Laurence Manning and Fletcher Pratt

NO. 2

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Contents

AVON FANTASY READER: NO. 2
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Without any effort at kowtowing to formula or dogma, David H. Keller has become one of the best loved writers of the science-fiction magazines. Where others strove to outdo each other in pseudo-scientific marvels, Dr. Keller made his primary consideration people, just plain everyday people. What, he asked, will people do under changed circumstances? What is to become of people in this new world that is being built? What, for instance, is to come of the specialization that business is forcing people into? Who will be the master, the machines or the persons who use them? Dr. Keller gives a vision in "Stenographer's Hands" that may disturb many. Though this story has not appeared in the United States since its original publication in 1928, it has achieved acclaim more recently in France and England. . . .

Stenographer's Hands

by David H. Keller, M. D.

"THEY make too many errors!" cried the great man in intense irritation, as he turned restlessly in his chair. "We keep a chart of the errors—we keep a chart of everything we do—and the number of errors a day per stenographer is constantly increasing. These errors are annoying, and they are costly. No matter how hard our office force try, they do not correct all of them. We were awarded a bid last month—one of the typists put a period in the wrong place and it cost our firm over a quarter of a million. In another instance the omission of a comma caused us to lose a law suit. Constant inefficiency—causing continual irritation and a lessened production of business! Our experts tell us that if the stenographic force were one hundred per cent perfect we could nearly double our business. I doubt that, but we could do much more than we are doing. I want you to devise some plan to stop the errors!"

Dr. Billings, eminent biologist and sociologist, looked curiously at the speaker. He had worked for Jerome Smith, President of Universal Utilities for several years and had always found him an interesting

personality and his problems vitally important. After a moment's pause he asked:

"How many stenographers do you employ, Mr. Smith?"

"Ten thousand in our New York offices. As you know, we decided to centralize all of our offices some years ago. We need ten thousand—but usually we have only about nine thousand and have to replace them constantly. We handle millions of letters a year, personal, individual letters—our business life depends upon the character of these letters—and we cannot secure the right kind of stenographers."

"Why not raise their pay?"

"That has been tried. The more pay, the more pleasure; the more pleasure, the more fatigue and the greater number of errors."

"Then educate them!"

"They refuse. We have free night schools—one fifteenth of one per cent attend. They won't even go when we pay them. Claim they want relaxation at night. Do you know what the average stenographer does with her twenty-four hours?"

Dr. Billings laughingly confessed his ignorance of their special habits.

"We studied a thousand of them and made a composite picture of their daily life," said Jerome Smith, answering his own question. "They are High School and Business College graduates, about twenty years old. They stay in bed as long as possible, dress as fast as they can, bolt an insufficient breakfast and spend about one hour in the subway, or elevated, going to the office. From 9 A. M. to noon their work is fairly correct. During the noon hour they window-shop and eat a poor lunch. They would rather spend their money on silk stockings than beefsteak. From 1 to 5 their work becomes more careless as they become more fatigued. It takes them an hour to return to their home where they eat the only hot meal of the day. At 8 their boy friends come and take them to a movie or dance hall. They usually retire between 11 and 1. On Saturday afternoons they go to Coney Island. Sundays are periods of relaxation, unless their boy friends have a Ford. After an average of two years and three months of work they marry and keep on working till the first child is born. Then they cease to work, but from the day of their marriage, they become less and less efficient. If it were not for humanitarian reasons, we would discharge every woman as soon as she is married. The capable clever ones become private secretaries, the beautiful ones marry or go into private apartments, the dull ones are discharged, and last year our turn-over was sixty-five per cent. We can hardly hire and train them fast enough. Something has to be done. I

engaged you with the understanding that you could solve such problems and I want you to get busy!"

Dr. Billings looked irritated as he replied:

"You talked to me about this a year ago and I gave you several models of a phono-stenic machine, invented in our laboratories. As I recall it, I advised that you have five thousand of these machines made and discharge ninety-nine per cent of your stenographers. You never commented on my suggestion?"

"We gave it a trial! We are always willing to try anything! At first it looked as though it might work: it really was a beautiful piece of machinery. All our men had to do was to talk into a receiver and the sound was transmitted to the machine, transformed into mechanical activity and the letter was finished a second after the dictation ended. As I remember the details, the machine was entirely automatic, had a paper feeder and discharged the letter into one tray and the carbon into another. As a machine, it was perfect, but it could not think, consequently, there were many words that could not be used—for example, to—too—two—three different words, three different meanings, but only one sound for the three. Another difficulty was in the matter of pronunciation. In adjusting the machine you used an actor who is credited with having a wonderful voice and speaking perfect English. Unfortunately, in our office we have men from every part of the United States and many foreigners who have had to learn English. All of our men spoke English, but they all had a different accent, and none spoke as perfectly as the actor. The machine typed exactly what they spoke, but the letters it produced were certainly queer affairs. I was sufficiently interested in the proposition to invite the actor to come and dictate for us, and the letters he produced were perfect, so long as he was careful in not using words with two meanings."

"You could have had the machines adjusted to suit the different accents," replied Billings in a rather irritated voice.

"Certainly. I knew that! Then they would have been one man machines. If adjusted to a Pennsylvania Dutchman, it could not be used by an English speaking Spaniard. The invention was simply not practical. What I demand is better service from more efficient stenographers."

"I do not see how that can be obtained!"

"You had better see! That is what I hired you for and let you write your own salary. I am a business man and not a scientist. All I know is that the stenographer is a human machine. She uses her hands to work with. The hands are connected with the brain. Brain, hands and typewriter produce letters—I must have perfect letters. It is your business to produce them. Get busy! When you have a plan, come and see me.

Till then stay away from me, because the presence of inefficiency irritates me."

The biologist lost no time in leaving the office, while Jerome Smith turned restlessly to his next task. Having given this definite problem to Dr. Billings, he promptly forgot it—for the time being. He knew, and so did Dr. Billings, that unless the problem was satisfactorily settled, there would be a new biologist employed within a few months.

For the next month, Dr. Billings and his subordinates studied the race of stenographers. He found that practically every statement that Jerome Smith had made about them was correct. Those who were capable ceased to be mere stenographers and filled offices of trust as private secretaries. They ceased to function as mere letter writers. Many married. The dull ones remained dull. Gaps in the ranks were easily replaced by very ordinary material from business colleges. Replacements were frequent and the yearly turnover large. The average office worker was fairly capable but absolutely undependable. Most of them had ambitions and day dreams, but these did not extend in the direction of writing a perfect letter. A few grew old in the service, but most changed occupations before twenty-five. Socially, they were middle class, poorly housed, inadequately fed, but rather elegantly dressed.

Dr. Billings worked and studied and yet failed to see how the work could be more efficiently performed. His inability fretted him. His pride was hurt, and, in addition, he was faced with the loss of his position in case he failed to satisfy his employer. Worry, nervous strain and overwork produced insomnia. Finally, tired nature demanded sleep, and in this slumber came a dream from the subconscious.

From a high balcony he overlooked in his dream an office where several hundred stenographers were working at noiseless machines. He could tell from the continued intensity of their labor and the satisfied expression on their faces that they were happy in their work. Someone put an opera glass in his hands, and he focused on one individual after another. He was at once impressed with the intelligent faces and the enormous, capable hands—large strong hands; long, and wonderful fingers, racing surely over the keyboards. In his dream he watched them, hour after hour, as they wrote letters—and he knew, without reading, that they were writing perfect letters at a terrific speed.

Waking with a start and shivering, he turned on the light. Unable to forget those hands, he placed his own between the light and the calcimined wall, making huge extremities appear as shadows with twisting menacing fingers. Then he went to sleep, and the next morning, after shaving more carefully than usual, he called to see Jerome Smith;

and in spite of his efforts, it was the scientist who was excited this time and not the capitalist.

Without preamble or delay, he blurted out the marvelous solution, which had come to him after his dream.

"We will secure better stenographers by breeding them!"

The astonished leader of finance could only stammer, "W—w—what?"

"Breed them!" repeated the scientist. "When man wanted to develop the carrier pigeon for speed, the trotting horse for racing, the pointer dog for hunting and the cow for increased milk production, he bred them. Burbank bred a spineless cactus—we will breed errorless stenographers!"

"You must be insane, Doctor!"

"Not at all, but I cannot blame you for thinking so. The students of developmental neurology, headed by Frederick Tilney and Dr. Huntington, organized the Galton Society of America. They have for years studied the growth of the brain, and they have shown that the development of certain areas in the cerebral cortex is directly controlled by the use made of the hand. They believe that there are certain undeveloped areas in the brain, especially in the frontal lobes, and that, as the use of the hand increases, these lobes will correspondingly be developed to greater usefulness.

"You spoke of human machines: you said that the perfect stenographer would have wonderful hands and an acute brain. That made me think. Stenography and typewriting are highly specialized uses of the hand, controlled by certain brain centers. The more expert the hand, the more highly developed will be the brain: the finer the cerebral growth, the more wonderful will the hand be in its accuracy. If we can develop new sections of the cortex, deepen the grooves between the convolutions, we can produce stenographers who are more nearly errorless. If we can breed them for accuracy and speed, we will have creatures as highly specialized as the racing horse or the bird-dog. These stenographers will remain faithful to their work, because they will be so bred that they will never want to do anything else, even if they are able.

"They will be perfect human machines, capable of doing one kind of mento-physical work and unable and unwilling to do anything else. By a process of selective breeding, we will increase their speed and decrease their errors. That is the solution to your question."

Jerome Smith remained silent for many seconds. Even though he was accustomed to tremendous problems, this was almost too much for his intellect to grasp. Finally he asked, almost in a whisper:

"But how can you breed them?"

"That is simply a matter of detail, technique, something for your

experimental station to work out. I give you a fact—*'Breed them.'* The rest can be left to your subordinates. Yet, I will give you the main outline of my plan. You appreciate the fact that most of your stenographers are women. When they marry, they mate with artisans, salesmen, street car conductors, occasionally with a business man, but never with another stenographer. I understand you have about ten thousand stenographers in your employ; gradually replace five thousand of the dull ones with five thousand male typists, the best you can find in the entire world. Build a suburban center with comfortable homes—and offer to every male stenographer who marries one of your office employees a home, rent free, and complete maintenance. Do not let them marry unless they both pass certain examinations for speed and perfection of copy. Give an extra bonus for every child born. Have a community hospital, day nursery, kindergarten, and school. Thus the mothers can soon return to their office, but the children will remain under your control. From their youth they will be taught stenography and typewriting: they will be made to live with their machines. As soon as they are efficient enough, put them to work in your offices. Make them independent of their families. From the first; control their twenty-four hours' activity. Always they will be stenographers—encourage them to marry stenographers—and breed stenographers. I believe that in ten generations you will be able to produce office workers that will turn out perfect letters and be glad to do it."

"Nonsense!" shouted Jerome Smith, springing from his chair and walking excitedly up and down the room. "Ten generations would take two hundred years. You and I would be worm's food long before even a start was made."

"Under ordinary circumstances, your criticism would be warranted," replied the biologist, soothingly, "but wait till you hear the rest of my plan. In this special colony, we will have complete control of the food supply. The food will be part of the salary. We will furnish three meals a day—the nourishment of the babies will be completely under the control of our dieticians. With these foods we will incorporate certain chemicals, especially some obtained from the ductless glands. Thus, the growth of the babies will be accelerated. They will mature more rapidly than the average children. The first generation will be ready to marry at sixteen, whereas the next generation will be working at ten and marrying at fourteen. Eventually, these specially bred stenographers will be doing full duty at six and marrying at eight. I do not believe we should force nature beyond that point. In fifty years, sufficient results will be obtained to make the experiment profitable. I thoroughly believe that five generations of such intensive breeding

will yield a race of stenographers who are able to produce the finest of work and absolutely incapable of doing anything else."

Jerome Smith shivered. The idea, for some reason, was distasteful to him—and he said so.

"I admit that the average stenographer is rather poor material, but they are human beings, Dr. Billings: I can hardly reconcile myself to your idea."

The scientist, however, was unable to brook opposition. "But it is for their own good, Mr. Smith! If you were just selfish in the matter, it would be different. You said yourself that their life was unhappy and unsatisfactory. You insisted that they had no future that was worth while—that few of them could advance. Your idea was that they were poorly fed, badly housed and that their sexual life was inadequate and unsatisfactory. If you follow my plan, you can make them comfortable and happy. Once they are bred to be capable stenographers, they will not want to do anything else. They will be able to attain the greatest satisfaction in their work. They will only be happy when taking dictation, and transposing it into type. Their motto will be, 'Efficiency plus contentment.' No doubt the time will come when we can have a new generation born every ten years; and every child will be born with the inherited desire to become a perfect stenographer. If it works, you can follow out the same plan with your other workers, but that is for the future to decide. You will be able to secure a great advantage over your competitors. In fifty years, Universal Utilities will control the market of the world—in two hundred years, you can have a specially bred line of workers. I can see that finally your organization could so breed workers that they would be willing to work for no other reason than the pleasure they had in it, or because they were forced to by the inherited urge. That is the picture of the future. We need only make a start."

"But won't they object? Can they be controlled?"

"Certainly! At first they won't realize what is happening—all they will know is that they are being well housed, excellently fed and beautifully clothed. The changes in the generations will come gradually. When the realization comes, it will be too late to resist. They will have only one ambition then—one primitive urge—to write perfect letters. Then they will only want to sleep and eat and work. All initiative will be gone except the desire to take dictation and write perfect letters. They will be machines, but human—they will know the difference between *to* and *too* and *two*. Can they be controlled? Why, Mr. Smith, the only strike you will ever have will come when you are unable to supply them with work!"

And Jerome Smith, President of Universal Utilities, was finally convinced. He was big enough to see that he was only a small part of an organization that might some day control the destinies of the world, that would hold in its grip the commerce of a universe. A small man might plan for a generation, but a big man would arrange a programme that would carry on in every detail a thousand years after his death. Alexander might make Macedonia famous for a generation, but William the Conqueror would found an Empire that would grow greater for a thousand years.

Jerome Smith looked into the future. He saw an organization, an office force that functioned perfectly, a sales organization of five thousand trained men, dictating to ten thousand errorless stenographers. He visioned a constant flow of perfect, beautiful letters, streaming in every direction from the central offices to all parts of the world, bringing in a volume of business that was the envy and despair of his rapidly weakening competitors. But he saw more than this. In his factories he saw specially bred workers, working rapidly with skilled hands, perfectly co-ordinated with highly developed brains. He wondered if the same principle could be applied to other departments of Universal Utilities—if salesmen could be bred to trail the uninterested customer with the unflagging interest of a blood-hound. Whether even the higher executive offices could not be filled with specially bred managers.

Realizing that time meant nothing, if only in the end the results were satisfactory, he gradually thought in terms of Universal Utilities, rather than in units of isolated humanity. Everything must be sacrificed for the organization. The individuals were of no value. In fact, he considered them simply as pawns on his chess board, things hardly human, living in human shape but somehow not worthy of sympathetic regard. The more he thought about the breeding of capable stenographers, the more he felt that the end result justified the means employed. He even reached the point where, in his grandiose pride, he felt that, like a true creator, he was changing something useless into a thing of beautiful utility. Without further delay, he gave the necessary orders. The final arrangements were made easily.

Universal Utilities manufactured everything necessary for the building and equipment of the suburban homes; the arrangement of a new salary scale and system of bonuses was also easy. The hard part was to find five thousand competent unmarried male stenographers to take the place of the five thousand incapable females who were to be discharged. Yet, even this was finally done—social centers were organized—every opportunity was given the ten thousand young people to spend their spare time with each other, thus encouraging matrimonial possibilities in every way. As a result, six thousand of the stenographers

were married within a year and another two thousand at the end of eighteen months. Those who refused to marry were discharged and their places filled by younger and more socially inclined typists. As fast as they married, each couple was given a comfortable home in one of the apartments in the new community centers. The generous system of bonuses made the birth of a child an unqualified pleasure rather than a foreboding of disastrous poverty.

Such a programme could not be kept a secret. In fact, Universal Utilities used it as one of their most striking advertisements—not only to bring their firm into world renowned fame as unselfish philanthropists, but also to attract to their employ the most skillful office workers from all over the business world. For several Sundays the leading newspapers ran long advertisements in their Magazine section. One was headed:

SKILLFUL STENOGRAPHERS SEEK SUBURBAN HOMES

"Universal Utilities promotes health and happiness among its office force by encouraging its employees in every way to lead normal lives. Marriage among the Stenographic force is encouraged and every inducement given the young people to become parents. Stenographic suburban centers are thoroughly equipped with hospitals, day nurseries and kindergartens. For the first time in the history of the business world the lesser employees of a great corporation are being given an opportunity to live the kind of lives that the Creator intended all men and women to live."

Naturally, children were born in these centers. In fact, many more children were born than were either expected or necessary for the continuation of the experiment, which both Dr. Billings and Jerome Smith were watching with the greatest interest. When, at the end of five years, the scientist reported to the Corporation president that there were now over ten thousand specially bred stenographic children, he anticipated his employer's question by ending his report with the statement:

"Under the present conditions of life in the stenographic centers, there is no doubt but that there will be many more children born and raised to maturity than there will be needed to carry on the experiment at the end of eighteen years. This is really a necessary part of the programme, especially in the early generations of breeding. There will be many children who will not be true to type. Later, we hope by a series of carefully conducted measurements, to eliminate the unfit at a very early age. Even now we believe that much can be told by the shape of the hands and the length of the fingers. In this generation,

however, a certain number of the children will resemble their grandparents more than their parents. We feel that we shall have to have thirty thousand children born as soon as possible in this generation in order to be sure of ten thousand adults who are perfect enough to carry on the experiment. Realizing the necessity of having as many children born as closely together as possible, we are now giving an extra bonus to stenographers who are twins. In this first generation, we will begin at once to teach stenography and typewriting in the primary grades, and we believe, that by the time the children reach the age of ten, we shall be able to pick out one-third of them as giving promise of special speed and accuracy. These will be trained in separate schools, while the duller ones will gradually be isolated, and in the course of years, be amalgamated with the ordinary city workers. I might add also that the special diet is working favorably; all the children are, on the average, two years in advance of the ordinary child in size, weight and intelligence."

Twenty years passed and eighty per cent of the old stenographers were retired on a liberal pension, being replaced in the offices of Universal Utilities by the first generation of specially bred and highly educated office workers. One out of every four of the children in the first generation had been able to pass the necessary tests. These had been sent to special schools where the entire time was spent on spelling, punctuation, grammar, stenography and typewriting. At the age of fourteen, they were working in experimental offices, while at fifteen they were being given positions in the main offices of Universal Utilities. As a rule, they were fine specimens of manhood and womanhood, having been given the best of care in every way since their birth. Irrespective of any ability they possessed, none in this generation were given positions unless they manifested genuine love for the work. Records were carefully kept and every precaution taken for the continuation of the work after the death of Jerome Smith and Dr. Billings. While the actual details of the proposed reform were only known to a few of the higher officials, still it was generally understood that Universal Utilities was sold to the idea that the business success of the future lay in perfect letters, written by errorless stenographers.

In such a company, more like a machine than an organization of human individuals, events moved with the regularity of clockwork. Jerome Smith at seventy-five was still watching the daily curve of errors which was placed routinely on his desk. With grim satisfaction he saw the line indicating the volume of business and the daily number of letters rise steadily towards a peak that could not even be estimated, while at the same time the number of errors per stenographer per

day was steadily falling. This record was carefully watched and the results published. A definite scale of advance in salary was the reward for weeks and months of perfection. Some stenographers were able to go an entire month without spoiling their record. The perfect stenographer had not yet been born, but a wonderful advance was already apparent. The gain in speed was as remarkable as the improvement in accuracy. Special inventions had to be devised in order to allow the typewriters to respond rapidly enough to the flying fingers. It was even found advisable to devise an automatic paper feeder so that the typist would not have to stop to insert a fresh sheet of paper. A touch on the button put in a piece of correspondence paper, while pressure on a different button inserted an envelope.

It might seem that with the increasing speed and greater accuracy, the correspondence of Universal Utilities could be carried on with five thousand office workers instead of ten thousand. The truth was that the ten thousand stenographers were doing ten times as much work as the same number had accomplished twenty years before. The business had correspondingly increased. The carefully kept charts showed that the experiment was paying for itself in every way. When the third generation was born, there was a smaller per cent to be discarded—the result of the intensive breeding was beginning to show. As an old man, aged in body but still active in mind, Dr. Billings in his annual report to his employer, Jerome Smith, made the interesting statement:

"In the fifth generation, we are finding less than fifteen per cent of the babies who are not running true to type."

Two hundred years passed. Universal Utilities, now governed by Hiram Smith, descendant of Jerome Smith, ruled the financial world. During that two hundred years, the basic principle that "better letters produce better business" had never been forgotten. There were new ways of reaching the ultimate consumer: the radio constantly endeavored to furnish new contacts, salesmen in monoplanes reached every small town, but still the great bulk of the business all over the world had to be carried on by correspondence.

And that correspondence, carried on by Universal Utilities, was now approaching a state of wonderful perfection. Errors might be made in dictation, addresses might be wrong, but a mistake made by the ten thousand stenographers, was now so unusual that the heads of departments were always inclined to blame the mistake on the other portions of the official force. Year after year the stenographers approached the perfection of beautifully adjusted machinery, with this difference: they could think, reason, evaluate, differentiate. To their finely co-ordinated muscles were added harmonious and specially trained minds. And most

important of all was the pleasure that they took in their work. They were content only when working, they were happy only in the office. Nothing but severe illness might keep them from their machines. Their homes were simply miniature offices, where they talked over the work of the day, helped their children write letters and vied with each other in speed contests.

The increased love for their work influenced their social contacts. Those who were recognized as being ninety-nine per cent efficient hesitated in seeking the society of the eighty-five per centers. An unmarried girl who was ninety-seven per cent perfect in accuracy and speed was willing to keep company only with a young man who was as brilliant as she was—she certainly would not consider matrimony with one who was rated at ninety per cent. Their one-track minds ceased to consider personal wealth, beauty, fame or sexual allure as reasons for marriage. All they could think, talk and dream of was their work and the possibility of some one, some time, working a whole year without making an error.

Sundays and holidays were observed but were always followed by days of increased production, as the ten thousand workers carefully rested, avoided every form of fatigue during their hours off duty, and in every way conserved their energy for the hours of production following the holidays.

One afternoon Hiram Smith was entertaining a young lady in his office. In fact, it was his daughter, recently returned from one of the most fashionable colleges in Massachusetts. Hiram Smith was disturbed, even though he tried to conceal his annoyance. His only daughter, in fact, his one and only child, had been dismissed from college on account of complete failure to make the necessary grades. The father had tried to keep her in college, but even his great wealth and unusual power had been insufficient to bribe the President of the college, who had simply said that the young lady was unwilling to study and could not stay.

There was nothing in the general appearance of the late collegian to indicate mental deficiency. In fact, she looked unusually alert and mentally active as she sat on the other side of the central table.

"Well?" grunted her father, savagely smoking a cigar.

"Well!" answered the daughter. "Is this the way you welcome your only-only?"

"You have disgraced me!" Hiram Smith replied. "Only my position has kept it out of the afternoon papers. All of New York knows about it. My daughter, Mirabella Smith, great, great, etc., granddaughter of Jerome Smith, thrown out of college, because she could not pass the necessary examinations."

"That is wrong, Dad!" protested the girl; "I could have passed them, but I did not want to—I told you that I did not want to go to college: I simply abominate mathematics and languages. I did not try to study."

"What are you going to do? Marry at eighteen?"

"No. I want to be a stenographer."

Hiram Smith nearly swallowed his cigar.

"A stenographer?" he whispered weakly.

"Yes. Your hearing is all right, is it not? You heard me the first time, didn't you? I have been practicing on a machine for over a year and can do some shorthand. I want a job in Universal Utilities."

It was then that the great man laughed—so heartily that his daughter began to blush in anger.

"I don't see anything funny," she protested.

Finally the man controlled his laughter.

"Have you ever seen one of our central offices?" he asked.

"No. Of course not. You never let me know anything about your business; and you should, because some day I am going to run it!"

He looked at her in astonishment, but this time he did not laugh. He simply stood up as he asked her to come with him.

Walking through long halls, they finally went by elevator to the tenth floor of the building, which cared for much of the clerical activities of Universal Utilities. They entered a large room where, in glass enclosed, sound proof, individual offices, five hundred men were apparently talking into telephone receivers, though not a sound could be heard. As they walked slowly around the room the father explained the system to the daughter.

"In order to handle our tremendous volume of mail it is necessary to employ ten thousand specially trained clerks who do nothing except dictate answers to the hundreds of thousands of letters we receive daily. Years ago these letters were all dictated and taken down in shorthand. Now each clerk is connected by telephone to a stenographer, and as fast as a letter is dictated, it is written. Some of our men talk at the rate of one hundred and fifty to two hundred words a minute, but we have never found one who could talk faster than one of our average stenographers could write. Our business is a peculiar one, and we take great pride in our letters. They have to be absolutely individualistic. For over one hundred years we have tried to avoid the semblance of anything like a form letter. When John Jones of Honolulu receives a letter from us, it is a highly personal one from Universal Utilities to John Jones. He likes it. Our millions of customers like it. We are able to establish an individual contact and our customers stay with us. We have the world divided into ten thousand districts, and the mail from each district is answered by a man we have familiarized with that particular district; a

man who is keenly alive to the special needs of the people, who seem to be his neighbors. He understands their habits, thoughts and reactions. Of course, we write letters in many languages, but eighty-five per cent of all our correspondence is conducted in English. We try to answer every letter within two days of the time it is received. Of course, some days are very heavy—Mondays and the days following holidays for instance—but we never fall very far behind. Each one of these ten thousand letter clerks dictates eight hours a day. There is a fifteen-minute rest period after every forty-five minutes of work and an hour off at noon—a fairly long day."

Mirabella Smith looked with interest around the room. There were fifty offices on each side, and above them, in four rows, were four hundred more. In each cell a man was dictating to an invisible stenographer.

"We will now go into the next room," said her father. "Here you will find five hundred glass enclosed rooms in a similar arrangement, but in each of these rooms is a stenographer, connected in every instance with a letter clerk. They each have one of our noiseless, self-feeding electrical machines, which automatically discharge the letters, with envelopes attached, into wide tubes. These letters are then carried by endless conveyors back to the dictator, who takes the fifteen-minute rest period to sign the letters he has dictated in the previous forty-five minutes. All he has to do is to sign them as they come to him, and another machine blots them, folds and seals the envelope. During the fifteen minutes he is thus occupied, his special stenographer sits motionless, eyes closed, relaxing every muscle, ready to spring into intense activity, when the dictating again begins. Of course, we have some stenographers, who still take dictation in shorthand, but only from the higher officers, who have not learned to dictate at the high speed necessary to make the most of this highly trained mechanical ability."

Mirabella looked at her father as he closed this sentence with the words, "mechanical ability." As though understanding her questioning glance, he went on, rather rapidly, seemingly defending himself from an implied accusation.

"You know, my dear, that is what these stenographers are—simply human machines. We take very good care of them—feed, house and clothe them nicely and provide for their every need. They are really very expensive to produce, but well worth all they cost."

"You mean they are slaves?"

"Not at all—go near that glass window and look at them. You will see they are human beings."

Mirabella stifled a swelling groan-like scream, mingled with nausea, as she looked into the cell of human machines. Live beings—god-like

with the most lovely, most perfect, long-tapering fingers she had ever seen—hands, the sight of whose beauty summoned worship; but ere the sacred rite was completed, those emaciated faces, bulging foreheads, staring eyes, hideous expressions met the view. She was sick. Her ancestors had done it—martyred humanity for commercial greed.

But, grasping a plan, like a flash she covered her feelings and enthusiastically answered:

"Oh! Father, it's all so wonderful—this working plan of Universal Utilities."

"Yes. It is a great plan. They have bodies very similar to ours, only there is a slight bulging to the forehead, and the hands are larger and the fingers longer than in the average individual. Their shoulders are broader and their arms longer and more muscular. Our medical department says there is a shrinking of the body and lower limbs, but only slight. You see, they take practically no exercise, except what they have at their machines. We send them back to their community homes in special passengers planes. Once home, they relax. They go to bed early and have practically no amusements or sports. All they know, or want to know, is how to write a perfect letter. We have ten thousand human machines like that, almost evenly divided between the sexes—for two hundred years we have bred stenographers—we have raised them on an intensive scale, specially fed and educated them. I will tell you something that few realize, because we have thoroughly bribed and controlled all sources of information. These human machines mature at the age of nine years, marry at ten and produce baby stenographers at eleven years of age. In other words, we have bred stenographers on a scientific scale as race horses or blooded cattle. Your great-number-some-odd grandfather started the plan—we are reaping the benefit. Before his time, they had a great deal of trouble with their office force—now we have no trouble whatever. They are simply wonderful pieces of living machinery. Now you understand why you cannot be one of our stenographers. You are a wonderfully beautiful young woman. These living beings you see in these glass cells are simply machines—living, capable of some emotions, able to reproduce other generations of machines, but absolutely incapable of doing any other kind of work. They are human beings so highly differentiated in their heredity and development, that they are no longer to be considered on the same level with the rest of humanity. They have gained efficiency in one direction at the loss of initiative in every other plane of human endeavor."

The girl frowned.

"And Universal Utilities did this to these people and their ancestors without their consent?" she asked.

"Certainly. It would never have been done, if we had waited for

their approval. They were mentally our inferiors—they made no attempt to progress by their own efforts. We took them and made them worth while, to themselves and to Universal Utilities—"

"I do not want to be that kind of a stenographer," said the girl hastily. "I want to be one of the old-fashioned kind I have read about, the gossiping, gum-chewing, error-making, soda-water-drinking, flirtatious kind of a girl, who went into the business world for the thrill she received. I want to be a stenographer, but not like those poor things. I think I will go back to college and graduate."

Her father really meant to check up on her movements, but he was so busy with a new side line, which Universal Utilities had absorbed, that he had absolutely no time to think about his family. This new project was nothing less than assuming a directing control of all the Protestant Churches of the world by welding them into one gigantic merger. The plan had long been dreamed of, but no one force had been powerful enough to bring it about. Now, with Universal Utilities to finance it, the scheme was accomplished, and there were no longer Baptists, Methodists or Presbyterians, but over four hundred and twenty sects, united to form the University Protestant Church. In every small town the little churches were torn down to be replaced by one beautiful chapel or cathedral. Hiram Smith attended personally to many of the details. In the meantime he neglected his daughter.

She never returned to college. Instead, she stayed in New York as the stenographer of a young physician. He was poor and his patients were poorer, but he was rather rich in having Mirabella in his office. In fact, they had decided on such a future while he was yet a medical student and she a student in a college. They had met at a dance. In a moment of confidence, she explained to him that she wanted to be a stenographer. That interested him and he returned her confidence by telling how he had bitterly disappointed his parents by becoming a doctor instead. At that time he did not know that she was the only child of Hiram Smith, owner and president of Universal Utilities—she was just a rich girl who wanted to be a stenographer, while he was only a poor boy who did not want to be one.

Mirabella Smith had gone directly from her father's office to the residence of the young physician. She lost no time in announcing her decision to him.

"I have come to be your stenographer, Carleton," she said in a very serious voice. "More than that, some day, I hope. I have just had my talk with father and he has told me some horrible things, and shown me even worse sights. For over two hundred years the company, which

I will some day own, has been deliberately breeding stenographers—as cattle or white rats—breeding them to write perfect letters so Universal Utilities can become great and crush out its competitors. Now, after two hundred years, the poor things are just like machines. I saw them writing with the speed of a tornado, for forty-five minutes and then resting quietly for fifteen minutes more till the sound of the dictating voice again spurred them into an almost super-human frenzy. I will own that company some day and with it will come the ownership of ten thousand human machines and their pitiful little children. Think of the babies—I understand that when they are old enough to talk they are put to work on miniature machines. They mature at nine, marry at ten. They have no childhood, no playtime. Why, even a hunting dog plays when it is a puppy. I wonder what they are like—socially. Can they talk—as we do?"

The doctor looked at her lovingly, as he answered, "I can tell you a lot about it, Mirabella. I never wanted to tell you before because I did not want to hurt your feelings. My father and mother were stenographers, working for Universal Utilities, just as you say those people are working today. I was their first and only child. They had great hopes for me—I was a well formed baby—they longed for me to grow to be the Perfect Stenographer. But when the time came for my earliest training, something went wrong. I screamed at the sight of the toy typewriter that they put in front of me. I never did learn to use it—would not even touch it. To my parents' surprise, I only grew half as fast, both mentally and physically, as the other children of my age. At ten, when the other children were working and thinking of marrying, I had not yet entered my adolescence. Horrified, degraded by the thought that they had produced a monstrosity, my parents had me placed in an average New York City home, where they contributed liberally to my support, though the family that cared for me learned to love me and wanted to adopt me legally. As I grew older, my mother lived in the hope that I would change. She would come to see me once a year, carrying a portable Underwood with her. With tears in her eyes she would beg me to try to write. I tried to humor her. I even promised that I would take lessons, but it was impossible. Finally she lost hope and told me that she realized that I was right in planning to lead my life in my own way.

"Last year I made an investigation. An ancestor of mine was a great New York surgeon. His daughter ran away, became a stenographer and worked for Universal Utilities. Scientists tell me that I am a throwback—a case of atavism. So, you see, I know what Universal Utilities has been doing. I am one of their experimental babies. I was born in one of their colonies, educated in one of their Community schools. I will

tell you one thing more —for the last year I have been part time physician in one of their smaller colonies. It is a poorly paying position but it helps me to meet expenses. While practicing in this colony, I found out something—I will tell you what it is, when I am more sure of it. Just now it is so horrible that I hesitate to believe that it is true.

Carleton continued to practice medicine and Mirabella wrote his letters. Now and then she sold one of her diamond rings.

Meantime, life was not going smoothly for the thousands of people working in the gigantic office building, owned and operated by Universal Utilities. At first the truth was covered up, but finally it could not be concealed from Hiram Smith. He sat silently, white, sweating, trembling as the chairman of the Board of Directors told him the horrible fact.

"The stenographic force no longer can be trusted. The number of errors they are making is unexplainable and unheard of. Mistakes in spelling, punctuation, addresses, use of capital letters—in fact they are making every possible mistake. The survey shows that there is no change in the Colony life—the habits of these workers are unchanged. They are still interested in their work—they are doing their best, but for some reason they are making mistakes by the million, and, what is worst of all—they do not seem to be conscious of the fact that they are making them. When their attention is called to the inaccuracy of their work, they seem unable to comprehend the gravity of the situation. As a result of the multitude of their errors, the entire machinery of the Universal Utilities has become completely demoralized. Over eighty per cent of the letters have to be rewritten. The correspondence is three weeks behind hand, the letter clerks are becoming exhausted and neurasthenic, the sales force is discouraged and our shipping department no longer can work in harmony and with accuracy. Unless something is done at once, Universal Utilities will lose eighty per cent of its customers."

Something had to be done! But first of all the cause had to be determined, the reason for these errors. All the science—the entire skill of the research department of the company, was put to work and yet, at the end of a week, nothing was learned, and another week of disastrous errors followed.

In the strain of events, Hiram Smith died. His daughter, Mirabella, at once took charge of Universal Utilities. Her first act was to call a meeting of her Board of Directors and speak to them. She began her address:

"Over two hundred years ago an ancestor of mine decided to breed stenographers. He succeeded rather well. He not only bred like to like

but eventually had a great deal of inbreeding. In this last generation, almost every husband and wife were cousins of some degree. No individuality was allowed and no initiative; he merely bred for accuracy and speed. All of you have followed in his footsteps. You have mated human beings as if they were rats or cattle. If you had studied the nervous systems of horses and dogs that have been bred in this way for many generations, you would have suspected the trouble with your present generation of stenographers. Any dog fancier will tell you how careful he has to be of white collies and fox terriers. One of your community doctors last year suspected what was going to happen.

"Over eighty per cent of your stenographers have nocturnal epilepsy. That means that they have convulsions which occur at night during their sleep. After the tonic and colonic muscular movements, they drop into a deep sleep, from which they only waken in time to dress, eat breakfast and go to work. They have no consciousness of the convulsion and no memory of it. On account of the intense muscular activity during the attack, they are tired, sore and bruised, when they start to work. That in itself would produce fatigue and errors, but in addition, there is in epilepsy, especially the nocturnal type, a very definite deterioration of the higher mental faculties. These unfortunates become dull, listless, incapable of highly specialized cerebration. They degenerate into listless animals. In their work, dress and speech, they give plain evidence of this dullness of the mind. Emotionally they change, become quarrelsome, abusive and indolent. This is what happened to your office force. Two hundred years ago my ancestor started it; you have tried to carry out his plans—to breed stenographers. Instead, you have bred a race of demented epileptics. My medical friends, who are in your employ as physicians to the Colony children, tell me that almost all the little children are showing definite signs of the same nervous disease. You were not told of it sooner, because they were afraid of my father."

The Chairman of the Board looked dully at the young woman. Then he roused himself to action.

"How did you learn all this?"

"Oh! the doctor who made the discovery was a colony child. For some reason, your special foods and glandular preparations did not work on him and in his tenth year he was taken away from his parents and put in the home of common people. During those ten years he saw a great deal of the colony life—he used to play with the other children, and spend the nights with them. Things happened during the night that he could not understand, but he remembered them, especially when he started to study medicine. After he graduated, he worked for Universal Utilities as one of their Colony physicians, and his observations there

made him positive of the presence of nocturnal epilepsy. Since then the disease has developed rapidly."

"Is there no cure?"

"None whatever. Universal Utilities has on its hands and conscience ten thousand epileptics and their children. All that can be done is to allow the defective race to die out. You will have to reorganize your entire office force—go back to the old system of incompetent, error-making stenographers who, in spite of their faults, are at least intensely human."

The Chairman, in his indignation at a woman's talking so disrespectfully and at such length to a dignified Board of Directors, demanded what the result would be.

"Under the stress of reorganization," Mirabella calmly replied, "Universal Utilities will lose over eighty per cent of its business. The time will come, however, when once again it will function smoothly, under conditions similar to its competitors. I will try to make the lives of the new stenographers happy, but never again will any effort be made to interfere with the normal progress of nature in the breeding of human beings. The unfortunate epileptics will be well cared for, but will die rapidly, and in twenty-five years the colonies will be converted into suburban homes for normal workers from the great city."

"Enough of this outrage!" stormed the chairman. "This meddling physician you speak of—who is he? Where is he? We'll teach him—"

In reply Mirabella Smith simply called a young man from the back of the room where he had been silently listening to the entire proceedings.

"This is my husband, Dr. Carleton Thoney," she said softly. "He used to be a colony child, but Providence made him a healthy physician instead of an epileptic stenographer. Together, we will do all we can, not only to make Universal Utilities a great business once more, but also to make full amends for the errors its leaders have committed in the past."

THE END

Back in the early twenties, when Bob Davis was editor of Argosy, Frank Munsey's fabulous weekly, there occasionally appeared stories the editor labeled "Different." And because in those days no stereotypes of science-fiction and weird-fiction had been formed, these writers really were unique. Outstanding among them were the always varied themes of Philip M. Fisher, Jr., who could spot the outré in the most unexpected places. Your editor has long cherished these tales for their "off-trail" excellence and it is now our delight to bring back to print one of those really "different" yarns.

The Strange Case of Lemuel Jenkins

by Philip M. Fisher Jr.

WE WERE just getting into the full swing of our morning constitutional through the campus when suddenly, without any reason that I could see, Burns came to an abrupt halt. A moment he stood thus, stiff, alert, questioning, as a good pointer will in the sage. Then he half raised his cane and pointed.

"Do you see that chap on the bench over there, P. M.?" he questioned.

I followed his direction, and smiled.

"If you mean that rather forlorn and washed-out rag some careless keeper has thrown over the green slats—why, yes," I answered.

"Well," he went on "that rag, as you call it, is a man for all your brilliant wit—and a queer enough one, too. It is Lemuel Jenkins."

Burns whispered this last bit of information as though he expected me to start with wonder at the announcement.

"Ah—Lemuel Jenkins," I repeated dryly. Yet, nevertheless, I surveyed with some curiosity the woebegone individual of whom we spoke, for I knew something of my companion's propensity for forming strange friendships. And I could not help but add, for the sake of bringing the story, I suspected: "Rather extraordinary name that—

Lemuel Jenkins. Must be a Russian platinum prince at least. Or some other of the experienced persons you so love to—"

"Stop!" whispered my friend fiercely. Then he seized my arm. "Come over and meet the man. Observe the way he greets me—observe it carefully, every detail. I'll talk a bit so you can do it. Then we'll leave him to his bench and I'll tell you something—something more."

I shrugged my shoulders, for I never cared to show too sudden an interest in Burns's adventures. I did that, once, and in ten seconds he had sputtered excitedly an extraordinary tale with a metaphysical background, that, properly worked up, should have kept me on edge for a good solid hour. If there is anything about this limp, thin-backed scarecrow huddled before us, I reflected now, let it come slowly and with relish.

"Watch everything he does"—cautioned Burns once more, as he stepped into the crunching sand of the drive—"his manner—everything."

At the sound of our feet a tremor ran over the stranger. Then slowly, still gathered into himself like a scared rabbit, he twisted his head about, and his eyes met mine. Those eyes! Shall I ever forget the look of wild pleading, the haunting fear, the desperate hope, that swam in those deep-set glowing eyes. The desperate hope—then as my own eyes held steadily upon them, as in truth I could not now prevent, the sudden terror which submerged that hope, and flooded out what rational light the stranger's eyes had held. I felt Burns's fingers press tighter on my arm.

Then the tortured eyes flitted fearfully to my companion, and behold—another transformation! For they lit up on the instant; the terror was overflowed by such swift relief as might shine in those of a sea-maddened castaway when at last he spies the sail. This light brightened, burned with a joy that was good to see, and my heart gave a great throb of sympathy, though as yet I did not understand.

I glanced at my companion. Was Burns not going to speak to the man? Why did he stare at the unhappy creature so blankly—as if he were not before us at all? I shifted back to the stranger on the bench, in time to see the light in his eyes grow dark again beneath a smooth black wave of returning desperation, of fear, of blasted hope.

A moment thus, I know not why, I was in agony for him as Burns's steady stare concentrated on the shrubbery immediately behind the bench. Then suddenly Burns pressed my arm again, started rather violently, and precipitously thrust out his hand.

"Why"—he cried explosively—"why there you are—Jenkins! Good old Lem Jenkins! I didn't expect you would be here."

The tide of eager joy that swept all else from the man's face then

was glorious. Lemuel Jenkins untangled himself and snapped up as though my companion's words had touched a hidden spring. He seized Burns's hands both in his and wrung them in feverish joviality.

"Oh!" he gasped—"I was afraid—"

Burns withdrew one hand and clapped it on the other's shoulder. He seemed quite to ignore the man's words.

"I am glad you're here," he cried. Then he seized my arm with an extra pressure I understood. "Here"—he said to the man—"I want you two good friends of mine to meet." He introduced us.

The hand I pressed clung to mine an appreciably longer moment than was necessary, and the man's eyes glowed on mine rather strangely until I nodded and smiled. Then Mr. Jenkins smiled, too—brightly, then loosened his grip and seized Burns's hand again. With a glance at me my companion engaged him in a bit of light chatter, in which, in Burns's voice at least, I thought I discerned a slight undercurrent of effort to put the stranger at his ease. Then he held out his hand again.

"Good-by, Lem," he said, smiling peculiarly. Then added—"Awfully glad to have seen you."

I was watching Mr. Jenkins as Burns said these last words. The man started again, and I saw once more a flash of pain flit across his eyes. Then his mouth tightened, he stiffened his shoulders, and returned with emphasis:

"Yes, my friend, I am glad you saw me."

I then muttered some sort of appreciation of our meeting, and we left. After a dozen paces or so I followed Burns's hint and glanced back. The man was still standing with his eager eyes yet fixed upon us. Burns nudged me again.

"Wave to him—quick!" he almost ordered. And as we did, the man's face lit up again with that most curiously happy smile. His arm went up spasmodically in answer—then dropped wearily as he slumped back to his bench.

We crunched on, I deep in thought. So this was Lemuel Jenkins, was it? Well, who is Lemuel Jenkins, anyway. Why does he huddle shabbily on a campus bench at this early morning hour? Why that appealing shadow in his eyes, that hope that seemed so often to have met rebuff, that look that one so often sees in a lost dog searching for his master, or just for a friendly face? Why the sudden light in them when at last Burns spoke? And why the man's manner toward me, a manner that was suggestive of apprehension lest I refuse to notice him, or to shake his hand? Why the pain at Burns's last words—and the misplaced emphasis of Jenkins' own farewell when he had repeated after Burns:

"Yes, my friend, I *am* glad you saw me."

I shrugged my shoulders—just another of Burns's haphazard pick-ups, I decided. Just another stranded individual who at one time or another had poured his story into the ever eager ears of my friend. I found myself wondering what that story might be. Just another—a quick sigh from my companion interrupted my thoughts.

"Well," he said, as I turned to him questioningly, "that was Lemuel Jenkins."

Evidently no answer was desired, or was necessary. I simply nodded and walked on.

"You watched him?" Burns continued.

In noncommittal silence I nodded again.

"Then you saw what I wanted you to see, of course," my friend went on. "You saw the changes while I paused before him as though in doubt whether to recognize him or not. You saw—"

It was my turn to interrupt.

"You did that on purpose?" I could not help but cry. "You tortured him on?"

Burns seized my arm again.

"I wanted you to believe what I'm about to tell you," he declared earnestly. "I wanted you to believe. And in order to believe you must see—see for yourself. So I held poor Jenkins in suspense a few moments before I let him know I saw him. And he acted as I suspected he would—and you *saw*."

I could hardly withhold my temper at the almost cold-blooded manner in which Burns recited his case.

"But his eyes!" I cried. "The desperation, the hope, then the horrible terror when you stared straight through him. It wasn't right, man, to treat him so; to cut so old an acquaintance as you say—"

Burns swung upon me.

"*Cut* him!" he exploded, his face suddenly red, and his eyes snapping angrily. "I wasn't going to cut Jenkins—I wasn't even cutting him for the moment. We're too old friends for that. Why, Jenkins wasn't hurt because he thought I was going to cut him, or because he thought that I didn't for the moment recognize him. Jenkins knows that as well as I do. Jenkins—"

"Then why did he palpitate so?" I persisted. "What was it held him in suspense that way? And why was he suddenly so happy when finally you spoke, if it was not because he thought at first that you wouldn't notice him hunched there on his bench?"

Burns smiled gravely.

"Now you're getting to the point, old man," he said. "Jenkins didn't fear that I wouldn't recognize him—hardly. But Jenkins *did* fear that I wouldn't notice him."

I jerked my shoulders.

"What's the difference?"

"Difference, P. M.?" Burns went on coolly. "Well, I'll ask you a question: does one ever notice something which one cannot see?"

I stared.

"Which one cannot see?" I repeated.

"That's what I said," nodded my companion gravely. "And Jenkins—"

I interrupted with great scorn.

"And Jenkins was afraid you couldn't *see* him, eh? Not afraid you wouldn't, but couldn't. Bah! I've heard other yarns of yours, remember. The next thing you'll be telling me is that Jenkins thought you were mad, or blind, or some such. Or else—" I paused a moment before throwing my capping bit of sarcasm.

"Go on," ordered Burns gravely. "Be logical—go on."

"Or else that Jenkins thought that he himself could not be seen. That he himself was—oh, nonsense! You're gaming me, old fellow, and I don't like it; particularly after seeing the real pain in that poor chap's eyes."

Burns swung about.

"We will take this other path back through the campus and I'll tell you about our friend yonder," he answered. "You saw how Jenkins acted—that at least you saw, and must believe. Now I'll tell you why." Burns glanced across the eucalyptus Campanile clock. "We have time a plenty, and I'll tell you why.

"Jenkins was, or rather is, a biologist here at the university, and very sane about his work—as he was, and still is, about everything he does. Too sane, almost, and too determined to make himself a name in it. A man can be that way, you know—too sane; too sanely strong in his beliefs."

Burns struck his stick at a bit of shrubbery. Then shrugged his shoulders and muttered once more: "Yes, too sane, the man is. And too deadly logical. That's what put that look in his eyes, or rather helped put it there."

I interrupted.

"You mean he—overworked?"

My companion shook his head.

"No—not that. It was due to his logic that he drew the conclusion which made him what he is. You see, not only is he so sanely logical, so doggedly in earnest when on the trail of a great idea, but he is also impressionable. You saw that."

I nodded and reflected in memory upon the strange man's eyes.

"Yes," I repeated. "I saw that. The man is impressionable—now at least."

Burns looked at me gravely.

"He was then, too. Sanity, logic, imagination, impressionability—characteristics that make great scientists—he had them all. And they made him grow in his work even as they should—and his promise was great: Hall of Fame, you know, and all that. Then came the final irony of their concerted action—or reaction, whatever you may call it." Burns swung his stick again and carefully lifted a curling bit of eucalyptus bark from our path. Then, as if to himself: "And now—poor Jenkins, poor chap." Then louder—"And yet he still hangs on here at the university—and he's going to make out. Getting over it right along. You should have seen him, his eyes, a month ago."

I muttered something to the effect that for my own sanity's sake I was glad I had not.

"You know," Burns ran on, "it happened only a month ago—or just over it. Four weeks last Tuesday, to be exact. That's why I thought maybe you'd heard."

"In the depths of the Humbolt redwoods one doesn't hear much," I answered. "Stage once a week, not even papers—"

"Of course, I had forgotten," my companion apologized quickly. "And we kept it out of the papers," he exclaimed rather bitterly. "No use having them make fools of us all. And we had to think of poor Jenkins, too. His position—we had to keep it from the papers. We had to—

"We could do it easily enough, too. It happened at the club, you know—in the low-ceilinged, walnut, smoking-room. You know how secluded that dark-paneled retreat is—and how cool and soothing. And how soft are the lights, and all. I never sink into one of those deep-cushioned lounge chairs by that heavy, deep-toned table that I don't feel a great peace stealing over me. It even mellows men's voices—mellows their thoughts, too—allows the imagination to slide smoothly along without the slightest hitch. If one of the boys wants to untangle a business snarl, or work out his lectures, or get inspiration and quiet for a story—that's the place. And that's where this thing occurred to Lemuel Jenkins. That's the place—cool, dark, soothing."

Burns eyed me gravely, reflectively.

"You saw his eyes—you believe *them* at least. I wonder if you—"

"Go on!" I cried. "Go on!"

"Well," said Burns, after a deep breath, as we passed a clump of fragrant golden acacia, "we were lounging in the half gloom pulling slowly on our cigars, and just saturated with the calm and comfort of it all. It was early in the evening. Dinner had been soul-satisfying, digestions were content, the mutual satisfaction of mutual peace and physical ease did not lend itself to conversation. Now and then one of

the fellows—there were only the usual half dozen, you know—would drop a single word and a low chuckle would run about the group, a chuckle that was as rich and low and soothing, too, as of waters in one of your deep-hid redwood cañons, P. M. This, with an occasional long-drawn sigh, or the light shift of cushion springs as one leaned to flick his ash, were the only sounds.

"Suddenly—and it broke as startlingly loud as a lion's scream from that same black Humbolt cañon of yours, old man—suddenly, I say, from the depths of his own precious chair, Jenkins's fist leaped out and crashed down upon the table. At the same time he cried explosively:

" 'It can be done—it *can* be! I say it is possible—it can be done!' "

Burns paused a moment reflectively, then turned to me with a dry smile.

"Do you think that lion's screech would startle you," he asked softly. "Coming in the everlasting peace of a damp, gloomy, Humbolt forest?"

My appreciative smile was sufficient answer.

"Then,"—my companion went on—"then you will understand how that crashing fist hit us. And understand, too, just why we tried the trick on him a few minutes later—the trick that turned out so weirdly awful, and that brought Jenkins to what you saw on the bench back there."

"Go on," I said again.

"Well," Burns continued, "I can still see the startled white faces and staring eyes against the dark of the half-lit room as every man-jack of us was jerked bolt upright out of his reverie. Then, as we stared, the man's fist came down again, and once more, as though half in argument with his own doubts, Jenkins cried:

" 'I say it *is* possible—it can be done. And, by Heaven, I'll find the way!'

"Ridges—Ridges, M.D., you know him, P. M.—finally lay back among his cushions, drew a long breath through his black cigar, and drawled in as insulting a tone as he could muster:

" 'Have it your own way, my unfortunate biologist. Have it your own way.'

"Jenkins's eyes snapped.

" 'You don't believe it?' he cried.

"Ridges chuckled. Harvey Gilson, opposite me, laughed loudly.

" 'Been dissecting somethin' extra old this aft', old man? Fumes, or somethin', seem to have—'

"Ridges cut in again with a chuckle.

" 'Perhaps,' he drawled again— 'perhaps if our vehement friend would propound his argument without first half stunning us, and would explain just what it is that can be done, and why, we might un-

derstand why he is so certain of his own ability to find the way.'

"Ridges could talk thus to him, you know," Burns went on in an aside to me— "he had introduced Jenkins to our little circle and felt responsible—naturally. And Jenkins we had come to like, he was, still is, so deucedly earnest about things— You saw his eyes."

I nodded, for the vision of them was yet clear; too clear.

"Well," my friend went on, "Jenkins blinked rather wildly at Ridges a moment, then with his hands clutching at the chair arms as though he were about to leap at us, he turned slowly about and tensely looked each of us in the eye. Then abruptly he nodded. He leaned toward me.

" 'Give me your glasses,' he demanded with a snap.

"I drew them from my case, and handed them over. Jenkins held them high that all might see.

" 'There!" he cried, and waved his other hand dramatically.

"Ridges chuckled again.

" 'Ah, yes,' he murmured— 'there—there.'

" 'Can't you see?' shouted Jenkins, appealing to the rest of us.

"I nodded.

" 'If you drop those glasses I'll have to see something pretty substantial, my friend," I said, for the thunder of his fist explosion still jangled on my nerves.

" 'But you can see right through them,' cried Jenkins as he belittled my attempt at wit with a deprecatory wave of his hand. 'You put them over your eyes to aid your sight. You see right through them. And yet they're made of a solid substance, concrete, hard; one of the densest compounds known, glass is. And yet you use it to aid your sight—to *aid* it.'

"Well, for a moment I thought the man's study had made him suddenly mad. Then his eyes turned steadily again upon mine, and I saw that I was wrong—quite wrong.

"Gilson laughed loudly again.

" 'Burns certainly doesn't use them for blinders, Mr. Jenkins," he bellowed heartlessly.

"Ridges was silent. Yet when at last Jenkins's gaze shifted from mine I saw that Ridges was chewing his cigar very reflectively. He knew Lemuel Jenkins better than we, then.

" 'And yet,' the little biologist went on, still holding my glasses high— 'and yet you can see through the stuff—a solid mineral substance.'

"This time we all nodded. I don't know why, but I suppose it was because we all felt the man was in dead earnest about something. We nodded. And Jenkins smiled.

" 'And so,' he went on— 'and so I say: it can be done—it *is* possible.'

"He smiled again upon us, and with such an air of gentle condescension that I felt a renewed resentment over our sudden disturbance arise. I glanced about at the others and saw enough to convince me that they, too, felt as did I. Our peace had been interrupted. Yet Hathaway, who had not yet spoken, fidgeted in his chair, and turned his cigar over and over in his hands as he stared at the glasses Jenkins had laid upon the table.

" 'You mean—?' he hinted.

" 'Did you ever see a jellyfish?' demanded Jenkins.

" 'Yes—yes!' exclaimed Hathaway.

" 'Umph!' came a soft grunt from Ridges as he pulled at his cigar.

" 'Like glass—' Jenkins went on.

"Young Gilson roared.

" 'He's going to make eye-glasses out of jellyfish! Oh, Lord—ha, ha, ha. Eye-glasses out of jellyfish!'

"Hathaway speared the youngster a glance. Then turned back to Jenkins, who was restlessly tapping the table top, and spoke quickly:

" 'And the jellyfish is as transparent as the glass—and yet is not a mineral substance like that lense, but is organic, is animal!' he prompted quickly.

"Jenkins smiled.

" 'You've got my point,' he commended, and nodded again in his new condescending way. 'The jellyfish is as clear as glass, and yet is a live animal organism, a living body. I was working on one this morning and the thought occurred to me.'

"He paused a moment. Ridges gave another soft grunt. Gilson turned upon me his humorous eye. Thoughtful Hathaway groped among the rugs for his cigar. I began to feel slightly uncomfortable. Then Jenkins went on.

" 'As I cut the thing up it occurred to me: if this animal can live and be transparent, quite invisible indeed when in its natural element, then why are there not other animals existing in the same condition?'

"Hathaway leaned forward.

" 'Yes, yes!" he breathed again.

"Jenkins waved his hand melodramatically now.

" 'And why cannot there be found, say by a more open-minded organic chemistry, or a more profound and analytical study of biological processes, some substance which will render any animal body—even your own, say—absolutely invisible. Invisible,' he repeated, 'and yet, nevertheless, allow it yet to live.'

"Having delivered himself of this rather astounding notion, he

leaned back, picked up his forgotten cigar, and calmly surveyed us as we stared. Gilson it was who first broke the silence with some absurd criticism—but he subsided at another glance from Hathaway.

" 'That's what I mean when I say: it can be done!' repeated Jenkins smoothly again. 'And I believe it, I believe it—the thing can be done. The only question is: how?' He paused a moment, then shot another question. 'Did you ever see one of these little lizards that take on the color of their surroundings?'

"Hathaway leaned forward.

" 'A chameleon?' he exclaimed. 'You put one on a green leaf and he turns green; on yellow sand and he becomes yellow; in mottled shadow, and he at once changes color to suit? I've seen them, yes.'

"Jenkins leaned back in satisfaction.

" 'What's to prevent them becoming quite transparent then, if that will help them any better?' he said quietly, cocking one eyebrow sagely.

"Gilson broke into another roar of laughter—yet, somehow, in it I felt I discerned an undercurrent of something that was not his usual whole-hearted fun. Gilson was beginning to think, perhaps, and the laughter was a cover. That, however, I cannot say. At any rate, he leaned forward and cried, with well dissembled horror in his voice:

" 'And you could feel it wriggle in your hand, that slimy lizard, and yet not be able to see it?'

"Ridges shivered in his chair. Jenkins's eyes lit up—as they did when I recognized him at last to-day.

" 'Why not?' he snapped.

"Ridges cleared his throat.

" 'Then'—he said, speaking for the first time since Jenkins's idea had really dawned upon us— 'then you believe that a human being could by some means become transparent and yet still live? In other words, that he might sit just as you are sitting, in that chair there, and we could see the sinking of the cushions, the depression made by his body—and yet he, himself, or you, could not be seen. Would be invisible?'

"Jenkins nodded, and let his eye move about the group. Hathaway appeared lost in thought. Even Gilson said no word. The others simply stared at the little biologist as though he had suddenly lost his wits.

" 'Why not?' snapped Jenkins again.

"Ridges shifted in his chair.

" 'And so you believe something could be found that, injected into a man, say, or if he were bathed in it, would do him no harm, and yet would make him invisible?' he questioned earnestly.

" 'Place some oil on paper, and it makes it almost transparent, doesn't it?' Jenkins defended eagerly. 'If something that would so

affect animal bodies could be found, and a man would work his mind to accept the thing, really deep in his subconscious mind and without that ever-present subconscious doubt with which we are so prone to unconsciously combat new ideas, accept it, believe it—the thing could be done. Like the jellyfish, the oiled paper, the chameleon—he would become quite invisible. That' —concluded Jenkins with a grave nod— 'that is the idea that came to me in the lab' this morning. And the impression of that new idea was so strong that I found myself wondering how it was that I had never thought of the thing before. So strong, that I can say that I, for one, deep down really do believe the thing is possible.'

"Hathaway looked up squarely at Jenkins a moment, then just as gravely nodded and spoke.

" 'Nothing' —he said in a quiet tone— 'nothing, in this day and age, absolutely nothing is impossible.'

"So solemnly did the words follow Jenkins's declaration that I felt a curious little tingling all over my skin. Even Gilson stared moodily at the table top. Then abruptly Jenkins stood up and stretched.

" 'I phoned Santa Cruz for some white jellyfish at noon to-day, just after I became convinced about it. They have made no answer yet, as I required. If—if you gentlemen will excuse me just a moment, I—I wish to—to—'

"When the heavy door had rumbled shut behind him, and the smoke-hazed room once more become the silent, cave-like haunt of soothing quiet, we looked into each other's eyes. As I reflected on the dim-lit faces before me I wondered what was going on in the mind behind each. I wondered what the calmly puffing Ridges thought in that deep well of sarcasm and mockery hid behind his snapping black eyes. I wondered what Hathaway saw with that far-away look he directed toward a half-obscured corner of the ceiling as idly he twisted the cigar in his two hands. I wondered just what care-free witticism was ready to leap from the tip of Harvey Gilson's ready tongue as he stared down at the table top. I wondered if the sobering influence of Jenkins's earnestness was yet upon him.

"As for my own conclusion, P. M., as to that, I must confess I really had none. I hadn't yet had time. Jenkins, so Ridges had told us all often enough before finally we bid the biologist into the club, was highly imaginative, most sensitively impressionable; as open-minded as nature itself, and ever ready to receive any new development of modern science. I knew one thing, of course, and of that was absolutely certain—Jenkins was not playing with us. He really did believe in his new idea. But as yet all I could do was simply to keep open minded myself and await developments.

"And then again the soothing, twilight silence of our room was broken. This time by Ridges at the far opposite angle of the great walnut table.

" 'Well?' he questioned. And with the one word was silent.

"All cleared their throats.

" 'What do you think?' Again the drawling voice was that of Ridges.

"For several minutes again there was deep, thinking, silence. Then, with a harsh laugh, Gilson spoke.

" 'I've an idea—might do some good.' The words were directed at Ridges.

" 'Some good?' questioned the latter, as he raised his brows.

"Gilson laughed again—this time a delicious laugh that rounded out into a deep chuckle of pure enjoyment that was a relief to all of us. The tingling of my skin was swept away by a general feeling of certainty and saneness.

" 'Humph, humph,' chuckled Gilson again. 'He says things can be made invisible, Jenkins does—and believes it. *Believes it.* Says he's going to practice on jellyfish 'til he finds the cause of their transparency, and then is goin' to apply it to other animals. Humph—I've got the idea all right.'

"Ridges lay down his cigar and carefully wiped his lips with his handkerchief.

" 'Well?' he hinted, with his old sarcastic drawl again in evidence.

" 'Old Jenkins believes it can be done,' repeated young Gilson. 'Believes animals, men, could be quite invisible. Lucky he's so mad to get those jellyfish people on the phone. Gives us our chance.'

"Gilson paused and surveyed us with a widespread grin. Hathaway frowned. Ridges tapped the table.

" 'Well?' the latter hinted again, his black little eyes intent upon the youngster beside me.

" 'He believes it might be done even by himself,' repeated Gilson. Then threw out his arms—'Well, why not?'

"We stared, and the man chuckled.

" 'Say!' he cried—'the way his fist crashed down on that table left me half deaf. And here's our chance. When Jenkins comes back we won't see him, see? He may talk, and we'll look surprised. But we can't see him. He'll have suddenly become invisible, see? Just work that game on him and soon enough he'll get sick of the idea—and we'll get even to boot. His—'

"A loud cry suddenly broke in upon the would-be joker. It was Hathaway, his face as white against the somber background as the moon behind scudding clouds, his cigar crushed in his fist.

" 'No, no, no! Not that, not that!' he cried, actual agony in his voice—'I wouldn't do *that!*'

"Gilson's jaw dropped. Then he threw back his head and whooped.

" 'You'll make the best actor of the bunch,' he cried, 'if you keep that face and that voice.'

"Hathaway swallowed convulsively.

" 'But—but I mean it. I—I—'

"Gilson turned from him with a nod and a grin.

" 'You fellows get me, then? When we hear Jenkins at the door we'll all be looking at something else. Then when we turn about we'll expect to see Jenkins, and—he won't be there.'

" 'Oh!' gasped Hathaway, staring with his white face. I was not so sure as Gilson that the man was acting—it was too real. But the joker ran on.

" 'We'll be horribly surprised at his condition, of course, and talk. And poor Jenkins, he'll sit there, and—oh, I tell you, he'll soon get enough—'

"Again came a cry from Hathaway.

" 'No, no, gentlemen, don't do that. Don't do it. Jenkins might—Jenkins believes—he—' The man's voice broke.

"Ridges caught my eye a moment, and elevated a brow. Then he nodded questioningly toward Hathaway. I shrugged my shoulders—I felt it would be better to let things take their course without my interference, and would rather leave the matter in Ridges's hands—he knew Jenkins. Ridges contemplated the half-frightened man a moment, then spoke decidedly.

" 'It can do no harm. Besides, we do owe friend Lemuel Jenkins something for scaring us with that crash upon the table. It can do no harm. And I know Lem Jenkins. I know—'

" 'Great!' cried Gilson. 'It's a go, then. And it'll cure the man of this fool notion as well. Jenkins—'

"Hathaway leaned forward almost pleadingly.

" 'Don't do it,' he whispered huskily.

" 'But why not?' snapped Gilson.

"Hathaway shrugged his shoulders.

" 'I don't know—I can't quite understand, myself. I—I just wouldn't, that's all. Oh, I wouldn't—'

" 'Nonsense!' cried Gilson, determined now to carry his point through.

"Hathaway threw up his hands and leaned stiffly back in his chair. The rest of us stared thoughtfully at the ceiling a moment. Then Gilson, all enthusiasm again, continued.

" 'See what he does,' he cried. 'See if he thinks of this morning's

idea. See how he likes it all. And above all, be serious about it. You fellows must act your parts.'

"Ridges cleared his throat. One of the other two men, I forget which, lit a new cigar, and I saw his hand tremble with the match. Then we heard softly muffled steps approaching. Ridges sprang up and poked at the coals on the hearth. Gilson leaped up to his side.

" 'He's coming,' he whispered, and his voice had become suddenly quite serious. 'Remember everybody—don't give the thing away—serious—serious.'

"Hathaway stiffened forward.

" 'I wouldn't—I—'

"But Ridges turned from the hearth and snapped his black eyes, and Hathaway leaned back once more. Then, as the door slid open, Ridges spoke as if in answer to me.

" 'If a man believes a thing strongly enough, then, you would say he could do, or be, what he believes. That about right?'

"I nodded dumbly. Then I caught the point.

" 'Absolutely,' I agreed. Then I quoted: 'That which a man in his heart believes, he is.' There's more in some of those ancient sayings than we think. It's not all surface talk. It's not all figurative language. Some of it is meant to be taken literally, and I believe that little saying is one of that kind—a man really is, or does in time become, that which he persistently and consistently thinks he is. It's absolutely literal truth. It's the same old thing of the mind dominating the body—the world-old truth.

"No one paid the slightest attention to Jenkins, who had slid in a quietly preoccupied manner into his deep chair, and was now intently gazing at the wrapper of his cigar.

"Gilson by the hearth chuckled. Hathaway had risen stiffly, and his back was toward me as he faced the glowing hearth with the others. Gilson questioned softly.

" 'Power of the mind, you say—even to turning invisible?'

"That was the cue. Ridges gave a queer hunch and bent over the fire, at which he began to assiduously poke with the tongs.

" 'Ask Jenkins'; he tossed carelessly over his shoulder.

"Jenkins, slumped in his chair, and, as I could see from the tail of my eye, had really been following the conversation, trying to get the thread of it, now raised his head.

" 'Ask what?' he queried in a low voice.

"Ridges bent and picked at the coals.

" 'Yes,' he repeated, as though no answer had been made by any one—'ask Jenkins.'

"Gilson half turned and gave me a twinkling glance. Jenkins had fallen back into his cushions again.

" 'I would if he were here,' I answered with a slight yawn.

"Jenkins, who was seated not two steps down the table, looked up quickly.

" 'Well?' he hinted, staring at me.

"Ridges turned slowly, and blinkingly surveyed the darkened room. His eyes even rested a moment upon the unsuspecting little biologist.

" 'Why,' he muttered half apologetically, 'I thought Jenkins had come back.' Jenkins's face changed slightly, and a queer bit of interest flickered in his eyes. 'I thought he'd come back. That's strange. Surely—' Ridges hesitated a moment, and glared absently at Jenkins's chair. Then quickly continued: 'But when he does come we'll get an opinion worth while. I tell you, gentlemen, and I tell it in all seriousness, when Lemuel Jenkins gets a hunch, as Gilson here would say, why look out! He generally knows what he's talking about. And when he says now that a thing can live and yet be invisible, he means it—and it's mighty likely to be truth. When he comes back—'

"Jenkins looked up rather puzzled a moment. Then laughed—a bit loudly. Ridges looked about and frowned.

" 'That door'—he hesitated again—'I'd swear I heard it open a moment ago.'

"He stared about at us.

" 'Who laughed just now?' he demanded harshly, and his voice held a frightened note. His acting was perfect, his face a marvel of expression. 'Who laughed—which one of you?' he cried.

"Jenkins cackled queerly. Then as our eyes all centered unseeingly upon him, his eyes widened upon us in a way that was more than bewildered.

" 'There!' cried Ridges again, coming back from the door. 'Again!' He glared at us savagely. 'Who did that? Who's playing a joke on us, anyway? That door—Jenkins must have come in. Must be something of a ventriloquist, though I never suspected it. Or are you fellows putting up a game on *me?*' He paused a moment, then suddenly cried: 'Look back of that screen, Hathaway. You, Burns, over behind those heavy portières. He must—' Ridges broke off again and stared again directly at Jenkins. The latter's face was quite pale now, and held such a half-bewildered, half-frightened expression, that my heart almost played me false. His mouth opened and closed convulsively, and he appeared to be trying to swallow. But whether it was from actual fright, or overwhelming anger at us for attempting a practical joke, I could not then guess. If I had known then, certainly I would not have allowed things to go on.

"Ridges bent and glanced under the table. When he straightened up his own face was red and angry, and his eyes flashed.

" 'Jenkins!' he cried, with his eyes roving wildly about the room. 'Here, you, Lee, turn up all the lights. Damned if that madman's talk about invisibility hasn't put the creeps into my bones. Jenkins! Jenkins!'

"By now the little biologist had shrunk back a huddled heap in his great chair. His eyes shone white, and his hands were fastened talonlike upon the upholstery of the chair-arms. I saw now that the man's impressionability had gotten away with him—either that or terrible rage. At any rate, I knew now that we had gone too far.

" 'I say,' I huskily whispered to Ridges; 'I say, we've gone far enough.'

"Ridges purposely misunderstood my words.

" 'I should say he has. Lord—*all* the lights on, Lee! I said all. I want to *see*. Jenkins! *Jenkins!* By all that's holy I'll—'

"He stopped short, for he had rested his hand over that of the shrunken scientist as it so whitely gripped the chair-arm. His face then positively awed me. The surprise, the fear, then the utter horror that shone in it as his hand closed upon that of Jenkins. His breath came short. All the others stared, too. Their acting was more than admirable, though it was to be expected in a group of men of the university type, perhaps. Even Hathaway—white-faced.

" 'God!' gasped Ridges, and his other hand leaped out to me. 'Feel—feel!' Then loudly, harshly: 'Jenkins!'

The miserable man in the chair at last found his voice.

" 'Here—here I am. Here—don't you see me? *Can't* you see me?' Then as we all stared wildly unbelieving: 'Oh, for God's sake some one say you're just gaming me; oh, say it, say it!'

"I started forward to seize the man by his hand and assure him that I did indeed see him, but Ridges held my arm. Jenkins sank back with his hands over his eyes. 'Oh, my God!' he moaned. 'What has happened to me, what has *happened* to me?'

"Ridges felt blindly for the huddled form. Then as his hands again encountered Jenkins's body, he gave a startled exclamation, and fell back.

" 'Lem—Lemuel—is—is—it—you?' he gasped. 'You—there?'

"The little biologist in the chair sobbed.

" 'They can't—can't see me. They can't—can't—they—they—'

"The others burst into excited chatter. But I could stand the foolery no longer. I seized one of Jenkins's hands and turned to Ridges.

" 'This must stop now!' I whispered hotly. 'It's gone far enough. You'll have the man mad in another moment. You'll—'

"Then I was aware that Ridges's eyes were not upon mine, but were

fixed glassily upon Jenkins beside me. Glassily with real and not simulated, horror and consternation and unbelief. And the room was suddenly quite still. I glanced at the others unconsciously and beheld them, too, with eyes intent, as in hypnosis, upon Jenkins. Then came another loud cry. It was Hathaway, though how I recognized his voice I do not know; for it was not his own, but a veritable wail of pain and pity.

" 'Ah—look! Look! he's going—go—'

"My own eyes shifted dully to soothe the man in the chair. That queer prickling sensation I had felt before crept over me again. I wheeled quickly about. Then, with my heart bounding within me, and my vocal cords suddenly paralyzed, I realized that I could not, in truth, see the man in the chair. Distinctly, as I stared at the others, came Jenkins's voice at my back.

" 'My hand—you've twisted it!'

"Still I had the man's hand in mine. I looked down at it—and saw nothing. My clutch froze spasmodically about some solid object in its grip—yet that object, solid, warm, throbbing with life, I could not see. All Hathaway's words of warning, all memories of Jenkins's own impressionable nature, all his theory of man's mental power over his own body, came rushing in upon me. One word tore from him in a loud scream:

" '*Jenkins!*'

" 'Oh!' came the voice from the empty chair beside me. 'They can't see me—they *can't see* me. They can't!' Then, in sudden shriek of horror: 'And I can't see myself. I can't—ah-h—'

"Jenkins's voice trailed off in a sob.

"Gilson, pale as death now, sweat glistening on his face, stood with hands out-stretched and quivering. A single drop of blood stood out in vivid contrast upon his lower lip. Ridges was on his knees in an instant pawing madly at what seemed the space between the arms of Jenkins's chair. Hathaway had sunk down, and with head buried in his arms moaned over and over and over again:

" 'I knew it! I warned you! Oh, fool that I was to even let you try. Fool, fool, fool! Poor Jenkins. It was not right—not right. I told you—it was not good to try it. He was so in earnest—he believed. We should not have done it—I—I—we—oh, my God, what have we done! What have we done!'

"His words were more in prayer than fear or reproach. Had a stranger at that moment entered the room he must have put us down at once as a group of men suddenly gone mad. By this time I, too, was desperately patting and shaking the thing that was so warmly alive beneath my hands, the thing that we could not see and yet

which must be Lemuel Jenkins—Lemuel Jenkins, stricken with terror and woe and desperation, and as invisible to our sight as the very air itself."

Burns paused in his story and swung his stick at a twig projecting from the golden acacia beside the path. He turned gravely to me then, for I had given a slight exclamation of incredulity. Then he said quickly:

"You saw him there on the bench, P. M. You saw what he is now. His eyes—you saw."

"Yes," I repeated. "I saw his eyes."

"You saw the desperation in them, the terror, then the hope as he searched our faces. Then the utter torture in them as I stared unseeingly at the bushes behind him."

"Yes," I repeated again. "I saw that." Burns nodded gravely.

"I—we could not at first believe ourselves. Thought Jenkins had seen through our joke and was turning the trick on us. Had hypnotized us into really believing we couldn't see him—he liked to dabble in hypnotism, you know; anything psychological, mental. But it wasn't so—Jenkins wasn't playing any trick—he had suspected us of none. He had taken our own play in undoubting seriousness. The thing gripped his mind, conscious and subconscious. And we've never told him either. Never will—at least, I won't.

"I remember Ridges turning to me with a face like gray death.

" 'We've done it now,' he whispered, brokenly fierce. 'We've done it now. I didn't dream of—of this.' He shot a glare at Gilson, who now, too, was frantically pawing at Jenkins's chair. 'Young fool,' he exclaimed bitterly. 'He'd better be conscience stricken—we all had.' A moment Ridges paused. Then, turning quickly: 'Jenkins!' he said quietly. 'Jenkins, can you see me?'

"A sobbing voice answered from the seemingly empty chair.

" 'Y-e-e-es; but I can't see my—myself. I've gone crazy, or something. Or that fool idea of mine has made me this way. I don't know—oh, I don't know. I didn't understand at first what you fellows were talking about—I thought you had gone mad yourselves. But now I can't see my—my—'

" 'Here's my hand,' said Ridges, sweeping his hand before the chair as though he himself were blind. 'Take hold of it. There—ah, good Heavens!'

"Ridges gasped as he tightened his fingers about what was evidently Jenkins's hand. It was horribly uncanny to see Ridges's knuckles whiten about what appeared to be empty air.

" 'Now get up,' he went on.

"The cushions of the chair squeaked a bit, and the upholstery rose—

that was the only sign that Jenkins had complied and left his seat. Ridges then locked his arm awkwardly about Jenkins's form apparently, and stepped toward the fire. I remember the awful look Hathaway turned upon me as we saw only Ridges moving and yet heard two muffled sets of footsteps on the rugs. I remember, too, staring fascinatedly to see if between me and the glow of the coals I could discern anything of the stricken man. But I could not—not even the slightest shadow or outline could I see.

" 'There,' said Ridges, pausing before the hearth. 'Do you feel its warmth?'

" 'Of course I do,' came a hollow cry from his side. 'But I can't see my—' The voice ended in a groan.

"Ridges's grip tightened convulsively on the unseen hand. Then all at once the arm he had hooked about Jenkins sagged as if a weight had suddenly been imposed upon it. And at the same time his face went a shade grayer and hardened anxiously.

" 'Quick! Quick!' he cried. 'The man's fainted or something. He's gone limp as a rag. Here—here, help me with him. Get him upon the table. You, Hathaway—'

"Hathaway drew back a moment, then, with his eyes suddenly filled with tears, reached down and gathered into his own arms the limbs we could not see. Then lifted—and the strained cords about his neck stood out.

" 'A cushion,' cried Ridges.

"Gilson jerked out of his trance, and snatched one from a chair. Then while Ridges lifted, placed it gingerly near his hand. Gilson exploded wrathfully in quite excusable anger.

" 'Not there, you young fool! Here, here,' and with his arm still held supportingly, he jerked the cushion nearer him, gently lowered his arm. At once a roundish depression slowly sank into the softness of it—but the head that made that hollow we could not see. 'Now water—quick!' ordered Gilson.

" 'God!' cried Gilson. 'Is—is—he only fainted?'

" 'Here!' cried Ridges. He seized Gilson's hand roughly, and held it down hard about ten inches above the table just below the cushion. 'There,' he said in a cold, hard voice, 'feel him breathe—his heart—'

"Gilson's hand and arm moved slowly up and down to the respiration of the unseen man upon the table—and his own breath came rather harshly.

" 'The water!' cried Ridges—Ridges always takes the lead in giving help despite his mocking and ofttimes cruel sarcasm. He nodded to Lee, who had run to get that best of nature's restoratives. 'You said nothing about this to any one?' Ridges questioned.

"The man shook his head.

" 'Not a word,' he declared.

" 'Good!' commended Ridges.

"And Gilson, his responsibility for all this resting heavily upon him, half sobbed:

" 'Thank God!' Then he cried: 'But if—if—anything—hap—happens—I—I'm here. Right here, and—'

" 'Shut up!' snapped Ridges. 'Shut up and help me give him water. Here, hold up his head. No—not there, not that way. Here—'

"He took Gilson's hands and held them, palms toward each other, about a foot apart and just above the depression of Jenkins's head in the cushion. 'Hold them so,' he ordered, then withdrew his own and moved them until they stopped above the little hollow. 'Now bring them on either side of mine—quick, man, we're wasting time. Now slowly toward each other—it wouldn't do to shock him while he's this way—we can't tell—'

"Gilson's trembling hands came to an abrupt stop.

" 'I—they've struck something—feels like hair. Yes, yes, it's his head.' His hand felt vaguely lower, and cupped. 'Ready,' he said. 'I've got Jenkins's poor head.'

" 'Hang Jenkins's poor head!' exploded Ridges. 'Lift.'

"Gilson lifted, and Ridges felt for Jenkins's mouth with his fingers, then gently tipped the glass. That was perhaps the most uncanny sight of all that awful evening. You see, P. M., he was pouring water. We could see its level dip. We could see it leave the glass—and then, you know, it—disappeared. It seemed poured into the air—one would expect to see it splash to the table-top. But instead, as if it had instantaneously evaporated—it disappeared. The thought that struck me then was queer enough. I bent down and examined the table-top, and saw that I was right.

"Where Jenkins's body touched the hard, polished walnut was a slight depression. With suspicion developing I put out a hand as if to assist Gilson, and saw that where my fingers touched that unseen body the tips of them, too, became invisible. It was as though an eighth of an inch of them had been by that contact clipped off. I bent and examined Gilson's hands and saw that they, too, were in the same condition. I nudged Hathaway, and called his attention to this extraordinary appearance. He stared silently, then burst out:

" 'That is what I feared—why I was afraid. Whatever it is that makes poor Jenkins this way is probably in the nature of vibration—and Jenkins's belief could bring that on—that is what I feared we would bring him to. And each minute particle of his body is vibrating so as to be quite invisible—just like the blades of an electric fan.

And that vibration is communicated to his clothing. That's why we can't see it—I've been thinking about it ever since it—it happened. And it's the same with the surface of anything his body touches—so, of course, those become invisible, too. Oh, I was afraid of this very thing occurring—Jenkins takes impressions so strongly, and believes, believes, believes—so profoundly in some of his weird ideas that he's just—'

"A startled exclamation from Ridges interrupted.

" 'He's coming back?' he whispered then.

" 'Coming back—can you see him?' shouted Gilson, though his mouth was within a foot of Ridges's ear. 'Oh, thank—'

"Ridges glared.

" 'Now everybody,' he cautioned in a deadly, quiet voice, 'when I give the word, swear by all that's holy that you can see his hand. You acted before—and got him into this. For God's sake play up now, and get him out of it. It's the only way—to work it by his own belief. Jenkins's very life may depend upon it. He's got himself into this condition because of his belief in his idiotic theory, and his acceptance of our jesting as serious fact. The only way to get him back is to make him believe just as strongly that we can see him again. Then he'll begin—but there, he's moving—he is coming back to consciousness—sh! everybody! And remember.'

"Ridges paused and stared at the unseen hand he held. Then turned fiercely upon us, and cried loudly:

" 'Look, look—his hand! Jenkins's hand. The fingers—see? Now the hand, the whole hand. The wrist—they're coming visible again—thank God, they're coming back!' Ridges fairly shouted now. 'Look, Jenkins, you look; see for yourself. Ah, thank God, thank God, old man, you're going to be with us again!'

"As yet I myself could see nothing—and knew that Ridges did not. But I added my voice to the rest—putting into it a gladness that I did not feel, things looked so hopeless. Then Ridges's hand jerked as though the unseen hand it gripped had moved.

Then weakly came a voice we recognized as Jenkins's.

" 'I can't see—' it sobbed pathetically, and Ridges's arms moved upward as though the body they were supporting had sat up.

" 'Madman—*look!*' stormed Ridges. 'Look at that hand!'

"Then Jenkins again: 'Oh, but I can't, I can't—'

" 'Thank God, thank God, you're coming back!' came in real sobs from Ridges, and I could feel the aching, throbbing sympathy in the cry. We gasped a similar declaration—yet stared all the time in trembling fear that the ruse might not prove as efficacious now as our boomerang practical joke had before.

" 'I can't,' cried Jenkins, half hysterical.

" 'Quick,' whispered Ridges fiercely to us. 'His pulse is horribly low. For the sake of the little man's very life, make it go!'

" 'Oh, I can't—I—I—' sobbed Jenkins once more.

" 'But you must—*you must!*' shrieked Gilson, the joker. 'You must see it. You can't help it—we see it, we do. You *must.* Only look—'

"Jenkins's voice broke in again, a bit stronger, and with now a lurking bit of confidence and belief.

" 'You—you're sure? Sure?' I imagined him wildly looking about at us with his frightened eyes. Then, with a heart-piercing little scream: 'Why—my hand, there are the fingers—growing, growing—I can—I believe I can—'

"A great sigh came from Ridges. Ours were not far behind. Weakly we joined in with his congratulations.

"For there, as a photograph develops out of the clear paper, as frost grows upon the window-pane, as salt crystallizes out of a clear solution, there did Jenkins become visible to our sight again. First the fingertips as we made him believe. Then the hand that Ridges held. Then the good solid right arm creeping weirdly upward to the shoulder. Then, as Jenkins's full belief came back, his whole body rushed out of nothingness into the world of normal vision.

"I for one sank into a great, soothing chair, and allowed my own trembling body to quiver slowly back to peace again. I believe all must have done the same—I could hear Gilson sobbing hysterically next me with his head hidden in his arms, and his body jerking with the violence of his emotion. Ridges sat upon the table-edge with his friend half in his arms, cuddling and consoling and heartening him as does a mother her nightmare-ridden child. Hathaway, stiff in his chair, twiddling a new cigar about in his hands, watched Jenkins's every move, the tears trickling unheeded down his cheeks.

"A long while, hours it seemed to me, we sat thus. Once we had a horrid scare. Jenkins, in a fit of doubt, suddenly declared he was going back again, and held out a fingerless hand in proof. But by calling in a page with water we downed his doubts, for the boy, when told for whom the drink was for, stepped straight up to the tremulous little biologist and held out the glass. And as Jenkins reached fearfully for it the hand flashed visible again—Jenkins *had* to believe then, for the lad had made no sign that he noticed anything unusual. After this we waited half an hour or so longer, and tried a desultory conversation about Sierra fishing that was decidedly not a success.

"Then we went home—Ridges going with the still quaking Jenkins, who pleaded that he stay the night over with him."

Burns's voice stopped abruptly. Our walk had brought us down to

the Campanile, and the library where my companion was due shone just a hundred paces further, its white, glistening granite contrasting gloriously with the clear California blue above, and the delicate green and gorgeous gold of the spring acacia rising along the pathways below.

Even as we paused Burns thrust out his hand as if in afterthought.

"See that hand?" he said quietly. "Notice the dried skin on the fingertips, and the shriveled appearance of the palm. Ridges's hands looked like that, and Gilson's—so with each one of us who touched Jenkins while he was that way. Almost as if they were blistered. But they were not painful, even though that same night when I washed, a good part of the surface cuticle crumbled off. The table-top where Jenkins lay was thus curiously rotted to the depth of an eighth-inch or so, too. And even the tapestry upholstery of Jenkins's chair. Not burned exactly, not really rotted, but crisped, dried, discolored.

"Hathaway came as near hitting the cause of it as any of us when we discussed the phenomenon afterward. The vibration of Jenkins's body, communicating its almost infinitely rapid trembling to everything his body touched, crystallized skin, wood, cloth. Something like heat, perhaps; or better yet, just as the metal parts of an automobile are crystallized by the vibration of the engine and road. Ridges told us next day, too, what a time he had in getting Jenkins home in even decent condition; for the little man's own clothing crumbled and broke and was shed at every step."

We were at the library entrance now, and Burns paused once more and stared up at the gracefully stretching eucalyptus across the roadway. Then turned and his gaze covered the splendid granite pile before us. A few words he muttered then; I could make out but one or two.

"Sierran stone—solid—solid—and like Jenkins—" Came some words I could not get. Then with a curious shrug of his shoulders:

"Who can tell—who can tell—"

Abruptly he swung to me again.

"That," he said, "explains Lemuel Jenkins's eyes—and the almost holy joy in them when he knew that we could see him. He lives in continual fear, you know, that his doubts will run away with him once more, and he—and the same thing happen another time. Has an utter horror of it—but is getting better, thank God, better every day. By the way"—Burns turned with one foot on the step—"Jenkins will remember you. Next time you see him, for the sake of his very soul, go straight up and hold out your hand, and smile your pleasure at seeing him right into his eyes. Don't forget, P. M., don't forget."

I gripped his hand with sympathy, and nodded. After seeing Jenkins's eyes as had I that morning—how could I forget? How could I?

For all our atomic bombs and electric lights, we should occasionally remember that for nearly a billion years this planet was the unchallenged empire of the triumphant reptile, against whose aeoned realm we seem like the veriest flash in the pan. Yet of that mighty reign of our scaly predecessors, so little is left that we relegate it to one of the driest and deadest of sciences, paleontology. To paraphrase a saying, many talk about dinosaurs, but nobody does anything about them. In this devilish novelette, Guy Endore, noted author of "The Werewolf of Paris," tells of a scientist who set out to do something about the dinosaur—with colossal consequences.

The Day of the Dragon

by Guy Endore

NO, IN THOSE DAYS no one ever thought of such a peril to the existence of the human race. I was young then, but I recall the times distinctly. Scientists at their annual meetings used to discuss the probability of the termination of the triumphant progress of the human race, but that it should come about in this fashion,—this terrible and at the same time ridiculous fashion, —*that,* no one ever imagined.

At the present writing it does seem that the complete extinction of all mankind will be delayed, for there must be quite a number of small communities that have found refuge in mines and caves. And though it is long since we have had any word from them, yet in big cities such as Paris, Berlin and London, where there are impregnable subway systems, men and women can still hold out against the terror that ravages the open country. But how long can we last?

Few people, I suppose, are more capable than I of recapitulating the whole story from its completely insane inception of which I believe I was, and remain, the only living witness. I have heard lately so many different versions of how it all began that I want to say this: they

are for the most part far from the truth. But it is a very human necessity to demand an explanation of some sort. . . .

Well, as I say, in those days scientists used to imagine many perils to mankind. Some foresaw vast cataclysms; others predicted more subtle scourges. Very frequent was the prophecy that insects would succeed to the rule of the earth. I can still recall clearly a very stirring lecture delivered by a great entomologist. He began by pointing out that though new species of insects were being discovered at the rate of ten thousand a year, and over half a million kinds were already listed, yet by virtue of the processes of evolution, he felt that the insects were increasing their species at a faster rate than they were being catalogued, certainly faster than their widely varying habits were capable of being studied. So that, in short, as far as insects were concerned, science was playing a losing hand.

He pictured vividly the hordes of insects that attacked our food crops in those days, the blights, the scales, the weevils, the fruit-flies and moths of all kinds. The listeners shivered as they heard tales of vast clouds of grasshoppers leaving whole countries bare, all growing things nibbled down to the last stalk; tales of permanent battle-lines of the entrenched farmer, the gardener, the orchard grower, fighting off with poisonous gases the perpetually renewed attacks of their inexhaustible insect enemies.

What, the lecturer queried, might happen in a moment of inattention? What, if by mischance some natural enemy of a given insect were to cease its alliance with man and allow this insect to breed in such multitudes as to ruin crops all over the world? Imagine, the lecturer told us, months of famine during which whole races would perish and others lapse into savagery and cannibalism. Was that to be the end of our proud civilization? Our puny chemicals would soon be found ineffective against these armored beasts, whose small size and vast numbers are so much in their favor.

"But," so this lecturer affirmed, "the peril from such disorganized swarms is small compared to that offered by those practically civilized insects, the ants, whose numerous varieties are already so high on the rungs of the ladder of progress. The ant cultivates plants, keeps domestic animals, has masons and bridge-builders, law-makers and rulers, soldiers and captains. What if some Napoleon of the ant-world were to arise and were to ally all the many species of ants into a great confederacy, the object of which would be the subjugation of the earth? What if ant-scientists were to discover some glandular extract that would cause them to grow to enormous size? Have not bees and many other insects already developed something analogous? What is to prevent them from doing this, then waxing big as rats, to move

against mankind in order to enslave and domesticate it? What a comi-tragedy! Man ending his history in the stalls of vast pyramidal ant-hills —the ant's bond-servant, his domestic animal!"

Curious, now I think of it, how man has come to a pass that is nearly, if not quite as ridiculous. I must say this lecturer had a pretty clear idea of what would happen, but how it was to come about—that was another matter. He had his guess, to which he was entitled. The guesses of others took different directions. I shan't dwell upon them at length. Now it was the sun that was to become exhausted, whereupon our planet would grow cold, the vast seas frozen to the very bottom and all life refrigerated to death in perfect cold-storage embalming. Again it was the earth that was to cease to revolve, leaving one-half of itself parched in perpetual high-noon sunshine, the other frozen in eternal midnight. Or else it was a comet that was to strike our earth and shatter it into a million inconsequential planetoids.

To such cataclysmic horrors others opposed more subtle dangers. Did not the statistics on insanity show that its rate of increase was such that it would not be long before the whole world was a raving madhouse, in which such poor normal beings as might remain would have a far from enviable fate? Would not, so other students asked, the increasing use of fuel disturb the balance of the atmosphere? Would not the use of oil by motor-ships give rise to a scum of oil on the seas? In short, were we not about to blanket the earth and the waters and shut out the health-giving ultra-violet rays without which life is impossible?

Ah, but that we should be attacked and destroyed by a legendary animal—no, that I never heard from the mouth of any of these scientists. Why, such an animal does not even exist, they would have said. Ridiculous! A fabulous monster? Why, that's pure myth! Oh, good enough, I suppose for fairy-tale writers and for artists with lively fancies. But we serious—

Well, it was out of just such legends that it came about. That sounds strange and impossible, but it is true. Listen:

In the old days, in the golden era when mankind walked out care-free into the great light, where the laughing sun played on the pied fields, and the good breeze blew—I was then a reporter; and I well remember the time I was called upon to do a story on a live toad said to have been immured for a billion years in rock. That was the beginning of it.

In some upstate county, this toad hopped out of a kind of natural bubble in the stone, hopped out just as the stone-cutter's chisel broke through into the air-hole. And the workman, flabbergasted, ran to

the editor of the village paper and there gasped out his tale. A local amateur geologist claimed that the rock of this region had been laid down a billion years or more ago, and that the toad must therefore be a billion years old or more. But the editor of the paper called the stone-cutter a fool for not having caught the toad. A group of people, however, who had gone out to investigate found a toad not ten feet away from the cup-like depression, the stone-bubble, and there was no reason to think that this was any other but the long-lived toad, just out from a billion years of solitary confinement.

The story, though old and often scorned, got about. The toad was exhibited in the village drugstore, where he contentedly accepted a tribute of live flies; and a reporter from a near-by town called to write up the tale and take pictures of the toad and the quarryman. And so the story came to New York. The Sunday rotogravure ran pictures of the event and such was the interest stirred up that I was asked to collect opinions from the wiseacres of the Museum and the local colleges and scientific institutes.

Naturally I took advantage of this assignment to look up my old teacher, Crabshaw. We used to call him Fossil Crab's Paw. If you said it rapidly it sounded so much like Professor Crabshaw, that we dared to say it to his face, and being young and silly, we thought it a very brave and clever thing to do. I thought it would be good fun to see old Crabshaw again.

But it did not prove to be such fun, for the once so familiar biologic laboratory on the top floor made me melancholy. And the memory of many drowsy afternoons spent here, dissecting cockroaches and rats, afflicted me.

The dissecting-room was empty, but there in the rear was old Professor Crabshaw's office. I could see him sitting at his desk, bent over a pile of examination papers. He was more seedy than ever and I swear he wore the same old acid-stained smock, even as his meek face bore the same old pale and drooping whiskers.

The honors and awards of being a scientist had passed over Professor Crabshaw and left him practically where he had started. He was still an instructor, overworked and poor. And yet he had done some fair work. He used to tell, with considerable pride, how his work on the surface-tension of various fluids taken from protozoa of different types had suggested to him the possibility of constructing a synthetic cell. This suggestion had been taken up by a later worker and carried to success, reaping fame and rich material rewards, but not for Crabshaw.

I introduced myself to the Professor and reminded him that I

had once been a student in his class. He smiled and bade me be seated. That he was pleased to have a great newspaper ask him for his opinion, was evident.

"Of course there's no truth in it. Just another popular fallacy like horsehair snakes. The toad no doubt lived near by. You say yourself that it differs not at all from the present species common to that region. That explains the whole story, which after all relies almost entirely on the say-so of the quarryman, who was probably frightened out of his with, when a toad hopped past his chisel."

"May I quote you?" I asked.

It was in his answer to this that Professor Crabshaw revealed all the meekness of his nature, all the years in which the better diplomats in his science had advanced to more important posts, while he, the patient worker, had remained behind to correct examination papers.

"I'm afraid I can't permit that. You may say—ah—that a professor at a local college—ah—a well-known biologist—of note—well, any sort of paraphrase." He smiled, pleased at his own flattery of himself, and content to visualize himself praised, even anonymously.

As I left, I imagined him secretly hoping I might forget his injunction and publish his name. But we published nothing, for it was decided to have a feature article on the subject in the Sunday magazine section. When the editor of the Sunday magazine told me this, I suggested Professor Crabshaw as a likely person to do the article. The moment I did so, I regretted it. No one could have been more unsuited to the task. But I consoled myself with the thought that he would surely refuse to write for a cheap paper.

But I was mistaken. He accepted, so I learned, and with great pleasure. Had he been seduced by the need of the two hundred dollars, which was the magazine's price for the article? I confess I was rather worried, for I felt myself responsible for the whole business.

I therefore called him up on the telephone and began by explaining that it was I who had recommended him.

"I thought as much," he replied; "and you must have lunch with me. Can you meet me at the Faculty Club at once?"

I accepted, thinking that my business would be settled better across a table.

Professor Crabshaw was prompt to the appointment. With him was his wife, a buxom, frowsy person, whose not unkindly face showed plainly the effects of years of disappointed hopes.

She was voluble in her thanks to me. It was so kind of me to have recommended Paul! That it was the two hundred dollars that mag-

netized her was easy to guess. Her conversation at the luncheon was of nothing but money.

"Look," she said, "there's Professor Slocum. Of course you've heard of him. Economics, you know. They say he's made a fortune in Wall Street. Those economists have secrets. You should see his new roadster.

"And that's Professor Dillinger, yes, the man with the little beard. He's rich. That's his wife there, the tall one with the permanent. He's got political connections. They say he's the brains for the sugar lobby."

"Now, Lizzy—" Crabshaw objected.

"But it's true. Just take a look at Professor Wailson. Just because he discovered that the mob reacts like a spoiled baby, he got himself a hundred-thousand-dollar-a-year job with an advertising house. . . . Oh, Paul, why haven't you ever discovered something brilliant like that? But of course, what can one do with protozoa? I always say there's no profit to be made out of raising such tiny bits of things."

"Well, I did once discover—" Crabshaw began meekly.

"Yes, Paul, we know all about that," his wife said severely.

"But, Lizzie, I was only going to explain to Mr.—"

"Paul, how often must I tell you to call me Elspeth? You know," she said, turning to me, "that I've always felt that if Paul would only get used to calling me Elspeth, instead of Lizzie, he'd make at least a thousand dollars more a year."

I saw that this conversation was becoming very painful to Crabshaw, so I began to question him about the article.

"What have you planned to say?"

"Well, I've begun with an examination of the much-disputed topic of what constitutes scientific evidence. Then taking up the story of the toad, I show that the proper evidence is lacking. And I conclude with a discussion of the life-habits of the toad and the experiments that have been made on prolonging the hibernation of various animals, demonstrating that they cannot survive much beyond their usual period."

This was, of course, precisely what I had been afraid of: a rather dull, scientific, educational tract.

"That's fine," I said. "Hm—but I'm just a little afraid it may not appeal to the reading public of our paper. Now, if you're seriously thinking of writing this sort of article, you'll have to come down a bit. Meet the public halfway. Its interest would be more aroused by a toad that had actually lived a billion years. Give the toad a chance to do his stuff."

"But toads don't live a billion years," Crabshaw exclaimed; "it's preposterous!"

"That's it!" I cried. "That's precisely it. The more preposterous, the better. You are a scientist, and you can give the preposterous that scientific veneer that will make it acceptable."

"But—" objected Crabshaw, his jaw hanging. His wife cut him short: "Of course you can, Paul. Think of it: two hundred dollars every time you write an article! Why, that's almost a month's salary."

"Even more than that, Mrs. Crabshaw," I said, "if the articles should ever come into demand and editors compete for your husband's product."

Professor Crabshaw looked most woebegone, but we two had no pity on him. I saw that in gaining an ally in Mrs. Crabshaw I had the matter clinched. And indeed, the article turned out to be all that could be expected of the most experienced yellow journalist. We ran it under big headlines: "GREAT SCIENTIST CHAMPIONS BILLION-YEAR-OLD TOAD," by *"Professor Paul Crabshaw, internationally famous biologist."* And we had enormous pictures of toads along with a strip of vignettes showing *"our artist's conception of history and the toad,"* in which, above repeated pictures of the toad immured in his rock-prison, were depicted prehistoric animals, the glacial period, early apelike man, first signs of civilization in Egypt, then the Jews captive in Babylon, then Christ on the cross, and following that, Columbus in his caravel, Napoleon, and then the final picture typifying the most up-to-date scene: The President of the United States surrounded by a draped flag and a spread-eagle. In the article itself Professor Crabshaw adduced numerous reasons, all couched in the form of striking anecdotes, and designed to prove the possibility of a billion-year-old toad.

It really made great yellow journalism, but it made mighty poor science for a college professor, and the higher powers were down upon him at once.

But that meant nothing to the editor of the Sunday magazine. A few weeks later, when passengers came home with a tale of having sighted a sea-serpent, that hoary legend was sent to Professor Paul Crabshaw for confirmation, and again he made good, no doubt goaded by Lizzie.

In a short time the articles of Crabshaw had become indispensable and were a regular feature for we paid increasing prices. There followed articles on boys brought up by wolves, living in the forest and running on all fours, and articles on the plagues of Egypt and —well, that sort of thing.

For several years this continued, during which Lizzie sure enough blossomed into Elspeth, with facials, permanents and better clothes to make her look the part. I used to meet them now and then for lunch

at the Faculty Club, where Professor Crabshaw, at his wife's behest, still went, though he could feel that his colleagues had lost their respect for him.

"But I'm preparing my revenge," he confided to me one day. "I'm going to electrify the world. You just watch and see. I'm going to prove that marvelous things can and do happen. And that will be my vindication for that tripe on *'Was Jonah Swallowed by a Whale?'* and *'What Will Man Look Like Fifty Thousand Years From Now?'* "

"Tell me more," I begged.

He shook his head. And Elspeth said: "He won't even show me what he's doing. But he's got himself a laboratory or something off in New Jersey and he goes there every day now."

One morning Crabshaw called me up and insisted that I must come up to see him at once, that he had something quite marvelous to show me. There was a note of exultation in his voice that made me drop my work and obey him.

When I arrived, he wrung my hand in his thin, nervous fingers, then skipping ahead of me like a French dancing-master, he led me into his study.

"Now," he said, when I was seated, "my great day is at hand!" And with a smile that freed and relaxed all the long-frozen wrinkles of his face, he declared proudly: "I was fired last night."

Seeing my look of astonishment, he continued: "No, not fired precisely, but given an ultimatum in something of this manner." Then old Crabshaw pulled in his little chin, tried to look cocky and arrogant and paunchy and said: "Here stood Prexy, just like this; he said: 'Mr. Crabshaw' (you see it was no longer *Professor* but just *Mister),* 'Mr. Crabshaw, I think the moment has come for you to decide what subject you are most interested in, science or fiction-writing!'

"I answered him back hotly: 'Mr. President, you have no right to set a limit to scientific investigation.' And he answered: 'No, but we do try to keep our departments of science and of *belles-lettres* distinct.'

"Then I said: 'Mr. President, if you want to be shown that I am not romancing but have made one of the greatest contributions ever made to biology, I invite you over to my New Jersey laboratory tomorrow. You will see mythology come to life. I have invited several of my skeptical colleagues to come with me and if you wish to be fair to me, I shall have the honor of calling for you at three tomorrow!'

"He refused at first, but upon my insistence that I deserved a fair trial, he consented. It is past two now and we must leave soon. You will go along as a member of the press and you will write this up for your paper. So get out your pencil and make notes of what I'm

going to tell you. This will be the biggest scoop of your life and will serve to repay you some for what you did for me."

"But—" I began.

"Let's not argue now," he said hastily. "We haven't the time. Listen carefully. I was going to make an article of this myself, but on second thought I decided that the first report ought to come from someone else. I would never be credited by serious readers: for it is more fantastic than anything I have ever written and yet every word of it is true.

"Let me begin at the beginning, however. You knew, did you not, that for some time I have been suffering under the slights of my fellow-scientists. I confess I did write many silly articles, but, if science would not butter my bread, then I had to do something else. So for a long time I have been scheming to rehabilitate myself. At first all I could do was hope and pray that something might happen that would, of itself, lift this reproach from me, some striking event that would, so to speak, give a little basis for my flights of fancy.

"Then I myself began to cudgel my brains to scheme out something of my own. After several false attempts that I need not discuss here, I recalled something I had known for many years. And I wondered if there might not be a possibility for me in this bit of knowledge. Perhaps you can still recall from my classroom lectures, the nature of the reptilian heart? Well, in brief, it is, compared to the mammalian heart, the human heart for example, an incomplete organ. In a way, it is a malformation. For it is so constructed that the blood-vessels of the animal are never filled with freshly oxygenated blood. The old stale blood, replete with body poisons, mixes in the chambers of the heart with the bright, clean blood from the lungs and is pumped back through the body again, only half cleansed.

"Scientifically, we express that by saying that the septum between the ventricles, the wall that should be there to keep the two blood streams separated, is incompletely formed. The animal thus suffers all its lifetime from auto-intoxication, and is by nature sluggish. Suffers is perhaps the wrong word, for its whole organism is evidently attuned to this sub-normal state. The alligator, is then, to speak roughly, a life-long congenital cardiac, incapable of great activity except in infrequent spasms. His race is an invalid race, each member born an invalid and remaining an invalid throughout its existence.

"And does not the alligator give us an example of how the cardiac should live? No physician could prescribe anything finer for his patients than the alligator's calm, docile, peaceful, snoozy sort of life. Notice the alligators at the aquarium. They may look fierce, but they are

condemned invalids and no matter how long they live, they will continue to practice extreme caution, sparing their poor circulatory systems, lying all day in bed, that is to say in the warm mud, and doing very little more than sending out an occasional blink of the eyelid.

"Well," Crabshaw went on before I could interrupt, "it occurred to me one day to see what would happen if that bad heart condition of the alligator were cleared up or at least improved by stretching that incomplete septum to form a dividing wall between the venous and the arterial blood streams. I immediately procured a lot of baby alligators and set to work to find out.

"My method was simple. I just chloroformed my patient and operated on him, following, as well as I could, the directions given in a textbook on surgery.

"My mortality rate was enormous. No doubt my surgical technique was atrocious. But then, I'm no surgeon and don't pretend to be one. It seemed that the heart condition only grew worse after the incomplete septum was stretched out. The poor alligators just turned up their pale and swollen bellies and gave up their alligatorish ghosts; many of them did not even bother to recover from the effects of the chloroform.

I, myself, was frequently on the point of throwing up the sponge, when patient Number 87 gave me the courage to carry on. For several hours after the operation, that fellow ran about the room like a frisky puppy. I am sure that no one in the world has ever witnessed such speed and agility on the part of an alligator. I tell you, he ran about like a chipmunk, dived in and out of the water-tank, leaped, frolicked and dashed about in a reckless, gleeful manner that was a marvel and a delight to behold. Then suddenly, over he turned, wriggled his paws madly, like a toy train upset, the wheels of which continued to spin until the spring has unwound.

"Number 87 revived my courage. I determined to fight on and as I say, I gradually grew more skillful and altered my technique by constant improvement as I studied the matter. Finally, I determined to try somewhat larger specimens than those I had hitherto been working on and do more thorough and careful operations. Out of ten trials, I achieved two amazing successes. Whereupon I ceased to operate on further specimens and studied those two.

"I noted, in the first place, that they devoured from four to eight times as much food as ordinary alligators of their age. But then they were never still for a moment, whereas their ailing brothers slept most of the day. Indeed, my two alligators grew so fast that I realized that something had to be done quickly or they would soon outgrow my little laboratory. At that time I worked in a store I had rented—a

former sea-food shop,—in which the left-over equipment provided me with excellent facilities for the performance of my experiments. I say it behooved me now to hasten, lest I be caught in a jam, for at their rate of growth I realized that I would soon be unable to move them. Fortunately, I was able to locate and rent for a reasonable price, a former platinum refinery in New Jersey, a large single-story brick building, a shed rather, which was particularly suited to my purposes since the windows were all heavily barred with iron.

"I had some trouble crating and moving my pets. I had to creep up on the beasts and spray them with chloroform, and that was dangerous business, for I very nearly chloroformed myself. I should have had help, but I wanted no inkling of my work to reach the outside world. And those alligators were quick as birds and big too, as large I should say as young calves. They had grown to four times their original size in six days' time. And could they fight and squirm! . . .

"Well, anyway, that's all over and I now have my two pretty ones in their new home, which was at that time, comfortably arranged to house them. Yes, I say pretty ones, for they were sleek and shiny and the way they flirted their tails and skimmed along the floor with their paws moving so fast you could hardly see them, was a pleasure; and their eyes were never closed. . . . I had built a big tank for them and you should have seen them swim and dive and go leaping out of the water and come falling back with loud smacking splashes, like dolphins or seals. And taking such joy in life! I wish I could show you that, but they have outgrown that tank now. I must build them a new one.

"I tell you I used to watch them by the hour and say to myself, 'You're a public benefactor, you are. Here are the first two healthy alligators in the world! Why has man been so cruel as to reserve his medical knowledge so much for himself and his domestic animals? Wild life, too, needs some attention.' You see, I hadn't then an inkling of what I had really succeeded in doing, but I was right nevertheless in one respect. I had given health to two alligators and I was the first privileged human being to observe what a healthy alligator was like.

"I noticed many peculiarities that set off my healthy two from the rest of the sickly breed of alligators. They began, for example, to show a better growth in the chest. They swelled out something like geckos. You know how geckos look, those small lizards. And with a better growth of the chest cavity went a different carriage of the head. The head rose from the ground—from which the ordinary alligator does not seem to have the strength to raise it—and was held up a bit, thus contriving to give the beasts the appearance of a neck. That bad

posture that one notices in all alligators, crocodiles and gavials and related species, is plainly just another symptom of their congenital heart-trouble. They are all stricken down with severe auto-intoxication. It is to be noticed, by the way, that they all have a bad breath. My alligators had a sweet breath.

"The next noteworthy change in outward appearance was the heavier growth of those spinal processes. In fact, in the common diseased alligator, there are no spinal processes to speak of, though along the tail are to be found some heavy skin-growths forming a serrated ridge and indicating perhaps what nature intended the beast to have there and which is actually to be seen on my two specimens, namely, ridges that are part of the spine and that reach luxurious proportions. The tail, too, grew larger and longer each day and there is nothing prettier to see than the way it curls and rolls in rich serpentine curves and even in complete circles. You won't be able to see that now, because the quarters have become so cramped, but you will see how instead of terminating in a weak point, my healthy alligators have developed a flat arrowhead on the end, something like the whale's tail, only sharper.

"Mind you, those beasts of mine were now consuming each a good-sized sheep. And demanding more every day! And though big around as cows and, of course, two or three times as long, they were still but tots, so to speak, being but a few months old and still in the process of development. Especially curious was the ridge that grew along the back, and which, between the shoulder-blades and the hips, if I may be permitted such loose anatomical designations, seemed to rise higher each day and to have greater internal structural support, for not only did the spine enter into its formation, but the ribs actually grew out of the body and provided buttresses for it. For some weeks my patients appeared as if a heavy mushroom-like parasol were sprouting out of their backs.

" 'Now whatever can that be?' I used to wonder and continued to watch. But there were so many interesting things to see. I must explain that with my beasts the size of elephants, I ceased to be able to examine them very closely. I'll tell you the way I go about it: the factory is along a rarely used unsurfaced road in a remote part of the country, and I drive up there every day, formerly in an old used car, but now in a truck specially purchased, and loaded down with a couple of sheep or pigs fresh from the slaughterhouse and with several tubs of fish. Before I installed a differential pulley, I had to drag all this up to the roof and dump the whole business through a ventilator on it. I don't dare enter the place. Why, it was even dangerous to do that much, for their lashing tails with that heavy

and sharp arrowhead termination used to come whipping around and crash through the glass of the window or rather whatever fragments of glass remained in the window, and come out thumping and feeling around on the roof. I guess they were curious to find out what was all the disturbance up there. Or perhaps they knew it was feeding-time and they just wanted to show their appreciation of my solicitude. I often did think they felt gratitude for me, their deliverer from the oppression of heart-trouble.

"Oh yes, I forgot to tell you how they began to show knobs on their snouts and how these knobs kept growing out and formed what I can only describe as feelers or whiskers, heavy things, flexible and curling like the trunk of an elephant, only thinner and covered with a leathery integument. Well, one of those feelers came whipping out of the ventilator one day and gave me a caress that tore through all my clothes and left a deep, bloody scar. As I say, I suppose it was a caress, but I was so frightened that I jerked back. I believe that if it had been ill-meant I wouldn't be here to tell about it. Yes, I'm pretty nearly positive of the fact that they like me.

"Of late it has grown more and more difficult to get a good glimpse of them. It's been getting more and more dangerous to go near that building and before I rigged up my rope system, I used to climb up to the roof by a ladder placed against the rear of the building where there aren't any windows, and once on the roof, I'd make sure that nothing was protruding from the ventilator and then I'd rush up and cast down my load and rush right back with another load. Once they were busy eating, it was fairly safe.

"Now and then I'd put my eye to a little opening I'd found and peer through. There were my beasts, growing larger every day, greater now than elephants in the bulk of their torso and with that parasol-like growth on their backs expanding and expanding, and shaping itself out into two vast ovals, one on each side. Then, one day, it came over me suddenly, what these were: wings! Yes, sir: wings!

"And suddenly, too, that day I realized what I possessed there, locked up in that old factory, and I ran back to my car and drove at breakneck speed to New York and to the library. Why, of course, what else but dragons! And the stories and pictures of those fabulous beasts proved to me that my alligators were not the only healthy alligators that had ever existed. There had been at various times, but mostly in prehistoric days, other rare specimens of healthy alligators. How else explain the fact that people had seen precisely such monsters as I have out there, and preserved the record of their appearance in story and art? Why, those Chinese dragons you see embroidered

in silk were as like mine as two peas. Undoubtedly there appears now and then, but exceedingly rarely, a sport or variant among the alligators or crocodiles, provided by chance with a healthy heart, and so free from auto-intoxication.

"But to get back to the progress of my pets. They continued to develop and pretty soon I began to see their wings unfold, with those enormous ribs of theirs strengthening them like ribbed Gothic vaulting. Hunched they are at the shoulders, and then smoothing down flat to the rear and wrapping against the lower body like enormous shields. You can see that they are aching, now, to try out the wings—but there is no room in the factory. But now and then they do a little tentative flapping, you know like chickens, and then they subside, sadly. I tell you it breaks my heart to see them so confined. But that will be remedied. Now they have begun to look awkward on the ground, trailing their immense wings, their size preventing them from frisking around as they used to do. They move back and forth like caged beasts and I can see that their tempers are getting short and ugly."

He paused suddenly and looked at his watch. "Come, we've no time to waste. I'm to call for the delegation at a quarter to three and then be at the President's house at three sharp."

"Say!" I exclaimed. "This is all so terribly exciting that my head is simply whirling. What a story this is going to make! We'll run a whole page of pictures!" I was so carried away by Crabshaw's vivid story that I never for a moment doubted its veracity.

"Pictures?" Crabshaw cried. "Pictures? Of course! Why did I never think of that? But I have been so feverishly excited. We must take some now. Wait, let me get our camera. Pshaw! I wish I had kept a photographic record of their development. Well, that will have to wait for the next group I operate on."

I suggested calling up for one of our news photographers, but he vetoed the idea. For the present, he wanted no outsider except me.

We drove out in a limousine Crabshaw had hired for the occasion. There was a curious strained atmosphere among the occupants of the car. At first there had been solemn politeness, the stilted courtesy of duelists, which now and then one of the former colleagues of Crabshaw would try to break by a weak attempt at humor. Crabshaw brushed these attempts aside and set the conversation on the recent spell of hot weather, or the latest political news, and in that fashion the conversation limped along until we had driven far out into New Jersey and had gone off the traveled highway and were bumping along a forest road much in need of repair.

The professors sat with their hats on their knees, the President wiped

the copious sweat from his brow, and Crabshaw, thin and alert, kept leaning forward to give the driver directions.

Suddenly Crabshaw gave a cry. The car drove out into an open space and stopped abruptly. Before us were the heaped ruins of what had once been a red brick building of some size.

Disregarding our solicitous inquiries, Crabshaw continued to yell: "They've escaped! They've broken out! They're gone!" We could not get any other intelligent statement from him.

He ran out and scrambled up over the masses of wreckage, the heaps of brick, the twisted girders and continued to let forth one piercing scream after another. We sat in the car for a while, overcome by a powerful stench that along with the heat of the day, robbed our lungs of the breath they craved.

The President, holding his kerchief to his nose, a gesture that his professional satellites imitated at once, made a muffled nasal remark: "Our friend has histrionic talents, too. Whew! If you agree with me, gentlemen, that we have seen enough, let us be off. I can't breathe here."

"Nor I. . . . Nor I," said the obedient professors.

But I followed Crabshaw up the heap of wreckage and looked down upon the interior of the building, where vast mounds of trampled filth lay so thick that it almost obscured the existence of a flat concrete floor beneath. And the odor was like that of the monkey-house at the zoo, only many times worse.

The President cried out: "Crabshaw, I insist upon being driven back to my residence at once. Otherwise I shall commandeer this car and leave you here."

Crabshaw, his eyes popping out of his head, his voice cracked with sobs, shouted back: "Come on up here, you fools! There's evidence left here, at any rate. Look at those foot-prints!"

Two of the professors, more curious and bolder than the rest, mounted to where we stood and looked down upon the scene below. But they had eyes only for the filth and not for its meaning or origin.

"The Augean stables had nothing on this," one of them began.

"See those prints?" Crabshaw cried.

"I insist, Crabshaw," bellowed the President, whereupon one of the professors dutifully declared:

"I've seen enough," and the other echoed that flat statement.

It made no difference to them how Crabshaw swore and begged and whined, with the tears flying from his eyes, his mouth sputtering: "Here you, Professor Albert, world-famous paleontologist, why don't you measure these foot-prints? What animal do they come from? Did

you ever see such enormous holes as these claws have dug? And you, Professor Wiener! Why do you stand like dummies? Do you turn up your noses because the evidence is not a million years old? Why, if this were in the rocks of Montana, you'd be all over the ground, sniffing and measuring and preparing to write huge tomes. What's the matter with you now?"

Gently I led the hysterical man down from his mound of bricks and pulled him into the car. On the drive home he remained silent except for an occasional attempt to arouse the others with a sarcastic or pleading remark. To these the President answered once, without looking at poor Crabshaw:

"I've never been so hoodwinked before . . . so grossly insulted!"

And the scientists repeated: "A plain fraud!"

"A salted mine," said another, and one mentioned Cesnola and the fake antiquities he palmed off on the Metropolitan Museum, and another mentioned Glozel, and a third thought of the Louvre and the crown of Artaphernes, and then they reminded themselves of the Cardiff giant. . . .

In short, they passed in sarcastic review all the trickeries ever perpetrated upon science.

But all things have an end; eventually we unloaded our cargo of scoffers and proceeded on to Crabshaw's apartment. The life had gone out of that man so that I could not desert him, but must see him safely home. As we rode on to his apartment, I heard newsboys crying extras. Though the moment was hardly propitious, I felt that my profession demanded a copy. I stopped the car and called to one of the boys. No sooner had I spread out the sheet than I gave Crabshaw a mighty slap on the shoulder, for I confess that my own first emotion was one of exultation:

"Look, man! Read this!" I cried.

MONSTERS ATTACK ATLANTIC CITY
FOUR BATHING BEAUTIES AMONG MISSING
MANY SPECTATORS AT BATHING
BEAUTY CONTEST ARE SLAIN AND MANY
MAIMED BY FLYING MONSTERS

As usual the actual news report was meager, for extras often have nothing more than a headline to sell. It is published while the reporters hustle out to secure more complete information. The body of the article repeated in various forms the following story:

"Conflicting reports by telephone from Atlantic City tell of enor-

mous flying monsters, birds or airplanes (eyewitnesses are not in agreement on this point), attacking the crowd assembled to watch the final awards in the nation-wide competition for the nomination of Miss America. Two or more scarlet-colored birds of vast size swooped down on the panic-stricken multitude, who dashed for cover in all directions. One informant declares he was reminded of the airplane attacks on infantry that were a feature of the World War.

"Whatever they were, beast or machine, they mutilated dozens of bystanders—and were gone. Their appearance and disappearance were so rapid, their speed was so enormous, that no one seems to have retained a clear notion as to precisely what happened. The monsters seem to have swooped down out of the clouds and back again, carrying off some of their victims and leaving the boardwalk strewn with the dead and the dying.

"The earliest reports from the hastily organized volunteer ambulance and medical corps—" And so on.

I grew more and more serious as I read of the victims. But Crabshaw only expanded. He slapped his knee:

"Ha, ha! Those healthy youngsters! What an appetite! Think of that! Just swooped down from the clouds,"—he illustrated the maneuver with a swoop of his hand,—"snatched up those beauties and climbed right back out of human sight. Wow! Think of it, man!" And he gave me a jovial dig in the ribs.

"I'm thinking of it, all right," I said soberly.

But he was so delighted that he actually began to caper around in the car. It was droll, but I could not laugh. I thought of the dead and dying out there on the boardwalk and the four young girls who had come to exhibit their youth and beauty and who had been snatched up beyond the clouds and devoured.

"Stop! Stop the car!" Crabshaw shouted. "We must get dozens of those papers and clip out those articles and send them to those benighted professorial asses who came out there and refused to use their five senses."

"Do nothing of the kind!" I cried and pulled Crabshaw back to his seat. "Listen to me, you fool. Do you want the whole world on your neck? Don't you realize what your dragons have done? They've killed, or injured for life, scores of people. What will the world say of Professor Crabshaw when it learns that his petty desire for vindication in the eyes of his colleagues has caused wholesale murder? Take my advice and keep quiet about this and pray that it may blow over. Or enjoy your bloody triumph if you like, but beware of proclaiming it. As far as I am concerned, not a word of your connection with this gruesome business at Atlantic City will get into the newspapers.

That sobered him. But only for a moment; then he wagged his head, tickled silly by the accomplishment of his pets: "Husky youngsters!" he muttered over and over again to himself. Then he exclaimed out loud: "Husky youngsters! Gad! What will they do when they are full-grown, can you imagine? Why, they're only kids now. They're not a year old yet. And just out of the hospital, so to speak. Why, come to think of it, this is the first day they flew. Say, what do you suppose they'll do when they are as big as battleships? Bigger, maybe. Wow!"

And he went on ruminating gleefully: "Flying so perfectly on their first essay! Where is the human aviator who could equal that! And say! By gosh, I never thought of that. Do you recall all the stories of the dragons demanding a tribute of fair maidens? Well, there you see it. First thing they do is go after the beautiful virgins. Ha-ha! Just another proof for you that those old artists and poets were not just imbeciles, but as good scientific observers as any of us moderns. Fairy tales, eh? I tell you, Mr. President, those fairy tales are true. And Crabshaw's fancies are as good as any of your old stodgy facts. Maybe better, because dreams come true, while facts are always being challenged and disproved."

He went on thus while the car drove to his home. Just as we reached there, he let out a scream that nearly stopped my heart beating.

"What's the matter now?" I gasped.

"Never thought of it!" he shouted. "Never once occurred to me. Oh, this is rich! Just too perfect! Male and female created he them. Yes sir! One male and one female. Think of it, man. Think of the race that will come from those beasts! Why—why, it—" He stood there with an ecstatic smile on his uplifted face. It was as if he felt himself akin to the Creator and was calling down a blessing upon the Adam and Eve of the new race of dragons.

It occurred to me later, where I had heard people talk just like Crabshaw during that ride home. Parents, hard-working parents of the poorer classes, who raise up their children to take the place in the world that they, the parents, would have liked to occupy, they speak thus. And for Crabshaw, his dragons, so strong, so unassailable, were his sons who were going to wipe out with their strength all the disappointments that he had been forced to swallow.

No sooner had we alighted and dismissed the car than he declared: "I'm not going upstairs. Please, do me a favor: go up and tell Elspeth not to expect me until late. Say nothing about the dragons, of course."

"And what are you going to do?" I asked, displeased at his request.

"I've got something I must take care of," he said mysteriously. And then, sensing that I was about to object, he pleaded quickly: "Go, please! Good Lord, am I to be balked all my life?"

I realized vaguely what he wanted to do, but his last words made me give in to his plea. And then what good would it have done to have refused him? He would have put through his plan anyhow. The manner in which he clutched his camera under his arm and the light of fanatic determination in his eyes, were indicative of a firm resolve: to go back to the ruined factory in New Jersey, no doubt driving there in his own little car, in the hope that the darling alligators whom he had nursed to health from their original heart-trouble, would return to roost there and he would be thus enabled to secure photographs of them.

I let him go and regretted it; but I hold myself blameless, for short of locking him up behind iron bars, nothing could have restrained him. I went up and made some excuse to Elspeth and then left to catch up on my neglected work. Of the unsuccessful dragon expedition, I said nothing to anyone. To have done so would have been to expose Crabshaw. I was rather surprised to find that the professors at the University suspected nothing of his connection with the disaster at Atlantic City, but on second thought, this was only natural: such a connection must have appeared extremely far-fetched and to have propounded it would have been to expose one's self to ridicule if it were proved false and again to ridicule, were it proved true. In any case, the great publicity would have been Crabshaw's. Such must have been the motives of the professors in keeping quiet, if indeed they had any thoughts on the matter at all. Afterwards, true enough, all sorts of crazy things were propounded, by professor and layman alike and Crabshaw's name was mentioned, but those who had been in a position to assure themselves of the justice of Crabshaw's claims and had neglected to do so, had nothing to gain by speaking up; on the contrary—

When I called up Crabshaw on the afternoon of the following day, Elspeth answered, extremely agitated.

"What do you know about this?" she asked. "Where is Paul?"

"Why? Didn't he come home?" I asked, my heart sinking at the thought of Crabshaw alone with the dragons.

"No, he didn't come home," she answered. "But that's not what puzzles me so much as where he has been. I'm afraid there's some sort of hoax afoot. Since yesterday I have had three cablegrams, ostensibly from him, all sent collect."

"Cablegrams?"

"Yes. One from London that came last night. The second one came early this morning and was from Alexandria. And I just had another, just this moment. From Singapore, Malay States."

"Well, what's he say?"

"He says the same thing in each one:

DON'T WORRY STOP AM SAFE STOP BE HOME SOON.

"Well, that sounds encouraging," I said, for want of any better comment.

Elspeth, however, declared: "Well, I can tell you this: I don't believe they come from Paul. He can't be all over the world in one night. And I'm not going to pay for any more of them! Perhaps you can tell me what it's all about. What did you two do yesterday?"

"Why, nothing," I said and blandly made whatever excuses I could think of quickly and then hung up. Actually, of course, I had a good notion of what had happened. It was plain that he was riding through the clouds on the back of one or the other of his flying alligators, and could stop them where he pleased. Flying from continent to continent, and over the oceans. . . . Well, glory be to you, Paul! Now you are truly vindicated. Now you have your apotheosis. All the world will bow to you when you come alighting in the middle of Broadway on your pet dragon!

I thought for a moment of proclaiming the arrival of Paul Crabshaw from a round-the-world hop done in one day. But fortunately I thought better of it—in view of the recent disaster at Atlantic City, of which the papers were now full. But I could not restrain my mind from waxing enthusiastic over the fact that it was plain that Paul had tamed the monsters. What would not mankind be able to do with these domesticated dragons, who were so superior to airplanes? Perhaps Paul had struck the right tack, the new road, along which mankind was to progress by breeding or otherwise developing animals to do the work of machines.

But we waited in vain for Paul Crabshaw to return. Elspeth paid for several more cablegrams from South America, from Africa and from other outlandish places. Then the cablegrams ceased, which both pleased and disappointed the economical Elspeth. And after that we never heard of Paul again. . . .

As for the rest, it is history. The bruit of the Atlantic City disaster died down and for several years we heard nothing more of monsters. Elspeth, bereaved, had gone away to nurse her sorrow and Paul Crabshaw's disappearance was soon forgotten. I used to ponder over the probable fate of the dragons. Evidently their mighty hearts had given way and they had fallen into the sea along with their doctor.

But they had only retired to remote regions, there to breed thousands of their kind. For soon the world awoke to the fact that it was positively infested with dragons. There were at first, rumors of dragons devouring the negroes of interior Africa. That was presumed to be false, like so many other jungle stories. And then there were rumors of dragons in South America and China. These were dismissed as tropically overheated imaginations and mere Chinese fantasies. And then there were dragons in Europe, in France, in England, in the United States, right here in New York—and no one could doubt the truth of it any more. The world was a prey to man-eating dragons!

Too late then to fight the vermin that had obtained such a foothold in our world. Alas—no longer *our* world, but the world of the dragons who have become supreme! Step by step, we have retreated and given up the globe which we had brought so near to complete civilization, given it up to our successors in time. The human history of the earth is closing its books.

Too late then for me to tell what I knew, and when I did, I found no one to believe me. No one would try my simple explanation and see if alligators could really be cured of their heart-trouble and become dragons. The mere suggestion was dismissed at once on the grounds that acquired characteristics were not inherited, whereas these dragons bred true. In short, the idea was too ridiculous to be discussed seriously. The explanation that science handed down was that some dragon-eggs, remaining for millions of years in the cold storage of the Arctic, had by chance been caught in the sweep of the glacier, had been carried down in the slow glacial movement to the sea, had thence, along with an iceberg, been carried off to sea and had floated down into the warmth of the tropics. On some tropical island shore the dragon-eggs, still by miracle unbroken and unspoiled, had slowly been brooded to life by the warmth of the sun. This theory fitted in well with old tales of gigantic roc-eggs and was generally accepted by science and laity alike.

I did not press my point, for what could be the value, at this late date, of knowing how to transform a comparatively harmless alligator into a dragon? Making more dragons, even in the name of research, was the silliest ever of all schemes to carry coals to Newcastle. Why, the world was full of them! Not a city, not a village, not the remotest hamlet but suffered its depredations. The dread fowl came down like a hawk upon chickens and carried off men, women and children, as well as cattle, and left only its horrid droppings as a final insult to the tragic survivors.

In vain mankind prayed. In vain ministers sermonized on the Beast of the Apocalypse, the beast whose number was 666. In vain we turned to anti-aircraft guns, to explosive bullets, to poison gases, to gigantic

traps. In vain, our most courageous aviators mounted the skies in pursuit of them. A thrash of their tails and man and his machine tumbled to the earth, while his bullets rattled harmlessly off the armor-like hide of the beast. It was useless to fight. We were beaten. And the wise ones were those who scurried off soonest to the best caves and mines. Farmers burrowed underground and tilled their fields in the darkest nights and did not trouble themselves to grow any more food than they could use. Famine added itself to the miseries of mankind. Our supply of coal gave out. Our electric power-houses ceased to function. Turbines still ran while there were volunteers to brave the danger of running them and of repairing the power lines. As long as our machines still held together they were used, but repairs grew more and more impossible. To work in the daylight was suicidal. At night, light was forbidden, for it immediately attracted a dragon out of the sky.

Evidently they bred rapidly. Not twenty years after Crabshaw's first specimen, thousands were counted. And the world of human life perished before their insatiable hunger, as once the world of animal life had perished before our advance. What we had done to buffalo and passenger-pigeons was repaid by us in full measure.

Oh, where is now the Saint George that is to rid us of our scourge? Where the scientist with serum or inoculation that should wipe out these dragons? What? Will science fail us? Are we doomed, we, the last remnants of the human race who now exist in perpetual fear? At first how many and how bright were the reports of what we would do to the dragons: Reports of new types of guns. Of great steel spring-nets. Of new and most potent gases, harmless to man but deadly to the great saurians. Of disease germs that were to be spread among them and wipe them out in one vast epidemic. Of poisoned bait. . . . Alas, all, all failed! Until even the most optimistic of us have lost heart. . . .

We ceased to hope and made the best of things, and quietly blessed those valiant old New Yorkers who had constructed that so often ridiculed megalopolis with its impregnable fortress of skyscrapers and its marvelous network of underground passageways where we, besieged mankind, can make our last stand. Here we are safe for a time. That is to say, until famine gets us. We stave off that as best we can by utilizing every roof-top and planting countless window-boxes and developing whatever mushroom and other fungus growths will thrive in the dark. Here and there too, we grow food under ultra-violet light, but current is almost priceless. How long can we last, seeing that our existence is ultimately dependent on the constant excursions of volunteer corps who are ever risking their lives for the community? Our numbers grow daily less. A few, we are told by rare travelers, survive in the far

north where dragons rarely go. A few survive in scattered mines. No doubt there must be other communities, say in London, and Berlin and other places where there are extensive subways, but it is years since we have had any communication with them.

What is to be the end of all this, I ask myself. Are we to perish utterly? I think I shall cause this tale to be engraved on stone so that if ever the human race arise again, it may read and know how the damnable inferiority complex of one Paul Crabshaw made all mankind the prey of fabulous monsters.

Men have been wandering the surface of the world for over a hundred thousand years. Yet when we come to turn the pages of history, we can flick back but five thousand years or so to come to the limits of our records in the misty files of ancient Egypt. Before Egypt lies the darkness of unrecorded time, the wars, the storms, and the ruins of a myriad buried cities and shattered kingdoms, heaped amid the ashes of a thousand lost causes. Into this lost storeroom of forgotten memories penetrated the smoky pen of Robert E. Howard, with a glimpse of Kull, King of Valusia, and of the thing that befell Kull before the mirrors of Tuzun Thune. . . .

The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune

by Robert E. Howard

"A wild, weird clime that lieth sublime
Out of Space, out of Time."

—Poe.

THERE comes, even to kings, the time of great weariness. Then the gold of the throne is brass, the silk of the palace becomes drab. The gems in the diadem and upon the fingers of the women sparkle drearily like the ice of the white seas; the speech of men is as the empty rattle of a jester's bell and the feel comes of things unreal; even the sun is copper in the sky and the breath of the green ocean is no longer fresh.

Kull sat upon the throne of Valusia and the hour of weariness was upon him. They moved before him in an endless, meaningless panorama, men, women, priests, events and shadows of events; things seen and things to be attained. But like shadows they came and went, leaving no trace upon his consciousness, save that of a great mental fatigue. Yet Kull was not tired. There was a longing in him for things beyond himself and beyond the Valusian court. An unrest stirred in him and strange, luminous dreams roamed his soul. At his bidding there came to him Brule the Spear-slayer, warrior of Pictland, from the islands beyond the West.

"Lord king, you are tired of the life of the court. Come with me upon my galley and let us roam the tides for a space,"

"Nay." Kull rested his chin moodily upon his mighty hand. "I am weary beyond all these things. The cities hold no lure for me—and the borders are quiet. I hear no more the sea-songs I heard when I lay as a boy on the booming crags of Atlantis, and the night was alive with blazing stars. No more do the green woodlands beckon me as of old. There is a strangeness upon me and a longing beyond life's longings. Go!"

Brule went forth in a doubtful mood, leaving the king brooding upon his throne. Then to Kull stole a girl of the court and whispered:

"Great king, seek Tuzun Thune, the wizard. The secrets of life and death are his, and the stars in the sky and the lands beneath the seas."

Kull looked at the girl. Fine gold was her hair and her violet eyes were slanted strangely; she was beautiful, but her beauty meant little to Kull.

"Tuzun Thune," he repeated. "Who is he?"

"A wizard of the Elder Race. He lives here, in Valusia, by the Lake of Visions in the House of a Thousand Mirrors. All things are known to him, lord king; he speaks with the dead and holds converse with the demons of the Lost Lands."

Kull arose.

"I will seek out this mummer; but no word of my going, do you hear?"

"I am your slave, my lord." And she sank to her knees meekly, but the smile of her scarlet mouth was cunning behind Kull's back and the gleam of her narrow eyes was crafty.

Kull came to the house of Tuzun Thune, beside the Lake of Visions. Wide and blue stretched the waters of the lake and many a fine palace rose upon its banks; many swan-winged pleasure boats drifted lazily upon its hazy surface and evermore there came the sound of soft music.

Tall and spacious, but unpretentious, rose the House of a Thousand Mirrors. The great doors stood open and Kull ascended the broad stair and entered, unannounced. There in a great chamber, whose walls were of mirrors, he came upon Tuzun Thune, the wizard. The man was ancient as the hills of Zalgara; like wrinkled leather was his skin, but his cold gray eyes were like sparks of sword steel.

"Kull of Valusia, my house is yours," said he, bowing with old-time courtliness and motioning Kull to a throne-like chair.

"You are a wizard, I have heard," said Kull bluntly, resting his chin

upon his hand and fixing his somber eyes upon the man's face. "Can you do wonders?"

The wizard stretched forth his hand; his fingers opened and closed like a bird's claws.

"Is that not a wonder—that this blind flesh obeys the thoughts of my mind? I walk, I breathe, I speak—are they all not wonders?"

Kull meditated a while, then spoke. "Can you summon up demons?"

"Aye. I can summon up a demon more savage than any in ghostland —by smiting you in the face."

Kull started, then nodded. "But the dead, can you talk to the dead?"

"I talk with the dead always—as I am talking now. Death begins with birth and each man begins to die when he is born; even now you are dead, King Kull, because you were born."

"But you, you are older than men become; do wizards never die?"

"Men die when their time comes. No later, no sooner. Mine has not come."

Kull turned these answers over in his mind.

"Then it would seem that the greatest wizard of Valusia is no more than an ordinary man, and I have been duped in coming here."

Tuzun Thune shook his head. "Men are but men, and the greatest men are they who soonest learn the simpler things. Nay, look into my mirrors, Kull."

The ceiling was a great many mirrors, and the walls were mirrors, perfectly jointed, yet many mirrors of many sizes and shapes.

"Mirrors are the world, Kull," droned the wizard. "Gaze into my mirrors and be wise."

Kull chose one at random and looked into it intently. The mirrors upon the opposite wall were reflected there, reflecting others, so that he seemed to be gazing down a long, luminous corridor, formed by mirror behind mirror; and far down this corridor moved a tiny figure. Kull looked long ere he saw that the figure was the reflection of himself. He gazed and a queer feeling of pettiness came over him; it seemed that that tiny figure was the true Kull, representing the real proportions of himself. So he moved away and stood before another.

"Look closely, Kull. That is the mirror of the past," he heard the wizard say.

Gray fogs obscured the vision, great billows of mist, ever heaving and changing like the ghost of a great river; through these fogs Kull caught swift fleeting visions of horror and strangeness; beasts and men moved there and shapes neither men nor beasts; great exotic blossoms glowed through the grayness; tall tropic trees towered high over reeking swamps, where reptilian monsters wallowed and bellowed; the sky was ghastly with flying dragons and the restless seas rocked and

roared and beat endlessly along the muddy beaches. Man was not, yet man was the dream of the gods and strange were the nightmare forms that glided through the noisome jungles. Battle and onslaught were there, and frightful love. Death was there, for Life and Death go hand in hand. Across the slimy beaches of the world sounded the bellowing of the monsters, and incredible shapes loomed through the steaming curtain of the incessant rain.

"This is of the future."

Kull looked in silence.

"See you—what?"

"A strange world," said Kull heavily. "The Seven Empires are crumbled to dust and are forgotten. The restless green waves roar for many a fathom above the eternal hills of Atlantis; the mountains of Lemuria of the West are the islands of an unknown sea. Strange savages roam the elder lands and new lands flung strangely from the deeps, defiling the elder shrines. Valusia is vanished and all the nations of today; they of tomorrow are strangers. They know us not."

"Time strides onward," said Tuzun Thune calmly. "We live today; what care we for tomorrow—or yesterday? The Wheel turns and nations rise and fall; the world changes, and times return to savagery to rise again through the long ages. Ere Atlantis was, Valusia was, and ere Valusia was, the Elder Nations were. Aye, we, too, trampled the shoulders of lost tribes in our advance. You, who have come from the green sea hills of Atlantis to seize the ancient crown of Valusia, you think my tribe is old, we who held these lands ere the Valusians came out of the East, in the days before there were were men in the sea lands. But men were here when the Elder Tribes rode out of the waste lands, and men before men, tribe before tribe. The nations pass and are forgotten, for that is the destiny of man."

"Yes," said Kull. "Yet is it not a pity that the beauty and glory of men should fade like smoke on a summer sea?"

"For what reason, since that is their destiny? I brood not over the lost glories of my race, nor do I labor for races to come. Live now, Kull, live now. The dead are dead; the unborn are not. What matters men's forgetfulness of you when you have forgotten yourself in the silent worlds of death? Gaze in my mirrors and be wise."

Kull chose another mirror and gazed into it.

"That is the mirror of the deepest magic; what see ye, Kull?"

"Naught but myself."

"Look closely, Kull; is it in truth you?"

Kull stared into the great mirror, and the image that was his reflection returned his gaze.

"I come before this mirror," mused Kull, chin on fist, "and I bring

this man to life. This is beyond my understanding, since first I saw him in the still waters of the lakes of Atlantis, till I saw him again in the gold-rimmed mirrors of Valusia. He is I, a shadow of myself, part of myself—I can bring him into being or slay him at my will; yet" —he halted, strange thoughts whispering through the vast dim recesses of his mind like shadowy bats flying through a great cavern—"yet where is he when I stand not in front of a mirror? May it be in man's power thus lightly to form and destroy a shadow of life and existence? How do I know that when I step back from the mirror he vanishes into the void of Naught?

"Nay, by Valka, am I the man or is he? Which of us is the ghost of the other? Mayhap these mirrors are but windows through which we look into another world. Does he think the same of me? Am I no more than a shadow, a reflection of himself—to him, as he to me? And if I am the ghost, what sort of a world lives upon the other side of this mirror? What armies ride there and what kings rule? This world is all I know. Knowing naught of any other, how can I judge? Surely there are green hills there and booming seas and wide plains where men ride to battle. Tell me, wizard who are wiser than most men, tell me, are there worlds beyond our worlds?"

"A man has eyes, let him see," answered the wizard. "Who would see must first believe."

The hours drifted by and Kull still sat before the mirrors of Tuzun Thune, gazing into that which depicted himself. Sometimes it seemed that he gazed upon hard shallowness; at other times gigantic depths seemed to loom before him. Like the surface of the sea was the mirror of Tuzun Thune; hard as the sea in the sun's slanting beams, in the darkness of the stars, when no eye can pierce her deeps; vast and mystic as the sea when the sun smites her in such way that the watcher's breath is caught at the glimpse of tremendous abysses. So was the mirror in which Kull gazed.

At last the king rose with a sigh and took his departure still wondering. And Kull came again to the House of a Thousand Mirrors; day after day he came and sat for hours before the mirror. The eyes looked out at him, identical with his, yet Kull seemed to sense a difference—a reality that was not of him. Hour upon hour he would stare with strange intensity into the mirror; hour after hour the image gave back his gaze.

The business of the palace and of the council went neglected. The people murmured; Kull's stallion stamped restlessly in his stable and Kulls warriors diced and argued aimlessly with one another. Kull heeded not. At times he seemed on the point of discovering some vast,

unthinkable secret. He no longer thought of the image in the mirror as a shadow of himself; the thing, to him, was an entity, similar in outer appearance, yet basically as far from Kull himself as the poles are far apart. The image, it seemed to Kull, had an individuality apart from Kull's; he was no more dependent on Kull than Kull was dependent on him. And day by day Kull doubted in which world he really lived; was he the shadow, summoned at will by the other? Did he instead of the other live in a world of delusion, the shadow of the real world?

Kull began to wish that he might enter the personality beyond the mirror for a space, to see what might be seen; yet should he manage to go beyond that door could he ever return? Would he find a world identical with the one in which he moved? A world, of which his was but a ghostly reflection? Which was reality and which illusion?

At times Kull halted to wonder how such thoughts and dreams had come to enter his mind and at times he wondered if they came of his own volition or—here his thoughts would become mazed. His meditations were his own; no man ruled his thoughts and he would summon them at his pleasure; yet could he? Were they not as bats, coming and going, not at his pleasure but at the bidding or ruling of—of whom? The gods? The Women who wove the webs of Fate? Kull could come to no conclusion, for at each mental step he became more and more bewildered in a hazy gray fog of illusory assertions and refutations. This much he knew: that strange visions entered his mind, like bats flying unbidden from the whispering void of non-existence; never had he thought these thoughts, but now they ruled his mind, sleeping and waking, so that he seemed to walk in a daze at times; and his sleep was fraught with strange, monstrous dreams.

"Tell me, wizard," he said, sitting before the mirror, eyes fixed intently upon his image, "how can I pass yon door? For of a truth, I am not sure that that is the real world and this the shadow; at least, that which I see must exist in some form."

"See and believe," droned the wizard. "Man must believe to accomplish. Form is shadow, substance is illusion, materiality is dream; man is because he believes he is; what is man but a dream of the gods? Yet man can be that which he wishes to be; form and substance, they are but shadows. The mind, the ego, the essence of the god-dream—that is real, that is immortal. See and believe, if you would accomplish, Kull."

The king did not fully understand; he never fully understood the enigmatical utterances of the wizard, yet they struck somewhere in his being a dim responsive chord. So day after day he sat before the

mirrors of Tuzun Thune. Ever the wizard lurked behind him like a shadow.

Then came a day when Kull seemed to catch glimpses of strange lands; there flitted across his consciousness dim thoughts and recognitions. Day by day he had seemed to lose touch with the world; all things had seemed each succeeding day more ghostly and unreal; only the man in the mirror seemed like reality. Now Kull seemed to be close to the doors of some mightier worlds; giant vistas gleamed fleetingly; the fogs of unreality thinned; "form is shadow, substance is illusion; they are but shadows" sounded as if from some far country of his consciousness. He remembered the wizard's words and it seemed to him that now he almost understood—form and substance, could not he change himself at will, if he knew the master key that opened this door? What worlds within what worlds awaited the bold explorer?

The man in the mirror seemed smiling at him—closer, closer—a fog enwrapped all and the reflection dimmed suddenly—Kull knew a sensation of fading, of change, of merging——

"Kull!" the yell split the silence into a million vibratory fragments!

Mountains crashed and worlds tottered as Kull, hurled back by that frantic shout, made a superhuman effort, how or why he did not know.

A crash, and Kull stood in the room of Tuzun Thune before a shattered mirror, mazed and half blind with bewilderment. There before him lay the body of Tuzun Thune, whose time had come at last, and above him stood Brule the Spear-slayer, sword dripping red and eyes wide with a kind of horror.

"Valka!" swore the warrior. "Kull, it was time I came!"

"Aye, yet what happened!" The king groped for words.

"Ask this traitress," answered the Spear-slayer, indicating a girl who crouched in terror before the king; Kull saw that it was she who first sent him to Tuzun Thune. "As I came in I saw you fading into yon mirror as smoke fades into the sky, by Valka! Had I not seen I would not have believed—you had almost vanished when my shout brought you back."

"Aye," muttered Kull, "I had almost gone beyond the door that time."

"This fiend wrought most craftily," said Brule. "Kull, do you not now see how he spun and flung over you a web of magic? Kaanuub of Blaal plotted with this wizard to do away with you, and this wench, a girl of Elder Race, put the thought in your mind so that you would come here. Kananu of the council learned of the plot today; I know not what you saw in that mirror, but with it Tuzun Thune enthralled your soul and almost by his witchery he changed your body to mist——"

"Aye." Kull was still mazed. "But being a wizard, having knowledge of all the ages and despising gold, glory and position, what could Kaanuub offer Tuzun Thune that would make of him a foul traitor?"

"Gold, power and position," grunted Brule. "The sooner you learn that men are men whether wizard, king or thrall, the better you will rule, Kull. Now what of her?"

"Naught, Brule," as the girl whimpered and groveled at Kull's feet. "She was but a tool. Rise, child, and go your ways; none shall harm you."

Alone with Brule, Kull looked for the last time on the mirrors of Tuzun Thune.

"Mayhap he plotted and conjured, Brule; nay, I doubt you not, yet—was it his witchery that was changing me to thin mist, or had I stumbled on a secret? Had you not brought me back, had I faded in dissolution or had I found worlds beyond this?

Brule stole a glance at the mirrors, and twitched his shoulders as if he shuddered. "Aye. Tuzun Thune stored the wisdom of all the hells here. Let us begone, Kull, ere they bewitch me, too."

"Let us go, then," answered Kull, and side by side they went forth from the House of a Thousand Mirrors—where, mayhap, are prisoned the souls of men.

None look now in the mirrors of Tuzun Thune. The pleasure boats shun the shore where stands the wizard's house and no one goes in the house or to the room where Tuzun Thune's dried and withered carcass lies before the mirrors of illusion. The place is shunned as a place accursed, and though it stands for a thousand years to come, no footsteps shall echo there. Yet Kull upon his throne meditates often upon the strange wisdom and untold secrets hidden there and wonders. . . .

For there are worlds beyond worlds, as Kull knows, and whether the wizard bewitched him by words or by mesmerism, vistas did open to the king's gaze beyond that strange door, and Kull is less sure of reality since he gazed into the mirrors of Tuzun Thune.

In 1934, when the boundaries of American fantasy were still undefined, there appeared in an obscure collectors' journal several lists of the favorite weird stories of leading writers. High up on all of these lists appeared the title of "The Yellow Sign" by Robert W. Chambers. To the uninitiate this was a mystery. Chambers was known to the world only as a writer of popular and historic romances. Therefore whence came this fantasy? Research revealed that back in 1895, Chambers had tried his hand at the Gothic, turning out one rare and treasured volume called "The King in Yellow." This book contained several loosely connected tales, all permeated with such an unusual atmosphere of dread that the late H. P. Lovecraft described them as achieving "notable heights of cosmic fear." Of all these tales, "The Yellow Sign" is surely the most powerful. . . .

The Yellow Sign

by Robert W. Chambers

"Let the red dawn surmise
What we shall do,
When this blue starlight dies
And all is through."

I

THERE are so many things which are impossible to explain! Why should certain chords in music make me think of the brown and golden tints of autumn foliage? Why should the Mass of Sainte Cécile send my thoughts wandering among caverns whose walls blaze with ragged masses of virgin silver? What was it in the roar and turmoil of Broadway at six o'clock that flashed before my eyes the picture of a still Breton forest where sunlight filtered through spring foliage and Silvia bent, half curiously, half tenderly, over a small green lizard, murmuring: "To think that this also is a little ward of God!"?

When I first saw the watchman his back was toward me. I looked at him indifferently until he went into the church. I paid no more attention to him than I had to any other man who lounged through Washington Square that morning, and when I shut my window and turned back into my studio I had forgotten him. Late in the afternoon, the day being warm, I raised the window again and leaned out to get a sniff of air. A man was standing in the courtyard of the church, and I noticed him again with as little interest as I had that morning. I looked

across the square to where the fountain was playing and then, with my mind filled with vague impressions of trees, asphalt drives, and the moving groups of nursemaids and holiday-makers, I started to walk back to my easel. As I turned, my listless glance included the man below in the churchyard. His face was toward me now, and with a perfectly involuntary movement I bent to see it. At the same moment he raised his head and looked at me. Instantly I thought of a coffin-worm. Whatever it was about the man that repelled me I did not know, but the impression of a plump white grave-worm was so intense and nauseating that I must have shown it in my expression, for he turned his puffy face away with a movement which made me think of a disturbed grub in a chestnut.

I went back to my easel and motioned the model to resume her pose. After working awhile I was satisfied that I was spoiling what I had done as rapidly as possible, and I took up a palette knife and scraped the color out again. The flesh tones were sallow and unhealthy, and I did not understand how I could have painted such sickly color into a study which before that had glowed with healthy tones.

I looked at Tessie. She had not changed, and the clear flush of health dyed her neck and cheeks as I frowned.

"Is it something I've done?" she said.

"No—I've made a mess of this arm, and for the life of me I can't see how I came to paint such mud as that into the canvas," I replied.

"Don't I pose well?" she insisted.

"Of course, perfectly."

"Then it's not my fault?"

"No. It's my own."

"I'm very sorry," she said.

I told her she could rest while I applied rag and turpentine to the plague spot on my canvas, and she went off to smoke a cigarette and look over the illustrations in the *Courier Français.*

I did not know whether it was something in the turpentine or a defect in the canvas, but the more I scrubbed the more that gangrene seemed to spread. I worked like a beaver to get it out, and yet the disease appeared to creep from limb to limb of the study before me. Alarmed I strove to arrest it, but now the color on the breast changed and the whole figure seemed to absorb the infection as a sponge soaks up water. Vigorously I plied palette knife, turpentine, and scraper, thinking all the time what a séance I should hold with Duval who had sold me the canvas; but soon I noticed that it was not the canvas which was defective nor yet the colors of Edward. "It must be the turpentine," I thought angrily, "or else my eyes have become so blurred and confused by the afternoon light that I can't see straight." I called Tessie, the model.

She came and leaned over my chair blowing rings of smoke into the air.

"What *have* you been doing to it?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing," I growled, "it must be this turpentine!"

"What a horrible color it is now," she continued. "Do you think my flesh resembles green cheese?"

"No, I don't," I said angrily, "did you ever know me to paint like that before?"

"No, indeed!"

"Well, then!"

"It must be the turpentine, or something," she admitted.

She slipped on a Japanese robe and walked to the window. I scraped and rubbed until I was tired and finally picked up my brushes and hurled them through the canvas with a forcible expression, the tone alone of which reached Tessie's ears.

Nevertheless she promptly began: "That's it! Swear and act silly and ruin your brushes! You have been three weeks on that study, and now look! What's the good of ripping the canvas? What creatures artists are!"

I felt about as much ashamed as I usually did after such an outbreak, and I turned the ruined canvas to the wall. Tessie helped me clean my brushes, and then danced away to dress. From the screen she regaled me with bits of advice concerning whole or partial loss of temper, until, thinking, perhaps, I had been tormented sufficiently, she came out to implore me to button her waist where she could not reach it on the shoulder.

"Everything went wrong from the time you came back from the window and talked about that horrid-looking man you saw in the churchyard," she announced.

"Yes, he probably bewitched the picture," I said, yawning. I looked at my watch.

"It's after six, I know," said Tessie, adjusting her hat before the mirror.

"Yes," I replied, "I didn't mean to keep you so long." I leaned out of the window but recoiled with disgust, for the young man with the pasty face stood below in the churchyard. Tessie saw my gesture of disapproval and leaned from the window.

"Is that the man you don't like?" she whispered.

I nodded.

"I can't see his face, but he does look fat and soft. Someway or other," she continued, turning to look at me, "he reminds me of a dream,—an awful dream I once had. Or," she mused, looking down at her shapely shoes, "was it a dream after all?"

"How should I know?" I smiled.

Tessie smiled in reply.

"You were in it," she said, "so perhaps you might know something about it."

"Tessie! Tessie!" I protested, "don't you dare flatter by saying that you dream about me!"

"But I did," she insisted; "shall I tell you about it?"

"Go ahead," I replied, lighting a cigarette.

Tessie leaned back on the open window-sill and began very seriously.

"One night last winter I was lying in bed thinking about nothing at all in particular. I had been posing for you and I was tired out, yet it seemed impossible for me to sleep. I heard the bells in the city ring ten, eleven and midnight. I must have fallen asleep about midnight because I don't remember hearing the bells after that. It seemed to me that I had scarcely closed my eyes when I dreamed that something impelled me to go to the window. I rose, and raising the sash leaned out. Twenty-fifth Street was deserted as far as I could see. I began to be afraid; everything outside seemed so—so black and uncomfortable. Then the sound of wheels in the distance came to my ears, and it seemed to me as though that was what I must wait for. Very slowly the wheels approached, and, finally, I could make out a vehicle moving along the street. It came nearer and nearer, and when it passed beneath my window I saw it was a hearse. Then, as I trembled with fear, the driver turned and looked straight at me. When I awoke I was standing by the open window shivering with cold, but the black-plumed hearse and the driver were gone. I dreamed this dream again in March last, and again awoke beside the open window. Last night the dream came again. You remember how it was raining; when I awoke, standing at the open window, my night-dress was soaked."

"But where did I come into the dream?" I asked.

"You—you were in the coffin; but you were not dead."

"In the coffin?"

"Yes."

"How did you know? Could you see me?"

"No; I only knew you were there."

"Had you been eating Welsh rarebits, or lobster salad?" I began laughing, but the girl interrupted me with a frightened cry.

"Hello! What's up?" I said, as she shrank into the embrasure by the window.

"The—the man below in the churchyard;—he drove the hearse."

"Nonsense," I said, but Tessie's eyes were wide with terror. I went to the window and looked out. The man was gone. "Come, Tessie," I urged, "don't be foolish. You have posed too long; you are nervous."

"Do you think I could forget that face?" she murmured. "Three

times I saw the hearse pass below my window, and every time the driver turned and looked up at me. Oh, his face was so white and—and soft. It looked dead—it looked as if it had been dead a long time."

I induced the girl to sit down and swallow a glass of Marsala. Then I sat down beside her, and tried to give her some advice.

"Look here, Tessie," I said, "you go to the country for a week or two, and you'll have no more dreams about hearses. You pose all day, and when night comes your nerves are upset. You can't keep this up. Then again, instead of going to bed when your day's work is done, you run off to picnics at Sulzer's Park, or go to the Eldorado or Coney Island, and when you come down here next morning you are fagged out. There was no real hearse. That was a soft-shell crab dream."

She smiled faintly.

"What about the man in the churchyard?"

"Oh, he's only an ordinary unhealthy, everyday creature."

"As true as my name is Tessie Reardon, I swear to you, Mr. Scott, that the face of the man below in the churchyard is the face of the man who drove the hearse!"

"What of it?" I said. "It's an honest trade."

"Then you think I *did* see the hearse?"

"Oh," I said, diplomatically, "if you really did, it might not be unlikely that the man below drove it. There is nothing in that."

Tessie rose, unrolled her scented handkerchief, and taking a bit of gum from a knot in the hem, placed it in her mouth. Then drawing on her gloves she offered me her hand, with a frank, "Good-night, Mr. Scott," and walked out.

II

The next morning, Thomas, the bellboy, brought me the *Herald* and a bit of news. The church next door had been sold. I thanked Heaven for it, not that it being a Catholic I had any repugnance for the congregation next door, but because my nerves were shattered by a blatant exhorter, whose every word echoed through the aisle of the church as if it had been my own rooms, and who insisted on his r's with a nasal persistence which revolted my every instinct. Then, too, there was a fiend in human shape, an organist, who reeled off some of the grand old hymns with an interpretation of his own, and I longed for the blood of a creature who could play the doxology with an amendment of minor chords which one hears only in a quartet of very young undergraduates. I believe the minister was a good man, but when he bellowed: "And the Lorrrd said unto Moses, the Lorrrd is a man of war; the Lorrrd is his name. My wrath shall wax hot and I will kill you

with the sworrrd!" I wondered how many centuries of purgatory it would take to atone for such a sin.

"Who bought the property?" I asked Thomas.

"Nobody that I knows, sir. They do say the gent wot owns this 'ere 'Amilton flats was lookin' at it. 'E might be a bildin' more studios."

I walked to the window. The young man with the unhealthy face stood by the churchyard gate, and at the mere sight of him the same overwhelming repugnance took possession of me.

"By the way, Thomas," I said, "who is that fellow down there?"

Thomas sniffed. "That there worm, sir? 'E's night-watchman of the church, sir. 'E maikes me tired a-sittin' out all night on them steps and lookin' at you insultin' like. I'd a punched 'is 'ed, sir—beg pardon, sir——"

"Go on, Thomas."

"One night a comin' 'ome with 'Arry, the other English boy, I sees 'im a sittin' there on them steps. We 'ad Molly and Jen with us, sir, the two girls on the tray service, an' 'e looks so insultin' at us that I up and sez: 'Wat you looking hat, you fat slug?'—beg pardon, sir, but that's 'ow I sez, sir. Then 'e don't say nothin' and I sez: 'Come out and I'll punch that puddin' 'ed.' Then I hopens the gate an' goes in, but 'e don't say nothin', only looks insultin' like. Then I 'its 'im one, but, ugh! 'is 'ed was that cold and mushy it ud sicken you to touch 'im."

"What did he do then?" I asked, curiously.

" 'Im? Nawthin'."

"And you, Thomas?"

The young fellow flushed with embarrassment and smiled uneasily.

"Mr. Scott, sir, I ain't no coward an' I can't make it out at all why I run. I was in the 5th Lawncers, sir, bugler at Tel-el-Kebir, an' was shot by the wells."

"You don't mean to say you ran away?"

"Yes, sir; I run."

"Why?"

"That's just what I want to know, sir. I grabbed Molly an' run, an' the rest was as frightened as I."

"But what were they frightened at?"

Thomas refused to answer for a while, but now my curiosity was aroused about the repulsive young man below and I pressed him. Three years' sojourn in America had not only modified Thomas' cockney dialect but had given him the American's fear of ridicule.

"You won't believe me, Mr. Scott, sir?"

"Yes, I will."

"You will lawf at me, sir?"

"Nonsense!"

He hesitated. "Well, sir, it's Gawd's truth that when I 'it 'im 'e grabbed me wrists, sir, and when I twisted 'is soft, mushy fist one of 'is fingers come off in me 'and."

The utter loathing and horror of Thomas' face must have been reflected in my own for he added:

"It's orful, an' now when I see 'im I just go away. 'E maikes me hill."

When Thomas had gone I went to the window. The man stood beside the churchrailing with both hands on the gate, but I hastily retreated to my easel again, sickened and horrified, for I saw that the middle finger of his right hand was missing.

At nine o'clock Tessie appeared and vanished behind the screen with a merry "good-morning, Mr. Scott." When she had reappeared and taken her pose upon the model-stand I started a new canvas much to her delight. She remained silent as long as I was on the drawing, but as soon as the scrape of the charcoal ceased and I took up my fixative she began to chatter.

"Oh, I had such a lovely time last night. We went to Tony Pastor's."

"Who are 'we'?" I demanded.

"Oh, Maggie, you know, Mr. Whyte's model, and Pinkie McCormick—we call her Pinkie because she's got that beautiful red hair you artists like so much—and Lizzie Burke."

I sent a shower of spray from the fixative over the canvas, and said: "Well, go on."

"We saw Kelly and Baby Barnes the skirt-dancer and—and all the rest. I made a mash."

"Then you have gone back on me, Tessie?"

She laughed and shook her head.

"He's Lizzie Burke's brother, Ed. He's a perfect gen'l'man."

I felt constrained to give her some parental advice concerning mashing, which she took with a bright smile.

"Oh, I can take care of a strange mash," she said, examining her chewing gum, "but Ed is different. Lizzie is my best friend."

Then she related how Ed had come back from the stocking mill in Lowell, Massachusetts, to find her and Lizzie grown up, and what an accomplished young man he was, and how he thought nothing of squandering half a dollar for ice-cream and oysters to celebrate his entry as clerk into the woollen department of Macy's. Before she finished I began to paint, and she resumed the pose, smiling and chattering like a sparrow. By noon I had the study fairly well rubbed in and Tessie came to look at it.

"That's better," she said.

I thought so too, and ate my lunch with a satisfied feeling that all was going well. Tessie spread her lunch on a drawing table opposite

me and we drank our claret from the same bottle and lighted our cigarettes from the same match. I was very much attached to Tessie. I had watched her shoot up into a slender but exquisitely formed woman from a frail, awkward child. She had posed for me during the last three years, and among all my models she was my favorite. It would have troubled me very much indeed had she become "tough" or "fly," as the phrase goes, but I never noticed any deterioration of her manner, and felt at heart that she was all right. She and I never discussed morals at all, and I had no intention of doing so, partly because I had none myself, and partly because I knew she would do what she liked in spite of me. Still I did hope she would steer clear of complications, because I wished her well, and then also I had a selfish desire to retain the best model I had. I knew that mashing, as she termed it, had no significance with girls like Tessie, and that such things in America did not resemble in the least the same things in Paris. Yet, having lived with my eyes open, I also knew that somebody would take Tessie away some day, in one manner or another, and though I professed to myself that marriage was nonsense, I sincerely hoped that, in this case, there would be a priest at the end of the vista. I am a Catholic. When I listen to high mass, when I sign myself, I feel that everything, including myself, is more cheerful, and when I confess, it does me good. A man who lives as much alone as I do, must confess to somebody. Then, again, Sylvia was Catholic, and it was reason enough for me. But I was speaking of Tessie, which is very different. Tessie also was Catholic and much more devout than I, so, taking it all in all, I had little fear for my pretty model until she should fall in love. But *then* I knew that fate alone would decide her future for her, and I prayed inwardly that fate would keep her away from men like me and throw into her path nothing but Ed Burkes and Jimmy McCormicks, bless her sweet face!

Tessie sat blowing rings of smoke up to the ceiling and tinkling the ice in her tumbler.

"Do you know that I also had a dream last night?" I observed.

"Not about that man," she laughed.

"Exactly. A dream similar to yours, only much worse."

It was foolish and thoughtless of me to say this, but you know how little tact the average painter has.

"I must have fallen asleep about 10 o'clock," I continued, "and after a while I dreamt that I awoke. So plainly did I hear the midnight bells, the wind in the tree-branches, and the whistle of steamers from the bay, that even now I can scarcely believe I was not awake. I seemed to be lying in a box which had a glass cover. Dimly I saw the street lamps as I passed, for I must tell you, Tessie, the box in which I reclined appeared to lie in a cushioned wagon which jolted me over a stony

pavement. After a while I became impatient and tried to move but the box was too narrow. My hands were crossed on my breast so I could not raise them to help myself. I listened and then tried to call. My voice was gone. I could hear the trample of the horses attached to the wagon and even the breathing of the driver. Then another sound broke upon my ears like the raising of a window sash. I managed to turn my head a little, and found I could look, not only through the glass cover of my box, but also through the glass panes in the side of the covered vehicle. I saw houses, empty and silent, with neither light nor life about any of them excepting one. In that house a window was open on the first floor and a figure all in white stood looking down into the street. It was you."

Tessie had turned her face away from me and leaned on the table with her elbow.

"I could see your face," I resumed, "and it seemed to me to be very sorrowful. Then we passed on and turned into a narrow black lane. Presently the horses stopped. I waited and waited, closing my eyes with fear and impatience, but all was silent as the grave. After what seemed to me hours, I began to feel uncomfortable. A sense that somebody was close to me made me unclose my eyes. Then I saw the white face of the hearse-driver looking at me through the coffin-lid——"

A sob from Tessie interrupted me. She was trembling like a leaf. I saw I had made an ass of myself and attempted to repair the damage.

"Why, Tess," I said, "I only told you this to show you what influence your story might have on another person's dreams. You don't suppose I really lay in a coffin, do you? What are you trembling for? Don't you see that your dream and my unreasonable dislike for that inoffensive watchman of the church simply set my brain working as soon as I fell asleep?"

She laid her head between her arms and sobbed as if her heart would break. What a precious triple donkey I had made of myself! But I was about to break my record. I went over and put my arm about her.

"Tessie dear, forgive me," I said; "I had no business to frighten you with such nonsense. You are too sensible a girl, too good a Catholic to believe in dreams."

Her hand tightened on mine and her head fell back upon my shoulder, but she still trembled and I petted her and comforted her.

"Come, Tess, open your eyes and smile."

Her eyes opened with a slow languid movement and met mine, but their expression was so queer that I hastened to reassure her again.

"It's all humbug, Tessie, you surely are not afraid that any harm will come to you because of that."

"No," she said, but her scarlet lips quivered.

"Then what's the matter? Are you afraid?"

"Yes. Not for myself."

"For me, then?" I demanded gayly.

"For you," she murmured in a voice almost inaudible, "I—I care for you."

At first I started to laugh, but when I understood her, a shock passed through me and I sat like one turned to stone. This was the crowning bit of idiocy I had committed. During the moment which elapsed between her reply and my answer I thought of a thousand responses to that innocent confession. I could pass it by with a laugh, I could misunderstand her and reassure her as to my health, I could simply point out that it was impossible she could love me. But my reply was quicker than my thoughts, and I might think and think now when it was too late, for I had kissed her on the mouth.

That evening I took my usual walk in Washington Park, pondering over the occurrences of the day. I was thoroughly committed. There was no back out now, and I stared the future straight in the face. I was not good, not even scrupulous, but I had no idea of deceiving either myself or Tessie. The one passion of my life lay buried in the sunlit forests of Brittany. Was it buried forever? Hope cried "No!" For three years I had been listening to the voice of Hope, and for three years I had waited for a footstep on my threshold. Had Sylvia forgotten? "No!" cried Hope.

I said that I was not good. That is true, but still I was not exactly a comic opera villain. I had led an easy-going reckless life, taking what invited me of pleasure, deploring and sometimes bitterly regretting consequences. In one thing alone, except my painting, was I serious, and that was something which lay hidden if not lost in the Breton forests.

It was too late now for me to regret what had occurred during the day. Whatever it had been, pity, a sudden tenderness for sorrow, or the more brutal instinct of gratified vanity, it was all the same now, and unless I wished to bruise an innocent heart my path lay marked before me. The fire and strength, the depth of passion of a love which I had never even suspected, with all my imagined experience in the world, left me no alternative but to respond or send her away. Whether because I am so cowardly about giving pain to others, or whether it was that I have little of the gloomy Puritan in me, I do not know, but I shrank from disclaiming responsibility for that thoughtless kiss, and in fact had no time to do so before the gates of her heart opened and the flood poured forth. Others who habitually do their duty and find a sullen satisfaction in making themselves and everybody else unhappy, might have withstood it. I did not. I dared not. After the

storm had abated I did tell her that she might better have loved Ed Burke and worn a plain gold ring, but she would not hear of it, and I thought perhaps that as long as she had decided to love somebody she could not marry, it had better be me. I, at least, could treat her with an intelligent affection, and whenever she became tired of her infatuation she could go none the worse for it. For I was decided on that point although I knew how hard it would be. I remembered the usual termination of Platonic liaisons and thought how disgusted I had been whenever I heard of one. I knew I was undertaking a great deal for so unscrupulous a man as I was, and I dreaded the future, but never for one moment did I doubt that she was safe with me. Had it been anybody but Tessie I should not have bothered my head about scruples. For it did not occur to me to sacrifice Tessie as I would have sacrificed a woman of the world. I looked the future squarely in the face and saw the several probable endings to the affair. She would either tire of the whole thing, or become so unhappy that I should have either to marry her or go away. If I married her we would be unhappy. I with a wife unsuited to me, and she with a husband unsuitable for any woman. For my past life could scarcely entitle me to marry. If I went away she might either fall ill, recover, and marry some Eddie Burke, or she might recklessly or deliberately go and do something foolish. On the other hand if she tired of me, then her whole life would be before her with beautiful vistas of Eddie Burkes and marriage rings and twins and Harlem flats and Heaven knows what. As I strolled along through the trees by the Washington Arch, I decided that she should find a substantial friend in me anyway and the future could take care of itself. Then I went into the house and put on my evening dress, for the little faintly perfumed note on my dresser said, "Have a cab at the stage door at eleven," and the note was signed "Edith Carmichel, Metropolitan Theatre."

I took supper that night, or rather we took supper, Miss Carmichel and I, at Solari's and the dawn was just beginning to gild the cross on the Memorial Church as I entered Washington Square after leaving Edith at the Brunswick. There was not a soul in the park as I passed among the trees and took the walk which leads from the Garibaldi statue to the Hamilton Apartment House, but as I passed the churchyard I saw a figure sitting on the stone steps. In spite of myself a chill crept over me at the sight of the white puffy face, and I hastened to pass. Then he said something which might have been addressed to me or might merely have been a mutter to himself, but a sudden furious anger flamed up within me that such a creature should address me. For an instant I felt like wheeling about and smashing my stick

over his head, but I walked on, and entering the Hamilton went to my apartment. For some time I tossed about the bed trying to get the sound of his voice out of my ears, but could not. It filled my head, that muttering sound, like thick oily smoke from a fat-rendering vat or an odor of noisome decay. And as I lay and tossed about, the voice in my ears seemed more distinct, and I began to understand the words he had muttered. They came to me slowly as if I had forgotten them, and at last I could make some sense out of the sounds. It was this:

"Have you found the Yellow Sign?"

"Have you found the Yellow Sign?"

"Have you found the Yellow Sign?"

I was furious. What did he mean by that? Then with a curse upon him and his I rolled over and went to sleep, but when I awoke later I looked pale and haggard, for I had dreamed the dream of the night before and it troubled me more than I cared to think.

I dressed and went down into my studio. Tessie sat by the window, but as I came in she rose and put both arms around my neck for an innocent kiss. She looked so sweet and dainty that I kissed her again and then sat down before the easel.

"Hello! Where's the study I began yesterday?" I asked.

Tessie looked conscious, but did not answer. I began to hunt among the piles of canvases, saying, "Hurry up, Tess, and get ready; we must take advantage of the morning light."

When at last I gave up the search among the other canvases and turned to look around the room for the missing study I noticed Tessie standing by the screen with her clothes still on.

"What's the matter," I asked, "don't you feel well?"

"Yes."

"Then hurry."

"Do you want me to pose as—as I have always posed?"

Then I understood. Here was a new complication. I had lost, of course, the best nude model I had ever seen. I looked at Tessie. Her face was scarlet. Alas! Alas! We had eaten of the tree of knowledge, and Eden and native innocence were dreams of the past—I mean for her.

I suppose she noticed the disappointment on my face, for she said: "I will pose if you wish. The study is behind the screen here where I put it."

"No," I said, "we will begin something new"; and I went into my wardrobe and picked out a Moorish costume which fairly blazed with tinsel. It was a genuine costume, and Tessie retired to the screen with it enchanted. When she came forth again I was astonished. Her long black hair was bound above her forehead with a circlet of turquoises,

and the ends curled about her glittering girdle. Her feet were encased in the embroidered pointed slippers and the skirt of her costume, curiously wrought with arabesques in silver, fell to her ankles. The deep metallic blue vest, embroidered with silver, and the short Mauresque jacket, spangled and sewn with turquoises, became her wonderfully. She came up to me and held up her face smiling. I slipped my hand into my pocket and, drawing out a gold chain with a cross attached, dropped it over her head.

"It's yours, Tessie."

"Mine?" she faltered.

"Yours. Now go and pose." Then with a radiant smile she ran behind the screen and presently re-appeared with a little box on which was written my name.

"I had intended to give it to you when I went home tonight," she said, "but I can't wait now."

I opened the box. On the pink cotton inside lay a clasp of black onyx, on which was inlaid a curious symbol or letter in gold. It was neither Arabic nor Chinese, nor as I found afterwards did it belong to any human script.

"It's all I had to give you for a keepsake," she said, timidly

I was annoyed, but I told her how much I should prize it, and promised to wear it always. She fastened it on my coat beneath the lapel.

"How foolish, Tess, to go and buy me such a beautiful thing as this," I said.

"I did not buy it," she laughed.

"Where did you get it?"

Then she told me how she had found it one day while coming from the Aquarium in the Battery, how she had advertised it and watched the papers, but at last gave up all hopes of finding the owner.

"That was last winter," she said, "the very day I had the first horrid dream about the hearse."

I remembered my dream of the previous night but said nothing, and presently my charcoal was flying over a new canvas, and Tessie stood motionless on the model stand.

III

The day following was a disastrous one for me. While moving a framed canvas from one easel to another my foot slipped on the polished floor and I fell heavily on both wrists. They were so badly sprained that it was useless to attempt to hold a brush, and I was obliged to wander about the studio, glaring at unfinished drawings and sketches until despair seized me and I sat down to smoke and

twiddle my thumbs with rage. The rain blew against the windows and rattled on the roof of the church, driving me into a nervous fit with its interminable patter. Tessie sat sewing by the window, and every now and then raised her head and looked at me with such innocent compassion that I began to feel ashamed of my irritation and looked about for something to occupy me. I had read all the papers and all the books in the library, but for the sake of something to do I went to the bookcases and shoved them open with my elbow. I knew every volume by its color and examined them all, passing slowly around the library and whistling to keep up my spirits. I was turning to go into the dining-room when my eye fell upon a book bound in serpent skin, standing in a corner of the top shelf of the last bookcase. I did not remember it and from the floor could not decipher the pale lettering on the back, so I went to the smoking-room and called Tessie. She came in from the studio and climbed up to reach the book.

"What is it?" I asked.

" 'The King in Yellow,' "

I was dumbfounded. Who had placed it there? How came it in my rooms? I had long ago decided that I should never open that book, and nothing on earth could have persuaded me to buy it. Fearful lest curiosity might tempt me to open it, I had never even looked at it in book-stores. If I ever had had any curiosity to read it, the awful tragedy of young Castaigne, whom I knew, prevented me from exploring its wicked pages. I had always refused to listen to any description of it, and indeed, nobody ever ventured to discuss the second part aloud, so I had absolutely no knowledge of what those leaves might reveal. I stared at the poisonous mottled binding as I would at a snake.

"Don't touch it, Tessie," I said; "come down."

Of course my admonition was enough to arouse her curiosity, and before I could prevent it she took the book and, laughing, danced off into the studio with it, I called to her but she slipped away with a tormenting smile at my helpless hands, and I followed her with some impatience.

"Tessie!" I cried, entering the library, "listen, I am serious. Put that book away. I do not wish you to open it!" The library was empty. I went into both drawing-rooms, then into the bedrooms, laundry, kitchen and finally returned to the library and began a systematic search. She had hidden herself so well that it was half an hour later when I discovered her crouching white and silent by the latticed window in the store-room above. At the first glance I saw she had been punished for her foolishness. "The King in Yellow" lay at her feet, but the book was open at the second part. I looked at Tessie and saw

it was too late. She had opened "The King in Yellow." Then I took her by the hand and led her into the studio. She seemed dazed, and when I told her to lie down on the sofa she obeyed me without a word. After a while she closed her eyes and her breathing became regular and deep, but I could not determine whether or not she slept. For a long while I sat silently beside her, but she neither stirred nor spoke, and at last I rose and entering the unused store-room took the book in my least injured hand. It seemed heavy as lead, but I carried it into the studio again, and sitting down on the rug beside the sofa, opened it and read it through from beginning to end.

When, faint with the excess of my emotions, I dropped the volume and leaned wearily back against the sofa, Tessie opened her eyes and looked at me. * * * * * *

We had been speaking for some time in a dull monotonous strain before I realized that we were discussing "The King in Yellow." Oh the sin of writing such words,—words which are clear as crystal, limpid and musical as bubbling springs, words which sparkle and glow like the poisoned diamonds of the Medicis! Oh the wickedness, the hopeless damnation of a soul who could fascinate and paralyze human creatures with such words,—words understood by the ignorant and wise alike, words which are more precious than jewels, more soothing than music, more awful than death!

We talked on, unmindful of the gathering shadows, and she was begging me to throw away the clasp of black onyx quaintly inlaid with what we now knew to be the Yellow Sign. I never shall know why I refused, though even at this hour, here in my bedroom as I write this confession, I should be glad to know *what* it was that prevented me from tearing the Yellow Sign from my breast and casting it into the fire. I am sure I wished to do so, and yet Tessie pleaded with me in vain. Night fell and the hours dragged on, but still we murmured to each other of the King and the Pallid Mask, and midnight sounded from the misty spires in the fog-wrapped city. We spoke of Hastur and of Cassilda, while outside the fog rolled against the blank window-panes as the cloud waves roll and break on the shores of Hali.

The house was very silent now and not a sound came up from the misty streets. Tessie lay among the cushions, her face a gray blot in the gloom, but her hands were clasped in mine and I knew that she knew and read my thoughts as I read hers, for we had understood the mystery of the Hyades and the Phantom of Truth was laid. Then as we answered each other, swiftly, silently, thought on thought, the shadows stirred in the gloom about us, and far in the distant streets we heard a sound. Nearer and nearer it came, the dull crunching

wheels, nearer and yet nearer, and now, outside before the door it ceased, and I dragged myself to the window and saw a black-plumed hearse. The gate below opened and shut, and I crept shaking to my door and bolted it, but I knew no bolts, no locks, could keep that creature out who was coming for the Yellow Sign. And now I heard him moving very softly along the hall. Now he was at the door, and the bolts rotted at his touch. Now he had entered. With eyes starting from my head I peered into the darkness, but when he came into the room I did not see him. It was only when I felt him envelop me in his cold soft grasp that I cried out and struggled with deadly fury, but my hands were useless and he tore the onyx clasp from my coat and struck me full in the face. Then, as I fell, I heard Tessie's soft cry and her spirit fled: and even while falling I longed to follow her, for I knew that the King in Yellow had opened his tattered mantle and there was only God to cry to now.

I could tell more, but I cannot see what help it will be to the world. As for me, I am past human help or hope. As I lie here, writing, careless even whether or not I die before I finish, I can see the doctor gathering up his powders and phials with a vague gesture to the good priest beside me, which I understand.

They will be very curious to know the tragedy—they of the outside world who write books and print millions of newspapers, but I shall write no more, and the father confessor will seal my last words with the seal of sanctity when his holy office is done. They of the outside world may send their creatures into wrecked homes and death-smitten firesides, and their newspapers will batten on blood and tears, but with me their spies must halt before the confessional. They know that Tessie is dead and that I am dying. They know how the people in the house, aroused by an infernal scream, rushed into my room and found one living and two dead, but they do not know what I shall tell them now; they do not know that the doctor said as he pointed to a horrible decomposed heap on the floor—the livid corpse of the watchman from the church: "I have no theory, no explanation. That man must have been dead for months!"

* * * * * * *

I think I am dying. I wish the priest would——

S. Fowler Wright is one of the world's outstanding authors of science-fiction novels. His vision of the future in "The World Below" is unparalleled for its strange, chillingly inhuman atmosphere. His novels "Deluge" and "Dawn" are classic world-disaster tales. Not as widely known, however, are his many remarkable short stories dealing with imaginative projections. In presenting Wright's probe into one of the possible outcomes of the ever-increasing dependence of mankind on machinery, your editor is aware of the disturbing feelings that always pursue him on considering the problem. Read "Automata" yourself and then see whether you can watch steel gears go round and ever again feel truly at ease.

Automata

by S. Fowler Wright

THE annual meeting of the British Association was being held at Sheffield, and the learned members were assembled to hear the presidential address of Dr. Tilwin, who had shaken the foundations of scientific complacency at the Brighton gathering of the previous year, by a casual allusion to "the two obvious fallacies in the theory of relativity."

He was too eminent a mathematician to be disregarded and the scientific world had waited impatiently for a justification of that audacious challenge, which had appeared only a few weeks earlier, and concerning which none of the nine persons in England who professed (rightly or not) to understand the assaulted theory had yet ventured an opinion.

Now it was hoped that the new president would use the occasion for a further elucidation of the startling heresy which he had put forward. Were they to be persuaded back to the childish levels of Newton, or led to unimagined heights of mathematical complexity?

Even the popular belief that two and two make four might not be

left unchallenged. All that is certainly known is that they have done so very frequently. The rule is not therefore proved to be invariable, nor, could it be shown that it has been so in the past, would it be a logical consequence that it must be always so in the future.

But Dr. Tilwin made no further assault upon Einstein's incomprehensible stronghold.

He commenced, instead, to direct the attention of his audience to the results of modern scientific discoveries as they had materialized themselves in the changed conditions of human life, and then, more specifically, as they had developed the instruments of production and labor, first substituting inorganic for organic sources of energy, and then inorganic for organic media for its practical implement.

The assembly listened at first with a somewhat tepid interest. They understood that the age of machinery was being eulogized, as an almost necessary compliment to the occupations of the city in which they met, and they expected that the address would pass on to other more disputable or fruitful fields, but they stirred themselves with a quickened observation as their president continued to develop the topic he had commenced, and to conduct it, with unemotional logic, to its somber end.

"The earlier inventors of mechanical apparatus," he was now saying, "asserted confidently that their advantages to mankind would result in an increase in population, and this fallacy was supported for a time by the fact that large numbers were enabled to congregate in centers around which there was no sufficient area of fertile land to feed them.

"Yet, even then, the writing was on the wall. Around these urban areas stretched mile after mile of green countryside on which a healthy peasantry shrank and dwindled as the powers of steam and petrol were substituted for that of human muscles. Gone were the merry crowds of the English hayfields, and the dead hands that had wielded the harvest-sickle had no descendants.

"When it was found that the few who were left could not, under the new conditions, grow the food which was their only merchandise, in successful competition with the supplies of distant lands, their countrymen were indifferent. Let them starve or cease. War brought famine, and there was a short-lived reaction. Then the spectacle of a race destroying its most virile elements for a delusion of profit was resumed and the declension continued.

"It is true that the rapid disappearance of the horse was observed as a direct consequence of the substitution of inorganic for organic energy, but its significance was disregarded.

"Even today, there may be few of us who have realized that it is not the horse alone which is destined to disappear before the advance of a

higher energistic form, that we ourselves in a few generations—probably in a very few generations—are destined to follow. . . . Yet the process of our destruction has commenced already.

"It is true that fears have been expressed lest the advance of knowledge should provide us with explosive substances, with bacterial cultures, or vaporous poisons, by which we might contrive our own annihilation. But it is difficult to suppose that an overruling Providence would permit our disappearance before we have fulfilled the high destiny of our evolution, and have occupied the earth with such a race of automata as will continue to function and to develop,—to what ends we can only dimly imagine,—without the need of our continued service.

". . . I have said that the process of our destruction has commenced already. Already Nature, working in her kindly, gradual ways, is preparing us to face not individual, but racial extinction without excessive protest, or too-keen regret. The old ideal of the home is fading. The old superstition of the value or necessity of children is leaving, if it has not already left, our minds.

"Our fathers thought no shame to let the plow-horse die, finding that the power of steam could be successfully substituted for a creature which had the pains and pleasures, the impulses and imperfections, of a sentient life. Our children think no shame to say that they will have a child less that they may have an auto-car the more. Some of the machines that we have designed already are employed in manufacturing appliances to frustrate the natural fertility of the race.

"The day of the substitution of the machine for the human body is not a vision of the future, a speculation of the philosopher. It is already upon us.

". . . It is the control of motion which has first betrayed us. We constructed machines which would move our possessions. Then our machines commenced to manufacture others which were adapted to move ourselves. The population of the machines has increased until they can be counted in millions; we are content to climb into them, and to be moved backwards and forwards continually, as gnats whirl in the sun.

". . . But, as yet, we may observe with some satisfaction that they are dependent upon our service. They can not move unless we put the food into their bellies, and we can stop or turn them with a motion of our hand.

"Yet how long can this balance of power continue? How long shall we be able to observe this pause of uncertainty, during which it may be hard to say whether the man exists for the machine, or the machine for the man?

"Already the tide is on the turn.

"It is not only that the automata have been constructed which in clumsy, limited ways can perform some human actions, or produce some vocal sounds.

"It is more significant that the number of men who are employed in every factory decreases as its machines become more numerous.

"The capstan lathe may require a workman's individual attention. The automatic lathe is capable of a great variety of independent operations, and a team of these, industriously occupied, may be content with the menial service of a single attendant.

"The humility of science will hesitate to prophesy the detailed incidence of that which may be seen in its inevitable outline, but it may not be a too-rash guess that the industrial workman and the domestic servant will be the first to disappear from their places in the national life. Some few may remain for generations, even for centuries. But is it reasonable to suppose that the nation will continue altruistically to support the persons and families of industrial workers who are no longer needed? For themselves, there may be some generous provisions to avert the euthanasia which would be the evident economic expedient for the aged horse, or the dog of which a woman has grown tired, but would it be tolerable that we should allow the propagation of their useless children?

"Or consider, how many would there be who would continue the employment of the domestic servant, idle, wasteful, dirty and unreliable as they too often are, merely that the population might not diminish, when there would be automatic substitutes available, which would not only be free from such faults, but would require no "evenings out," no annual increase in wages, and could be put away if the house were closed, without requiring the continued supply of food or fuel?"

At this point Sir Ireton Mount looked at the illustrious author of Sheerluck Soames, who was seated beside him. They shook their massive heads in a troubled wonder. Their colossal intellects told them that such developments were logical enough. But why had the spirits given no hint to their faithful servants? They went out to consult Pheneas.

II

Bellorina was a woman of a weak sentimentality, which had caused her to expand the free allotment of seventeen units of energy, which was the maturity-portion which every woman of the community was entitled to claim on allocation, in the erection of a personal home, modeled on the expiring traditions of the aborigines of the Twentieth

Century. It was built of oblong red bricks, with a tiled and sloping roof. Its rooms were of irregular sizes, and were disfigured by many ingle-nooks, "exposed" oak beams, and the remains of a bread-oven. It had a feeding-table, and quaint crockery utensils, instead of the usual nutrition-pumps. Even the automata which waited upon her were of the oldest patterns, finished in imitation of the living maid-servants of that remote period to which her mind reverted. The outside of the house was patched with flowers and shorn grass, and groups of senseless and insanitary trees. Appropriately enough, after what she knew to be the way of the ultra-esthetic Georgians, she had called it Daisy Villa.

Today, Bellorina had invited three female acquaintances, who, like herself, were not on the mating-list of the week, to join her at an "afternoon tea" so that the illusion of savagery might be completely realized.

They were all allocated women, with a full knowledge of life, and sure to talk freely and scandalously when they got together

Bora-Ann came a few minutes before the others, as the dignity of her suffix required, and waited without complaint when the door (which should have opened in response to the secret word of invitation in F sharp) remained closed till she pressed the push, and an automaton, dressed in black with a white apron and cap, had promptly responded.

She did not falter in her courteous approbation, even when a child, with the appearance of a girl of five or six years, met her in the hall, and held out a timid hand, saying, "Good-afternoon, Mrs. Bora-Ann," in a gay Georgian voice. She did not know what the "Mrs." meant, for the folly of studying past history was no longer general, but she understood that this was the sort of thing which was supposed to happen in the old barbarous days, and she stooped good humoredly for the small lifted arms to go round her neck, and kissed the soft cheek kindly.

The queer little room was windowed but a loggia reduced its light, and an obsolete electric bulb glowed from the ceiling, for it was winter twilight without. The corners of the room were in shadow, and Bora-Ann, who had never known an actual darkness, controlled her fear with some difficulty, as she fitted herself, with commendable agility, into the wicker-chair which her hostess indicated for her reception.

"How sweet everything is!" she said kindly; "it was almost like a real flesh-child in the hall. . . ." Then her voice changed to a half-fearful excited note, as the thought came, *"It wasn't a real flesh-child, was it?"*

The question remained unanswered for a moment, for Mira and Scarletta came in together, and chairs had to be drawn out, and their

uses indicated; then Bellorina answered, with a laugh which was not free from embarrassment "Oh, no; I'm not quite so mad as that. . . . Not in the hall, anyway. You couldn't tell what would happen. . . . But it's a very good imitation. I've got two, really. They can say almost anything, and are never seriously disobedient. They oil themselves, and charge each other's batteries at bedtime. They're really no trouble at all."

"I was speaking to someone yesterday," said Hira, who was always indefinite as to her sources of information, "who told me that the man she had last week told her that he had a woman the week before who told him that she knew a woman,—I can't be sure, but I believe it's that blue-banded scratchcat at Pity Rise. It couldn't be anyone else in our country. They say she's so coarse that she had the same man twice in one year when the lists were altered,—I told Biltie last night that I'm sure it's she, and Biltie told Agra-Ann this morning that he knows it for a fact,—who had a flesh-child five years ago, and the woman said she believes it's still there."

"I daresay it's true enough," said Scarletta, hopefully. "They say that flesh-children are almost common in some parts of Italy. I don't think that anyone has more than one, and, of course, they have two or three automata for them to play with. But it's an endless trouble to all concerned. Flesh-children are dirty things, and they won't keep the same size, and sometimes they die altogether. They say you can't imagine what has to be done for them the first year or so, to keep them going at all. I suppose there have to be a few somewhere, but it's hard to think that a decent woman should have one."

"It isn't only the coarseness of it," Mira answered. "It's difficult to understand any woman being so silly. The automata make each other so well now, that there's no excuse for anyone messing with a flesh-child. Since the mathematicians perfected the law of the Automatic Balance of Deviation——"

"I don't understand mathematics," her hostess interposed, "and I know Scarletta hates them. Of course, Bora-Ann"—she smiled deferentially at the woman whose suffix placed her among the intellectual aristocracy of her time—"but there isn't any real need for us humans to worry about such things now, is there? Sartie told me that the automata can work out problems that no man could possibly even attempt. He says it's because they're not distracted with feelings and jealousies, and help each other instead of quarreling. And they don't get tired, and make mistakes. Sartie says we shan't be needed much longer, even to make them. . . . Of course, evolution's right enough, and I know I'm silly, but it all seems rather dreadful to me. I wish I'd got a body that lasts, or could have a new valve when the old one wears out. And—

I know you'll laugh at me, but I almost wish I'd got a flesh-child, or even two. The automata are both very sweet and loving, and they're no trouble at all, but it must be rather fun to watch them change as they grow,—and—to comfort them when they cry."

Bora-Ann moved uneasily. She was a guest, and she would be sorry to hear anything which might involve report and repression. She resisted an inclination to change the subject. She felt that it would be cowardly to do so. Such a position should be handled kindly, but firmly.

"I don't think," she answered, "that you quite realize what you say. The unhealthy atmosphere in which we are sitting may go far to explain it. But you are right that the automata can solve problems which are far beyond the capacity of the human mind, and some of the newest are so constructed that they can themselves design any machine which is needed to carry out their own conceptions. . . . There is a difference between the greatest man and the simplest machine which can never be bridged, and our highest wisdom is to observe it with reverence and humility. It is not a difference in degree, but in kind. We act from confused and contradictory impulses, but they act with the inevitability of universal law. In a word, we are human, and they are divine."

She made the sacred sign as she said it, and observed with satisfaction that the hand of her hostess was lifted also. It was, at least, no house of open blasphemy into which she had entered. . . . But she resolved that a suggestion which she had intended to make should remain unspoken. It had been calculated that twenty human attendants would be required by their masters for certain menial offices in the next generation, for which provision had not yet been made, and she had been commissioned to obtain twenty women volunteers to produce them. She had thought of Bellorina at once as one who would be less likely than most of her acquaintances to resent the indignity of such a proposal. But she was a woman of religious mind, and she saw that Bellorina was morally unfit for such a motherhood. She turned the subject adroitly by remarking that the Bliskie trial would commence on Tuesday.

"I don't believe he did it on purpose," Scarletta started at once. "I think it's a shame to try him. I know I should make mistakes continually."

"It was bad enough for Corinna, anyway," said Mira; "you can't expect her not to complain. If you were put into the wrong operating-machine, and found you'd left half your thyroid behind when you only wanted a cancer taken out of your liver——"

"Well, he says he forgot the numbers of the machine for a moment. He'd never made a mistake before in over twenty years," Scarletta persisted.

"But you know they say that he'd quarreled with Corinna the week before, and she said she knew he'd play her some trick before she entered," Bellorina felt it only fair to remind her.

"It all shows the importance of eliminating the human element," said Bora-Ann, who saw it to be a lesson which her companions needed. "A machine is not merely incapable of a spiteful action, it is so far above it that the very suspicion would be an absurdity; nor could it make such a mistake as the man suggests in his own defense,—if such it can be called. To my mind it condemns him more utterly than if he admitted the accusation. But I believe that a proper automaton is already being designed to replace him, so that we need have no fear for ourselves in future."

Bellorina sighed silently. She knew that it was wrong to doubt, and she was really sorry for the misadventure of Corinna's thyroid. She realized the defects of her race. If only she had the intellect of Bora-Ann, no doubt it would be easier to believe. . . . After all, she had the prettiest hair in the Thames valley, or so Gartie had told her. . . . And Gartie would be hers for a week from next Tuesday. . . . In the end, what matters?

. . . She became aware that her thoughts had wandered, and her guests were rising. "Must you really go?" she was saying.

It may be that nothing does.

III

The last—the nameless last—of a dying race, the man sat before his drawing-board, idly fingering his compasses, forgetful of the uncompleted task which the overseer had set him, while his aging mind went backward.

He might be the last of his kind . . . he knew that it was a sign of weakness to regret it. The fact that his mind was wandering now was a sign of his inferiority to the busy mechanisms around him. His mind was lawless and unstable in a universe in which law and order were supreme and final.

There were some men who had seen this, even in the crude beginnings of the age of machinery. They had taught that everything is controlled at last by Natural Laws which are both blind and inflexible.

Men had foolishly imagined an ultimate supremacy of their own blundering bodies;—even, in their incredible egotism, they had postulated an anthropomorphic God.

Yet, in a universe where law and order rule, the precision of the machine—even of the earliest and crudest constructions—must have been superior—in greater harmony with their environment—than

were bodies so clumsily constructed that they can not be trusted to repeat the simplest operations with the exactitude of time or movement. Bodies easy to break, difficult to control or repair.

Dimly they had seen, even then, in a universe which is itself a machine, working by mathematical, unchanging law, the absurdity of an emotional anthropomorphic God.

Yet they had not seen far ahead, at the first.

The steam-plow came, and the petrol-drawn car, and the horse died out to make place for these mechanisms. Few men had realized that the doom of their own race was logically foreshadowed, and that nothing could save them but a war sufficiently disastrous to destroy the world's machinery and the conditions which could produce it.

But such wars as came had only resulted in the subjection of the backward tribes who had not learned the new worship. The industrial worker had disappeared before the pressure of economic law; the domestic servant before the dictates of fashion.

Even in the earliest days the new worship had been established, although it was not then recognized that a new and higher faith had superseded the old superstitions. When the new Moloch called for blood-sacrifice it had been paid without protest or regret, though it would not have been easily satisfied. It sucked blood very greedily, not of single sacrifice as on the Hittite altars of old, but the blood of thousands. When it was thought (in error) that a system of one-way traffic might be conducive to its speed and comfort, the blood of an extra hundred of Londoners had not been grudged to the trial, though their deaths had been foreseen and fore-calculated.

Ships had already been manipulated without crews, and airplanes controlled without pilots, and where the helmsmen had gone the chauffeur had very quickly followed.

Of course there had been anger—protest—rebellion. There had been populations, particularly in some of the old urban areas, that had persisted in the production of useless insanitary children. But such revolts had been futile. The machines had been invincible, and the men who fought beside them had shared their triumph. Even those early machines, directed and controlled by the men who made them, had been irresistible. They had not cried out when they were hurt, they had not slept when on duty. They belonged to a higher natural order than mankind.

. . . Soon it would be a world of machines from which the memory of mankind had died. He did not know that he was the last man living. How should he? But he knew that the last of human births was behind him.

A world of machines—to his feeble, futile brain it seemed lacking

in purpose. Yet he knew, as his ancestors had perceived, that the universe is without consciousness. Scientists had realized, even then, that sentient life is a sporadic outbreak, which, if it has ever occurred, or will do so, elsewhere is almost incredibly remote and occasional, a mere outbreak of cheese-mites, a speck of irritation, a moment's skin-disease on the healthy body of a universe of never-changing law.

. . . He remembered the Crawlers. They had been no larger than a man. Their smooth skins had been impenetrable to anything less than a high-explosive shell. Their mandibles were a 20 H.P. vise, yet so softly padded, so gradual in operation, that they could be trusted to strangle the throat they seized without breaking the skin, and to loose it when pulsation ceased, and they fulfilled their purpose. A dozen of these let loose in the rebellious slums had soon checked their foolish fecundity. Then there had been—but his mind turned from the thought. They had been rather horrible in their operations;—but effectual, as machines are.

The hypnotic method by which the Eastern races had been led to destroy themselves to the accompaniment of their own laughter had been a pleasanter thing to watch.

Deus ex machina,—the human race has always had a subconscious knowledge of its own deficiency. It was shown in their clumsy efforts at patterning: in their desire for repetitions of any kind: by the way in which they would snap and worry at anyone who deviated in word or garment: or in the stubborn continuation of a custom after need and meaning had left it.

But the time of rebellion had passed, and resignation had followed. Resignation,—and worship.

Worship had been gradual in its growth, but inevitable. Even in the early days of the Twentieth Century man had stood in silent adoration around the machines that had self-produced a newspaper or a needle. . . . And at that time they could no more have conceived what was to follow than the first ape that drew the sheltering branches together could foresee the dim magnificence of a cathedral dome. But even then they were displacing the anthropomorphic God, and preparing for the occupation of a vacant throne. . . .

He wakened guiltily from his wandering thoughts as the bell rang that announced the coming of the messenger that would collect the work of the day. . . . Only five of the six drawings were ready. He did not know what would follow. Would they scrap him in the consequence? He knew that he had been quite safe so long as he had been regular in his habits, and exact in his work.

It was all law now,—blind law. No emotion—no injustice: no

caprice. Had the intricate evolutions of self-designing machinery provided for this unprecedented failure?

He became aware that the collector was standing beside him. It would not wait. Starting hurriedly, he dropped the folded sheets into the slot that opened to take them. One—two—three—four—five.

The collector paused for a moment longer, giving time enough for the sixth sheet to follow. A wild and impious thought leaped into the brain of the delinquent. Might he not drop a blank into the slot? When and how would the error be discovered? What a confusion would result? Had he done so, it may be that the tiny cause would have spread disaster and chaos in that ordered world, and it might have fallen in fragments, to be rebuilt by the patient forces of evolution through the succeeding eons. It is more probable that such a contingency had already been discounted by the inhuman powers which were at work around him. But had he been capable of such an action, he saw, even as he thought it, that it would be impossible. There was no time to fold the empty sheet before the automaton, after a second of human-seeming hesitation, had passed on, and was making its collection from the workers further along the bench.

He knew that he ought to move; he knew that the oiler would be here in a few minutes to caress and comfort the joints and bearings of his companions. Yet he sat still, wondering.

. . . The door opened, and an automaton entered. It was one of those which still bore vague resemblance to humanity, the pattern of the first designers not having been entirely abandoned. It was thus that the human race might leave the impress of its passing flicker of life for a million years—perhaps for ever—as a mollusk may leave its fossil imprint in the enduring rock. It came quietly up to the nameless relic of the human race, and took his arm in a grip that was sufficient, but without violence.

He shuddered inwardly, remembering the fate of those who had rebelled in his early childhood, and who had been given in sacrifice by their fellowmen to the offended deities.

He remembered their screams as they had fallen among the machines that they had blasphemed so foolishly.

Be he did not dream of rebellion. Evolution had triumphed. Side by side, they went out together.

When the movies were first introduced, early in this century, the amount of time spent by the average man in being entertained began to rise. And with every improvement in the development of the dream-world of the silver screen, that consumption of time grew. From the nickelodeon to the feature film, then to sound and Technicolor, and the motion picture show has become an almost vital part of the world scene, virtually a necessity of life to millions. What next? How far will this go? How far CAN *it go? Laurence Manning and Fletcher Pratt found answers to those questions and in "The City of the Living Dead" you find out what they are. When you finish this story, you may wonder whether you would have been able to resist the lure of the Adventure Machines?*

The City of the Living Dead

by Laurence Manning and Fletcher Pratt

THE sun sank slowly behind the far-off, torn and rocky crags, throwing up a last red glare like a shout of defiance as the white tooth of Herjehogmen mountain blotted the last beams from Alvrosdale. A deep-toned copper bell rang across the evening, and the young men and girls, leaving their dancing on the ice, came trooping up the path in little groups to the Hall of Assembly, laughing and talking. Their gay-colored clothes stood out brilliantly against the white background of the snow in the Northern twilight that often seems like day.

At the door of the Hall they parted—not without sadness, since for many it was the last parting—some going into the Hall, others passing on up the path to the line of houses. Those who entered were grave, though they had smiled not long before. Yet they were a goodly company for all that, some three-score in number and all in the fire of youth.

Within the Hall might be seen benches; a great fire against one wall, and against the other the mouldering remains of those Machines that

were the last relics of the days of old. At the center was a dais with places for the elders of Alvros, and midmost among these sat a man full of years, but in no wise feeble. Strong, stern, white-headed, he bore on one arm the silver band of authority, and in his hand he held a small shiny Machine, round in shape and with a white face which bore twelve characters written in black. As the youth took their places, he twisted this Machine, so that it rang a bell, loud and stridently. Then there was silence, and the old man rose to speak.

"My friends," said he, "you will leave Alvrosdale tomorrow. Your skis are even now prepared; your glider wings await you outside. In this Hall of Assembly, which was once the House of Power, we are met tonight, as is the custom of our people, that I may tell the story of the last of the Anglesk and warn you of the dangers you will meet. Some of you—God grant it may be few!—will be caught in treacherous winds and flung against the Mountain of the South to die. Some may be caught by the Demon Power, whom the Anglesk worshipped. Some will find green fields and prosperity, and will meet the others of our folk who have gone before . . . But a few of you will wish to return. To these I now say—stay behind! You are better off here! And I cannot go on with my tale till I have asked whether there are any among you who would prefer the life of this quiet dale to that of the outer world, with its Power, its mountains, and its living dead."

He made a pause, and for a breathing space none stirred. Then a maid of the company arose, sobbing; she cast her shawl over her face and said she would live and die in Alvrosdale; then she went forth from the Hall. With her went likewise the young man of her choice, and as the door of the Hall clanged to behind them, the rest sat the closer and gave ear to the voice of the old man.

"There are none now left alive," he said, "who remember Hal Hallstrom in his youth; but I give you my word that it was as lusty a youth as any of yours. I was light and gay and would roll the flavor of adventure under my tongue. In those days, before the year 4050 A. D., as was the reckoning, there were legends of the lords of old, and how the Demon Power drove them through the skies and over the waters and under the earth. But they were the rusty legends of those who tell a tale without understanding its meaning. This very Hall of Assembly was held to be the home of the Demon Power, a place so accursed that none dare approach it. This Demon was believed to be the same who had so dealt with the Mountain of the South that it fell across the neck of our dale and cut it off from the

world in long past ages. We know now that this is not true; but men thought otherwise then.

"In those days I heard also legends that came down from my fathers' fathers, how, when the Mountain of the South closed off the dale, the Anglesk sent men through the air to bring us this thing and that; but such tales were held foolish beyond words. Now, lo!—we ourselves fly through the air, though not as the Anglesk with the aid of the Demon Power.

"Also there were legends of the splendor of the villages of the Anglesk: how they piled stone on stone to make mountainous dwellings in which the night was bright as day by suns of their own contriving; how they quarrelled and slew each other from afar with thunderbolts; how the voices of men long dead spoke to them from Machines, and the voices of men far away spoke to them through the clouds.

"Old wives' tales! But I was young, and youth must ever test the false and true by the touchstone of experience, even as you now go forth to do . . . One who has reached my age seeks neither for truth nor beauty any more, but only for rest." Herewith, one of the elders touched the arm of the old man, who thereupon looked around and, as one who has been recalled to his narrative, went on.

WANDERLUST

"On a day in spring, then, as I was in charge of the flock close by the brink where Oster Dalalven plunges into the channel that carries it under the Mountain of the South, I was seized with a great longing to see these dwellings where men moved in light and music.

"Thereupon, so hasty was my mood, I slung my quiver over my shoulder without more ado, and with staff in hand set out for the Mountain of the South, making a wide circuit to the east to go around this very House of Power.

"In those days few in Alvrosdale and none outside could equal me as a cragsman. But I had need of all my skill, for, as I advanced, the edges of the Mountain of the South became ever more rugged, torn into heaps and pinnacles as sharp as daggers. All morning long I clambered among the rocky screes, not seldom tearing clothes or skin, and at noon made pause and ate, though sparingly, of the bread and cheese that I had brought for my lunch. Of water there was none, nor did I see any sign of trees or other life. The Mountain of the South is a vast wilderness of stone, hard and desolate, not mellowed with age like our summits of the Keel.

"But still my heart was high, and after my midday meal I took to climbing again. My road grew worse; thrice I was near to death,

as some ledge I was on ran into sheerest precipice without room to turn back. The loneliness of the place weighed down upon my spirit also, for all that day I saw no living thing—I, who had always known the kindly dale of Alvros, where the cow-bells tinkle ever within hearing. And at night I made camp just below the edge of the line where the snows mantle the rugged pinnacles.

"In the morn, as I started on, I still saw the summit towering far above me, and now I dared not turn back, for fear of the rocks and avalanches. All day I tramped the snow. Toward afternoon I found a glacier that eased my labor somewhat; yet up it I must move with utmost caution, for there were great crevasses running down for miles into its heart, often so hidden that it was not until I thrust my stick down through the crust of snow that they became visible. That night I built myself a cairn of ice in the lee of a rock, and camped supperless and cold.

"I awoke so stiff that the third day of my ascent was like to be my last. A storm had come up and veiled the head of the mountain; I was weak with the chill, the wounds in my hands were nipped by the icy blast, and my hunger had become a terrible gnawing pain. The glacier petered out and I had to clamber among rocks again—rocks that were covered with a glare of ice.

"The wind shrieked about me among the rocks; the storm blotted out all knowledge of the sun, and I knew that if another night found me on that bleak summit, all nights and days would end for me. Yet I kept on! I came at last to a place where a wall of ice-covered rock rose sheer before me; to right and left there seemed no passage, and I halted, ready to lie down in blank despair. But as I stood still, I caught sight of a black shape amid the gray of the whirling snow, and a great golden eagle swept down on the wings of the wind past me, swung off suddenly to the left and, just at the limit of my sight, turned again over the rocky wall.

"I took it for an omen and followed down the wall to where the eagle had disappeared. Sure enough, there lay a narrow chimney through the rock, that might not otherwise have been seen. I leapt into it, stumbling and slipping on the loosened stones, but going upward; and a few minutes later I had reached the top of the wall, and with it the crest of the mountain!"

The old man paused, and in the hall one might see a stir of motion, as his hearers, stiffened by listening to his recital, changed their position. He paused and looked around, as though loath to believe that he was not living again the brave days of his adventure. Then he began once more.

"It is unlikely that any, however, expert cragsmen they may be, will follow my path; for we now have the wings and follow the raven, soaring over that perilous tower with never a break. But if, through courage, you should wish to attempt it, I warn you—do not venture! For I am convinced that only by the favor of the most high gods and by the omen of the golden eagle did I come through unscathed.

"When I had followed the eagle through the pass and stood indeed on the highest crest of the Mountain of the South, the storm cleared away as if by magic, and far beneath me I saw the Mountain spread out, and beyond the Mountain a smiling valley—like Alvrosdale, but broader and deeper. Through the heart of it trailed our own river —Oster Dalalven—after it had burst foaming from the rocks beneath the mountain. Beside it was a white ribbon of a road that ran off into the distance. Along the road I could see the habitations of men, gleaming in the afternoon sunlight, and forests that ran down almost to the houses and at times hid the road. I shouted for joy at the prospect and began the descent of the mountain; for in the moment I knew that the tales of a world of splendor were based in truth.

CHAPTER II

BEYOND THE MOUNTAIN

"Half an hour later I shot a ptarmigan amid the snow and so tasted meat for the first time in three days. This was the greatest luck, for the descent was worse than the climb on the other side had been. For a day I floundered amid the drifts, and came at last to a place that dropped sheer for half a mile. There was no descent, so I had to turn back and try this way and that. Three days I spent thus, going down and coming back, climbing and descending, before I deviously reached the bottom. On the second day I tasted once more the kindness of the gods, for my foot touched a stone that touched another and suddenly set off a landslide that cleared my path down the worst of the steeps.

"At last I stood at the base of the mountain, a place by no means lacking in piled rocks, but with no more dizzy descents. For a time I lay on my face, prostrate, and clasped the fair grass with my bruised hands—grass that felt softer to them than after the longest winter! Then I arose and, with such strength as I had left, staggered to the brim of Oster Dalalven and plunged my face in the water; then by the brim of the stream I fell asleep, though the sun was still high in the heavens.

"I woke in the chill of dawn, with the memory of a sound ringing in the back of my head. As I started to my feet, I heard again the

sound that had aroused me—the baying of a dog—and in the moment it was answered by multiple voices, as when a pack of our Alvrosdale hounds course on the trail of a rabbit.

" 'Surely,' I thought, 'there must be men not far away in this dale, since there are men's dogs here,' and I climbed up onto a boss of rock the better to see my way and the dogs that had sounded. As I reached the crest of the stone, the hounds swept into view from the road not a hundred paces to my left, and came tearing among the stones—dogs indeed, but such as I had never seen, strong and terrible of aspect, and not on the trail of rabbit, but of a great antlered deer. In a moment they were past, but two of the later members of the pack paused when they came to where I had passed, sniffing and growling over the place where I had slept.

" 'If all the Anglesk are as great as their dogs, then theirs is indeed a mighty race,' I thought. The road itself was curious, all overgrown and the stones pushed apart by grass and weeds; and the dried grass of other summers lay among the fresh, as though it had been there for a long time. Yet I mused not overmuch on it, for the road led up under the Mountain of the South, and all men knew how that hill had risen between Alvrosdale and the world in a single night, breaking sheer across the road and all else.

"Perhaps a mile or two further along I saw houses clustered in a hamlet between road and river. Among them all there was no sign of life and while it might have been the earliness of the hour, I remarked it because of the other signs of desolation on that journey and my heart misgave me. And as I drew near I was more surprised than ever, for in all that village, which by the legends of the dale should have been a great and splendid place, there was neither sound of voice, bark of dog, nor sign of smoke in the chimneys. A fear came upon me, and I ran forward, weak as I was. But at the first house my fear was confirmed. The door hung all awry with rust marks at its side—the doorsill split and dug up by the frost of winter, and the broken windows looking in on ruin and desolation.

"I hastened to the next house and the next, and so on through the village. Some were of stone and some of purest glass, but all alike were empty; it was a village of the dead, but with no sign of dead or living. Only at the end of the village did I hear the bleating of sheep and, going to the spot, came upon a flock—not well-kept, fat sheep such as we house in Alvrosdale, but thin and lank, and their coats filled with briars. At my approach they made off toward the forest. I bent my bow against them and slew a ewe, and taking of her meat went to one of the houses, thinking to cook the meat in that ruined

town; but in no house that I entered was there so much as a fireplace—all were filled with Machines, now fallen to dust and rust, and other appliances whose use I did not understand; so I built my fire in the open, using dead branches from the trees.

"The food refreshed me much, and packing in my scrip as much more of it as I could conveniently carry, I followed the road onward. Further down I came upon another House of Power, so like this that the two might have been built by the same hand; and with fear strong within me I swung wide around it, yet had no need, for like all else in this dale, it was lifeless.

THE DEAD CITY

"It is sad to me even now in retrospect to think of coming to that place after a journey of so much arduousness. For in all that land of the Anglesk I found no living man nor heard any voice save those of the wild dogs as they bayed now near, now far. For days I journeyed thus; many villages I passed, all well built and strong and beautiful, most of them made of shining glass, testifying to the glory of the Anglesk. All were filled with Machines of much marvel—and all were fallen to ruin and rust, befouled by beasts, streaked with the wet of rains and rent by tempests. At night I often lay in the cellars of these houses. By day I walked, killing now a sheep and now a hog, according to my need and as I came upon them. One day I came to a place where the houses grew thicker and the forest had retreated until the village was the greatest ever seen by the eye of man. Some of these houses were like those I had heard of in legends—mighty towers whose tops soared to the clouds, built all of stone and bronze so that the tooth of time had hardly touched them. But all were dead and deserted like the rest, with only birds to nest behind the broken windows, and swine to wander among the streets of that melancholy place.

"I wandered to and fro among the streets for close upon a day, and as twilight fell I made preparations to find a cellar for the night. But as I did this I saw among the myriad towers a single one that held a light in its window. A great, fierce hope sprung up in me that living men might be here, though mingled with it was the fear that it was only a trap of the Demon Power to lure me into his clutches. However, for what purpose had I come so far in such a melancholy land— but to adventure? So I made for this tall tower as rapidly as I might through all the tangled maze of streets.

"Night had come on before I reached it. I came upon it suddenly, swinging around the corner of another tower upon a square of forest

land let into that village. A fox stirred in the underbrush as I crossed this square and for a moment a dark owl soared between me and the spring moon. The tower rose before me—a mountain of stone and glass, like the Mountain of the South in size but all dark and silent behind its windows, save some four or five near the base, and a whole floor high up, from which came the light I had seen.

"I drew near and saw a flight of steps that led up to a great bronze door. It would not yield to my push, nor was there any answer to my knocking. As it was already late, I looked for a place to spend the night so that I might attempt the adventure of the tower again when day should come.

"When the sun gilded the towers of the great village, I rose to try again. As before, I found the bronze doors locked fast against me; but the building was of great extent as well as height, and I did not desist, thinking there might be some other way in. I had not looked far when I came upon another and smaller door, set level with the street. This I tried; it gave a little to my push and I set my shoulder against it. As I did so, door and lock burst and I plunged in.

"I stood in a long hall, lit dimly by the tall and narrow windows at the side of the door I had entered. At either side there was a long row of doors. With my mind now made up to follow the venture through, I tried the first. It would not open; but the trick of its movement as I pushed it showed me that it was a sliding panel door, and slipping it to one side, I stepped in. I found myself in a room no larger than a closet in my father's house in Alvrosdale, windowless as that same closet, and very dark. The door had slid into place behind me. I groped for it, and it is in my mind that I must have touched some Machine within the wall of the room, for forthwith there rose a humming sound, and when I put my hand out again, it touched a wall in rapid motion. The whole room was moving! . . . My friends, you cannot understand the terror of that moment; for I felt that I was in the very grip of the Demon Power. Though Power is an old and feeble demon now, in those days he was strong and malignant."

The old man paused and from the hand of one of the elders took a fragrant draught of mead; and when he paused, a low sigh of interest and excitement ran around the hall, for all those folk had been brought up to fear Power and Machines as the most deadly of things.

"In real life men do not faint or go mad with terror, when in such situations," said the old man, beginning again. "They seek for some means of escape. But even as I sought to escape from that moving room, there came a louder buzz and it stopped as suddenly as it had moved. A shaft of light filtered in at the top and showed me that it had

stopped before a door. I flung it open—anything was better than that small moving closet. I stood in a long hall with sunlight streaming through the glass walls and reflecting back in dazzling radiance from row on row of great ingots of silver.

THE SILVER MEN

"So much wealth neither I nor anyone in this dale has ever seen. Yet there was something curious about those ingots, when I looked at them a second time, for each one was laid on a table by itself, and each seemed rather a close winding of many wires than a solid piece of that precious metal. Dumb with astonishment at the sight, I stood for a moment, and then approached one of them, thinking that they might be a dream wrought for my undoing by the Demon Power. I noted that the form of the silver winding had, from a little distance, a certain likeness to that of a man, from one side of which many of the wires were collected and twisted through holes in a slab of stone on which the form lay.

"The likeness to the form of a man increased as I approached, and when I came and stood directly over it, I saw that it was indeed a man, but a dead one—all swathed and wound in silver wires which, as they drew near his body, drew into finer and finer wires till right over the skin they were spread out like silver spider webs, half-concealing his features. The dead man had a grave and reverend aspect, like a priest of the gods; no hair grew on his head nor beard on his face, for even here the silver wires lay over him.

"All this I took in at a glance, and in the same moment the thought came over me that each of these piles of silver was a man, dead like the first. I stepped back in horror. As I did so, my hand touched the tangle of silver wires from one of the dead, and all up my hand and arm ran a tingling jar! At the same moment the dead man before me stirred ever so slightly. With the horror of that moment my tongue was loosed! I shrieked and fled. Around and around the room I ran, like a rat trapped in a cage. At last I reached a door and flung it open, not on another narrow room, but on a stair, and up this I fled without taking account of direction . . .

"You will understand that, although the place is of ill omen and hence forbidden for our folk to approach, it is in no wise deadly; but I did not know this. I thought that these living dead were under the shadow of the Demon Power and that the jar I had received was a warning not to disturb their sleep, lest I become like them . . . But the staircase up which I fled gave on another hall, filled, like the first, with row upon row of those living corpses, lapped in silver. As in the hall

below, the walls were all of glass; and the coiled silver cables, where the thin wires of this most precious metal united, were twisted from the sides of the sleepers and passed through holes in the slabs.

"Yet all this I hardly noted, for I fled again, and so to another hall, and another, and yet another, up and down the stairs seeking only to leave that accursed place. I do not know how long I ranged thus up and down. I only know that at last, stumbling downward, I came to a door that led upon a long passage. Down it I went, though it was narrow, and at one side a Machine hung over the edge of the passage to grip the passer-by the instant the Demon Power should will it.

CHAPTER III

THE MAN WITH THE METAL MASK

"At the end the passage divided in two. Not knowing which turn would lead me from the building, I chose the right, but had hardly gone twenty paces when before me I saw the low flare of a light and heard a mighty clanking. Surely, I thought, this is the very abode of the Demon Power himself, and I turned back with a new fright to add to the old.

"This time I took the other branch. As I went down it I again saw a light ahead—but to what purpose would it be to turn back? Moreover I had now somewhat gained control of myself, and so, saying—"A man who is fated to die will surely die, whereas a man fated to live shall walk through perils,"—I strode on. And lo! the shaft of light came from a room, and near the door of the room sat a man, a veritable living man in a chair with a board before him, on which he moved small carved figures. As I entered, he turned to me a face that was not a face, but a metal mask, and said some words to me in a tongue which I did not understand. Overcome with fatigue, I fell at his feet. . . ."

Again the old man paused and drank a draught of mead, then seated himself for a brief space, while in the Hall arose a whirr of voices that were stilled again when he rose once more.

"When I awoke I was lying on the floor of the room where I found the man with the metal face, and it seemed that he looked upon me with kindness. In his hand he held vessels, which he extended to me, making signs that I should eat and drink, and though the food was strange I ate and was refreshed. I spoke to him quickly, asking what this city of the living dead was, and where were the people of so glorious a town and what had become of the Anglesk, but he only shook his head and sat down again to his board, which was marked out in squares of alternate black and white. Then, taking one of the

carved figures from the board, he held it up to me, and said—"Rook." I examined it—it was in the likeness of a tower of stone—but it conveyed no meaning whatever to me, so I handed it back with a smile for his courtesy. Therewith the man with the metal face sighed deeply and motioned me to a seat beside him, while he went on moving the carved figures here and there, making notes on a piece of paper he held in his hand the while.

"I looked about: the room was long rather than wide, and along one wall of it ran a great board, from which loops of wire jutted, entering into little holes. Presently a red light shone from the board and the man with the metal face rose, and with slow and halting steps, like one of great age, went to the board and transferred one of the loops from one hole to another; then returned to his table.

"For a long time I waited, watching the man with the metal face. He said no more—nor did I. But after a time he arose and, motioning that I should follow him, led me through the other end of the room. There he showed me a bed; it was narrow and low, and covered not with blankets but with a single web of a weave marvellously fine and softer to the fingers than anything I had ever touched. The room was filled with a pleasant fragrance like that of the woods in spring, though there was no window and we were far from the trees.

"He signed that I should lay myself on the bed, and when I had done so he brought forth from some corner a Machine like a cap, fitting close to the head, with special parts to cover the ears, and this he placed on my head. I started back in fright at it, for I thought it some new device to trap me deeper into the lures of the Demon Power. But the man with the metal face spoke kindly, and placed the cap on his own head to show that no harm was intended.

"With that I lay down on the bed and slept, and knew no more, though my sleep was shot with dreams in which the living dead rose and spoke to me in the tongue of the Anglesk, and told me of frightful things. . . . To you, my friends, it will seem strange that men should speak in another tongue than ours. Yet so it was in the days of the Anglesk, that different men in different dales had different words for the same thing and could no more understand one another than we could understand the babbling of a child or the bark of a fox.

"In the morning I awoke fresh and rested after my sleep. The man with the metal face was bending over me, and as I sat up in the first wild surprise at finding myself in this so familiar place, he bent over and detached the Machine I had been wearing through the night.

" 'Do you play chess?' he asked; not in our own words, but in the

tongue of the Anglesk of old; and, wonder of all wonders, I understood him.

" 'What?' I cried in astonishment. 'How is it that I now understand what you say, though it is in a different way from our own speech?'

" 'Oh, that is the radio helmet,' he replied, treating the matter as one of no import. 'But tell me, do you play chess?' His speech was thick and slow, as though passed through lips unable to properly form the words.

" 'Chess?' I answered. 'I don't know the name. Is it a game of the Anglesk?'

"The man with the metal face sighed deeply and half to himself said: 'And for twenty years I have been bringing my Sayers gambit to absolute perfection—my legacy to the world.' Of this I understood nothing, but he said aloud: 'Yes, I am one of the Anglesk, as you call them, though our name is the English. I am the last.' And again the man with the metal face sighed.

"Questions rushed to my lips. 'Then what does all this mean?' I asked. 'Who built this glorious village and these shining towers with the spider-like bridges from one to another, and where are those who should live in them? And who are the living dead that sleep above?

" 'They are the English,' said the man with the metal face, 'all that are left of them. Now let us eat and I will explain it to you; but first you shall tell me how you came here, ignorant of Machines and civilization, and yet with a white skin.'"

THE TALE OF THE MACHINE MAN

"I fell in with his humor and with him partook of his curious foods; then sat in the room of the board and table, where ever and again the red light flashed and the man with the metal face ceased his talking and changed a loop of silver wire from one hole to another. I told him of Alvrosdale and of our life there; how we hunted and tilled the ground and tended our flocks; and of the Mountain of the South and how I had climbed over it with the aid of the most high gods. It was a tale of which he did not weary. He plied me with meat and drink, and learned what I knew. Then he told me his tale in turn, which I will rehearse to you."

At this saying the old man paused again, and again drank from the mead-horn. And as he began the tale of the man with the metal face, the hall was hushed to hear him.

* * * * * *

" 'Know, man of Alvrosdale (the man with the metal face told me) that I am of an age compared to which you are but a babe in arms, for

I count beyond a hundred summers, and so does the least of those sleepers above. Much have I seen and heard and read, and of one thing I am sure—that you are a part of a race which for thousands of summers has been shut away from the progress of civilization. You have no business in this dying world today, and when you have heard how it is with us, you had best go back over your mountain, there to stay. Or perhaps you will gather companions, and out of your dale come to people a new world.

" 'Know that long centuries ago—about the year 1950 A. D.—the world held countless hundreds of millions of people. There were men whose skins were black, and men with yellow skins and even with red skins; but they were mostly barbarians, and hence I was surprised at your own arrival, for I thought all the men with white skins had died long ago. The men with white skins were, in truth, the greatest of peoples; they had spread out and conquered all the rest of the world, so that the black and yellow and red men toiled for them. Now of all the white men, the greatest were the English; they moved fastest and strongest across the face of the earth; they founded colonies, and the colonies themselves grew to be greater than other nations.

" 'In elder ages men quarreled, this group and that, and fought destructive wars in which thousands were slain by the use of guns, which hurled great pieces of steel that rent and tore asunder all that stood in their path. But among the English and the colonies of the English were many great scientists. These scientists designed Machines called Radio, fashioned so cunningly that a man had but to speak in them to be heard afar by many men in other lands. Now in the days of which I speak, the English spoke into their Radio and their tongue spread across the whole world. Then the quarreling of nations ceased, for there is no quarrel that may not be settled by simple words when men may speak these words understandingly to one another.

" 'That was long after the Mountain of the South had risen to shut off your dale. The people of your dale may have heard of the wonders of our civilization, though it is not likely. We had Machines that flew through the air and bore many passengers across the oceans; Machines that grew crops for us, tending them carefully and driving away the insects; Machines that transformed these crops into food without the intervention of hands. We built great cities, of which this is one of the least; cities of majestic buildings, all of glass in which men lived lives of ease and pleasure. Pleasure! That was the cause of the whole tragedy of our world. We did not know that the pursuit of pleasure alone, which had been our guide, was to be our ruin.

" 'Can you imagine, barbarian of Alvrosdale, what it is to be free

from the necessity of earning your bread? You cannot—for you belong to another age and another race. But the English all over the world, and the men of other races who had become English, now had nothing to do. The sources of Power were so inexhaustible, and the amount of work necessary to make them available so slight, that half an hour's labor a day sufficed to earn a man his living. And the Machines continued to grow ever more complex and more ingenious.

" 'Adventure, which is the pastime of many men, disappeared when war became obsolete. For some people, art filled the vacant hours. But as the scientists grew in knowledge, the Machines they made executed the arts better than the artists themselves. Music was the first of the arts to disappear. First there were Machines that recorded the performances of great musicians and reproduced them to all hearers at any time. Then came Machines that gave these reproductions to vast audiences, and others that showed the audiences such lifelike pictures of the musicians that they seemed to be present in person. And finally Machines were invented that altogether eliminated the musician, striking the correct tones and shades of tones with scientific accuracy.

" 'The picture Machines, that brought an end to music, were the beginning of the end of the art of the theatre—you hardly know what a theatre is? It is, or was, a place where people acted stories. With the going of theatres, too, there were fewer and fewer artists, and finally we had only mere puppets. Sculpture, which was a kind of carving, was the next art to cease. The scientists made Machines that felt gently over living persons and carved their likenesses out of enduring stone or wood.

CHAPTER IV

ADVENTURE IS DEAD

" 'But why tell you more? You have heard enough to understand that art, the last refuge of men of leisure, was destroyed by the very Machines that gave man the leisure to enjoy art. . . . So it was with everything. Adventure of all kinds died. The last depths in the earth were plumbed, the last mountains were climbed or flown over by the might of the Machines. Men even made Machines to travel to the other planets that circle around the sun; they went to them, found them all inhospitably hot, cold or airless.

" 'And even here the Machines did away with all those occupations which provide adventure; for adventure is always the outcome of some lawless act, and the scientists had eliminated lawlessness by eliminating criminals soon after the coming of universal peace. Machines tested

every child psychology and supplied the proper remedies to make him a good citizen. . . .

" 'You must picture, my barbarian friend, a world in which Machines had deprived men not only of labor, but of amusement, of adventure, of excitement—in short, of everything that makes life worth while. Oh they were terrible days of boredom! What was left? Only the frantic pursuit of artificial pleasures. And men did pursue pleasure to a degree which seems fantastic to even me. Men became connoisseurs of odors, of clothes; I, even I, have spent a month's income on a new perfume, and a thousand dollars for a single piece of cloth of original design. . . . But even here the Machines followed us, doing things better than we. We had nothing but leisure—endless, meaningless leisure.

" 'Then the institution of Adventure Insurance arose. It began with a Japanese named Hatsu Yotosaki, who was hired to furnish new amusement—"thrills" they called it—to a party of rich Australians who had gone on an extended air voyage over Antarctica. This Jap conceived the idea of letting each member of the party know, indirectly, that some other one of the party was a criminal lunatic who was scheming to murder him. Long before their six months' cruise was up, they were all eying each other with suspicion and fright, prowling about the corridors of the airship at night and doing all the things men do under the influence of fear. Three of them were even killed by mistake.

"When they got back to Melbourne, Yotosaki told the survivors the story of how he had manufactured their fear and fright. Instead of jailing him for murder, they hailed him as a deliverer, the founder of a new idea. The idea was taken up with enthusiasm, and everywhere men were hired by others to involve them in wild and impossible, often bloody, adventures.

" 'But even here the scientists tried to intervene with their Machines. Why, they argued, go to all this trouble and expense to provide adventures for oneself, when one could obtain them second-hand by attending the mechanized theatres? The answer of the public was that the second-hand adventures of the theatre were insipid, being without the element of personal contact; they gave the spectator none of the personal thrill that is part of a real adventure. This led to the formation of great companies to furnish adventures to people.

" 'Now the governments of the world grew worried, for with the coming of universal freedom from labor, pleasure and its pursuit had become the main concern of government. They accordingly set the scientists to work to find an antidote to the adventure companies, which had succeeded in eluding government control. . . . The result is what you see! This building and these people that you call the living dead.

" 'It did not come all at once, young man. You see only the finished

product. At first the scientists sought only to make their mechanized theatres more perfect. They had already perfected sound and motion in the early ages; to this was now added a device that added the sense of smell; if the pictured story was laid in a woodland the scent of piny branches swept through the audience, and if at sea, there was the tang of the salt spray.

" 'But the people tired of these shows; they came and were amused for once, but never came again. The scientists then produced the sensations of heat and cold—people went to winter pictures wrapped in furs as though for a trip to the arctic regions; vast artificial winds stormed through the theatres to the tune of the swaying boughs in the pictures; clouds of smoke and tongues of veritable burning flame were rolled out over the audience; and at last devices were introduced which gave the sitters gentle electrical shocks at emotional moments in the performances.

" 'And now came the great discovery. It happened that a man had had his hand cut off in an accident. It had been the custom previously to provide such unfortunates with artificial limbs of marvelous ingenuity and dexterity. Now the man's surgeon, whose name was Brightman, suggested a metal hand which should be controlled by silver wires; and that the ends of the silver wires should be drawn out exceedingly fine, and attached to the nerves controlling the motions of the fingers. The nerves of the body are themselves like wires; they carry the messages of the brain to the muscles and of the muscles back to the brain. What Brightman was proposing was that the brain should deliver its message to the artificial metal nerves, thus causing the metal hand to move as a live hand would. It was his theory that all nervous impulses are delivered by electrical means, and if this was true the process would work.

" 'The theory was not new, nor the idea; but previously there had been lacking any means to connect the metal wires to the nerves. This time it was done by the process discovered for building up human protoplasm; the connection between the silver wire and the nerve was made; it was placed in an electrical bath and given an atomic bombardment; and behold! the connecting end of the silver wire became itself a nerve wire of the same material as the rest of the nerve!

" 'Thus the plan worked—at first, not well nor rapidly, but it worked. And as it was tried in succeeding cases, it worked better and better until a perfect artificial hand could be produced that was as good as a new one. . . . The next step came when the plan was applied to a man who had hopelessly lost his sight. Back of each eye is one of these nerves, which carries the message of what you see to the brain. For this

man they made a new pair of eyes, fitted with Machines called photo-sensitive cells, such as those I bear on my own face. In them is a marvel-metal called potassium, which, when light falls upon it, changes in resistance to an electrical current. Thus, for every speck of light there was a change in the electrical current that ran through the Machine, and the change was communicated to one of a set of wires, which in turn communicated it to the nerve of the eye. Then the man, though without eyes, could see!

" 'In time, this grew to be the common treatment for those who had lost their eyes, just as mechanical hands and feet replaced those members. And to one of our scientists (Professor Bruce) there came a new idea: If a man could by these means see what really happened, why should he not see also things that have never occurred? . . . Do you understand?

" 'After a long experimentation Bruce found that if the photo-sensitive cell of a blind man were removed, and the silver wires that led to his optic nerve were attached to other wires, electrical currents could be sent down these other wires that would make him see things that were not actually there at all.

" 'All this was before the adventure associations sprang up. At the time these associations came into being, the scientists had achieved so high a state of perfection with the device of providing blind persons with sights they did not actually see, that the result was, the blind could be made to see almost anything, even a whole series of non-existent events.

CHAPTER V

A DRASTIC EXPERIMENT

" 'This was the situation when the growth of the adventure associations began to threaten the basis of organized government. For the adventure associations promoted disorder among those very elements of the people who should most desire security. The head of a great food company, for example, was involved in an adventure. In the course of it he was attacked by several men who struck at him with clubs. One of them struck a trifle too hard; the food company head was killed, and his company suffered from it.

" 'In an evil hour, some scientists suggested to the New Zealand government that the people should be offered plays they could witness through their optic nerves, and thus experience them as actual. This would be a substitute for the adventures of the associations. The government accepted the suggestion. It would necessitate removing the

eyes of the subjects, and providing them with photo-sensitive cells. A man who trusts his whole life to an adventure association would certainly be willing to submit to the slight inconvenience of seeing through a mask instead of through his eyes for the rest of his life.

" 'At first there was no great rush on the part of the people to accept the operation. A few did so, and gave glowing accounts of the results; but to submit to an operation whose results would be permanent for the sake of a few hours or even days of visual pleasure did not appeal to the majority. But it was at once apparent that if electrical impulses could be arranged so that the subject would see things that were not in existence, others could be similarly arranged to reach the senses of smell, and even of feeling, taste or what you will. Like the original operation on the eyes, the process of development was slow; it was over a hundred years from the time when the New Zealand government first offered its citizens operations on the eyes to the date when the completed Adventure Machines such as you have seen were produced in all their complexity. The type of electrical impulse to produce the desired sensation on every nerve had first to be found, then applied, and finally woven into a complex record to be placed in a Machine with other records to provide the Machine Adventurer with a complete series of sensations.

" 'The final process was that the subject was operated upon by skilled surgeons. Every nerve in the body was laid bare, one after another; eyes, ears, nerves of feeling and taste, nerves of motion. To each was attached the tiny silver wire, and each was given the atomic treatment, then led down with the others to form a cable. During the first part of the operation the subject was placed under anaesthesia, but at the end, until his record was connected up, he experienced no sensations at all; he merely existed in an inert state, devoid of animation or feeling.

" 'As one set of nerves after another yielded its secrets to the scientists, the government Adventure Machines began to grow popular. They had enormous advantages over the adventure associations. The associations offered personal adventure that was often deadly; the Government Machines were absolutely safe. The adventure associations were costly; the Government device cost nothing, for when the subject submitted to the operation he was regarded by the courts as legally dead and his property passed to the Government. The adventure associations could offer only violent, physical adventures; the Government method could give the adventurer whatever he wanted. They could enable him to get the most out of life in whatever way he wished, for records of every sort were prepared, suited to the psychology of the individual.

" 'Thus if the operator wished to make the Adventurer feel that he was hunting, the record of a hunting adventure was placed in the Machine, and the cable leading from the adventurer's nerves was connected to it. The nerves of the adventurer's foot would assure him that he trod the mould of the forest; the nerves of his eyes would bring him a vision of the dim vista of trunks and a wild animal bounding through them; the nerves of his hands and arms would tell him he was making the correct motions to take aim and bring the animal down; and through the nerves of his ears, the Machine Adventurer would hear the dying scream of the beast he had slaughtered.

" 'These records are of an immense complexity; all the lower stories of this building are filled with them. It would not have done to make them too simple, for in that case the Machine Adventurer would have done better to have joined one of the associations. As it was, the Machine Adventurer chose his general type of adventure; his psychological charts, made when he was young, showed the type of mind he possessed, and what his reactions would be in certain cases. With the charts and his choice before them, the Government operators would lay out a course of adventures for him, and after the operation, he would pass through them in succession. There was a large number of adventures to choose from. Did he, for instance, wish to know what the distant planets looked like? In that case he would be given an adventure in which he was the head of an expedition. Under the spell of the Machine he gathered men and materials; with his own hands he worked on a space ship; he saw friends and companions about him, and all his senses reeled to the shock as his ship sprang away from the earth. He even felt that he ate and drank during the trip, for the nerves of taste and digestion were connected up as well as the others. At last he saw the new planet he was to visit swimming in the skies, larger and larger, as his ship approached it.

" 'You see the advantages? Men could achieve anything by this means; they could have the experience of accomplishing not only everything possible in actual life, but a great many things that actual life never holds even for the most fortunate. They could, if they were of the proper type, return to the cave-man period of existence and bounce over the hummocky moss in pursuit of the hairy rhinoceros, or float as disembodied spirits down endless corridors of an artificial Nirvana.

" 'In fact, there was but one thing the Machine Adventurer could not do; he could not return to the world. For the operations, once undergone, were practically irreversible. They involved, as I have said, laying bare every nerve of the body and by atomic bombardment making

it an integral part of the silver wire that carried the false messages of sensation to it. To reverse the operation would naturally leave the returned Machine Adventurer deaf, dumb, blind and helpless, a mere living jelly. But nobody wished to return. The Adventure Houses, like this one, contained a vast store of records; the adventurers themselves were practically immortal and merely passed the rest of their days in a series of pleasing and thrilling experiences that always ended happily. Some of the more complex adventures, like those in which the subjects found themselves in the rôles of world conquerors, lasted over a period of years, and as soon as one was ended, the operators in the offices of the Adventure Houses switched the subject onto a new adventure.

" 'People readily abandoned the outside world in which everything was rapidly becoming dead. The adventure associations died as quickly as they had been born. After all, the majority of men and nearly all women soon tired of the crude excitements these adventure associations provided. In a short time whole groups of people undertook Machine Adventures; and the world's population, which had been rising ever since the apes first descended from their trees, began to fall.

" 'At this point the very scientists who had developed the Machines began to become alarmed at the great rush of people to use them. They advised the destruction of the machines and the substitution of some other method of providing thrills and adventures. But the governments of the world, successful and peaceful and secure as no governments had ever been before, turned their backs on the scientists and built more and greater Adventure Houses. The scientists attempted to appeal to the people over the heads of the governments. The people laughed at them; and the governments paid no attention until one group of Oriental scientists, more devoted or less prudent than the rest, destroyed the great Adventure House at Chien-po by concentrating destructive rays upon it. This roused the governments to action; they rounded up all the disagreeing scientists and instead of executing them, forcibly operated upon them and placed them in Adventure Houses.

" 'The battle was a losing one on the side of the scientists from the start. One after another they grew old and abandoned the hopeless struggle, preferring themselves to enter the Adventure House and have a couch of ease and pleasant experiences.

" 'I cannot, I am afraid, picture for you the universal decay of every kind of life save that furnished by the Adventure Machines. Adventure Machines for even the little children were produced. . . . After a while it became difficult to find operators for the Machines; cities and towns were practically depopulated. Even the black barbarians succumbed, for they had their Adventure Machines as the white men had theirs.

In the Machines, be he never so fond of the pleasures of life, every man found every pleasure enhanced to the *n*th degree. The glutton, the drunkard, the man mad over women found here his own special paradise. Everything else became useless . . .'

THE DEMON POWER

"With these words," continued Hal Hallstrom, looking over the hall, "the voice of the man with the metal face trailed off and he sat babbling in his chair like one grown mad. So I even let him babble on, while I sat in silence. And after a time he rose and prepared meat for us and we did eat.

"But still some doubts and questions troubled my mind, how such things could be; and I asked him: 'How came it that you escaped to tell this tale?'

" 'I did not escape,' he said, touching the metal mask that covered all his face. 'Don't you see this? It is the badge of my own servitude to the Machines. I, no less than the rest, underwent the operation. And oh, the delight of it! For I was born by the shore of the sea, and in my adventure I swam forever among the green depths and saw strange monsters. I would willingly have been left there. But a day came when the last of the operators of this Adventure House died, and the three surgeons, who were all that were left, took me from the Machine and brought me back to this cruel world, for I was in those days an engineer and they needed me to operate the Machine. For my eyes they gave me these Machines, for my ears other Machines, and the tips of my hands and feet—all, all, I am a Machine! The mark of the Machine is on me. . . .'

"He cried these last words so wildly that I was fearful he might again fall into his insensate babbling. So I broke in upon him. 'But these Adventurers,' I asked, 'how do they eat?'

"His lip curled with scorn of my ignorance. 'In truth,' he said, 'you are a barbarian of the early ages that do not know of the D'Arsonval diathermic method. Know then, that among the silver wires on each Adventurer's leg is clamped the end of an electric circuit, and at such times as meals are necessary, they are given electric meals of low and high frequency currents. I tell you because you ask, not because you will understand.'

" 'Ah,' I said, for in truth I did not understand. 'And what is your work here?'

" 'I change the adventures and see that the machinery does not break down.'

" 'But there are thousands of the living dead above. Do you change all the adventures as they run through them?'

"The man with the metal face hesitated and stammered as one in embarrassment. 'I am supposed to,' he said finally, 'but I am all alone now. It is too much. These few'—he waved his hand at the board on the wall, 'were friends of mine once, and their adventures I change.'

" 'But what makes the Machines run?' I asked, seeing that he was cast down and wishing to draw him from his thoughts.

" 'Power,' said he. And then I shuddered, for I knew in good truth that I was in the very lair of that Demon.

" 'But where does Power come from, and who is he?' I asked, as boldly as I might.

"For answer he took me by the hand and led me out of the room and down a dizzy flight of iron stairs—down—down—to the very bowels of the earth. Finally he stopped and pointed. I saw a long shaft with a ruddy glow far at the base, and as I leaned over the iron rail a pebble that had somehow caught in my pocket tinkled from it against the rail and fell downward. I never heard it strike.

" 'There is the source of Power!' cried the man with the metal face. The earth's central heat—for this world is fiery-hot at its core, and our scientists learned long ago how to tap it. I doubt me not that the first tapping was one reason why the mountain rose against your dale.'

"With that we fell into conversation on this thing and that, and I stayed with him for many days.

"In the end I was fain to return to my own place, but knew not how to surmount the Mountain of the South again, so I begged the man with the metal face to help me out of the wisdom of the Anglesk.

"He thought on it for a time and said that he would help me, but when he would show me how to escape over the mountain by means of Power, I refused. So he thought out another plan, and offered to show me how to build these wings we now use, on condition that I do a certain thing for him—namely, take him with me so that he might look again upon the faces of living men and women, and hear them talk. I agreed to this and thereupon we left the living dead to repeat eternally their empty adventures.

"The man with the metal face was stricken by the brilliance of the day when outside, and not a little overcome at the appearance of those mighty towers. Yet the thought of meeting living people sustained him and he showed me the trick of these wings, calling them gliders, and training me in their use until I could fly with them both fast and far, soaring down the currents of the wind like a bird. Thereupon we set out for the Mountain of the South and for Alvrosdale.

"But ere we reached the place, the man with the metal face sickened and died; for we had exhausted such of his food as he brought with him from the tower, and the flesh of sheep and swine was over-rough fare for him. So perished the last of the Anglesk, and on his death he gave me this Machine with a voice, which he called an 'alarum clock,' to be a perpetual memento of the terror of Machines and the folly of the Anglesk.

"The man with the metal face I buried by a pile of stones, then buckled my wings to my back and soared away.

"But when I returned to Alvrosdale bearing on my back the wings that were the proof of my tale, there was great hustle and bustle, and many would have taken the eagles' causeway outward as I had taken it inward, for in those days the dale was so crowded with folk that many could not have good fortune. Nevertheless the land would lie fallow if all went, or even a great part, and some must remain behind to care for those who returned broken in spirit or in body. Therefore this ceremony and the examinations through which you have passed were instituted. Each year the dale chooses of its best and boldest, and to them is told the tale you have heard before they start on the long journey. Now I leave you—and good luck attend your flight; but bear in mind that the villages and Machines of the Anglesk are accursed and belong to the living dead until their towers shall topple to the ground. Farewell."

With these words the old man sat down as one exhausted with long speech and with the memory of the trials and terrors of the past.

The dawn was streaking palely along the eastern windows of the Hall of Assembly, as the hearers of the tale arose and made their way gravely to the door.

In the doorway each was met by one who gave him a scrap of food, a pair of skis and a set of wings, and one after another they spun down the snowy hill, away from the Hall, to gather speed and finally to soar aloft in the clear wintry dawn, over the Mountain of the South, out into the dead world with their cargo of new hopes and fears and aspirations.

END

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