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September

WONDER Stories

A GERNSBACK PUBLICATION

HUGO GERNSBACK
Editor

25¢

"THE MAN FROM BEYOND"
by John Beynon Harris

Good News for Members of the
SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE

THE following list of essentials has been prepared for members of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE by the officers at Headquarters.

A FEW WORDS AS TO THE PURPOSE OF THE LEAGUE

The SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE was founded in February, 1934. The Executive Directors are as follows:

Forrest J. Ackerman, Eando Binder, Jack Darrow, Edmond Hamilton, David H. Keller, M.D., P. Schuyler Miller, Clark Ashton Smith, and R. F. Starzl. Hugo Gernsback, Executive Secretary, Charles D. Hornig, Assistant Secretary.

The SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE is a membership organization for the promotion of science fiction. There are no dues, no fees, no initiations, in connection with the LEAGUE. No one makes any money from it; no one derives any salary. The only income which the LEAGUE has is from its membership essentials. A pamphlet setting forth the LEAGUE'S numerous aspirations and purposes will be sent to anyone on receipt of a 3c stamp to cover postage.

One of the purposes of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE is to enhance the popularity of science fiction, to increase the number of its loyal followers by converting potential advocates to the cause. To this end, the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE supplies members with membership letterheads, envelopes, lapel buttons, and other essentials. As soon as you are enrolled as a member, a beautiful certificate with the LEAGUE'S seal will be sent to you, providing 15c in stamps or coin is sent for mailing and handling charges. However, this will be given free to all those enrolled members who find it possible to call personally at Headquarters for it.

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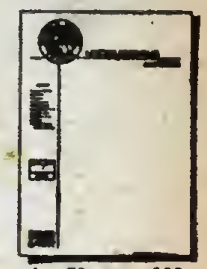

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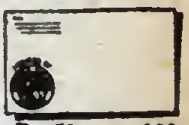

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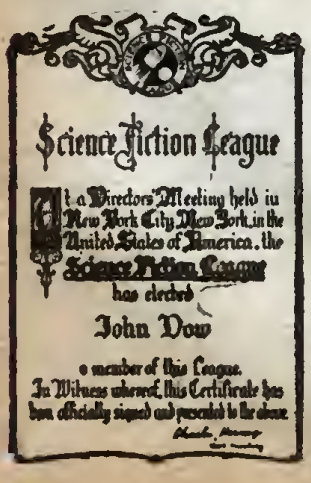

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THE MAGAZINE
OF PROPHETIC FICTION

Vol. 6, No. 4 | TABLE OF CONTENTS | September, 1934

ON THE COVER this month we see Gratz stealing the space-ship, leaving his companions stranded on Venus. (From "The Man From Beyond" by John Beynon Harris.) Cover by Paul.

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VOLUME 6
No. 4

WONDER Stories

SEPTEMBER
1934

. . . . Prophetic Fiction is the Mother of Scientific Fact . . . .

HUGO GERNSBACK, *Editor-in-Chief*
CHARLES D. HORNIG, *Managing Editor* FRANK R. PAUL, *Art Editor*
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WONDERS OF THE PLANETS

By HUGO GERNSBACK

THE more we learn about our sister planets, the more discouraging are the reports that science gives us as to the possibility of life existing on the various planets. It has often been reported that on the larger planets—Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune—conditions are so unfavorable that it would seem certain that life, such as we know it, can not possibly exist on them. In the first place, they have not solidified sufficiently, with the exception of one or two, where even a hard crust would be possible.

And while the major planets seem to have an atmosphere, it would not do much good here due to the excessive cold. As to the inner planets, we know that Mercury is entirely too hot to support life; we also know that it has no atmosphere. As to Venus, the next on the list, recent researches show that its atmosphere does not contain oxygen but rather carbon dioxide, commonly known as "choke damp," such as we find in our own coal mines.

But it is possible that a form of life, different from what we know, may thrive on Venus and if so, it most assuredly would be of a totally different order; and most likely exceed even the most fantastic conceptions of our science-fiction authors.

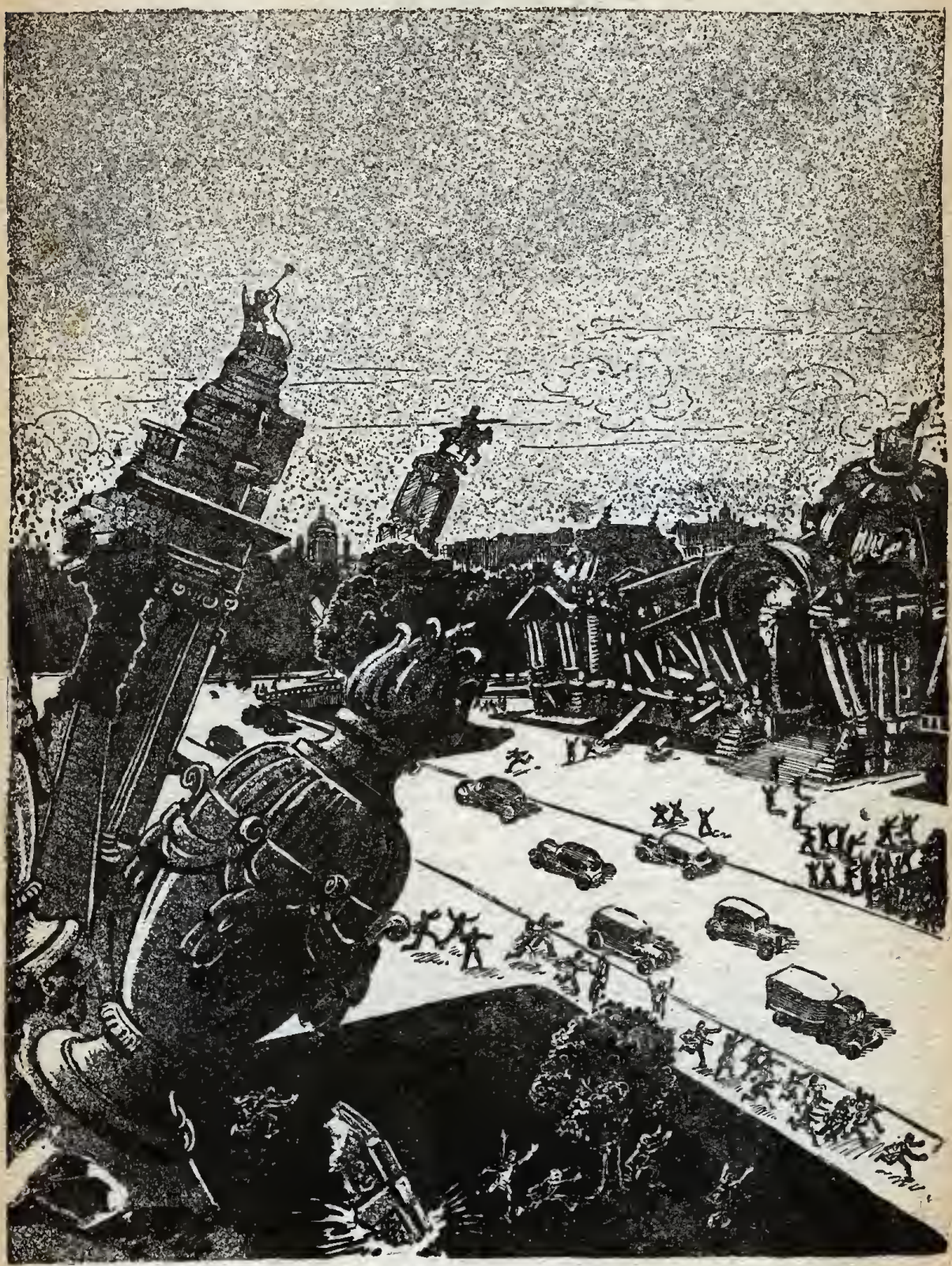
As to Mars, I have reported before that there seems to be little or no oxygen on this planet; and therefore, such life as we know it would find difficulty in thriving on Mars. The rest of the planets do not seem to make good abodes for life and therefore are as far as science can ascertain today, lifeless. This leaves only Venus and Mars as homes for some form of life, the like of which it is almost impossible to imagine today.

The spectrograph, and other scientific instruments in conjunction with photography, have done much to encourage research work on the surface conditions of several of the planets, but it also must be admitted that the work is still made exceedingly difficult for us because the planets themselves do not give off light of their own. *We see them only by reflected sunlight.* The light which we view, and which we analyze in our spectroscopes, therefore, has to pass through—for example—the Martian atmosphere twice; once descending and once being reflected upward from the surface. Then, too, it has also to pass through our own atmosphere. This complicates matters a great deal, and we cannot be too certain that the results which science indicates today are final. A tremendous amount of research work still must be done, as the years pass; and, as has happened so often, ever since the days of Galileo science has had to change its mind over and over, from one theory to another.

With Venus, we have the additional trouble that we have never been able to see the actual surface of the planet. The cloud or fog, or whatever it is, is so dense, that it covers the entire planet with a veil which, so far, has never been lifted. Whether we will be able to pierce it and look down upon the surface of the planet, is something that cannot be predicted today.

With Mars, we have the opposite condition: the atmosphere is so thin and tenuous, that we have no trouble to see the surface, and here science has made some progress, and that is why, to the public mind, Mars, rightly or wrongly, holds the center of the stage.

But even with all this, we have not made much progress, and it may be many centuries before actual knowledge of the planets' secrets is obtained.



(Illustration by Paul)

The next day the Grand Palais collapsed and the great statue of Marshal Paul Boncourt fell down.

THE FALL OF THE EIFFEL TOWER

By CHARLES de RICHTER

(Translated from the French by Fletcher Pratt)

PART ONE

● Acting upon the requests of our readers, we are importing and translating the greatest foreign science-fiction stories that are being written today. We recently gave you "Druso" by Friedrich Freksa and are now presenting this remarkable French novel. We pride ourselves on being the only magazine to give our readers the greatest science-fiction from all parts of the world.

Here we have a baffling mystery. Terrible things happen in the city of Paris and the most reputable politicians and scientists are lost when trying to solve it. After reading Part One, you will have an entire month to work it out in your own mind. Rarely has there appeared such absorbing mystery in science-fiction.

● The 22nd of April, 1987, will always mark an important date—not in the history of any single nation, but in that of the whole world. It was on that date that appeared the first manifestation of the Menace—that Menace which lacked so little of destroying civilization and changing the entire character of life on this terrestrial globe.

Before that date, certain epidemics, revolutions, wars, cataclysms of one kind or another, let loose upon the world, had threatened the existence of this country or that race, but sentient humanity had never yet faced a danger that threatened first its control of nature and ultimately its very existence.

The curious thing about it is that so very few people, especially at the beginning, realized the seriousness of the situation. From April 22, 1987 on, events moved forward with a beat that was more and more rapid, but men and nations continued for days and weeks more their ordinary mode of existence, in the comfortable certainty that their supremacy over the world was some kind of divine law and civilization as we know it was too perfect not to be eternal.

Before the eyes of the skeptical and optimistic world could be opened, there had to be a terrific accumulation of catastrophes, so great that the most rigorous censorship could not deny their reality and a series of events such as had never before been recorded in history.

Moreover, during the early days of the menace, those who knew about it—and by this I mean the members of the government and some people connected with the press—understood all too well what an explosion would take place if it were openly admitted that "the human race is done; its superiority over nature has ended." To do this would be to make a public appeal to all the instincts of revolt which lie in the minds of the mob, always whispering—very faintly, in normal times—that anarchy is the only possible system. There would have been a revolution, born of the general despair, beside which the wildest excesses of the Bolsheviks would have seemed mild.

The last barriers of law and order would infallibly have fallen; and finding itself opposed by a humanity plunged in self-destruction and anarchy, the Great Menace would have triumphed.

Whereupon the kingdom of man would be ended.

God be praised, the Invisible Menace (as the historians have agreed to call it) failed in its task; and although it is still too soon to say that all danger of relapse is over, today we may relate the absolute and simple truth with regard to the events which little by little broke down the

morale of the nations, and particularly of the French nation, resulted in the abandonment of Paris, depopulated several cities of lesser class and surpassed, in their accumulated horror, all the melancholy catastrophes of preceding history.

The events that take place daily and with regard to which the papers inform us every night and morning being the first to efface themselves from our memories, the reader will pardon me for running over a few of them—a task which he can reproduce himself in any library, but probably will not wish to undertake.

Moreover, a certain resumé of events seems necessary. The Menace made itself manifest on the date I have indicated, but those who realized it for what it was were few indeed. At first, it was only a collection of curious and inexplicable events, and it was not until the sequel showed they were part of the same picture that it became possible to connect them up.

Everyone remembers certain things.

For instance, they remember that the seventh International Disarmament Conference had just recessed after having heard several admirable speeches—among others, that of the Delegate from the Principality of Monaco—in which the idea of universal peace and arbitration of difficulties were referred to in the most affectionate terms. Unfortunately, the great powers had shown a certain reluctance to translate these speeches into acts, and the newspapers were commenting bitterly on the lack of tact that Germany had displayed in not even waiting for the return of her delegates before laying down a new "Super-Vest-Pocket" cruiser which destroyed the effect of the limitations on naval tonnage.

The French and Italian governments had recognized the cleverness of the Germans by imitating them, and everything indicated that the result of the disarmament conference would be a new race in armaments, or at least in the technical perfection of existing arms.

The shipyards of France, Germany, and Italy had labored as though the honor of their nations depended upon their efforts and the three "Super-Vest-Pocket" cruisers had been finished a few days apart, and were all ready to be launched amid a tumult of newspaper articles and recriminations.

It had even been hoped to launch all three on the same day, but the wise advice of the delegate of Manchukuo at Geneva had been heeded, and the three powers had agreed to launch their warships at different dates and with the patriotic ceremonies reduced to a strict minimum.

And it was on April 22, 1987—the date on which the launching of the German cruiser was to take place—that the first of those events happened, like the tolling of the funeral bell of Humanity.

During the night of April 21, and without any warning of the possibility of such a catastrophe, the shores supporting the cruiser in her dry-dock broke down; the precious cruiser fell over on her side and was so badly damaged that her complete reconstruction was necessary.

It is useless to go into the articles that greeted this event. In Germany there was a chorus of vituperation against the negligence of the technical departments which had failed to take the necessary precautions. The conservative papers naturally spoke of sabotage and the dangers of Bolshevism, and the whole affair degenerated into a quarrel between the Nazis and the Communists in which the latter had the worst of it.

The French press deplored the catastrophe in a tone of polite but not very sincere regret, and offered its condolences to the navy of the neighboring nation. Only a single journal, and that a religious one, saw in the event the hand of God and a particular proof of his protection for the country of Saint Genevieve.

The fuss over the affair had not yet died down in Germany when France, conformably to the treaties and the wise words of the delegate of Manchukuo, prepared in her turn to launch into the water the cruiser built in the greatest secrecy

under the direction of the Ministry of Marine.

The ceremony was to take place at Brest on April 30 — but before it took place all the papers were out with screaming headlines.

During the night of the 29th, at the exact hour at which the catastrophe had taken place at Kiel—at the same minute and second, it seemed—the shores of the new ship went to pieces, and in a single moment, the result of several years of research and long months of labor was destroyed.

● When a ship—whether it was German, Turkish, or Japanese—crashed over on its side in drydock, one could see the hand of chance or God in the event. When such an unlikely event was repeated, it was impossible not to see in the event some trace of human machination. If the two cruisers destined to make a new disarmament conference necessary lay on their sides, broken to pieces, it was because someone had wished it to happen. But who in the world was so powerful and so clever as to be able to twice evade all the safeguards thrown around the construction of a great warship and twice in succession to accomplish his desire?

The newspapers of the whole world asked their readers this question in varying tones.

To imagine that either France or Germany themselves were guilty was too stupid an idea to be entertained for a moment, and only the yellow journals of both countries entertained it.

Only one group of men seemed both powerful and dangerous enough to have accomplished it—the Communists. And it was against them that the accumulated angers of the two accidents were directed.

It must be admitted, in the interests of truth, that the Soviet government, at this time, acted in a manner that seemed to lend color to the suspicion that it had a hand in the matter. Not only did the official Soviet newspapers publish long articles on the "happy" events that had demonstrated to the capitalistic nations the futility of their course, but the government itself took no pains to deny that it was responsible, contenting itself with a few vague statements that seemed designed to admit rather than disavow responsibility.

Throughout Europe, the reaction was vigorous. Members of the French Chambre, as well as of the Reichstag, demanded that the ambassadors of the U. S. S. R. be given their passports at once, a measure which the French and German governments hesitated to take. Meanwhile the populace took out their fury on the Russians wherever they could find them — particularly on the Russian dancers, who found they could obtain no more engagements.

There remained the launching of the Italian ship, and already Il Duce II or III —for nobody was absolutely certain which, and certain people even maintained that it was still the original Mussolini— had made his position in the matter clear to all the radio listeners of the world.

"Catastrophes," he said, "can still strike at the navies of old nations stupefied by politics and plunged in the obscurity of their daily routine. Nothing of this kind can ever happen in Italy, where a race regenerated by effort and faith pursues a destiny which will some day bring it to the leadership of a rejuvenated world."

In spite of this discourse, the drydock where the *Benito First* lay was watched night and day; and this famous cruiser, thanks to chance, would give Italy an inestimable advantage over the neighboring nations.

The seventh of May was the date fixed for her launching, and there was hardly a newspaper in the world that had not sent a special correspondent to Spezia to cable the progress of events there minute by minute.

Would there be one more repetition of the disasters that had struck the two great European navies, or would events proceed in their regular course?

In the first case, the theory of chance would certainly no longer be admissible,

and one would be forced to admit that some human hand had caused the destruction of the warships. But whose hand?—and what had been the means?

This is what the newspapers and all those who had admitted the possibility of communist sabotage asked themselves. So also did numerous insurance companies which had taken risks on the Italian vessel, even in England and America.

On the evening before the launching, a radio speech from the Duce—I, II, or III; we are still uncertain—hurled into the face of the world the inextinguishable determinates of the great Italian people to make certain of its domination of the Mediterranean sea.

● A little later, an admirably organized radio news service permitted the radio listeners of the world to be present in the dockyard and to admire the technical perfection of the new cruiser, a marvellous weapon of war which would permit its inventors to laugh at all limitation. The broadcaster described in detail all the precautions taken in the shipyard and its surroundings, and complacently enumerated the number of marines on guard under the command of two captains, as well as the military and police forces which rendered all sabotage, even all approach to the vessel, impossible.

The broadcast was terminated by the recitation of an inflammatory ode from the pen of F. T. Marinetti (junior), the poet laureate of Fascism, and by the Italian anthem, rendered simultaneously on 450 trombones.

In the morning hours of May 7, a quarter of an hour before the time when twice already the disaster had taken place, the official Italian broadcaster began his description of the ceremony by naming the high personages present, which included His Holiness the Pope, His Majesty the King, and—he had, of course, been mentioned first—the Duce, I, II, or III.

Suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, the broadcast ended.

Those who had watches with them were able to convince themselves, by simply glancing at their timepieces, that it was exactly 8:22, the moment when the French and German cruisers had rolled over on their sides.

Without exaggeration, it can be said that there was hardly a radio-owner in the world who was not listening.

But it was in vain that all the listeners turned their dials this way and that; the voice, which had been expressing the national pride only a moment before was silent, and its silence could mean only one thing.

Once more the incredible had happened. Like the German cruiser and the French cruiser before it, the Italian vessel had turned over and broken itself to pieces.

Its shores had broken, and in its fall, fifty men had been killed as they stood on guard, double the number being injured.

The full facts did not come out till the evening papers, but when they did, the emotions stirred by the first two disasters reached their height.

It was now no longer possible to close one's eyes in the face of the facts.

Evidently there was a plot, and it was impossible to find the authors of it.

And for that matter, there was nothing to show that the thing was over, and all the nations—with the exception of Russia, whose guilt appeared clear—lay in the shadow of danger.

Tomorrow the same force which had already struck in Germany, France, and Italy might be directed toward England, India, or the United States.

A new danger, whose effects were evident even though its causes remained altogether hidden, had risen before the nations of the world, and it had become important to discover its nature and method promptly in order to limit its damages and to combat it on an even basis.

Doubtless, this would be one of the most important tasks before the Eighth International Disarmament Conference, which had already been in session for ten weeks, and which in that time had heard several excellent reports and speeches.

But after ten more weeks of useless labor, the conference recessed without having been able to clarify the situation in the slightest degree.

As no further catastrophes had followed the fall of the three cruisers, the public, with its usual carelessness, had turned to other things. The Russians were still believed responsible, although several people who were supposed to be well-informed whispered that the British Intelligence Service could give a quite accurate history of the matter if it really wished to.

The business, in fact, was over and was already sliding down into forgetfulness. But in spite of that, the danger had never been greater. For it was no one nation, neither France, nor Italy, nor Germany, that lay in its shadow; there was, as we have said, something much greater and much higher—the whole of civilization and the human race.

Three times the Invisible Menace had materialized; now, unknown to all the world, and invisible to it, it continued to make its approaches for the next blow.

CHAPTER II

The Condemned Man

● The door of the editor-in-chief of *Nouvelles du Monde* was suddenly kicked open, and that worthy was interrupted in his task of listening to the latest news from Tokio as communicated by his special correspondent there over a private beam-radio.

Without even bothering to turn his head to see who the newcomer was, he indicated the armchair at his right by a slight displacement of the cigar he was chewing.

"Good news?" he inquired, spitting the extremity of the cigar through his teeth.

"No news! And what's worse than that, no trace, no trail of news," replied the other. "Up to a certain point, it's all perfectly clear, and then, suddenly—goodbye! It's like some trick of magic, as though our man had been vaporized. The only curious thing is the place where the trail leaves off. A thousand to one you can't guess it."

The editor-in-chief, who had been tapping his foot impatiently during this little speech, now pressed a button that put him in touch with the city desk, ordered that the news that had just come in from Tokio should be given a double head in the first edition, threw a lever to cut the communication, and then turned toward his assistant.

The editor-in-chief could have been forty-five years old, was clean-shaven, had a strong, athletic figure, and in the newspaper world, was accounted an authority on international politics. A good many people were astonished that he had not gone into politics or diplomacy himself. But Jean Sorlin, which was the name that appeared at the masthead of the most frequently read and heard newspaper in the whole of the French-speaking world, shook his head to every offer, always stating that nothing in the world could make him renounce a life so interesting and diverse as that of the editor of a modern paper.

Throwing away the cigar he had been chewing, he chose a new one from his case, sniffed it briefly, and then lit it. He extended the case to his reporter, who gave a slight positive motion of the head and smiled.

The latter could have been twenty-five years old, and in spite of the strength of character which radiated from his slender and vigorous figure and even more from his square jaw, there was something very young, almost boyish in his face.

It was evident that he was one of those fortunate individuals who find all life a game, and that he was not yet exhausted by the curiousness of the facts with which he came in daily contact.

For a moment, he returned the glance of the editor-in-chief, then tossing his cigar into the air, he caught it with the expertness of a professional juggler and it vanished into the pocket of his coat.

"Yes," he went on, "a thousand to one that you can't guess it."

"Perhaps it would be a good idea to

tell me what this is all about?" indicated Jean Sorlin politely.

Louis Berson, for this was the name of the young reporter, shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps. Since this is not a question of high international politics, nor yet of ships that turn over on their sides in dry-dock before they are launched, it is something that hardly comes within your usual orbit. Well then—you know that Marc Charpin, the lawyer, went to call on the President of the Federated Republics of the French Language the day before yesterday. He wanted to find out whether there was any chance of a pardon for his client, old Melpomes, condemned to the electric guillotine, you remember, for that diverting series of Jack-the-Ripper murders.

"Unnecessary to remark that Marc Charpin, who is reasonably intelligent for a lawyer, had very little hope for the success of his mission. But all the same, the interview had to be carried through, as he was the animal's official attorney, and had to go through all the motions of believing Melpomes innocent.

"All went for the best; the attorney was turned down; there was nothing to do but wait for a couple of gentlemen to take Melpomes down the alley to his electric guillotine, but when the lawyer went to announce the result to his client—astonishment! No more Melpomes! He had disappeared, passed out of circulation—presto chango, now you see him, now you don't."

"And the guards who usually watch outside the condemned cells, what had happened to them?"

"Oh, they were very much on the job. Only, the things they said and did were so incoherent, that they took them to the hospital. They had unquestionably been drugged."

"In their food?"

"No. More likely with gas. Science is wonderful—you know that it has been making great progress in the direction of gas research. But how in the world did anyone make them take poisonous gases? That's what the police are asking now, and possibly what they will continue to ask forever. For the present, only two things are certain — the guards were cuckoo and Melpomes free. You can imagine the explosion."

"I should say so. And where do *you* come into it?"

Louis Berson plunged both hands into his pockets, and throwing his feet up into the air like an acrobat, did a pirouette and then gave a whistle.

"I come into it a little ahead of the rest of the world. At least, a little ahead of the other reporters. For, as you know, there is a special god for faithful reporters, and in the present case, this god was simply the husband of my landlady, a man who is too puritanical to really think highly of me, but who is not without a special value of his own—he is a guardian at the Sante prison."

"Then it was he, or rather his worthy spouse, who let you into the secret?"

"Precisely. And I didn't lose any time lying in bed and thinking things over. I heard the news at half-past seven—"

"You get up early."

"Not at all; I was getting home."

"My compliments."

"And at eight o'clock I was on the spot."

"Where you found out what?"

"Very little, and yet perhaps a good deal."

● The editor-in-chief threw the cigar, which he had hardly begun to smoke, into an ash tray, and posing his chin on his joined hands, gave the reporter what was meant to be a glance of curiosity.

"Well, here it is," the latter said. "I'll skip over the details and stick to the main outlines. When I was running over the register of the prison in the concierge's lodge, where I entered with the name of my friend the guardian as an open sesame, I glanced at the names of the visitors who asked to see Melpomes yesterday. First there was his lawyer, Charpin; nothing extraordinary about that, and it is difficult to point suspicion at such

a man. Then, a bum of the same type as the murderer himself, whom they refused to let in. Finally, a young girl who also was refused admission."

"I don't see anything in that to get excited about."

"Just what I thought myself, and that's where we were both wrong, for when I went to talk with the concierge, I got a piece of information that may be important."

"And it was . . . ?"

"That if no one else was able to come near old Melpomes, his guards could receive visitors and at least one of them did."

"Someone came to ask for him?"

"Yes, someone who had, it seems, an official document to present to him, someone who was taken to the cell of the condemned man and who was left there in conversation with the guard he came to see."

"For a long time?"

"That's just what they don't know. Nobody saw him come out."

"Ah! The plot thickens. Do they know, at least, from what government department the messenger came?"

"On that point they were quite certain; I even saw his pass. It came from the Ministry of Justice."

"Obviously."

"Not at all. It's right at that point that the plot gets thicker than ever. At the Ministry of Justice they absolutely deny having given a pass to anyone either yesterday or the day before."

"Well, someone forged or stole it."

"It looks very much like that."

"And is that all you're taking up my time with?"

Once more the smile played across the smoothly-shaven face of Louis Berson.

"You are not complimentary to your star reporter today, Chief. I understand perfectly that you're firing me for loafing on the job. No, my dear editor, I didn't stop with that. With the other reporters, who had shown up by that time, I went to have a look at the condemned cell, which was most deplorably empty.

"Useless to enlarge upon the fact that we found neither Melpomes, who has left for parts unknown, nor the guards, who are at the hospital trying to get over their surprise at finding him gone. But I did find something that seems not altogether without interest. Do you know what this is?"

He had plunged his fingers into his vest pocket and brought them out to toss a little object on the table before his interlocutor.

"Ground glass. And ground glass finer than I have ever seen before," the latter said after a moment of inspection.

He gazed across the desk at the reporter. The latter went on.

"Just that. The kind of glass they use in electric light bulbs."

"And the detectives on the job let you get away with it without saying a word?"

Louis Berson had the air of a man overwhelmed by his own remissness.

"Oh, Lord—perhaps I acted a little too hastily. The inspector was inspecting; it is obviously his job to do that. He was inspecting the bars at the window and the lock on the door, as though someone had had the queer idea to get into or out of the cell that way. So when my glance fell on the floor, and I saw a little piece of glass, I was unable to resist temptation. I dropped my handkerchief, and picked it up again with the glass inside. Do you suppose they'll throw me into prison for it?"

Jean Sorlin did not answer this innocent question.

"So the police don't know you found anything at all, and the other reporters don't know it either?"

"Well, it wasn't my job to tell the other reporters about it—"

"Good. And your opinion?"

"Well, it isn't certain, of course, but I think this is the explanation of the extraordinarily opportune sleep that fell upon the two guards, who are quite above suspicion."

"A bulb of gas or some other chemical product. Is that what you are trying to

communicate? But how is it that Melpomes didn't suffer from the effects of the gas himself, and how did he get away?"

"He might have been warned, and we are altogether ignorant of how he made his get-away. Remember there is a concierge at the gate of the Sante, guards along the walls, and patrols of guardians making the rounds all the time. Just the same, there is the undeniable fact—nobody saw him, heard him, or knew anything about it."

"And naturally, the bulb of gas was brought in by the person who had the pass from the Ministry of Justice?"

"It seems beyond doubt."

"Unfortunately, that doesn't get us much farther along. For, with the elements of the mystery we have here, I don't see exactly how we are putting over anything important on the other papers. If we say nothing either of the bulb of gas or the pass, we are on the same level they are; if we do mention them, they will be as well informed as we."

"Obviously, if that were all there is to it. But I didn't stop there."

"Ah! More! My dear Berson, please don't think it's necessary to waste my time by producing the effect on me that you ought to save for the readers. I assure you that there are matters in Europe and Asia, not to mention Australia, that are as important as the escape of Melpomes. And even more important to some people."

The guilty party acknowledged the rebuke with an inclination of his head, and drawing from his pocket a paper, he placed it on the table before him without unfolding it.

"In that case, I'll go straight to the heart of the matter. I got busy as rapidly as possible, trying to find out who the two people were, the bum and the young girl, who were so oppressed by the necessity of visiting Melpomes in his condemned cell.

"As far as the bum was concerned, I could find out nothing at all. That's not surprising, and I had almost the same result when I began to look up the girl. I say, almost the same, for I obtained a fairly good description of her that contained one curious detail. One of her ring-fingers was cut off at the first joint —and that's something you won't find in every street. As regards the bearer of the mysterious pass, I had a little more luck. They were able to tell me what kind of a taxi it was that brought him; and as there are not too many taxis around the Sante, I found out soon enough where the taxi came from that brought him. It came from the Place Beauveau; that is, from the Ministry of Justice."

"Very curious, and perhaps even indicative of something. Go on."

"Not wishing to lose that trail, which was the only one that seemed to lead anywhere, I hurried to the Place Beauveau and tried to connect up the young girl with the missing finger-joint with our friend who had the mysterious pass. The Minister was in conference, but I got through to his messenger, a little old man with a white beard and a face like a rat's whom you have certainly seen around the place—Father Felicien. He seemed much interested by what I told him, particularly about the young girl, and went with me through the list of people connected with the Ministry who have daughters of about that age. This paper, here before you, contains that list, and I wonder if that is not the key to the mystery."

● The reporter picked up the folded paper, and opening it with care, prepared to read the names, when, suddenly, a cry escaped from his mouth, while his face showed the most complete astonishment.

"But what's the matter?"

Without a word he extended the paper to the editor-in-chief in a hand which trembled a little.

The latter took it, then looked as surprised as his reporter, his eyes gazing into vacancy for a moment.

There was no sign on it of the names of which the reporter had spoken and in-

stead there sprawled across the paper in staggering capitals a series of words which made all comment seem futile:

IF YOU WANT TO STAY ALIVE, DROP THIS BUSINESS. IT IS A COMBAT BETWEEN TWO OPPOSED PRINCIPLES AND YOU WILL BE CRUSHED BETWEEN THEM. ONE STEP MORE AND YOU WILL BE DONE. THE MENACE WILL NOT PARDON.

Jean Sorlin read the message aloud once more, and handed the paper back to his reporter.

"You say that the old messenger gave you a paper with something altogether different on it?"

"I am absolutely certain."

"Very well; somebody followed you and picked your pocket of the first paper, then replaced with this one. Can you imagine when it happened?"

Louis Berson shook his head.

"I took a taxi when I left the ministry, and it brought me right here to the door."

"Very well, it happened before you got into the taxi, then. And how do you intend to answer this little warning from someone who seems to value himself rather highly?"

Louis Berson leaped to his feet.

"If they imagine that they are going to frighten me, they are up against the wrong person. This is like a red rag, only it's not waved in front of a train, but in front of a bull! In any case, this warning proves one thing; whoever there is behind it—that I'm on the right track, and that I'm not too far away from the heart of the matter. I don't know who they are or what they can do, but I will tell you one thing—if you will give me your permission, I will go after this business and not leave it till they have me or I them. Will you give me permission to go about it in my own way?"

Jean Sorlin stood silent for a moment, weighing the arguments for and against the reporter's audacious proposal. He wondered what kind of an adventure he was sending his reporter into, and the idea of exposing him to serious, and perhaps deadly danger troubled the editor. He looked up, and before that youth and strength, before the anxious eyes of Louis Berson, he no longer hesitated. He nodded.

"Thanks, chief. In that case, the paper won't print anything more than the others. Just embroider a little on the official report that the police will send out. I'll keep what I have already found out to myself, and go to work to find more."

Louis Berson rubbed his hands together nervously.

"I may be wrong, Chief, but I don't believe so. I have a sort of idea that our paper is going to have a scoop in a few days."

The editor-in-chief had relit his second cigar, and his face had taken on its habitual expression.

"If it doesn't have a funeral. But I hope not. Don't forget your little note, Berson."

Mechanically, both men extended their hands toward the paper and then, as though both had been struck with sudden paralysis, both hands stopped at the same moment.

Beneath the text they had already read, and written in the same blue ink, was another line, which seemed to have appeared only when the paper was exposed to the air, and which looked like the signature of the message:

"THE WEAKNESS WHICH IS STRENGTH"

"At all events, your friends know all about chemical inks," remarked the editor drily.

"Just one more point to help us in finding them," retorted Louis Berson with a shrug of the shoulders, and made his way toward the door.

As he reached it, he made a little gesture in the direction of his chief.

"So long, boss, and I'll see you later with the news."

And it was thus that Louis Berson, a reporter a little too clever and too self-confident for his own good, found himself in the midst of the great conflict in which he had nothing to gain.

As the warning had so truly said, he

was in "a combat between two principles" and would be crushed between them.

He was yet to learn that the Menace which did not pardon, which called itself "the weakness which is strength" had a third name.

That name, as history learned it, was—The Invisible Menace.

CHAPTER III

A Man Disappears

● Etienne Gromier, who had been Minister of the Interior for the last six months, made a little movement of impatience as he ran through the morning's mail.

The envelope he held in his hand was of a familiar type. This made the eighth one of the kind he had received during the week, and he had not the slightest doubt as to the general tendency of the letter he would find inside it.

Shrugging his shoulders, and playing nervously with his paper-knife, he held it to the light of the half-opened window for a moment, then threw it back on the desk.

The secretary, who had been watching this bit of by-play, judged the moment opportune to risk a question.

"A new one like all the rest?"

Etienne Gromier, who had been meditating, his eyes fixed on vacancy, did not answer; instead, he opened the missive.

There fell out a piece of that kind of paper one can find in every cheap stationery store, and which has been known for generations under the name of "school paper." He glanced at it, then held it out to the secretary.

"Unnecessary to read it," he remarked, "it's always the same. Some kind of a monomaniac, I should say. The same words, the same sentences. I am beginning to learn the thing by heart."

And as though he were a school-boy repeating a lesson, he began to recite, in a voice devoid of all expression.

"Three times now the weakness which is strength has struck. Let Humanity understand and repent. Let peace on earth, good will to men be a fact. An end of armaments, an end of wars. Otherwise the rule of mankind over the earth is at an end. This is a warning."

"Correct, word for word," remarked the secretary, who had been following the text of the strange missive with his eyes. "And in spite of all the inquiries that have been set on foot, there is still no indication against what this warns us?"

Etienne Gromier took a cigarette from the box on the desk, lit it, and rising, began to pace back and forth in his office.

"The police have put their best detectives on the job, but up to now, without the slightest result. For that matter, what result do you expect. Paper and envelope are of the most ordinary quality, such as can be bought anywhere. As to getting anything out of the fingerprints, you might as well look for a needle in a haystack; they are not on record, none of them. And for that matter, the thing has passed through dozens of hands before reaching this office."

"Perhaps the postmark—?"

"Useless. Not one of the letters was mailed at the same place as another one. See for yourself."

The secretary bent over the desk to pick up the envelope and examined it attentively.

"True. This one was mailed at the Rue de Clignancourt, and yesterday's at the Rue de Rome, and I remember one of the others coming from the Gare de Lyon. But in any case, there is no doubt that they all come from one and the same person."

"Not the slightest, and that brings with it another little problem of its own. Either we are dealing with a monomaniac, one of those imaginary apostles who take their dreams for realities and who think the golden age will be easy to bring about—in which case the only thing to do is laugh at the letters and wait till their writer has trotted on to his place in the madhouse—or, they are really sent by some organized band or religious sect, and if that is the case, the matter has an entirely different aspect."

The secretary seemed to meditate for an instant, but ended his meditations by making a grimace.

"Your second possibility is not very probable. For after all, the police would have found some trail of a band. And, moreover, what can you connect up these queer warnings with, which never go beyond a generalization, and which seem to promise us—one could hardly call it a revolution, for the term is not strong enough—but the complete upset of human civilization? It's a kind of mania that could only have been born in the brain of a mystic or a madman."

The minister, who had been standing with his back to the bookcase, did not reply at once. A frown of uneasiness stood on his forehead, but this detail escaped the attention of the secretary, who was picking up the mail he had brought in.

"I don't know," the minister finally said, slowly. "My dear Lurkin, you don't want to forget that the bacillus of pacifism at any price circulates in the veins of every country, and that since the inexplicable accidents which have befallen the three first navies of the world, the anti-war people have been more active than ever."

"But still it seems to me that there can hardly be any connection between this and the accidents at Kiel, Spezia, and Brest?" the secretary exclaimed, with a laugh, looking up at the minister as he did so.

The latter contented himself with a shrug of his shoulders, and having given the necessary orders for answering the mail, seated himself at his desk, while the secretary left the office for the waiting room, where, with his official chain around his neck and his rusty black coat, the messenger of the ministry sat. It was the same old man who had spoken to the reporter on the previous day, old Papa Felicien.

Jean Lurkin, the secretary, was just about to say something to him, when he remembered an anecdote the minister had told at a dinner a little while before, and halted himself with an inward smile.

According to this legend, it did not matter who was about to tell him something or what the order was that he was to be given; Papa Felicien—nobody knew whether the old man had any other name—always guessed in advance what it would be and messed the matter up before he was asked to do it.

The old man, who was, according to the universal opinion around the government offices, the most stupid employee there, always occupied the same place in the ante-chamber of the ministry. Every morning, winter or summer, warm or freezing, Papa Felicien arrived, clothed in a suit whose sleeves and pants-legs were a little too short or too long, due to the garment having been bought from some second-hand peddler along the street. A long-haired felt hat, rendered shapeless by exposure to the weather, covered a mass of white hair that made an unruly aureole around his head when it was set at liberty. To finish the portrait, an enormous pair of spectacles were astride his nose, concealing his small eyes which seemed always watery and which were set deep under bushy brows. "Eyes like a crow's" one of the visitors to the ministry had described them one day, with the added assurance that Napoleon had said that eyes like that were always an indication of treason. But it was a little difficult to imagine anything Papa Felicien could have betrayed. Add to all this a little thin voice, sharp and in a high register, and one has a more or less accurate idea of the man who watched the doors of the ministry during the time this story occupies.

The secretary wondered whether the old man was about to exercise the talent of guessing what was coming which had already given the old man a certain celebrity, and with which several scientists from the Academy of Medicine and Psychology had busied themselves from time to time, seeing in it an interesting case of telepathy. He was quickly relieved of his doubts.

"I agree with you completely, Monsieur Lurkin," proferred Papa Felicien.

"It is the work of some madman, some poor maniac, and nothing more. A couple of evenings ago the boss was all stirred up because he found one of those letters in with his pile of newspapers, and that time, it hadn't even been mailed at all, but had been brought by hand. He insisted that I should have seen who brought it and when. As though it were possible for me to watch everyone who comes in here and everything they do. And besides, why be worried over a thing like that? It's some crazy lunatic, that's all, Monsieur Lurkin; you can be sure of that."

● The secretary, who was in a good mood that day, was about to answer that such was the opinion of the minister, when the ringing of the bell interrupted them.

"Ah! That's for me," remarked Papa Felicien. "Excuse me; I must answer."

He entered the minister's office, leaving the secretary to make his way to the stenography office where he spent most of his time, and came out a moment later with his orders and the list of persons whom His Excellency would see that morning.

Finding the secretary gone, he murmured a few unintelligible words and reseated himself in his chair, and taking a cloth from a drawer, began to polish the insignia of office which hung at the end of his chain, a pursuit which seemed to interest him enormously.

Papa Felicien was a perfect example of the old servant grown grey in harness. He was one of the great line of French departmental messengers, who have existed unchanged since the days of the kings.

Within the offices where he was now alone, the minister had gone back to his tasks, but something seemed to pre-occupy him, and finally he threw down his pen and leaned back in his chair to watch the curls of smoke from his cigarette as they ascended toward the ceiling.

He might have been somewhere about fifty-two years old, was clean-shaven, and his hair was slightly grey around the edges. This sign of age, however, was contradicted by the rest of his face, from which radiated an extraordinary force and youth, by the direct, keen glance of the eye behind his monocle, and by the energy of his movements. Etienne Gromier, in spite of his age, was famous in sport circles as an amateur boxer, and when he wished to use the airplane at the service of the minister, he always piloted it himself.

There was nothing about him of the type of politician who is so familiar to us in the caricatures of the period between 1900 and 1940. He belonged definitely to the new age, the period that began about 1950, the school that knew so well how to preserve its youth.

Opening a drawer in his big desk, he now drew forth a number of letters and spread them out on his work-table.

They were the eight missives received during the last week, and which all bore, written in the same trembling and staggering hand, the same message:

"Three times now the weakness which is strength has struck. Let Humanity understand and repent. Let peace on earth, good will to men, be a fact. An end of armaments, an end of war. Otherwise the rule of mankind over the earth is at an end. This is a warning."

In a low voice, but accenting every word, the better to bring out its significance, the minister read them over, word by word.

"Three times!" he murmured to himself. "Three times—yes, it has happened three times already. I wonder if it's possible . . . ."

He did not finish. Instead, he reached out to pick up the wireless telephone that lay on his desk and asked to be placed in communication with the Ministry of War. The news was as he expected. Like himself, and for the eighth time in seven days, his colleague there had received the same warning. And the reply was the same at all the other ministries he called on the phone.

"Therefore, it is a well-organized plot,"

he remarked to himself, replacing the apparatus. "And they are making certain that none of the members of the government are left in ignorance. But why—and what is the penalty?"

He was at this point in his meditations, and had picked up the little package of letters to put them back again, when the door that opened into a little private room of his at the side was flung open to admit the secretary.

Something seemed to have excited that person, and he did not wait for the Minister's question.

"I beg your pardon for having interrupted you, Monsieur the Minister," he began, "but the fact is that, going down the hall just now, I ran into one of my old school-fellows, Louis Berson."

"The journalist?"

"The same. It seems that he is on the track of this Melpomes affair for his paper, and certain indications, of which he did not wish to give me the details, seem to indicate that the Ministry of Justice, which is in your department, is very deep in the matter. He came to try to interview you with regard to it; I think it would be a good idea to see him."

The minister frowned at the last sentence and threw a quick glance at the onyx clock on his desk. The time for the first of the morning's appointments had not quite come. He reflected that it would be better to see the reporter, whose uncanny talent for getting at facts he knew. Moreover, *Nouvelles du Monde* was one of the papers that was most vigorously supporting his party, and its editor held a prominent place in the councils.

"Let him come in then, since you evidently took it upon yourself to promise him you would get him the interview," he said. "But I'm in a hurry. Tell him I can't give him more than five minutes."

The secretary was already at the door, and stepping rapidly across the inner office, met his friend in the corridor. With a few words, he told him the state of affairs, recommending that the interview be as brief as possible.

A moment later Louis Berson was bowing to the minister, and at his invitation, taking his seat in the chair in front of the latter's desk.

He had laid down his hat and gloves, when suddenly, he stopped, his gaze fixed as though he had been hypnotized.

Etienne Gromier, who was looking at him with a glance as cold and hard as steel, toying with his monocle, followed the direction of the stare and in his turn was dumbfounded to see what had provoked this reaction.

It was the envelope received that morning, and which the secretary had left on the edge of the desk.

For a moment the two men said nothing, then inserting his monocle in its accustomed place, the minister lifted his head and looked directly at the journalist.

Berson, his voice trembling slightly, like that of a man whose emotions are too strong for him, burst out, without trying to conceal his emotion.

"Monsieur the Minister, excuse me for this question, which, no doubt, will seem indiscreet to you, but will you permit me to look more closely at the envelope I see there on your desk?"

The minister acquiesced with a nod; Berson took the envelope and studied the writing on it with attention.

The blue color of the ink, the formation of some of the letters were the things that had struck him at the first glance; and now that he could see the envelope close up, there was no longer the slightest doubt.

The envelope he held in his hand and the warning he had found in his pocket on the preceding evening were written by the same person.

He lifted his head, and with a voice now vibrating with the delight of the hunter who is on the right track, a track he never hoped to discover, he asked:

"Would it be asking too much, Monsieur the Minister, if I asked you who wrote the letter that was contained in this envelope? I beg your pardon for taking the liberty, but—"

The minister, who had not ceased to look at him, cut him short.

"Is this part of the interview you asked for with regard to the escape of Melpomes?"

Louis Berson returned the stare firmly.

"Yes, Monsieur the Minister, and in a way whose importance you will, I am sure, appreciate. Look at this paper, which I found in the pocket of my coat yesterday evening in place of a note I had put there myself only a short time before."

And he rapidly related the story which we know already, and as he told it, he could see that it produced on the minister an effect even more startling than it had on himself.

Etienne Gromier's whole face seemed to become petrified. His teeth set, his forehead wrinkled; he read and read again the phrases which, under penalty of death, warned the young reporter not to proceed with the Melpomes inquiry. Opening his drawer, and pulling from it the eight letters which he had just put there, he compared them with the reporter's note. No doubt was possible. The same ink, the same handwriting, the same formation of the letters, everything corresponded.

"You say," he said, finally breaking the silence, "that this paper was pushed into your pocket without your being able to discover when, in place of a note which you had with you at the time?"

"Yes, Monsieur the Minister, during the journey between the office of this ministry and the office of *Nouvelles du Monde*. And I made the trip in a taxi."

"Tell me the whole story," said the minister. "The appointments can wait."

● In precise and careful words as though he were giving a news broadcast, Louis Berson went over the story of everything that had happened on the preceding day, as he had told it to his editor-in-chief. Omitting none of the details, he described his researches at the Sante prison and finally those at the ministry itself.

Not a word came from the lips of the minister during this recital. But when Louis Berson had finished, Etienne Gromier stood up, and as though he were under the influence of some sudden compulsion, went to the safe that stood behind a curtain at the side of the room.

"Monsieur Berson," he said, "to prove to you the importance I attach to what you have just told me, and the value I set on your coöperation in this matter, I am going to show you something which up to now has been a secret from everyone but the President of the federated French Republics, the Minister of National Defense, and myself."

He turned the combination, and with a click, the door of the safe swung open. Pulling out a drawer marked "Confidential, Affair X" he drew forth a note written on the same paper, and held it out to the reporter. It contained these words:

FOR WORLD-PEACE. THREE DAYS MORE AND THREE EXAMPLES WILL BE GIVEN. IF THE LESSON IS NOT UNDERSTOOD, GOOD BYE TO CIVILIZATION.

THE MENACE.

"And do you know when I received that message?" demanded the minister. "Exactly three days before the German cruiser turned over on her side in the Kiel dry-dock, an event which was followed by similar accidents to the Italian and our own ships."

"You don't mean that these are the three examples he's talking about . . . ."

"I do. Everything seems to prove it, and alas! I fail to see any other explanation."

"But in that case . . . ."

"Wait a moment. After a conference with the President and my colleague of the National Defense department, it was resolved not to make public a message which so clearly shows the premeditation of the three accidents; to do so would be to alarm the public. An inquiry was taking place; we could count on an outburst of super-heated patriotism, and our first duty was not to give it too much to feed upon. But we were also determined to lay the matter before the Cabinet if anything new happened. Eight days ago, as you can check for yourself by means of these

envelopes, the communications from the Menace began again. And this time, in order that every member of the Cabinet shall know about it, they all got copies addressed to them personally. As you see, the handwriting on all of them is the same. Now at a first glance, it is certainly altogether impossible to see what connection there can be between Melpomes, the assassin of six poor women, and this impassioned apostle of world peace! But it is now beyond doubt that some such connection exists. Your investigation yesterday annoyed someone. In other words, you were on the trail. May I ask what effect this threat produced upon you?—and what your intentions are in the matter?"

Louis Berson, who had recovered, in appearance at least, his habitual gaiety of manner, smiled.

"Would you have let me into all these government secrets, Monsieur the Minister, if you had the slightest doubt as to my reply to that question?"

"True," said the minister, smiling in his turn. "I told you because I was certain that nothing would stop you, and that this threat instead of persuading you to withdraw, would act like an excitant. Now, let me say something, speaking to you as man to man; there is not the slightest doubt in my mind that a grave danger, whose methods of striking cannot be foreseen, but which disposes of powerful means of offense, hangs over both of us. Do you wish to, will you forget for the time being that you are a reporter, and continue this inquiry for your country?"

Louis Berson did not even stop to think. He had risen to his feet while the minister leaned back in his chair, looking at him. Now he simply bowed.

"I accept, Monsieur the Minister," he answered with a quiet energy. "I don't know whether I am really running into danger or not; perhaps all these threats are so much . . . ."

He was interrupted by the minister, who leaned across the desk to shake his hand.

"In that case, go back to the job at once. Take up the trail where you left it. You will find me in this office every day, and if anything urgent comes up, call me on the telephone at my home. And now I must ask you to leave, for I have to see a long procession of those infernal bores who imagine that the job of a Minister of the Interior requires him to listen to complaints about everything in the country. Only don't go out the main door. Unnecessary that any more people know that you have been visiting me. You can follow the way my secretary brought you in? Good."

The minister closed the door behind Louis Berson and went to ring for his messenger, when he noticed that the safe in which he kept confidential documents had been left open. Picking up the letters from the table, he placed them inside and closed the heavy door, giving the combination two or three turns.

Returning to his desk, he stopped by the window to glance for one more time at the man in whom he had reposed so much confidence. The court of the ministerial building was empty and he calculated that his visitor had not yet had time to reach the ground floor and issue into it. He lit a cigarette and stood idly gazing out of the window for several minutes. As he waited, his fingers tapped a little tattoo of impatience on the pane—really that reporter was a long time in leaving. Several more minutes went by; still he did not appear. The minister turned and pressed the button that communicated with his waiting room.

Papa Felicien came in, inclining his head with the obedient gesture of the perfect servant.

"Someone was talking to me in here a moment ago and went out by way of my private entrance. I wanted to say something more to him. Will you catch him and bring him back?"

Papa Felicien's crows' eyes seemed to wobble, and with his fingers fumbling as usual at his official chain, he went out to execute the order.

Three minutes later he was back. There

was no one either in the corridor or on the stairway.

"Did the concierge tell you that my friend had left?" inquired the minister.

"The concierge, who is sitting in the entry-way, says that nobody at all has left the building for the last ten minutes, Monsieur the Minister."

"It's impossible."

"Monsieur the Minister, the concierge is very reliable."

"Certainly, but I tell you it's impossible. Go back down into the court, look around for yourself, and ask in the other offices."

But although every office in the building was searched, and everyone in the ministry was soon joined in the hunt, no trace of Louis Berson could be found.

A chauffeur who was waiting at the doorway said that he had brought a young man there about an hour before in whose description it was easy to recognize the journalist. He had told him to wait, but had not come out again.

Noon and afternoon came, and the mystery advanced no further than this point:

At a quarter to ten, Louis Berson, in a state of abounding health, had entered the minister's office, and from that moment forth no one had seen the slightest trace of him. Between the time he had left the minister's office and that necessary to reach the court, he had disappeared as completely as though he had disintegrated.

"Is the Menace already passing from threats to acts?" the minister asked himself, as he went back to his work. And he wondered whether he had not acted too rapidly in putting the young reporter on a task that had perhaps led him to his death.

On the next day there was a brief postscript to the ninth letter in the series of writings.

USELESS TO STRUGGLE, it said, THE INFINITELY DESPICABLE IS THE STRONGEST. MEDITATE THE FATE OF THE MAN WHO VANISHED.

Once more the Menace had won.

CHAPTER IV

The Invisible Menace

● The inexplicable disappearance of Louis Berson would doubtless have been one of those tremendous journalistic sensations that shake great cities, thanks to the place he had disappeared and to his position, if the minister himself had not judged it more prudent to keep a complete silence about the matter.

Only one person was informed—the Prefect of Police. And he was warned to pursue his inquiries carefully, and without revealing the matter to the newspapers.

Moreover, there might not have been any sensation after all. For it was on the morrow of the disappearance that those events began, which, with a rhythm more and more rapid, were repeated under a dozen different circumstances for more than a month, arousing public opinion to fever-heat and threatening explosions of almost any kind.

Who, in view of the danger that suddenly arose to menace the city of Paris, would have thought of trying to find a connection between it and the disappearance of a young reporter who was trying to find an escaped murderer? The idea would never have occurred to any person in his right senses. But unfortunately, the sequel was to prove that it is not always the people in their right senses who are right.

That morning, that is, the morning two days after the disappearance of Louis Berson, the Minister of the Interior, who did not partake of the optimism of the rest of the Cabinet as to the mysterious letters, and who approached the opening of the morning's mail with something like apprehension, had not been in his office ten minutes before he was trying to get a radiophone call through to the President.

He explained to him that something new had occurred, and asked that an urgent Cabinet meeting be summoned immediately.

The summons were sent out at once, and an hour later all the members of the

government were gathered around the long table where such conferences had been held ever since the Constitution of 1952 had been adopted.

Arriving ten minutes before the rest, the Prime Minister had held a brief private talk with the President, and they had agreed on the course to be followed.

The other members of the Cabinet came in, asking each other what was the reason for this hasty meeting, which no outside fact seemed to justify, and most of them did not trouble to hide their apprehension. Was there some unseen political current which would demand their resignation? It was in vain that they sought an answer to these inward questions in the faces of the President and the Minister of the Interior.

One of the most uneasy, though he hid his disturbance fairly well, was the Minister of the Air and Communications, M. Rouleau-Dugage. If the Premier himself and most of the other Cabinet officers were the incarnation of the modern and youthful type of politician of our days, he was altogether the classical type of politician descended from the old days before the Second World War.

With his prominent belly, his little pointed beard, his myopic eyes behind glasses attached to his vest by a cord which had once been black, he was the delight of caricaturists.

The pockets of his coat, always swollen with papers, seemed the symbols of his mind. Nevertheless, he had considerable ability in the handling of the technical details of his ministry, and it was thus that his presence in a cabinet, otherwise intelligent, was justified. Aside from this technical ability, he represented an element of civil war in the combination; it was no secret that he aspired to displace Etienne Gromier and himself become Premier.

Finally, the Minister of the Interior rapped on the table for silence, and opening a file, rose in his place.

"I would like to know," he inquired, "if each of my colleagues found in his morning mail a note like the one I received?"

He extended his hand and laid on the table a sheet of that school-paper with its daily letter.

There was a chorus of agreement, while a good many of the members shrugged their shoulders disdainfully at the idea of a cabinet meeting to discuss these maniac letters.

"The crazy letter? Evidently everyone got them. And what now?"

The Premier rapped on the table to reëstablish silence in the buzz of talk that arose.

"I will not go back over the eight first letters," continued the minister, "copies of which all of us have received. You doubtless know their contents more or less by heart, and as for myself, I am not ashamed to say that I was altogether skeptical about the matter in the beginning.

"And if any of you continued to read the letters which seemed too foolish to be taken seriously, did you notice that there was a postscript to the ninth?"

"Correct!" announced one of the undersecretaries, who was anxious to prove his zeal in the service of the state, in the hope of obtaining a full ministry in the next cabinet. "I have a good memory; I can recall it quite well. It was 'Useless to struggle. The infinitely despicable is the strongest. Meditate the fate of the man who vanished.' Only I at least, could not understand what it was talking about."

"That postscript," continued the Premier, "was the souvenir of an event of which I happened to be the only witness. Day before yesterday, a young journalist, Louis Berson, came to see me at the ministry. He disappeared as he left my office, never reached the court below. Since that time there is no news of him."

"What?" burst out several voices.

"That is exactly what happened the day before yesterday in Paris, in broad daylight. A man disappeared from the Ministry of the Interior a few doors away from here. But the thing is even more serious than it appears on the sur-

face. The day before, that same man received a letter from the Menace, that is, from the same maniac who wrote the letters we all of us regarded as those of a simple crank."

"But why did he get one? Why was he kidnapped like that?"

"Because the young journalist in question was busy with the problem which has excited Paris for the last three days—the escape of the murderer Melpomes."

"Pardon me," interjected the Minister of Finance, "but what connection is there between the escape and the crank letters?"

The Premier shrugged slightly.

"As to that point, my dear sir, I am as ignorant as you. Only, you can be certain of one thing; whether we like it or not, the connection exists. The hand that traced those letters disposes of means of offense which it does not hesitate to use."

By the attitude of the Premier and the gravity of his tone, the Cabinet understood that they were arriving at the crucial point of the meeting.

No one spoke as the Premier opened his portfolio and drew forth a yellow envelope from which he took a sheet of that school-paper which everyone knew so well by this time.

"Here," he said simply, "is the note I received this morning, and which seemed to me so important that I asked the President to summon this urgent meeting of the cabinet. It is brief and to the point. I will read it:

"ON THE TENTH DAY, THE INFINITELY DESPICABLE WILL STRIKE. LET THE LESSON BE UNDERSTOOD: IF IT IS NOT, NOTHING WILL SERVE TO STAY THE INEVITABLE. WHEN THE RADIO SPEAKS THIS MORNING, THE FIRST BELL WILL TOLL FOR THE END OF HUMANITY."

● A voice cut across the dead silence which greeted the reading of this Bible-like prophecy.

It was that of the Minister of the Air, who was astonished that, contrary to precedent, only the Minister of the Interior had received a copy of this communication.

Etienne Gromier looked at him calmly.

"It is because, my dear colleague, I ordered that all envelopes like this one, and addressed to no matter what ministry, be taken at once to the office of the secret police to be inspected for finger-prints."

The Minister of the Air seemed to explode.

"And do you call that a proper respect for the secrecy of the mails and for ministerial privileges? My word; this is going a bit too far! Do you think you are a despot?"

"It is more important to defend the interests of the nation than to satisfy the vanity of members of the Cabinet," retorted the Premier, without being in the least stirred out of his calm. "You would have done the same thing yourself, and will very likely do the same thing yourself when you are in my place. Moreover, I did it with the entire approval of the President."

"But," interposed the Minister of Public Works, desirous of cutting short what looked like the beginning of a boresome argument, "why does this new crank letter so change your opinion that you found it necessary to call this meeting? If these letters are the work of some insane person, do his prophecies mean any more than his threats? Don't you think it would be better to wait and see?"

The Premier smiled bitterly.

"There will be a confirmation of the prophecy, my friend, and rather sooner than you think. For the man who threatened once through these letters had kept his word, no matter how impossible it seems. That man . . . ."

He hesitated, as though some counsel of prudence held him back, then took the plunge.

"That man warned us, before the event, of the accidents at Kiel, Spezia, and Brest."

There was only a single voice from the Cabinet.

"The three cruisers!"

"The same."

The silence around the table was that

of stupefaction, of doubt, of a refusal to believe the possibility of such a thing. A couple of moments ticked by silently, as though no one had sufficient courage to ask any further explanations. It was the President himself who broke it.

"Monsieur the Premier," he said, "if you are willing, will lay the whole story before you."

Silently, the Minister of the Interior brought from his portfolio the warning, the first of the series, which we have seen already, and which today can be found in the National Museum; the warning he had shown to Louis Berson two days before, and which so clearly demonstrated that there was nothing accidental in the triple disaster.

Wordlessly, he passed it to his neighbor on the right, who, after glancing at it, passed it in turn to his neighbor.

"And how many members of the Cabinet," inquired the Minister of the Air, controlling his evident irritation with an effort, "did you take into your confidence with regard to this secret; the first I have known a government to keep?"

"The Minister of National Defense and His Excellency the President, who were altogether in agreement with me that to reveal this communication to the public might cause the gravest consequences."

"Curious fashion of showing confidence in the rest of the ministry, but never mind. Then, according to you, the catastrophes at Kiel, Brest, and Spezia had a common author, who lives in Paris, in view and in knowledge of the police and who is now preparing a new stroke of some kind?"

"You have expressed the sense of my words."

"And with what object is all this going on, my dear Premier?"

The Minister of the Interior did not take offense at the irony of words and tone. Instead he shrugged his shoulders.

"*Mon Dieu,* my dear colleague, I didn't think it was necessary to recall to you the pacifistic campaigns that have been going in Germany and Italy, and above all, in our own country, ever since the building of the cruisers was announced. Certain people devoted to the idea of peace we all of us have at heart, imagine that there is only one thing which will cure all the ills from which Humanity suffers — universal disarmament, after which we can all of us return to the Golden Age and dance to the sound of pipes. About a hundred years ago these dreamers imagined that the millennium would come with the liberation of the individual from all control—they were then called anarchists. Today they love the whole world and peace at any price is their doctrine. Now instead of preaching it, they are trying to put it into practice, and I think you will admit that their first efforts have been rather a success."

And now it was Rouleau-Dugage who gave a shrug.

"But that's all foolishness. The engineers who looked into the matter reported that natural causes were responsible in the cases of the three cruisers."

"Exactly. But my colleague of the department of National Defense will not contradict me when I say that these conclusions were announced to calm public opinion. As a matter of fact, the business was white-washed. Come now, can any man in his senses believe that the disintegration of the shores, which they attributed to the action of the gas used to temper the armor plate, took place to such a degree that in all three cases it brought about the fall of the cruiser at the same hour, the same minute and the same second?"

"All right, admit that then. But what is this being, this superman, who is behind all these things, looking for?"

"I can only offer suppositions, but it seems to me that his object is very clear. Every time any improvement in the national defenses takes place, he wishes to destroy it and finally to produce disarmament through fear."

"It's insanity."

"Certainly; but it is an insanity which is aided by a power of whose strength we are unfortunately ignorant, and which will very likely furnish us a new example at no very distant date."

● While this unamiable discussion had been going on, the Minister of the Interior had been glancing frequently at the big and very horrible clock on the mantelpiece—that famous clock, which, like all old things, is so very fashionable today. One would have said that he was waiting for something.

Finally the two gilded hands met at the hour of twelve, and as they did so, a muted bell rang somewhere at the back of the room.

It belonged to the radio instrument which permitted the President to listen to the latest news as communicated by the official speaker, four times a day—at nine, noon, four o'clock, and ten in the evening.

In spite of himself, the Minister of the Interior started at the sound, and it was easy to perceive that this was the signal for which he had been waiting. What would it bring?—the confirmation of his fears—or a definite end of them?

Several members of the Cabinet remembered the phrase which had closed the last message from the unknown, the message they had all heard a few moments before:

WHEN THE RADIO SPEAKS THIS MORNING THE FIRST BELL WILL TOLL FOR THE END OF HUMANITY.

And the hour had come and the radio was about to speak.

At a sign from the President, his secretary had risen and crossed the room to the instrument on which he turned a disc.

Immediately, the voice of the official news announcer filled the room, loud and clear:

"Hello! Hello! This morning, at eight forty-two, Boulevard de Versailles, Paris, a barrack being built to house the new recruits for the army coming from Hoggar, collapsed without any visible reason. There are forty-one injured and fifteen dead.

"At the same time, to the minute, and by a strange coincidence, almost to the second, a portion of the building of the Invalides, famous throughout the world as the tomb of Napoleon, fell down. As it was too early in the morning for visitors, there were no injuires.

"The most striking bit of the day's news is that there was a third accident at exactly the same time. The airplane factory at Le Bourget where pursuit planes were built, collapsed, destroying the work of several years of research. There were several victims, but their exact number is as yet uncertain.

"Paris is very much excited over the news. In spite of assurances to the contrary from official quarters, there is a rumor that there is a connection between this series of accidents and the recent destruction of the three cruisers."

The voice halted and suddenly the room was filled with a heavy and pregnant silence—a silence like death, marked only by the breathing of men who were trying to convince themselves that they really heard what they thought they had.

It was the Minister of the Interior who broke it.

"I believe," he remarked coldly, placing his documents in his portfolio, "that our opponent has made good his prediction that he would give us a proof of his power. He has begun the attack. God alone knows what he will do tomorrow."

It was as though his words had released a storm in the room.

All the members of the Cabinet, as though released from an enchantment, spoke at once, questioned, interrupted one another.

It was Rouleau-Dugage whose voice dominated the tumult.

"And what does the government intend to do?" he demanded, banging his fist on the table. "What measures will be taken? What orders do you expect to give?"

The Premier, who had been saying something to the President in a low voice, turned around.

"First, it is necessary to know whom we are dealing with. And at the present moment, that is just the detail on which we have no information. I hardly doubt that tomorrow and the following days will bring us more exact information. For

the present, we can do nothing but wait."

"And do you call that governing the country?" cried the Minister of the Air angrily, fumbling nervously with the buttons of his coat.

"Yes, my dear colleague, wait!" flung Etienne Gromier. "And meanwhile I am going back to my ministry, where there is no unemployment."

And with this parting shot, he proceeded toward the door, without paying the slightest attention to the chorus of cries behind him. But at the door itself, he thought of something further.

"Do you know what you remind me of, gentlemen?" he inquired, ironically. "You remind me of an ant-heap which has been kicked by some unknown enemy. Believe me, it will be much better if we are all calm. For, alas! this is probably not the last kick that our ant-hill will receive. Good-bye, gentlemen."

And without knowing it, the minister had used the one expression that really fitted the situation.

An ant-heap! An ant-heap menaced by an implacable enemy.

CHAPTER V

The Mysterious Attackers

● The official news speaker had not exaggerated the emotion of the people of Paris, faced by the triple catastrophe of that morning.

No matter how carefully official quarters worked to diminish the effect of the events and to give them the appearance of accident, there was a growing inquietude abroad which nothing could appease.

The affair of the three cruisers, already half-fallen into forgetfulness, leaped suddenly to the fore again, with all the doubts and problems that it presented.

The three ships had met the same fate, and now three new accidents had come in the same fashion to throw half the city into mourning.

It was too much to suppose coincidence responsible. Evidently it was the work of some pre-planned band of terror—though God alone knew what organization was behind it.

The rumors, contradictory as rumors usually are, would have died down with the passage of time, however, if on the very next morning there had not been another series of three accidents.

This time it was the annex to the Ministry of War building (that annex where the espionage service had its headquarters); the munitions store for the entrance camp of Paris-Rouen; and the building where the archives of the inventions division of the Ministry of National Defense were housed that fell, and as on the last occasion there were dead and injured as well as purely material damage.

That evening all Paris was assembled around the loud-speakers of the daily papers, listening to the latest news and theories as to the accidents, gesticulating, discussing, accusing this group or that, and sometimes even the government itself as the guilty party.

One thing was evident at once, and the populace at large did not fail to notice and comment on it. None of these catastrophes had touched any home or civil building of any kind. All of them had taken place in buildings and establishments attached to the Ministry of National Defense.

The fact was important.

That same evening the Premier held a conference with the President that lasted for over an hour, and the result of this interview was that at midnight a meeting of all the newspaper publishers and directors of radio stations took place in the Place Beauveau.

Orders were given to both press and radio, under pain of the severest penalties, to observe a complete silence in the future as to repetitions of the accidents that had taken place. A conspiracy of silence was organized in the interest of the public as a whole. When the publishers asked what they should do, they were told to turn attention onto something else, something that would arouse wide public interest.

"Here," suggested Etienne Gromier, "you have the escape of this criminal Melpomes. Embroider a little on that subject, gentlemen; keep people busy with it.

"That will be the salvation of your papers. With that toy to occupy their attention, the people of Paris will be calm and we will be at liberty to work in our own way."

It was one of those governmental requests which have the force of a demand. The editors and radio-directors agreed, with a somewhat bad grace, that the escape of Melpomes was a subject that would interest everyone in France.

On the next morning when everybody crowded to the newspaper dealers to get the news of the latest accidents, they found themselves confronted with staring headlines on the Melpomes affair. And for eight days long, that was the only subject of the front page articles, while Heaven alone knows how the unhappy journalists managed to find something new in the business to write about.

It was almost as bad as in the days of the old kings, when the governments invented assassinations to keep the public from knowing what was really going on.

And during all that time, known only to those who actually saw them, and then quickly buried in the conspiracy of silence, one accident followed another with maddening iteration.

One after another there were struck down the new building at the military school of St. Cyr, prepared especially for women who wished to become army officers; the barracks where the Indo-Chinese troops were quartered; the new torpedo school at the naval port of Paris, that school whose opening marked the deepening of the Seine that finally made Paris a seaport; the mobilization office, and many other minor establishments.

Each time the procedure of destruction was the same; some subterranean tunnelling was carried on for days and weeks without any trace of it showing on the surface; then, one day, without warning, the ground caved in, and the building with it.

There would have been a wave of public fear if the papers had not kept the most complete silence with regard to the whole business.

And then it was that a rumor, beginning no one knew just where, began to go the rounds, like a wave that rises when a stone is thrown into a pool. It was received at first with smiles and scepticism, then finally, with terror—and it said that termites were responsible for the damage.

Beginning on June 14, 1987, the word "termites" ran from one mouth to another throughout the city and the country, without the newspapers or radio once mentioning it. And then, leaping the frontiers, it was picked up in foreign countries and propagated to the most remote corners of the globe. Within a week, there was not a city, not a hamlet in the world that was not pronouncing the word which was to throw a thrill of terror into the heart of everyone who heard it for months to come—termites.

At last, civilization found itself face to face with the most serious menace in its history.

At first, the effect was not that which one would normally expect.

Faithful to the spirit of scepticism which through the centuries has been the source both of her weakness and her strength, France did not understand the full meaning of the word, and repeated it in the beginning only to amuse herself.

In this she was aided by the quarrel which opened at once and split the newspapers into two opposing camps, each with its attendant train of radio stations.

"The Dreyfus case of the termites!" laughed one of the comic papers, and the battle was opened with this reference to a celebrated case of the last century.

It really began with a long article in the *Nouvelles du Monde* which defied the ministry to penalize it for telling the truth, listed the damage done by the collapse of buildings in Paris during the last three days, and announced that these curious white ants, unknown in Europe up to that time, were the beings responsible.

The articles were a tremendous success; everybody was reading the paper and the Minister of the Interior, who was about to suppress it, remembered that newspaper readers are also voters and decided to do nothing. But, inspired by him, an opposition sheet, *Les Temps Revolus* came out the next morning with a complete refutation of the termite theory of *Nouvelles du Monde,* ridiculing it from start to finish and declaring that termites had never appeared in France within the memory of man. The temperature and the condition of the ground rendered it altogether impossible.

Whereupon the battle of the facts began on all sides.

Without delay *Nouvelles du Monde* gave a radio talk in which official documents were quoted to show that in 1898 termites had appeared at Rochefort, and in 1936, 1944, and 1972 at other places on French territory.

This blow only served to stir up *Les Temps Revolus* and the other opposition journals.

"Imagine for a moment," wrote a distinguished professor of the College of France, in a leading article, "the quantity of the termites necessary to produce the building-collapses of June 11. The number necessary for only one of these accidents, to say nothing of all three, runs up into the millions. How can any man of sense maintain that such a number of insects could be at work for the time necessary without some trace of their operations being found? This is only another example of the pseudo-science so frequently met with in yellow journalism, whose object is merely to amuse. And if it is claimed that the termites, which, we repeat, cannot live in our climate, could produce the disasters to all of these buildings, why not go one step further and claim that termites also are responsible for the destruction of the three cruisers? Genuine scientists will be calm, seeing in these events nothing but what really appears in them—an as yet unexplained operation of chance."

● Thoroughly aroused by now, *Nouvelles du Monde* replied on the following day with an article which ended:

"And what if we do claim that, after all, the disasters at Kiel, Spezia, and Brest, were due to the terrible termites? It may surprise the honorable professor to know that there are several similar instances of insects or disease germs appearing in places where they have hitherto been unknown for ages. After all, to claim that the destruction of the cruisers was due to the action of gases is to jump from the frying pan into the fire. There is no proof whatever of this theory. Nobody—except the government experts—has examined the shores that broke down. We demand that a public examination of them be permitted, and that there be a public exhibition side by side, of pieces from them, and from the ruined buildings in Paris."

Two days later, a sensational dodger from *Nouvelles du Monde* was on the street:

ONE OF OUR CORRESPONDENTS GETS INTO BREST ARSENAL AND SECURES EVIDENCE. NO ERROR POSSIBLE. WRECK OF THREE CRUISERS DUE TO WORK OF TERMITES.

On that day it seemed that everyone in Paris was walking past the windows where the great daily was exhibiting fragments from the recent disasters. It was impossible to deny the evidence, and France and the world had to accept the existence and destructiveness of the termites as a fact. But even yet the full extent and implications of the menace were hidden from most and the revelation was received rather with a spirit of amusement than one of solemnity.

Popular songs about termites were broadcast. Old gentlemen from the colonies were hunted out to give their accounts of the damage that termites had wrought there. Maurice Maeterlinck, whose name had altogether been forgotten by the new, athletic and active generation, became popular again as though by magic. All the publishers hastily brought out new

and illustrated editions of "The Life of the Termites"; newspapers published it serially—and street-sellers appeared with new toys made in the form of a termite which ran around busily when they were wound up.

Finally, a ditch-digger found several living termites and became a kind of national hero for at least three days.

What most of the people did not see and what would have thrown a shadow over their enjoyment of the situation if they had seen it was the unseen hand that continued to write a "Mene, Tekel, Uparshin" directed toward all humanity.

For the destructions continued, unforeseeable, implacable. Not a single building connected with the national defense seemed safe from attack. And neither measures of defence nor measures of precaution were of the slightest value against the spread of the plague. Here was a force against which all known means of combat were useless. Everything would have to be revised, improved, and unfortunately the assailants were leaving no time for such revision and improvement.

The daily catastrophes, which could no longer be concealed by any means in the power of the government, soon arrived at the stage of thoroughly stirring public opinion.

It became evident that the termites were no longer a new game at which one could laugh. And then suddenly, that mysterious mass fear which paralyzes every effort of the best governments, began to raise its head.

The newspapers became more excited than they had for an age, and it was necessary to go back to the black hours of the war of 1914-1918 or to the still blacker days of the super-war of 1947-1952 to find a parallel for the emotion that breathed in every line of the papers.

Like a train of powder, the news ran through the city; Paris was undermined throughout by the termites, and its buildings would one by one crumble into their galleries. No means of defence were possible.

There was a lively reaction against the government the day one of the papers openly printed this fact, and within an hour, the Place de la Concorde began to fill up with a mob heading toward the Chamber of Deputies in the midst of a low growl of anger. The intervention of the troops, accompanied by a battalion of tanks, was necessary to quell the excitement, and it lacked only a little of being transformed into a revolution.

That same day the Premier pronounced before the microphone a speech which was heard throughout all France. He announced that the General Staff of the army and the scientists of the Institute were coöperating in taking the most complete measures possible to overcome the menace and that at any moment the danger would be over.

This acted like oil on the troubled waters, and within a day, the capital was calm once more.

Unfortunately, the next day there were two new and particularly obvious disasters; the Grand Palais collapsed and the great statue of Marshal Paul Boncourt, the hero of the super-war of 1947-1952, fell down.

After these events, the Premier could do nothing but tighten up the reins of censorship again. He summoned the journalists and radio directors.

"Not a word more about the termites, I implore you!" was the order. "The scientists are now at work, and we can expect good results from them at almost any moment. But for God's sake, keep the people calm."

The next day, a new measure was taken against foreign radio stations. These, receiving direct information from their Paris correspondents by beam-radiophones, were giving lists of the destroyed buildings in every broadcast, and adding comments of their own, which by no means helped to restore confidence.

Thus the Edinburgh station, the property of the Presbyterian Church, broadcast a sermon against French depravity, seeing in the repeated disasters the hand of God turned against the modern Babylon. Meanwhile, a German station

was giving a heart-rending description of Paris in the grip of terror, with the frightened inhabitants fleeing the ruins of houses that every day crashed about them in greater numbers.

To prevent such tidings getting abroad, the new invention of a professor at the Francis Carco College was called into play, thanks to which it was possible to close the frontiers of the country to all foreign radio emissions and surround France with a veritable quarantine.

But all these, unfortunately, were nothing but expedients. The brutal truth could not be concealed; the termites were continuing their work of destruction uninterruptedly.

● The Premier hardly slept; he went about his daily task with deep rings under his eyes and his heart agonized at the fate of the city. And to this was added another cause of anxiety, thanks to information which he and the rest of the Cabinet alone possessed. Several of the journalists and numerous other persons had shown astonishment that the hand of destruction had been visited only upon buildings connected with the national defense. To this, the Premier, through the mouths of the writers, had responded that if the termites showed a preference for these buildings it was due to the fact that most of them were comparatively new and the materials used in their construction must contain some substance that proved particularly attractive to the insects.

The Premier could say this sort of thing at a press conference, and when he gave interviews over the radio; but he was very far from deceiving himself.

It was only necessary for him to remember the notes that lay in his safe. They told the whole and only truth. And it was these that caused him to wake in the middle of the night with perspiration on his forehead.

If the attacks of the termites were directed only against one class of buildings, the real reason was that it was according to plan. He had been told in advance what form the ravages would take and had even been warned how to avoid them.

And now certain expressions that had seemed only part of the sybillic languages used by madmen seemed to leap up at him out of those notes, becoming more and more comprehensible—"the weakness that is strength," "the infinitely despicable" which was "the strongest of all."

Was it not infinitely little, the strength of the adversaries with which civilization was faced? And yet what strength they had! Nothing could resist them, neither the greatest warships produced by human genius, nor the ancient buildings that had withstood for centuries the ravages of time.

But there was another thought that haunted the Premier, filling his nights with terror.

In order that any man should be able to predict exactly what would happen, some weeks in advance of the event itself, could mean only one thing—that he was in some obscure manner controlling the progress of the ravages.

Well, then, who was the man who could command the work of the termites and make use of their labors to attain a desired result? What naturalist or super-man had so penetrated the secrets of the infinitely little as to be able to use them as a weapon? How did he control the insects, how communicate with them? In spite of himself, Etienne Gromier was more than a little disturbed by this line of thought. It seemed such madness, and yet it was indisputable and demonstrable fact.

And, furthermore, was not the master of the "infinitely little" whoever he was, to be taken seriously when he spoke of the end of human civilization? Decidedly; if he could control the ravages of the insects to this extent, it would be the simplest thing in the world for him to bring down any building, any human construction in the world. Man is a creature of his own constructions.

Certainly no one but a madman would do such a thing. But all the evidence at hand seemed to show that the whole thing

was the work of a madman of such genius as the world had never seen before.

And what would come next?

In spite of himself, the Premier previsioned a field of ruins from which the last stones of Notre Dame projected mournfully, the Arc de Triomphe in ruins on the ground, the destruction of everything that had made Paris the loveliest city in the world . . . .

"And the traveller, sitting on a broken stone, will seek to discover some trace of the great city of Paris," an author of the last century had written.

And moreover, who could tell where the thing was going to stop? Once Paris were destroyed it would be the turn of the other cities of France, and then of the other cities of the Continent—perhaps even now the termites were laying their tunnels under Berlin, Rome, and Geneva. There would be no stopping it unless it were stopped now. And what would become of the civilization that had dominated the globe and held it in slavery to the human will? Would a new race of beings against the attacks of which man had never dreamed of defending himself, thus dispossessing him, establish its own supremacy and rule the earth in its turn? Was mankind definitely at an end?

Alone in the night, in the silence of his little private office at home, Etienne Gromier gave a shrug at this thought. It was too much like some nightmare—a comical nightmare.

He found himself wishing that his messenger, old Papa Felicien, were at his door. He would have found a little distraction, a little gaiety perhaps, in the contemplation of that ridiculous person. But he was all alone, and invincibly Etienne Gromier's thoughts returned to the subject of his preöccupation—what sort of a man could it be who considered himself thus the master of the world? A pacifist fanatically devoted to his idea, so fanatically that he was willing to sacrifice a whole city to it. But why did he not make himself known so that one could discuss terms with him, perhaps convince him of the folly of his course?

Since the last message announcing the destructions, the enemy had given no sign of life. Doubtless he was confidently awaiting the success of his enterprise in the surrender of the government.

At this thought, a wave of anger took possession of the Minister of the Interior. He would rather resign on the spot than give in in such a fashion! And moreover, what sort of a welcome would he have in the Cabinet if he proposed surrender and what would the Chamber say to the idea of complete and immediate disarmament? He imagined himself giving out a public statement, "We must capitulate to the pacifists."

Admitted that war was an atrocious thing, and there in France they knew it very well, for the war of 1914-1918 and later that of 1947-1952 had cost her more than ten million men, the flower of her youth. But to dream of a pacifist utopia was simple madness.

No, a thousand times no. The combat must be continued at any cost.

One evening after another these same thoughts assailed Etienne Gromier. Never before had he found the responsibility of government, which he had sought all his life, so heavy and so charged with responsibility.

And in the midst of all this, with the newspapers baying against the government, buildings crashing day by day, and the population growing more and more excited and unreasonable, a piece of news came in that changed the aspect of everything. Louis Berson had been found again.

While Ernest La Folette, the poet, whose death will be mourned and whose verses repeated for as long as the French language lasts, was walking through that vague district where the Place de la Republique stood in the old times, with his big red dog by his side, he had stumbled across a body half-concealed in the tall weeds. To his stupefaction, and in spite of an eight days' growth of beard and a face thin with hunger, he recognized the young journalist, who was one of his warmest personal friends.

At first, La Folette thought him dead, but he quickly realized that Berson was only asleep.

He slept, in fact, with the deep unconsciousness of one who has arrived at the limits of his strength.

Carrying his friend bodily like a child, Ernest La Folette had taken him to the bank of the Seine where a hydro-taxi quickly carried him off to the Lebrun Hospital.

For seven hours more, Louis Berson slept uninterruptedly, but his awakening was hourly awaited.

The Premier was overjoyed at the news.

"At last!" he declared. "Now we will begin to get at the secret of this business."

And for the first time in many nights, Etienne Gromier went to bed and slept well himself.

It seemed to him impossible that the Louis Berson in whom he had reposed so much confidence should not have found the key to the problem on which depended the safety of Paris.

CHAPTER VI

The Man Who Came Back

● "And you remember absolutely nothing?"

Louis Berson, newly shaved and smoking a cigarette with the enjoyment of a man who has been long separated from his favorite pleasure, shook his head.

He was seated in the office of the editor-in-chief of *Nouvelles du Monde,* his feet braced up on the shelf of a bookcase, while at the other side of the room, Jean Sorlin, standing beside the radio apparatus, was listening briefly to the communications from different parts of the world, then turning them over to the proper editorial departments.

"Try to remember!" he repeated after several moments of silence while he listened to the New Zealand correspondent. "It seems impossible that you should have been through anything that absolutely wiped out your memory."

Louis Berson closed his eyes and concentrated for several instants. Then, with a shrug, he gave up the effort.

"No, it's impossible. There is nothing to be done about it. I remember everything that happened before my interview with the minister and during it, but from the precise moment when I shook hands with him to say good-bye, a veil seems to descend on my memory—or rather, there is a granite wall at that point through which I am unable to pierce."

"Queer! And you're sure there's nothing wrong with your head?"

A blow on the skull would have explained everything nicely.

"No, nothing like that. I am like a man who has remained in a dark room for several days, and who has come out again into the daylight. Do you believe in reincarnation?"

"Oh, I beg you! We have enough mysteries of that sort around. You surely aren't going to tell me that someone reincarnated you? After all, remember you are living in an age which prides itself on having definitely disposed of the supernatural."

Louis Berson contented himself with smiling and making a slight gesture with his fingers.

"Don't worry. I was only going to remind you what the theosophists and other sects like that claim. According to them, the immortal soul remembers all its successive lives whenever it can get rid for a moment of that hindrance called the body. I have an impression as though something like that has happened to me. It seems to me that I remember what I have seen and heard, but that I can't bring myself to talk about it, and that if I could only get free—"

"Yes, yes, it would be a good idea, but aside from killing you, I don't just see . . . . And we don't know any reason for this curious case of amnesia. You are certain nobody gave you an injection?"

"A doctor at the Lebrun Hospital examined me this morning. He found me in perfect physical health except for a bad nervous strain. He reached the con-

clusion that I was suffering from a momentary weakness of the brain due to overwork. Of course, I told him anything that came into my head—which probably explains his diagnosis. I also neglected to show him the little note that was found in my pocket when I came back. Our friend, the author of the anonymous threats, does an awful lot of writing! At all events, this is the second time that he has honored me with specimens of his classic prose. Would you like to look it over?"

Without changing his position, Louis Berson slid his hand into his pocket, and withdrawing a note folded in four, held it toward the editor-in-chief. The latter spent no great time in examining it.

Ah! Our friend, as you call him, is at least a man of regular habits. The same paper, same blue ink, same queer handwriting, in which there are incoherent letters where one expects them least. What do you think of it?"

Louis Berson made a little face.

"Oh, very little. He is only warning me that this was a first lesson, but that if I keep on in my course . . . ."

"Yes, that's clear enough. And it is signed, as usual 'The Menace will not pardon.'"

"For this time at least, he has not kept his word, because I am still alive. But this is doubtless the exception that confirms the rule."

Seating himself on the edge of his desk, Jean Sorlin continued to gaze at the paper the young reporter had handed him. There was a frown of preoccupation on his forehead as he gazed at the writing.

"It's queer," he ended, "that although I am no expert at handwriting — and Heaven keep me from that deceptive profession—there is something that looks decidedly out of the ordinary in the formation of these letters. Look how some of them are quite perfect, while in other cases, especially those where there is a line made with an upward movement, the thing seems to jump. Look at that J and here at this capital G; one has the impression of some nervousness. Look here, too, where the pen has been driven so hard that the paper is torn. It seems stupid that with a handwriting so altogether characteristic, the police, who have on record the fingerprints and signatures of every citizen of the country, haven't made any progress toward identification."

He stopped suddenly as though a new thought had come to him from nowhere.

"Berson, do you know what this handwriting reminds me of? I may be mistaken, but I would bet my head I have it —it's the handwriting of a man suffering from locomotor ataxia. Look at this word here. While the hand is tracing letters that follow one after another and connect up, everything goes nicely, but when we arrive at a line where the pen has to be lifted—*crack!* there is a jump."

"Perhaps there is something in that idea. Unfortunately, it doesn't get us much further along."

"Anyhow, that reduces the number of possibilities, and the labor is worth it. For, according to what you have told me of your interview with Gromier, there is no doubt but that there is some connection between the escape of Melpomes and the man who has been threatening us all. He has made good his threats pretty well while you were away, too."

"Evidently it doesn't do to go to sleep for eight days in the times we are living in."

"I should say not. A queer age, my dear Berson, and I fear that if you had remained in no man's land for eight days more, you would have to ask the first man you met where the people of Paris were, and perhaps even where the city itself was."

"Things no better today?"

"Not a bit. The séance keeps right on, as someone said back in the old times. Only, in the present case, the séance keeps on to the profit of the attackers. Look, if you want to know for yourself."

Stepping to the radio apparatus which kept him in constant contact with the whole world as well as with the local correspondents in different parts of the

city, he manipulated the red dial marked "Paris" and turned the pointer to the section marked "Latest news." A click announced that the aluminum record on which every communication was stored to be heard later had fallen into its place in the machine. He pressed a button and immediately the voice of the speaker was heard in the room.

"Hello! Hello! For the first time since the present series of disasters began, the damage done by the termites, which up to the present have confined themselves to military establishments, began to be noted in civil buildings. We are informed that in the quarter of Clignancourt disturbances of the earth have been discovered around the Grand Magasin department store, pointing this place out as a new center of infection. The Prefect of Police is at the locality and all possible measures have been taken. This incident demonstrates that we are not in the presence of a conspiracy against the government as has been rumored.

"Hello! Hello! At 10 a.m. today, the floor of the Palace of the Elysee, part of the great reception room fell in. The President and his family were then in their private apartments, and the damage was material only. An inquest has been begun by the department of public works.

"Hello! Hello! The trains leaving Paris have doubled the number of cars they are drawing since yesterday. Special police and volunteer deputies have been sworn in to keep order at the different railroad stations in the city. Three people injured at the Gare Montparnasse. There are heavy crowds around all the ticket windows."

● The hand of the editor-in-chief pressed on the button of the machine and the melancholy recital came to an end.

"You see," he remarked. "You understand, I hope. And this is only a piece of the morning's news. The thing would keep on indefinitely if I let it. I can't give you the noon or evening reports yet, but there would be nothing different in them. The truth is that everything is going from bad to worse, and that we don't know in what direction we are headed. It's very well to speak about taking measures, but what measures and against whom? Up to the present, everybody is arguing and nobody knows in what direction to turn. We are dealing with a complete mystery. And I want you to notice that up to today, only the military establishments were attacked. From today that distinction no longer exists. It's like an oil-spot, spreading in all directions. And where is it all going to end? I fear that we will find out altogether too soon. My dear Berson, no one has ever accused me of being a pessimist, and I think I have as much courage as anyone, but I admit to you frankly—I'm frightened."

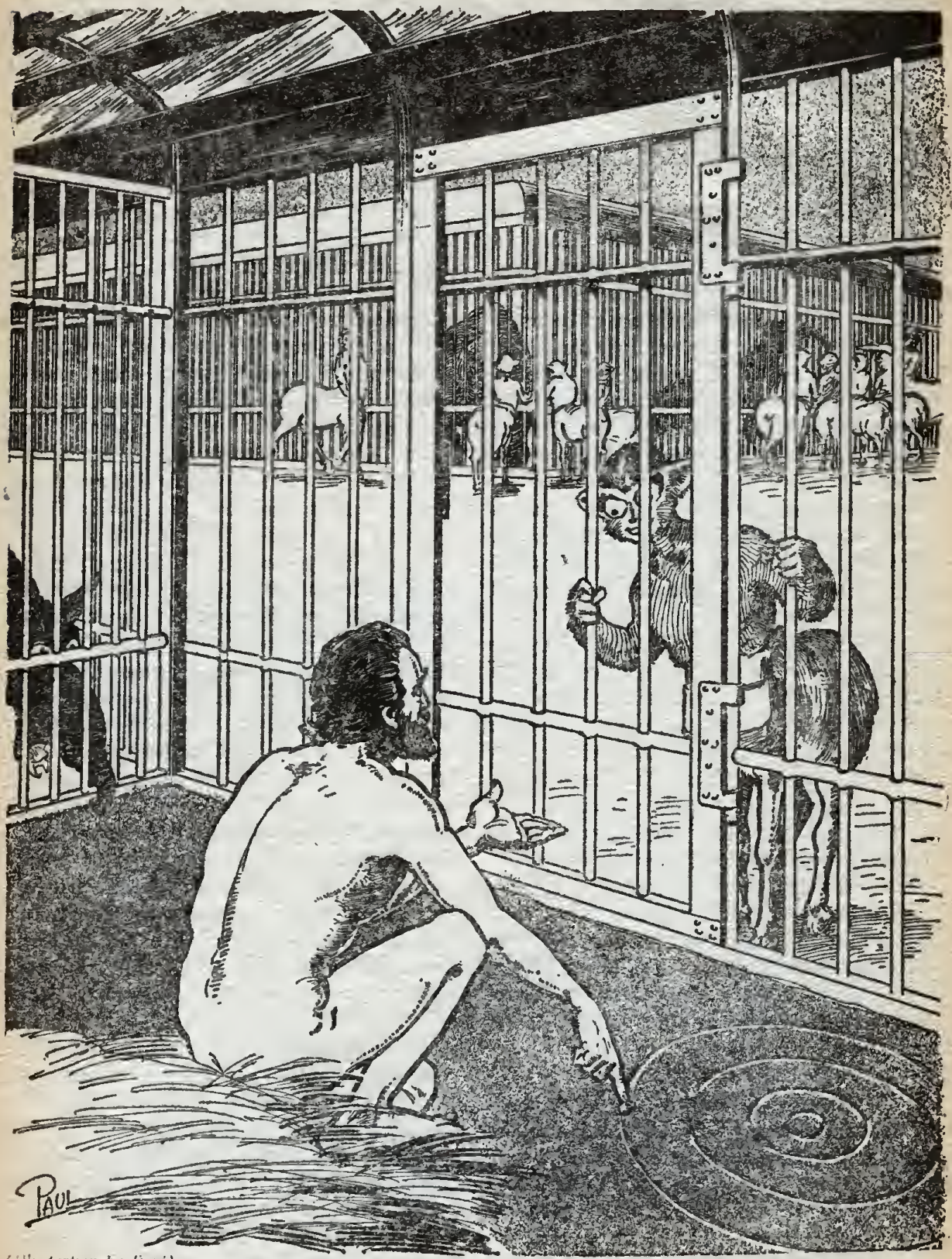
He stepped across the room and stopped before the big window that looked out on the boulevard, lifting the curtain.

"Look there," he said, "at that crowd reading the latest despatches as they are posted. Look at their anxious faces. They don't exactly know what the danger is yet, nor its full extent, because the news we had given them has been edited for their consumption; we are keeping things from them for their own good. But they are beginning to understand. Yesterday I took the avibus from Concorde to Orleans instead of using my private plane. I wanted to overhear what people were saying. I got my wish all right. Everyone was talking to his neighbor as though he had known him all his life and before five minutes were up, the whole bus was chattering. Do you know, my dear Berson, that's a bad symptom? When man becomes a wholly social animal and forgets the necessity of keeping things to himself, it's because he scents danger. And the danger is there, believe me!"

Louis Berson had risen and taken his place beside his chief, looking at the crowd gathered on the boulevard.

It was the usual Parisian crowd, made up of all the different grades of society and professions. No children, and as many men as women. But Jean Sorlin

(Continued on page 491)



(Illustration by Paul)

It had scrawled a series of queer lines in the dust.

THE MAN FROM BEYOND

By JOHN BEYNON HARRIS

● Here is a brand new treatment of the interplanetary theme. The writer attempts to bring out a side of human nature that few authors touch upon. Gratz hates mankind because of its evil greed and lust for power. He denounces his own kind to an alien intelligence. And then the tremendous truth is revealed to him . . . .

You will find this tale one success in our drive for distinctly *new* stories.

● One of the greatest sights in Takon* these days was the exhibition of discoveries made in the Valley of Dur. In the building erected especially to house them, Takonians and visitors from other cities crowded through the corridors, peering into the barred or glass-fronted cages, observing the contents with awe, interest, or amusement according to their natures. The crowd was formed for the most part of those persons who will flock to any unusual sight, providing it is free or cheap; their eyes dwelt upon the exhibits; their minds were ready to marvel and be superficially impressed, but they had come to be amused and they faintly resented the efforts of the guides to stir them into intelligent interest. One or two, perhaps, studied the cases with real appreciation.

But if the adults were superficial, the same could not truthfully be said of the children. Every day saw teachers bringing their classes for a practical demonstration of the planet's prehistoric condition. Even now, Magon, a biology teacher in one of Takon's leading schools, was having difficulty in restraining his twenty pupils for the arrival of a guide. He had marshaled them beside the entrance, and to keep them from straying, was talking of the Valley of Dur.

"The condition of the Valley was purely fortuitous and it is unique here upon Venus," he said. "Nothing remotely resembling it has been found, and it is the opinion of the experts that nothing like it exists anywhere else. This exhibition you are going to see is neither a museum nor a zoo, yet it is both."

His pupils only half attended. They were fidgeting to and fro, casting expectant glances down the row of cage fronts, craning to see over one another's backs, the more excitable among them occasionally rising on their hind legs for a better view. The passing Takonian citizens regarded their youthful enthusiasm with a mild amusement. Magon smoothed back the silver fur on his head with one hand and continued to talk.

"The creatures you will see belong to all ages of our world. Some are so old that they roamed Venus long before our race appeared. Others are later, contemporaries of those ancestors of ours who in a terrible world were forever scuttling to cover as fast as their six legs could carry them . . . ."

"*Six* legs, sir?" asked a surprised voice.

Some of the youths in the group sniggered, but Magon explained considerately.

"Yes, Sadul, six legs. Did you not know that our remote ancestors used all six of their limbs to get them along? It took them many thousands of years to turn themselves into quadrupeds, but until they did that, no progress was possible. The fore limbs could not develop such sensitive hands as ours until they were carried clear of the ground."

*All Venusian terms are rendered in their closest English equivalents.

"Our ancestors were animals, sir?"

"Well, er—something very much like that." Magon lowered his voice in order that the ears of passing citizens might not be offended. "But once they got their forelegs off the ground, released from the necessity of carrying their weight, the great change had begun; we were on the upward climb—and we've never stopped climbing."

He looked around at the circle of eager-eyed, silver-furred faces about him. His eyes dwelt a moment on the slender tentacles which had developed from stubby toes on the fore-feet. There was something magical in evolution, something glorious in the fact that he and his race were the crown of progress. It was a very wonderful thing to have done, to have changed from a shaggy, six-footed beast to a creature who stood proudly upon four, the whole front part of its body raised to the perpendicular to support a head which looked out proudly and unashamed at the world. Admittedly, several of his class appeared to have neglected their coats in a way which was scarcely a credit to the race — the silver fur was muddied and rumpled, but then, boys will be boys; no doubt they would trim better and brush better as they grew older.

"The Valley of Dur—" he began again, but at that moment the guide arrived.

"The party from the school, sir?"

"Yes."

"This way, please. Do they understand about the Valley, sir?" he added.

"Most of them," Magon admitted. "But it might be as well—"

"Certainly."

The guide broke into a high speed recitation which he had evidently made many times before.

"The Valley of Dur may be called a unique phenomenon. At some remote date in the planet's history, certain internal gases combined in a way yet imperfectly understood and issued forth through cracks in the crust at this place, and at this place only.

"The mixture had two properties. It not only anaesthetized, but it also preserved indefinitely. The result was to produce a form of suspended animation. Everything that was in the Valley of Dur has remained as it was when the gas first broke out; everything which has entered the Valley since has remained there imperishably. There is no apparent limit to the length of time that this preservation may continue.

"Among the ancients, the place was regarded with superstitious fear, and though in more recent times many attempts have been made to explore it, none were successful until a year ago when a mask which would withstand the gas was at last devised. It was then discovered that the animals and plants in the Valley were not petrified as had hitherto been believed, but could, by means of certain treatment, be revived. Such are the specimens you are about to see: the flora and fauna of a million years ago—yet alive today."

● He paused opposite the first case.

"Here we have a glimpse of the carboniferous era—the tree ferns and giant mosses thriving in a specially prepared atmosphere, continuing the lives which were suspended when Venus was very young. We hope to be able to grow more specimens from the spores of these. And here," he passed to the next case, "we see the beginning of one of Nature's most graceful experiments—the earliest form of flower."

His audience stared in dutiful attention at the large, white blossoms which confronted them. They were not very interesting; fauna has a far greater appeal to the adolescent mind than does flora. A mighty roar caused the building to tremble; eyes were switched from the magnolia-like blossoms to glance up the passage in anticipatory excitement. Attention to the guide became even more perfunctory. Only Magon, to the exasperation of his pupils, thought it fit to ask a few questions. At last, however, the preliminary botanical cases were left behind, and they came to the first of the cages.

Behind the bars, a reptilian creature,

which might have been described as a biped, had its tail not played so great a part in supporting it, was hurrying tirelessly and without purpose to and fro, glaring at as much of the world as it could from intense, small eyes. Every now and then it would throw back its head and utter a kind of strangled shriek. It was an unattractive creature covered with a grey-green hide, very smooth; its contours were almost stream-lined, but managed to appear clumsy. In it, as in so many of the earlier forms, one seemed to feel that Nature was getting her hand in for the real job. She had already learned to model after a crude fashion when she made this running dinosaur, but her sense of proportion was not good and she lacked the deftness necessary to produce the finer bits of modeling which she later achieved. She could not, one felt, even had she wanted, have then produced fur or feathers to clothe the creature's nakedness.

"This," said the guide, waving a proprietorial hand, "is what we call *Struthiomimus,* one of the running dinosaurs capable of traveling at high speed, which it does for purposes of defense, not attack, being a vegetarian."

There was a slight pause while his listeners sorted out the involved sentence.

"You mean that it runs away?" asked a voice.

"Yes."

They all looked a little disappointed, a trifle contemptuous of the unfortunate, unhappy *Struthiomimus.* They wanted stronger meat. They longed to see (behind bars) those ancient monsters which had been lords of the world, whose rumbling bellows had sent *Struthiomimus* and the rest scuttling for cover. The guide continued in his own good time.

"The next is a fine specimen of *Hesperornis,* the toothed bird. This creature, filling a place between the *Archeopteryx* and the modern bird is particularly interesting—"

But the class did not agree. As they filed slowly on past cage after cage, it was noticeable that their own opinions and that of the guide seldom coincided. The more majestic and terrifying reptiles he dismissed with a curt: "These are of little interest, being sterile branches of the main stem of evolution: Nature's failures."

They came at length to a small cage occupied by a solitary curious creature which stood erect upon two legs though it appeared to be designed to use four.

"This," said the guide, "is one of our most puzzling finds. We have not yet been able to classify it into any known category. There has been such a rush that the specialists have not as yet had time to accord it the attention it deserves. Obviously, it comes from an advanced date, for it bears some fur, though this is localized in patches, notably on the head and face. It is particularly adept upon two feet, which points to a long line of development. And yet, for all we know of it, the creature might have occurred fully developed and without any evolution—though of course you will realize that such a thing could not possibly happen. Among the other odd facts which our preliminary observation has revealed, is that although its teeth are indisputably those of a herbivore, it has carnivorous tastes—altogether a most puzzling creature. We hope to find others before the examination of the Valley is ended."

The creature raised its head and looked at them from sullen eyes. Its mouth opened, but instead of the expected bellow, there came from it a stream of clattering gibberish which it accompanied with curious motions of its fore-limbs.

The interest of some of the class was at last aroused. Here was a real mystery about which the experts could as yet claim to know little more than themselves. The young Sadul, for instance, was far more intrigued by it than he had been by those monsters with the polysyllabic names. He drew closer to the bars, observing it intently. The creature's eyes met his own and held them; more queer jabber issued from its mouth. It advanced to the front of the cage, coming quite near to him. Sadul held his ground; it did not look

dangerous. With one foot it smoothed the soil of the floor, and then squatted down to scrabble in the dirt.

"What's it doing?" asked someone.

"Probably scratching for something to eat," suggested another.

● Sadul continued to watch with interest. When the guide moved the party on, he contrived to remain behind unnoticed. He was untroubled by the presence of other spectators since most of them had gravitated to watch the larger reptiles feed. After a while, the creature rose to its feet again and extended one paw towards the ground. It had scrawled a series of queer lines in the dust. They made neither pattern nor picture; they did not seem to mean anything, yet there was something regular about them.

Sadul looked blankly at them and then back to the face of the creature. It made a quick movement towards the scrawls. Sadul continued to stare blankly. It advanced, smoothed out the ground once more with its foot, and began to scrabble again. Sadul wondered whether or not he should move on. He ought, he knew, to have kept with the rest; Magon might be nasty about it. Well, he'd stay just long enough to see what the creature was doing this time . . . .

It stood back and pointed again. Sadul was amazed. In the dirt was a drawing of a Takonian such as himself. The creature was pointing first to himself and then back to the drawing . . . .

Sadul grew excited. He had made a discovery? What was this creature which could draw? He had never heard of such a thing. His first impulse was to run after the rest and tell them, but he hesitated, and curiosity got the better of him. Rather doubtfully, he opened the bag at his side and drew out his writing tablet and stylus. The creature excitedly thrust both paws through the bars for them, and sat down scratching experimentally with the wrong end of the stylus. Sadul corrected it, and then leaned close to the bars, watching over its shoulder.

First the creature made a round mark in the middle of the tablet, then it pointed up. Sadul looked at the ceiling, but quite failed to see anything remarkable there. The creature shook its head impatiently. About the mark it drew a circle with a small spot on the circumference; outside that another circle with a similar spot, and then a third. Still Sadul could see no meaning.

Beside the spot on the second circle the creature drew a small sketch of a Takonian; beside the spot on the third, a creature like itself. Sadul followed intently. It was trying very hard to convey something, but for the life of him, he could not see what it was. Again a paw pointed up at the light globe, then the fore-limbs were held wide apart. The light . . . . an enormous light . . . . Suddenly Sadul got it—the sun; the sun —and the planets! He nearly choked with excitement. Reaching between the bars, he grabbed his tablet and ran off up the corridor in search of his party. The man in the cage watched him go, and as his shouts diminished in the distance, he smiled his first smile for a very long time.

* * *

● Goin, the lecturer in phonetics, wandered into the study of his friend Dagul, the anthropologist in the University of Takon. Dagul, who was getting on in years as the grizzling of his silver fur testified, looked up with a frown of irritation at the interruption. It faded at the sight of Goin, and he welcomed him.

"Sorry," he apologized. "I think I'm a bit overworked. This Dur business gives such masses of material that I can't leave it alone."

"If you're too busy—?"

"No, no. Come along in. Glad to throw it off for a time."

They crossed to a low divan where they squatted, folding their four legs beneath them. Dagul offered refreshment.

"Well, did you get this Earth creature's story?" he asked.

Goin produced a packet of thin tablets from a satchel.

"Yes, we got it—in the end. I've had

all my assistants and brightest students working on it, but it's not been easy, even so. They seem to have been further advanced in physical science than we are. That made parts of it only roughly translatable, but I think you'll be able to follow it. A pretty sort of villain this Gratz makes himself out to be—and he's not much ashamed of it."

"You can't be a good villain if you are ashamed."

"I suppose not, but it's made me think. Earth seems to have been a rotten planet."

"Worse than Venus?" asked Dagul bitterly.

Goin hesitated. "Yes, I think so, according to his account — but probably that's only because it was further developed. We're going the same way: graft, vested interests, private traders without morals, politicians without consciences. I thought they only existed here; but they had them on Earth—the whole stinking circus. Maybe they had them on Mars, too, if we only knew."

"I wonder?" Dagul sat for some moments in contemplation. "You mean that on Earth there was just an exaggerated form of the mess we're in?"

"Exactly. Makes you wonder if life isn't a disease after all—a kind of corruption which attacks dying planets; growing more and more vicious in the higher forms. And as for intelligence . . . ."

"Intelligence," said Dagul, "is a complete snare and delusion—I came to that conclusion long ago. Without it, you are wiped out; with it, you wipe out one another, and eventually yourself."

Goin grinned. Dagul's hobby-horses were much ridden steeds.

"The instinct of self-protection—" he began.

"— is another delusion, as far as the race is concerned," Dagul finished for him. "Individuals may protect themselves, but it is characteristic of an intelligent race to try continually by bigger and better methods to wipe itself out. Speaking dispassionately, I should say that it's a very good thing, too. Of all the wasteful, destructive, pointless . . . ."

Goin let him have his say. Experience told him that it was useless to attempt to stem the flood. At length, there came a pause and he thrust forward his packet of tablets.

"Here's the story. I'm afraid it'll encourage your pessimism. The man, Gratz, is a self-confessed murderer, for one thing."

"Why should he confess?"

"It's all there. Says he wants to warn us against Earth."

Dagul smiled slightly. "Then you've not told him?"

"No, not yet."

Dagul reached for the topmost tablet, and began to read:

CHAPTER II

The Earthman's Story

● I, Morgan Gratz of the planet Earth, am writing this as a warning to the inhabitants of Venus. Have nothing to do with Earth if you can help it—but if you must, be careful. Above all, I warn you to have no dealings with the two greatest companies of Earth. If you do, you will come to hate Earth and her people as I do—you will come to think of her, as I do, as the plague spot of the universe. Sooner or later, emissaries will come. Representatives of either Metallic Industries or International Chemicals will attempt to open negotiations. Do not listen to them. However honeyed their words or smooth their phrases, distrust them, for they will be liars and the servants of liars. If you do trust them, you will live to regret it, and your children will regret it and curse you. Read this and see how they treated me, Morgan Gratz.

My story is best started from the moment when I was shown into the Directors' Room in the huge building which houses the executive of Metallic Industries. The secretary closed the tall double doors behind me and announced my name:

"Gratz, sir."

Nine men seated about a glass-topped table turned their eyes upon me simul-

taneously, but I kept my gaze on the chairman who topped the long table.

"Good morning, Mr. Drakin," I said.

"Morning, Gratz. You have not met our other directors, I think?"

I looked along the row of faces. Several I recognized from photographs in the illustrated papers; others I was able to identify, for I had heard them described and knew that they would be present. There is no mystery about the directors of Metallic Industries Incorporated. Among them are several of the world's richest men, and to be mounted upon such pinnacles of wealth means continual exposure to the floodlights of publicity. Not only was I familiar with their appearances, but in common with most, I was fairly conversant with their histories. I made no comment, so the chairman continued.

"I have received your reports, Gratz, and I am pleased to say that they are model documents—clear and concise—a little too clear, I must own, for my peace of mind. In fact, I confess to apprehend and, in my opinion, the time has come for decisive measures. However, before I suggest the steps to be taken, I would like you to repeat the gist of your reports for the benefit of my fellow directors."

I had come prepared for this request and was able to reply without hesitation.

"When it first became known to Mr. Drakin that International Chemicals proposed to build a ship for the navigation of space, he approached me and put forward certain propositions. I, as an employee of International Chemicals, and being concerned in the work in question, was to keep him posted and to hand on as much information, technical and otherwise, as I could collect without arousing suspicion. Moreover, I was to find out the purpose for which International Chemicals intended to use her. I have carried out the first part of my orders to the chairman's satisfaction, but it is only in the last week that I have been able to discover her destination."

I paused. There was a stir among the listeners. Several leaned forward with increased interest.

"Well," demanded a thin, predatory-faced man on the chairman's right, "what is it?"

"The intention of the company," I said, "is to send their ship, which they call the *Nuntia*, to Venus."

They stared at me. Save for Drakin to whom this was not news, they appeared dumb-founded. The cadaverous-looking man was the first to find his voice.

"Nonsense!" he cried. "Preposterous! Never heard of such a thing. What proof have you of this ridiculous statement?"

I looked at him coldly.

"I have no proof. A spy rarely has. You must take my word for it."

"Absurd. Fantastic nonsense. You stand there and seriously expect us to believe on your own, unsupported statement that I. C. intends to send this machine to Venus? The moon would be unlikely enough. Either they have been fooling you or you must be raving mad. I never heard of such rubbish. Venus, indeed!"

● I regarded the man. I liked neither his face nor his manners.

"Mr. Ball sees fit to challenge my report," I said. "This, gentlemen, will scarcely surprise you, for you must know as well as I that Mr. Ball has been completely impervious to all new ideas for the past forty years."

The emaciated Mr. Ball goggled while several of the others hid smiles. It was rarely that his millions did not extract sycophancy, but I was in a strong position.

"Insolence," he spluttered at last. "Damned insolence. Mr. Chairman, I demand that this man—"

"Mr. Ball," interrupted the other coldly. "You will please to control yourself. The fact that Gratz is here at all is a sign not only that I believe him, but that I consider his news to seriously concern us all."

"Nonsense. If you are going to believe every fairy story that a paid spy—"

"Mr. Ball, I must ask you to leave the conduct of this matter to me. You knew, as we all did, that I. C. were building this ship, and you knew that it was intended for space-travel.. Why should you disbelieve the report of its destination? I must insist that you control yourself."

Mr. Ball subsided, muttering indefinite threats. The chairman turned back to me.

"And the purpose of this expedition?"

I was only able to suggest that it was to establish claims over territories as sources of supplies. He nodded and turned to address the rest.

"You see, gentlemen, what this will mean? It is scarcely necessary to remind you that I. C. are our greatest rivals, our only considerable rivals. The overlapping of our interests is inevitable. Metals and chemicals obviously cannot be expected to keep apart. They are interdependent. It cannot be anything but a fight for survival between the two companies. At present, we are evenly balanced in the matter of raw materials—and probably shall be for years to come. But—and this is the important point — if their ship makes this trip successfully, what will be the results?

"First, of course, they will annex the richest territories on the planet with their raw materials, and later import these materials to Earth. Mind you, this will not take place at once, but make no mistake, it will come as inevitably as tomorrow. Once the trip has been successfully made, the inventors will not rest until they have found a way of carrying freight between the two worlds at economic rates. It may take them ten years to do it, or it may take them a century, but, sooner or later, do it they will.

"And that, gentlemen, will mean the end of Metallic Industries."

There was a pause during which no one spoke. Drakin looked around to see the effect of his words.

"Gratz has told me," he continued, "that I. C. is convinced that their ship is capable of the journey. Is that not so?"

"It is," I confirmed. "They have complete faith in her and so have I."

Old John Ball's voice rose again.

"If this is not nonsense, why have we let it go on? Why has I. C. been allowed to build this vessel without interference? What is the good of having a man there who does nothing to hinder the work?" He glared at me.

"You mean?" inquired Drakin.

"I mean that this man has been excellently placed to work sabotage. Why has there been none? It should be simple enough to cause an 'accidental' explosion."

"Very simple," agreed Drakin. "So simple that I. C. would jump to it at once. Even if there were a genuine accident, they would suspect that we had a hand in it. Then we should have our hands full with an expensive vendetta. Furthermore, I. C. would recommence building with additional precautions, and it is possible that we might not have a man on the inside. I take it that we are all agreed that the *Nuntia* must fail—but it must not be a suspicious failure. The *Nuntia* must sail; it is up to us to see that she does not return.

"Gratz has been offered a position aboard her, but has not as yet returned a definite answer. My suggestion is that he should accept the offer with the object of seeing that the *Nuntia* is lost. The details I can leave to him."

Drakin went on to elaborate his plan. Directly the *Nuntia* had left, Metallic Industries would begin work on a space-flyer of their own. As soon as possible, she would follow to Venus. Meanwhile, I, having settled the *Nuntia*, would await her arrival. In the unlikely event of the planet being found inhabited, I would get on good terms with the natives and endeavor to influence them against I. C. When the second ship arrived, I was to be taken off and brought back to Earth while a party of M. I. men remained to survey and annex territories. On my return, I would be sufficiently rewarded to make me rich for life.

"You will be doing a great work for us," he concluded, "and we do not forget

our servants." He looked me straight in the eyes as he said it. "Will you do it?"

I hesitated.

"I would like a day or so to think it over."

"Of course. That is only natural, but as there is not a great deal of time to spare, will you let me have your answer by this time tomorrow? It will give us a chance to make other arrangements in case you refuse."

"Yes, sir. That will do."

On that I left them. As to their further deliberations, I can only guess. And my guesses are bitter.

Beyond an idea that it would appear better not to be too eager, I had no reason for putting off my answer. Already I had determined to go—and to wreck the *Nuntia*. I had waited many years to get in a blow at I. C., and now was my chance. Ever since the death of my parents, I had set my mind on injuring them. Not only had they killed my father by their negligence in a matter of unshielded rays, but they had stolen his inventions and robbed him by prolonged litigation. Enough, you say, to make a man swear revenge. But it was not all. I had to see my mother die in poverty when a few hundred dollars would have saved her life—and all our dollars had gone in fighting I. C.

After that I changed my name, got a job with I. C. and worked—hard. Mine was not going to be a paltry revenge; I was going to work up until I was in a responsible position, one from which my hits could really hurt them. I had allied myself with Metallic Industries because this was their greatest rival, and now I was given a chance to wreck the ship to which they had pinned such faith. I could have done that alone, but it would have meant exile for the rest of my life. Now M. I. had smoothed the way by offering me a passage home.

Yes, I was going to do it. The *Nuntia* should make one trip and no more . . . .

But I'd like to know just what it was they decided in the Board Room after I had gone . . . .

CHAPTER III

Murders in Space

● The *Nuntia* was two weeks into space, but nobody was very happy about it.

In those two weeks, the party of nine on board had been reduced to seven, and the reduction had not had a good effect upon our morale. As far as I could tell, there was no tangible suspicion afoot; just a feeling that all was not well. Among the hands it was rumored that Hammer and Drafte had gone crazy before they killed themselves. But why had they gone crazy? That was what worried the rest. Was it something to do with the conditions in space; some subtle, unsuspected emanations? Would we all go crazy?

When you are cut off from your kind, you get strange fancies. Imagination gets overheated and you become too credulous. That is what used to happen to sailors on their long voyages in the old windjammers, and it began to happen to our crew out in space. They started to attribute the deaths to uncanny, malign influences in a way which would never have occurred to them on Earth. It gave me some amusement at the time.

First there had been Dale Hammer, the second navigator. Young, a bit wild at home, perhaps, but brilliant at his job, he was proud and overjoyed that he had been chosen for this voyage. He had gone off duty in a cheerful frame of mind. A few hours later he had been found dead in his bunk with a bottle of tablets by his side—one had to take something to insure sleep out here. Everyone agreed that it was understandable, though tragic, that he might take an overdose by mistake. . . .

It was after Ross Drafte's disappearance that the superstitions had begun to cluster. He was an odd man with an expression which was frequently taciturn and eyes in which burned feverish enthusiasms. A failure might have driven him desperate, but under the circumstances, he had everything to live for. He was the designer of the *Nuntia*, and she, the dream of his life, was endorsing his every

expectation. When we should return to make public the story of our voyage, his would be the name to be glorified through millions of radios, and his the face which would stare from hundreds of newspapers — the conqueror of gravitation. And he had disappeared . . . .

The air pressure graph showed a slight dip at one point and Drafte was no more . . . .

I saw no trace of personal suspicion. No one had even looked askance at me nor, so far as I knew, at anyone else. No one had the least inkling that one man aboard the ship could tell them exactly how those two men had died. There was just the conviction that something queer was afoot.

And now it was time for another.

Ward Govern, the chief engineer, was in the chartroom talking with Captain Tanner. The rest were busy elsewhere. I slipped into Govern's cabin unobserved. His pistol I found in the drawer where he always kept it, and I slipped it into my pocket. Then I crossed to the other wall and opened the ventilator which communicated with the passage. Finally, after carefully assuring myself that no one was in sight, I left, closing the door behind me.

I had not long to wait. In less than a quarter of an hour I heard the increasing clatter of a pair of magnetic shoes on the steel floor, and the engineer passed cheerfully by on his way to turn in. The general air of misgiving had had less effect upon him than upon anyone else. I heard the door slam behind him. I allowed him a few moments before I moved as quietly to the ventilator as my magnetic soles would allow.

I could see him quite easily. He had removed his shoes and was sitting at a small wall desk, entering up the day's events in his diary. I thrust the muzzle of the pistol just within the slot of the ventilator, and with the other hand began to make slight scratching noises. It was essential that he should come close to me. There must be a burn or at least powder marks.

The persistent scratching began to worry him. He glanced up in a puzzled fashion and held his head on one side, listening. I went on scratching. He decided to investigate and released the clips which held his weightless body to the chair. Without bothering to put on the magnetic shoes, he pushed himself away from the wall and came floating towards the ventilator. I let him get quite close before I fired.

There was a clatter of running feet mingling with cries of alarm. I dropped the pistol inside my shirt and jumped around the corner, reaching the cabin door just ahead of a pair who came from the other direction. We flung it open and I dashed in. Govern's body under the impetus of the shot had floated back into the middle of the room. It looked uncanny, lying asprawl in mid-air.

"Quick," I yelled, "fetch the Captain!"

● One of them pelted out of the door. I managed to keep my body between the other and the corpse while I closed the dead fingers around the pistol. A few seconds later everybody had collected about the doorway and the Captain had to push them aside to get in. He examined the body. It was not a pleasant sight. The blood had not yet ceased to flow from the wound in the head, but it did not drip as it would on Earth; instead, it had spurted forth to form into several red spheres which floated freely close beside the corpse. There was no doubt that the shot had been fired at close range. The Captain looked at the outflung hand which gripped the automatic.

"What happened?"

No one seemed to know.

"Who found him?"

"I was here first, sir," I said. "Just before the others."

"Anyone with you when you heard the shot?"

"No, sir. I was just walking along the passage—"

"That's right, sir. We met Gratz running 'round the corner," somebody supported.

"You didn't see anyone else about?"

"No, sir."

"And was it possible, do you think, for anybody to have gotten out of the room unseen between the time of the shot and your arrival?"

"Quite impossible, sir. He would have been bound to walk straight into me or the others—even if there had been time for him to get out of the room."

"Very well. Please help me with this." He turned to the other four who were still lingering in a group near the door. "You men get back to work, now."

Two began to move off, but the other pair, Willis and Trail, both mechanics, held their ground.

"Didn't you hear me? Get along there."

Still the two hesitated, then Willis stepped forward and the Captain's unbelieving ears heard his demand that the *Nuntia* be turned back.

"You don't know what you're saying, man!"

"I do, sir, and so does Trail. There's something queer about it all. It's not natural for men to kill themselves like this. Perhaps we'll be the next. When we signed on, we knew we'd have dangers we could see, but we didn't reckon with something that makes you go mad and kill yourself. We don't like it—and we ain't going on. Turn the ship back."

"Don't be a pair of fools. You ought to know that we can't turn back. What do you think this is—a rowboat? What's the matter with you?"

The two faces in front of him were set in lines of stolid determination. Willis spoke again.

"We've had enough, and that's flat. It was bad enough when two had gone, but now it's three. Who's going to be the next? That's what I want to know."

"That's what we all want to know," the Captain said, meaningly. "Why are you so anxious to have the ship turned back?"

"Because it's wrong, unlucky. We don't want to go crazy even if you do. If you don't turn her back, we damned well will."

"So that's the way it blows, is it? Who's paying you for this?"

Willis and Trail remained uncomprehending.

"You heard me," he roared. "Who's behind you? Who's out to wreck this trip?"

Willis shook his head. "Nobody's behind us. We just want to get out of this before we go crazy, too," he repeated.

"Went crazy, eh?" said the Captain with a sneer. "Well, maybe they did, and then again, maybe they didn't—and if they didn't, I've got a pretty good idea what happened to them." He paused. "So you think you'll scare me into turning back, do you? Well, by God you won't, you lousy rats. Now get back to your work; I'll deal with you later."

● But neither Willis nor Trail had any intention of getting back. They came on. Trail was swinging a threatening spanner. I snatched the pistol from the corpse's hand, and got him in the forehead. It was a lucky shot. Willis checked and tried to stop. I got him, too.

The Captain turned and saw me handling the pistol. The suddenness of the thing had taken him by surprise. I could see that he didn't know whether to thank me or to blame me for so summary an execution of justice. There was no doubt that the pair had mutinied, and that Trail, at least, had meant murder . . . . Strong and Danver, the two men in the doorway, stared speechlessly. Nine men had sailed in the *Nuntia;* four now remained . . .

For a time, the Captain said nothing. We waited, looking at the two bodies still swaying eerily, anchored to the floor by their magnetic shoes. At last, the Captain broke the silence.

"It's going to be hard work for four men," he said. "But if each of us pulls his weight, we may win through yet. To the two of you, all the engine room work will fall. Gratz, do you know anything of three-dimensional navigation?"

"Very little, sir."

"Well, you'll have to learn — and quickly."

After the business of disposing the

bodies through the air-lock was finished, he led me to the navigation room. Half to himself, I heard him murmur:

"I wonder which it was? Trail, I should guess. He's the type."

"Beg your pardon, sir?"

"I was wondering which of those two was the murderer."

"Murderer, sir?" I said.

"Murderer, Gratz. I said it, and I mean it. Surely you didn't think those deaths were natural."

"They seemed natural."

"They were well enough managed, but there was too much coincidence. Somebody was out to wreck this trip and kill us all."

"I don't see—"

"Think, man, think," he interrupted. "Suppose the secret of the *Nuntia* got out in spite of all our care? There are plenty of people who would want her to fail."

I flatter myself that I managed my surprise rather well.

"Metallic Industries, you mean?"

"Yes, and others. No one knows what may be the outcome of this voyage. There are a lot of people who find the world very comfortable as it is and would like to keep it so. Suppose they had planted one of those men aboard?"

I shook my head doubtfully.

"It wouldn't do. It'd be suicide. One man couldn't get this ship back to Earth."

"Nevertheless, I'm convinced that either Willis or Trail was planted here to stop us from succeeding."

The idea that both the men were genuinely scared and wanted only to get back to Earth had never struck him. I saw no reason to let it.

"Anyway," he added, "we've settled with the murdering swine now—at the cost of three good, honest men."

He took some charts from a drawer.

"Now, come along, Gratz. We must get to work on this navigation. Who knows but that all our lives may soon depend on you."

"Who, indeed, sir," I agreed.

CHAPTER IV

Stealing the Ship

● Another fortnight passed before the *Nuntia* at last dipped her nose into the clouds which had always made the nature of Venus' surface a matter for surmise. By circling the planet several times, Captain Tanner had contrived to reduce our headlong hurtling to a manageable speed. After I had taken a sample of the atmosphere (which proved almost identical with that of Earth), I took my place close beside him, gaining a knowledge of how the ship must be handled in the air. When the clouds closed in on our windows to obscure the universe, we were traveling at a little more than two hundred miles an hour. Despite our extended wings, we required the additional support of vertical rockets.

The Captain dropped cautiously upon a long slant. This, he had told me, would be the most nerve-racking part of the entire trip. There was no telling how far the undersides of the clouds were from the planet's surface. He could depend on nothing but luck to keep the ship clear of mountains which might lurk unseen in our path. He sat tensely at the control board, peering into the baffling mist, ready at a moment's notice to change his course, although we both knew that the sight of an obstacle would mean that it was too late. The few minutes we spent in the clouds seemed interminable. My senses drew so taut that it seemed they must snap. And then, when I felt that I could not stand it a moment longer, the vapors thinned, dropped behind and we swept down at last upon a Venusian landscape.

Only it was not a landscape, for in every direction stretched the sea—a grey, miserable waste. Even our relief could not make the scene anything but dreary. Heavy rain drove across the view in thick rods, slashing at the windows and pitting the troubled water. Lead-grey clouds, heavy with unshed moisture seemed to press down like great, gorged sponges which would wipe everything clean. No-

where was there a darkling line to suggest land; the featureless horizon which we saw dimly through the rain was a watery circle.

The Captain leveled out and continued straight ahead at a height of a few hundred feet above the surface. There was nothing for it but to go on and hope that we should strike land of some kind. For hours we did, and for all the difference it made to the scene, we might have been stationary. It was just a matter of luck. Unknowingly, we must have taken a line on which the open sea lay straight before us for thousands of miles. The rain, the vastness of the ocean and reaction after our journey combined to drive us into depression. Was Venus, we began to ask ourselves, nothing but a sphere of water and clouds? At last I caught a glimpse of a dark speck away to starboard. With visibility so low, I could not be certain what it was. We had all but passed it before I drew the Captain's attention. Without hesitating, he swerved towards it, and we both fixed our eyes on it and anxiously watched it grow.

As we drew closer, it proved to be a hill of no great size, rising from an island of some five or six square miles. It was not such a spot as one would have chosen for a first landing, but he decided to make it. We were all thoroughly tired of our cramped quarters; a few days of rest and exercise in the open air would put new heart into us.

It would be absurd for an Earthman to describe Venus to Venusians, but there are differences between your district of Takon and that island where we landed which I find very puzzling. Moreover the conditions which I found elsewhere also differ from those which abide here. I know nothing about the latitude of these places, but it seems that they must be very far removed from here to be so unlike. For instance, our island was permanently blanketed beneath thick clouds; one never saw the sun at all, but for all that, the heat was intense and the rain, which seldom ceased, was warm. Here in Takon, on the other hand, you have a climate not unlike that of our temperate regions — occasional clouds, occasional rain, warmth that is not too oppressive. When I look around and observe your planets and trees, I find it hard to believe that they can exist on the same planet with the queer jumble of growths we found on the island. I know nothing of botany, so I can only tell you that I was struck by the quantities of ferns and palms, and the almost entire absence of hard-wooded trees.

● Two days were occupied in minor repairs and necessary adjustments, varied by occasional explorations. These were not pleasure trips, for the rain fell without ceasing, but they served to give us some much-needed exercise and to improve our spirits. On the third day, the Captain proposed an expedition to the top of the central hill, and we agreed to accompany him. We were all to go armed, for though the only animals we had seen were small, timid creatures which scuttled from our approach, there was no telling what we might not encounter in the deeper forest which lay between the hill and the beach where the *Nuntia* rested.

We assembled shortly after dawn, almost in a state of nudity. Since the heat rendered heavy waterproofs intolerable, we had decided that the less we wore, the better. It would be hard enough work carrying heavy rifles and rucsacks of supplies in such a climate. The Captain shepherded us out into the steady rain, pushed the outer door to behind us and we began our tramp up the beach. We had all but crossed the foreshore scrub which bordered the forest proper when I stopped abruptly.

"Damnation," I said with some irritation.

"What is it, do you think?" asked the Captain.

"Ammunition," I told him. "I put it aside ready to pack, and forgot to put it in."

"Are you sure?"

I hauled the rucsack off my back and looked through the contents. There was no sign of the packet of cartridges he had given me. In order to travel light, we had only a few rounds each. I could not expect the others to share theirs with me in the circumstances. There was only one thing to be done.

"I'll go back for them. It'll only take a few seconds," I said.

The Captain grudgingly consented. He disliked inefficiency, but could not afford to weaken his party by taking a member of it unarmed into possible dangers. I hurried back to the ship, stumbling along through the sand and shingle. As I pulled open the air-lock door, I glanced back. The three, I could dimly see, had reached the edge of the forest and were standing under such shelter as they could find, watching me.

I jumped inside and threw down my rifle and rucsack with a clatter. First I rushed for the engines and turned on the fuel taps, then I made forward to the navigation room. Hurriedly I set the controls as I had been shown, and pulled over the ignition switch. With my fingers above the first bunch of firing keys, I looked once more out of the windows. The Captain was pounding across the beach, followed at a little distance by the others. How he had guessed that there was anything wrong I cannot say; perhaps his glasses had enabled him to see that I was in the control room. Anyway, he meant business . . . .

He passed out of my line of sight, and a moment later I pressed the firing keys. The *Nuntia* trembled, lurched and began to slither forward across the sand. I saw the other two wave despairing arms. It was impossible to tell whether the Captain had managed to scramble aboard or not. I turned the rising ship towards the sea. Again I looked back, just in time to see the others running towards a form which lay huddled on the sand. Close beside it they stopped and looked up. They shook wild, impotent fists in the direction of my retreating *Nuntia*.

CHAPTER V

The Mysterious Valley

After a few hours, I began to grow seriously worried. There must be other land on this planet, but I had seen none as yet. I began to have a nasty feeling that it would all end with the *Nuntia* dropping into the sea, condemning me to eventual death by starvation should I survive the fall. She was not intended to be run single-handed. In order to economize weight, many operations which could easily have been made automatic had been left to manual control with the assumption that there would always be one or more men on engine room duty. The fuel pressure gauge was dangerously low now, but the controls required constant attention, preventing me from getting aft to start the pressure pumps. I toyed with the idea of fixing the controls while I made a dash to the engine room and back, but since it was impossible to find a satisfactory method of holding them, the project had to be abandoned. The only thing I could do was to hold on and hope land would show up before it was too late.

In the nick of time, it did—a rock-bound, inhospitable-looking coast, but one which for all its ruggedness was fringed to the very edges of the harsh cliffs with a close-pressed growth of jungle. There was no shore such as we had used for a landing ground on the island. The water swirled and frothed about the cliff-foot as the great breakers dashed themselves with a kind of ponderous futility against the mighty retaining wall. No landing there. Above, the jungle stretched back to the horizon, an undulating, unbroken plain of tree tops. Somewhere there I would have to land, but where?

A few miles in from the coast, the *Nuntia* settled it for me. The engines stopped with a splutter. I did not attempt to land her. I jumped for one of the spring acceleration hammocks, and trusted that it would stand the shock.

I came out of that rather well. When I examined the wrecked *Nuntia*, her wings torn off, her nose crumpled like tinfoil,

her smooth body now gaping in many places from the force of the impact, I marveled that anyone could sustain only a few bruises (acquired when the hammock mountings had weakened to breaking point) as I did. There was one thing certain in a very problematical future—the *Nuntia's* flying days were done. I had carried out Metallic Industries' instructions to the full, and the telescopes of I. C. would nightly be searching the skies for a ship which would never return.

Despite my predicament (or perhaps because I had not fully appreciated it as yet) I was full of a savage joy. I had struck the first of my revengeful blows at the men who had caused my family such misery . . . . The only shadow across my satisfaction was that they could not know that it was I, and not Fate, who was against them.

It would be tedious to tell in detail of my activities during the next few weeks. There is nothing surprising about them. My efforts to make the *Nuntia* habitable, my defenses against the larger animals, my cautious hunting expeditions, my search for edible greenstuffs, were such as any other man would have made. They were makeshift and temporary. I did only enough to assure myself of moderate comfort until the Metallic Industries ship should arrive to take me off. So for six months—by the *Nuntia's* chronometers—I idled and loafed, and though it may sometimes have crossed my mind that Venus was not altogether a desirable piece of real estate, yet it was in a detached, impersonal way that I regarded my surroundings. It would make a wonderful topic of conversation when I got home. That "when I got home" colored all my thoughts; it was the constant barrier which stood between me and the life about me; this planet might surround me, but it could not touch me as long as the barrier remained in place.

At the end of six months, I began to feel that my time of exile was nearly up. The M. I. ship would be finished by now, and ready to follow the *Nuntia's* lead. I waited almost a month longer, seeing her in my mind's eye falling through space towards me; then it was time for my signal. I had arranged the main searchlight so that it would point vertically upwards to stab its beam into the low clouds, and now I began to switch it on every night as soon as the darkness came, leaving it glaring until near dawn. For the first few nights, I scarcely slept, so certain was I that the ship must be cruising close by in search of me. I used to lie awake watching the dismal sky for the flash of her rockets and straining my ears for their thunder. But this stage did not last long. I consoled myself very reasonably that it might take much searching to find me. But all day, too, I was alert, with smoke rockets ready to be fired the moment I should hear her . . . .

● After four months more, my batteries gave out. It is surprising that they lasted so long. As the voltage dropped, so did my hopes. The jungle seemed to creep closer, making ominous bulges in my barrier of detachment. For a number of nights after the filaments had glowed their last, I sat up through the hours of darkness, firing occasional distress rockets in forlorn faith. It was when they were finished that I saw what had occurred. Why I did not think of it before, I cannot tell. But the truth came to me in a flash: Metallic Industries had duped me just as International Chemicals had duped my father . . . .

They had not built—had never intended to build—a space-ship. Why should they, once I. C. had lost theirs? That, I grew convinced, was the decision which had been taken in the Board Room after my withdrawal. They had never intended that I should return . . . . I could see now that they would have found it not only expensive, but dangerous. There would be not only my reward to be paid, but I might blackmail them. In every way it would be more convenient that I should do my work and disappear. And what better method of disappearance could there be than loss upon another planet? The swine . . . .

Those are the methods of Earth—that is the honor of great companies, as you will know to your cost should you have dealings with them. They'll use you, and then break you . . . .

I must have been nearly crazy for some days after that realization. My fury with my betrayers, my disgust with my own gullibility, the appalling sense of loneliness, and, above all, the eternal drumming of that almost ceaseless rain combined to drive me into a frenzy which stopped only on the brink of suicide.

But in the end, the adaptability of my race began to assert itself. I began to hunt and live off the land about me. I struggled through two bouts of fever and successfully sustained a period of semi-starvation when my food was finished and game was short. For company I had only a pair of six-legged, silver-furred creatures which I had trained. I had found them one day, deserted in a kind of large nest and crying weakly with hunger. Taking them back with me to the *Nuntia,* I fed them and found them friendly little things. As they grew larger, they began to display remarkable intelligence. Later I christened them Mickey and Minnie (after certain classic film stars at home) and they soon got to know their names.

And now I come to the last and most curious episode which I confess I do not yet understand. It occurred several years after the *Nuntia's* landing. A foraging expedition upon which Mickey and Minnie accompanied me, as usual, had taken us into country completely unknown to me. A scarcity of game and a determination not to return empty-handed had caused me to push on farther than usual. At last, at the entrance to a valley, Mickey and Minnie stopped. Nothing I could do would induce them to go on. Moreover, they tried to hold me back, clutching at my legs with their fore-paws. The valley looked a likely place for game, and I shook them off impatiently. They watched me as I went, making little whining noises of protest, but they did not attempt to follow.

For the first quarter of a mile, I saw nothing unusual. Then I had a nasty shock. Some way farther on, an enormous head, reared above the trees, was looking directly at me. It was not like anything I had ever seen before, but thoughts of the giant reptiles jumped to my mind. Tyrannosaur must have had a head not unlike that. I was puzzled as well as scared. Venus could not be still in the age of the giant reptiles . . . . I could not have lived here all this time without seeing something of them before this . . . .

The head did not move; there was no sound. As my first flood of panic abated, it was clear that the animal had not seen me. I took cover and started to move cautiously closer. The valley seemed utterly silent, for I had grown so used to the sounds of rain that my ears scarcely registered them. At two hundred yards, I came within sight of the great head again and decided to risk a shot. I aimed at the right eye and fired.

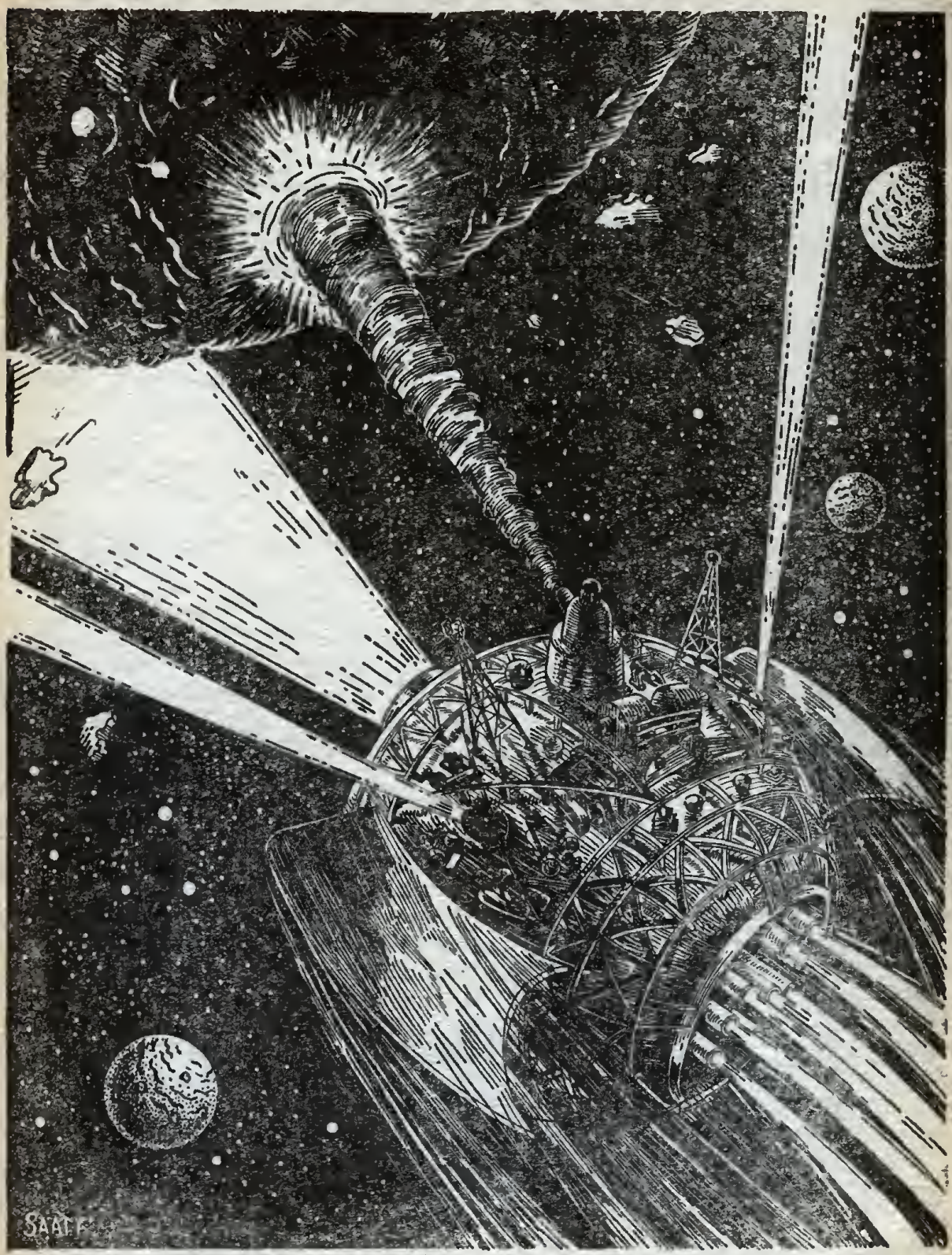
Nothing happened—the echoes thundered from side to side; nothing else moved. It was uncanny, unnerving. I snatched my glasses. Yes, I had scored a bull, right in the creature's eye, but . . . . Queer. I decided that I didn't like the valley a bit, but I made myself go on. There was a curious odor in the air, not unpleasant, yet a little sickly. Quite close to the monster I stopped. He had not budged an inch. Suddenly, behind him, I caught a glimpse of another reptile—smaller, more lizard like, but with teeth and claws that made me sweat. I dropped on one knee and raised the rifle. I had begun to feel an odd swimming sensation inside my head. The world seemed to be tilting about me. My rifle barrel wavered . . . . I could not see clearly. I felt myself begin to fall—I seemed to be falling a long, long way . . . .

When I awoke, it was to see the bars of a cage—

The Revelation

● Dagul stopped reading. He knew the rest.

"How long ago, do you think?" he asked. *(Continued on page 492)*



(Illustration by Saaty)

The ten planets shrank almost a tenth of their weight at each blast—shrank in one second!

THE LIVING GALAXY

By LAURENCE MANNING

● Everyone has an imagination—some have more powerful ones than others, and it is well-known that science-fiction fans have the most vivid of all.

In the present story, our famous author lets *his* have full reign—wander unlimited throughout the Cosmos. You are sure to appreciate this story, and the greater *your* imagination, the more you will like it.

We come across light years, universes, galaxies, and curved space as we never have before.

Here is an utterly different story, truly a tale at the limit of fantasy.

FOREWORD

● It is impossible for me, as author, to write this story so that it is complete in itself; I must ask you, as reader, to lend a hand to the work. This is what must be done: Close your eyes and picture to yourself a classroom of children about six years of age. *You are one of these children.* You have a book open in front of you and, as you read it, a lecturer says the words of it out loud, so that the subject matter is impressed through ear as well as eye. The date is very far in the future—more than 500,000,000 years, and the sun, Earth, Mars, Venus, and other ancient things have long since died and become as forgotten and legendary as the Garden of Eden. You, at the age of six, have played with strange toys—toys that would puzzle a skilled engineer today. You look forward to a whole century of study, research, sport, amusement, and philosophy. This first century is your childhood and it will end when you go to the great hospital to be operated upon and made bodily young once more. After that you are grown up and set about doing your work in the world—in whatever world you please, as a matter of fact, for there are billions of planets to choose from. You expect to live in this way forever, except for the risk of accidents. There is no hurry about learning or doing anything—but at six you are curious and ill-informed and this is the very first time you have been given any insight into the history of the human race, its habitations and its physical limits.

So you look around the room, with its bare green tinted walls, and gaze at the young face of the lecturer with awe, for his eyes are the most astonishingly intelligent things you have ever seen and they stare out from the youthful head with all the contrast and force of a scream coming out of the dark night. His name is History Zeta Nine and you have been told by one of your playmates that he is more than 100,000,000 years old. You did not believe it until he entered the room. Now you rather wonder if he can be as young as that! All through the reading, your eyes wander from the page every few minutes to steal a glance at this ancient man—just a glance, for you dread lest those burning eyes might meet yours.

Now, if you are ready, we will commence the history lesson:

● As human beings, history must start for us upon a planet circling a small sun that has long since died. This sun was not located in our present universe, but very far away from here in a large cluster of stars known by courtesy as the "First Universe." In the Chart of Space it is known as Nebula X23G79 and is medium sized, slightly smaller than the one in which our sun and planets happen to be located. It will be the object of this first

introduction to history to paint a brief picture of the progress of the race through space and to give some hints as to its final limits and their possible nature. When you have understood this general picture, we shall be in a position to go into more detail, but this is reserved for future lessons.

The planet on which the race first developed was called "Earth" and it possessed by nature a climate and an atmosphere suitable to human existence without any artificial aids. In all of Space, counting millions upon millions of Universes, such a condition has been noted only seventy-two times so that it may be considered extra-ordinary. Eight other planets circled the same sun and two of these called "Mars" and "Venus" (all ancient heavenly bodies were named instead of numbered) were colonized with great difficulty. This would have been the total distribution of humanity but for three pre-historic inventions that occurred among the ancients who inhabited the "Earth" planet. Let us examine these.

First came the release of atomic power, the first freeing of humanity from the necessity of using its man-power. The early engines and motors were, presumably, crude and dangerous but the result of the invention was, nevertheless, to enable power to be used to the limit of the raw material available in the planets. It rendered trips from one planet to another possible on a practical scale, instead of being gigantic adventures that could be afforded only once a century.

Second, arising out of the first, was atomic synthesis. This was observed as a phenomenon in the exhaust tubes of atomic rocket motors and it was found that the product could be controlled if the exhausts were surrounded by heavy induction magnets turned on and off with very high frequency. The "Earth" was now freed of its last need for labor. Food, metals, fabrics could be produced at will by atomic power using any handy raw material—rock and water being, of course, most common.

Now the "Earth" was deserted by thousands of explorers who settled down on the five remaining planets of the original solar system. These were not habitable without artificial air and heat, but the two great inventions mentioned above had solved all difficulties. One planet called "Mercury" was so near the sun of that system that it called for cooling and not until millions of years later was this perfected. The ability to reduce the heat of a body in isolated space is nowadays a mere technical commonplace —yet it involves transforming heat into energy and energy into matter.

We have, then, a human race existing on the planets of one star. The life of a man lasted little more than one century. For this reason, exploration of other stars came slowly, for a whole lifetime was used up in the mere trip. Had it not been for the third great invention, the human race might still have lived and died in one tiny corner of one universe. This invention was the rejuvenating operation which we all undergo every hundred years today. It came slowly and was not perfected without accident and many deaths. In principle, it is simple—being the familiar law of biology that hybridizing renews the youth of two aged parent races. The difficulty lay in its practice, for to hybridize the thousands of different cell types in the human body called for skill and technique then unknown. The result, historically, was to permit the long trips of exploration and colonization which in a few million years spread mankind over the planets of the "First Universe" and, subsequently, throughout all the universes and galaxies in space.

Of late, this steady, peaceful expansion has slowed down. The reason is that few new planets remain. In every direction we have spread to the very edge of matter and have come to a stop. For "space" as we know it is finite and its "curvature" that ancient men so brilliantly argued has been actually found and studied by us. As the very outermost planets grow more thickly populated and as further studies and observations are reported, we shall, perhaps, know more than now. What

actually constitutes this end of matter is still a mystery. The action of light and electricity is warped and bent there and so far, the only data available is due to the work of Bzonn, the chief actor in this lesson. His trip beyond space occupied a period of fifteen million years and since one of the results was to prevent the destruction of the human race before it had spread outside of the stars of the "First Universe," he may be called the most important character in history.

Just at the time when the human race was engrossed in possibilities of new exploration in distant galaxies and universes, with thousands of huge rocketships under construction, astronomers reported in alarm a violent "shift to the red" in one area of the sky. As all of you have had toy spectroscopes, you know what this means. Over an area ten degrees of arc across, the star background seemed to be flying apart at terrific speed —hundreds of times faster than anything ever observed. As the centuries passed, it was seen that a void was being created where once stars had been. A great black empty area thrust its way down toward the First Universe which then contained all the human race. It was like a vast cone, point down, and in it there appeared to be nothing—absolutely nothing. Beyond it the blank space extended to infinity and not even the most powerful telescopes showed any trace of distant stars.

As the years passed, it was seen that the cone's point would at its present rate touch the First Universe in a few more millions of years. Yet what action could be taken? Most scientists were resigned to the rôle of mere observers. Not so Bzonn!

He gathered together a dozen scientists —twelve men and women whose names are now unknown. They settled upon an uninhabited planetoid circling a small sun —a tiny planet not quite one hundred miles in diameter—and busied themselves in secret preparations. Atomic motors of huge size were constructed and the entire core of the planet scooped out and its stone transformed into metal. From the center, great rocket tubes flared out to the surface—fifty miles away—and the entire planet was in a few centuries made into a rocket ship. A mile below the surface they made themselves living quarters and were ready to start. The voyage they planned was, in those days, incredible. So much fuel would be needed that only a ship of planetary dimensions could have contained it and it would have been absurd to construct such a vehicle. The whole planet was set under motion by earth-shaking blasts from the great rocket chamber and the voyage commenced. Its purpose was no less than to explore the edge of space and investigate the force that was driving the stars apart. Consider this at a time when the longest flight had been less than a thousand years! After the fashion of those days of naming everything, the planet-ship was named the *Humanity*.

● These twelve immortals and their leader, Bzonn, had wasted no time upon preparations. As soon as the blast chambers had been excavated by atomic motors in the core of the *Humanity*, they set off. For what remained to be done there would be ample time during the voyage. After continuous firing for thirty hours, they were travelling at the speed of 100,000 miles a second. The bulk of their ship had been reduced by one-quarter, in spite of the well-known efficiency of atomic power. For two hundred years they tore through the First Universe at this speed, often averting collisions by furious application of rocket power at the last second. During this time, the tiny planet-ship had been converted into the most enormous powerplant known to mankind. Its surface was gleaming with a silver tracery of beams and girders housing every known appliance for the use of power in attack and defence. It is said that a tenth of the weight of the *Humanity* could be converted into energy in one second—a greater outpouring of force than possessed by many of our stars.

When the grey stretches of inter-galac-

tic space were reached, a course was set to avoid all stars and the pace was speeded up to 150,000 miles a second, relative to its starting speed, in its orbit which was, of course, unknown in the absolute. Four million years were to elapse in this monotonous journey and, there being four females among the dozen scientists, a few hundred new humans were bred and educated during the first two or three centuries and the *Humanity* turned into a research laboratory in physics and related subjects. Several important inventions were given to the human race as a result, which you will learn about later in more technical courses. The only one I shall mention is the theory of gravitation diseases—that inexplicable effect upon stars and planets of Bzonn's "delayed" or static vortex. We now know that this effect on a minute scale is responsible for our atomic power. When applied to a sun, the result, after a delay of a century or two, is sudden expansion and deterioration until nothing remains but a vast cloud of bright gas. Since suns are rarely found outside of thickly starred systems, the net result is that several dozen suns are destroyed before the reaction is complete. The sending apparatus is extremely complicated and the power required to set up such a vortex is enormous.

It must not be thought that the opportunity for charting the galaxies was neglected. A small mountain of photographs was prepared during the four million years. Progress was made in every phase of art and science. It is regrettable that the colonization idea was not thought of until a million years had elapsed. This consisted of breeding a hundred humans and thoroughly educating them, stopping the *Humanity* in her course, entering a galaxy and finding a planet, and then leaving the hundred colonists on it to multiply and explore their new universe. This was done, Bzonn reports, more than one hundred and seventy times in the last three million years of the voyage. Twice during this period, the *Humanity* was deserted for a new planet and fresh and improved machines and equipment were set up, the name and purpose in each case being transferred to the new planetship, and the old one left with the current quota of colonists in the quickly deserted universe that then held them.

All dimensions, no matter how gigantic, have a definite end and the time came at last when, search as they might, no light of any sort could be seen beyond the edges of the last universe they had visited. Always before, though it might be a million years to the next star, the sky had shown dusty gray with distant pin-points. This sky now showed blankly black—dead black—the unseeable darkness where light simply does not exist in any form, color, hue, or strength. They had arrived at the end of Matter and, by theory, also at the end of space itself. But of this latter point they were not yet certain, for though they saw this blank area, they had not yet reached it. At full speed they proceeded in its direction guided by the near stars. But before they passed these, fresh stars swung into view from the left or the right and seemed to move into the space ahead. This, Bzonn decided, must be caused by the curvature of space which seemed to be greatly magnified at its edges. To overcome this deceptive effect was impossible by physical means, for light waves and even motion itself were all equally distorted. A thousand years were spent in study and a corrective curve drawn painstakingly from empiric tests. For its solution it was necessary to solve the problem of three forces—three inpinging curves, each of three dimensions, and this tedious mathematical task had to await the breeding and educating of a thousand new humans and the construction of countless elaborate calculating machines. When at length it was finished and a course could be set, it seemed so startling and disastrous in its implications that the work must needs be gone over again painstakingly.

There was no mistake; the course was correctly laid out. But it called for driving at full speed on a course that curved

more sharply as the last fringe of stars were approached until at the last the course twisted back upon itself and would return them, seemingly, into the very universe from which they sought to escape! Seven hundred years were spent in completing the manoeuver and at the end, they were apparently driving with full power straight back toward a distant star. It was days before they suspected and months before they were certain of the amazing fact that the faster they drove toward it, the farther away it became! When it finally vanished as a far pin-prick of light, they searched with the telescopes and took sufficient observations to orient themselves, afterwards attempting to correct the photographs for light curvature. For they had passed beyond the stars.

And now picture these intrepid ones, gazing on one hand out upon nothingness and on the other upon a far distant wall of dusty light that was all that remained of Creation! This wall they imagined as a floor and across it they sped for a hundred thousand years searching for anything that might project above it—that might possibly explain the great shift to the red that had been the cause of their adventure. And they found it. What they found is, of course, still debatable. Ahead of them there loomed up a wall of distant starlight at right angles to the great floor beneath their planet-ship. This they approached not too closely, but skirted it and in the course of a million years completely circled the mass of star-matter. It rose about a million light years in height and half that in diameter. Photographs of its contour were taken and by superimposing the outlines, a tiny model was created—a weird little thing that stood on their laboratory table. This sculpture you have all seen copied in the museums under the title of "The Living Galaxy." This is, of course, a misnomer for upwards of fifty galaxies were noted in it. The title, however, clearly gives the idea of one theory of its origin, which is that the protuberance was a creature of life in some form which utilized solar systems after the fashion of atoms. This theory is much supported by the observed fact that photographic projections of its outline repeated at intervals of a hundred years showed clearly that the mass was in movement. For two million years it was studied with the most intense interest and a series of miniature statues were projected and photographed upon moving-picture film, one after the other, each in its proper attitude. It was found that when the film was viewed rapidly, the result was progressive movement.

● Let us be as explicit as we may: The shape of this mass was that of a rounded cylinder, bulged out roughly above the center line. From this projected a streamer which tapered almost to nothingness. The motion observed was, briefly, a wriggling of the streamer (possibly a tentacle?) and a slow bending forward of the main body.

The next action of Bzonn upon establishing these facts was characteristic of the fearless and coldly scientific mind which drove him continuously throughout this extra-ordinary voyage. Straight down toward the wriggling tip of the tentacle of star-matter he sped his ship *Humanity*. The voyage lasted half a million years and as the last stars in the streamer came into view, it was noted that at its point commenced the enormous vacancy in the universes—that conical emptiness formerly occupied by countless stars that had first started them on their quest!

Here was (and still is) matter for the gravest minds to consider! Those who take the opposite view from Bzonn point out that it is inconceivable that this moving cluster of star groups could have held life. They argue by analogy that even if stars and planets could be substituted for atoms to make a scale of existence similar to our own, yet the number of stars involved was too few (relatively) to have created anything more than a very primitive microscopic creature—much too small to have fixed body parts such as tentacles. They also, by mathematics, seek

to establish that there is so slight a resemblance between atoms and solar systems as to preclude the very possibility. Such reasons and arguments cannot be considered in an elementary treatise, but it must always be said that this occurred upon the edge of space—that light rays travel only a short distance outside of space (as was learned later and almost to their destruction) and that the rules and properties of such an existence cannot be yet established. On the other hand, Bzonn undoubtedly leaped to conclusions. His next action can hardly be condoned upon a scientific basis—for even if it averted destruction from a few billion or trillion humans, what is that? Humans can always be bred. And the phenomena he destroyed was one that, to date, has not since been observed and may conceivably never again occur.

Ours is not to judge. Here to Bzonn seemed a clear issue. He had found a gigantic creature rooting dangerously with a tentacle among the stars that housed the human race. This he determined to stop if it lay in his power. It must be borne in mind that Bzonn felt no doubt that the star-mass composed a living intelligent creature. At the top of the rounded body must, he thought, lie some sort of brain and toward this he drove his mobile planetoid. Right up to the "head" of the creature he came and into it, observing no difference between the stars which formed it and those back in the more orderly portions of space. Possibly, he reported, the stars were more closely placed than might have been expected—no more than that. They were still more than two light years apart at the closest and often as much as ten.

The task of destruction which he now set himself was simple—all that was necessary was to infect every tenth star he passed with his newly invented "delayed" vortex disease. There were by this time several thousand humans upon the *Humanity* of the moment. These were now divided into ten groups and each group established upon a suitable small planet as they passed among the suns. Each new planet was excavated for blast chambers of gigantic size and covered with huge engines for creating and releasing power. A hundred thousand years was spent in making these preparations, and upon an agreed day, the ten *Humanities* set off through the star-strewn space a hundred light-years apart, and as each selected star was passed, it was subjected to the terrific thrust of the disease-producing vortex. The violence and fury of this operation must be seen to be believed. Photographic reproductions are available at all museums and you are requested to view them before the next term. The ten planets shrank almost a tenth of their weight at each blast—shrank in one second! You may well believe what terrific earthquakes and storms racked them at that moment! The crew could not have lived upon them and did not attempt to. They set automatic controls an hour in advance and took themselves to small space-ships which they guided to a few thousand miles distance and there they waited until the shock had passed before returning to their wrecked living quarters. In the two or three hundred years which had then to elapse before the next selected star approached, it was necessary to rebuild the machinery over the entire surface of each of the ten *Humanities*.

By the time the second blast was shot, it was possible to see in the telescopes the first signs of the vortex disease in the first infected suns they had left behind. When four blasts had been delivered by each of the ten planet-ships, the distant stars were in violent disruption. On they sped, delivering in all, six blasts apiece, and came out through the other side of the "Living Galaxy" and hastened away through the blackness beyond space, anxious to be well out of the way before that galaxy vanished in fiery vapor. On they continued until, with the naked eye, they saw nothing but a distant hint of grey, and the telescopes showed only faint images of far stars. And as they proceeded to get clear of the danger zone, these faint images suddenly, inexplicably, and horrifyingly vanished!

Bzonn vividly recalls this scene in the following words: "Astronomy Gamma* first reported it to me and I did not believe him. It was not an hour before that I had used the telescope myself. He went away and returned with Astronomy Alpha* himself and upon this I went to investigate and found it was even as I had been told. Through our most powerful electric telescope nothing—literally nothing—could be seen save for the other nine planets that formed our fleet. I signalled each of the nine in turn but not one reported any observation different from ours. The command to apply rocket power to bring our flight to a halt was a dangerous one—I dare not give it. How could we tell that direction might not be lost in the manoeuver? One thing I did know and only one—if our rockets were kept shut off, our inertia would continue us in a straight line. Possibly large gyroscopes would hold direction and set us upon a return course. I proceeded at once to try them.

"By signal, I requested Physics Beta, who commanded one of the planetoids, to make the official tests, using the other nine ships to check direction. In a tenth of a year, he had completed his apparatus and the test was made. He found that the gyroscope retained its direction in spite of all manner of manoeuvers to which he subjected his planetoid. The facts were signalled to all our consorts and I delayed the command to return on our course only long enough for Mechanics Delta to finish a gyroscope on my own planet. This delay was fatal, as you shall see.

"All this time, it must be remembered, our planet-ships were speeding outward in the blackness beyond space. Evidently, light waves cease to function entirely when space completely ends. Also, evidently we had reached about then an absolutely blank condition which, near or in space, only partially exists. Whatever the exact reason, the fact is that, of a sudden, the other planets in the fleet grew faint and dim and quite casually vanished. One of them was less than a thousand miles away! Radio signals were tried in vain. Our gyroscope was set in motion finally and I changed course at once, hoping to come close enough to the nearest planet-ship to get into communication. Possibly her commander had the same idea—I may never know—but I never saw him again.

"For a hundred thousand years, I searched through the black fog in the most complete and utter fruitlessness. Finally, despairing of ever finding them, I gave the command for setting our course back to our starting point. Of the other nine planets, eight had not set up gyroscopes when the light failed and could only by the merest chance ever hope to return to our familiar star universes. Physics Beta, of course, had a guide for his return and him I expected to find later on. As a matter of fact, he returned to human civilization half a million years before I did.

"For centuries we peered despairingly out at the desolate wastes that lie there so emptily and blackly, searching for the first distant hints that might indicate our approach to familiar space. We gave up hope a dozen times, fearing that the gyroscope compass had failed, and a dozen times we kept grimly on, for what else was there for us to do? Then came the glorious moment when, with the naked eye, we all of us could make out the far floor of light formed by all created matter and toward it we rushed until the separate light-points showed as stars in the telescopes. And where we entered space, there was a great rough lump of star-clusters projecting above the level floor of stars and this we photographed as we passed over and, laying silhouette upon silhouette, built up a tiny replica of its outline in our laboratory. It had the appearance of a long, rounded body lying on its side with a tentacle motionless on the floor beside it."

● The remainder of Bzonn's narrative is an argument in favor of his theory that he had slain a super-beast—a living

*A member of the crew.

galaxy of stars. He warmly defended his action and insisted that a second beast doubtless exists somewhere and can be studied. He has made frequent expeditions to the edge of space in many directions but, so far, without success. At present, he has been absent twenty million years and is feared lost. But space has been conquered by many other explorers and there remains almost no star not already in our catalogs and almost no planet without its human settlement.

The next problem facing the human race is, is all this finite incurved group of star clusters we know as "space" merely one unit in infinity? Do there lie imbedded in the dark nothingness beyond "space" incalculable other such units? Can we reach these other islands in chaos steering through the lightless areas with gyroscopes? Only time can tell.

AFTERWORD

● When the voice of the teacher ceases, you look up, for the end of the chapter has been reached. You have been so excited by the substance of what has been read that you have lost your awe for this ancient man. Then his eyes sweep over the class and meet yours—just for an instant—and pass on to the door as he walks out of the room. And then a low babel of conversation breaks out among your six-year-old contemporaries and there is a general movement toward the door. You, reader, barely notice the others. Your chin is on your hands and your elbows on your desk. Your eyes stare through walls and pass through space until, in imagination, you see the warped and bulbous edge of space itself —see it as a fish sees the surface of water from beneath. How fine it would be, you think, to devote yourself forever to searching for the lost companions of Bzonn! But to do that one must wait until one knows enough and . . . . there is the book before you. You are one of those who cannot wait for the next day to bring what it will—you must peer into the next chapter, driven by curiosity. For long hours you sit there over the book and I would give anything to know what you read there!

THE END

BRITAIN TESTING SHELL AIDED BY EARTH'S MOTION

London, June 10 (U. P.).—The War Office was understood today to be interested in experiments with a new shell designed to utilize the rotation of the earth to drop a tremendous distance from where it was fired.

The shell contains a number of rockets arranged to detonate in automatic succession. By this method, it is hoped, a perfected shell fired in London would be able to stay in the air long enough, while the earth rotated, to land in Paris, Berlin or any other designated spot.

WHAT IS YOUR SCIENCE KNOWLEDGE?

Test Yourself by This Questionnaire

1. Why don't termites thrive in France? (See Page 413)
2. Have termites ever been found in France? (See Page 413)
3. What is the effect of hybridizing? (See Page 438)
4. What is the effect of nicotine on the teeth? (See Page 449)
5. Why did the ancient alchemists sometimes use symbols and cyphers? (See Page 456)
6. How can a tree be killed without cutting it off completely? (See Page 493)
7. Trace briefly the evolution of the horse. (See Page 494)
8. What is the "hoof" of a horse composed of? (See Page 494)
9. What animal, next to man, is the furthest evolved? (See Page 494)
10. Under what principle does the rocket work? (See Page 495)

The Wanderer

By L. A. ESHBACH

Through vaults of blackest night a flaming globe
Sweeps by, majestic, like a star set free
To wander on the endless, spacial sea,
With golden lace its train, a kingly robe.
The worlds it passes in its careless flight
Glare after it in jealous rage, for they
Can never leave their dull and weary way —
The speeding comet vanishes from sight.

Long years go by; in space appears a glow —
A sphere of light; the wanderer comes back.
And as it speeds upon its destined track,
The circling planets smile, for now they know
The comet is not free to wander far,
'Tis bound by cosmic laws like every star.

(Illustration by Winter)

When the lady opened the top of the wire cage and the cat jumped out, the snake was ready for him.

THE TREE OF EVIL

By DAVID H. KELLER, M.D.

● This favorite author returns with a story of the most peculiar people in the world—not just odd or eccentric, but utterly strange. The inhabitants of Glendale will arouse your interest and make you wonder.

Psychology and morals, like in much of the author's other work, play a large part in this *different* tale. Why did the people of Glendale consider morals an unnecessary weakness of humanity? Why had the Ten Commandments suddenly left the minds of every citizen leaving the town populated by uncouth, murderous, and unmoral creatures?

The famous Taine of San Francisco, the best-loved detective in science-fiction, solves the problem in the way that only Detective Taine can. Many of our readers have followed his adventures for many years and will be glad to see him with us once again.

Anyone who has ever read a Keller-yarn before will know, without further comment on our part, that the story will be thoroughly enjoyable and well worth the reading.

● "You were born in Glendale, Mr. Harley?"

"Yes."

"Left there when a boy?"

"Yes."

"Never went back?"

"No."

"What kind of a place was it when you were a boy?"

"All this interests me, but at the same time, I cannot see that it is any of your business. You came here with good enough introductions presumably to see me on business. I make an appointment with you and you start in asking me a lot of personal questions. What is the idea, Dr. Riorden?"

"Simply this. I became interested in Glendale. Tell you why later. After a rather intensive search of 'Who's Who in America,' I found that you are about the only person who ever left Glendale and became wealthy. So I made it my business to come and see you."

"What do you want? Free library? Drinking fountain? A new church? Uniforms for the High School football team?"

"No. I wanted to know if you loved the town you grew up in as a boy."

The rich man's face softened.

"It was a dear old town," he replied. "It was just as nice a town as a person could find in America after the Civil War. About eight hundred people lived there and they were all clean, if you know what I mean. Two churches, but most everyone went to the Episcopal church. It was of stone covered with ivy. There was one wide street, and on each side, maple and oak trees furnished shade. Martins nested there and their song was just about the only thing that ever disturbed the quiet. Everybody had gardens and were proud of their lawns. People spoke to each other on the street, and when a gentleman met a lady, he held his hat in his hand when he spoke to her. If a boy went into a store to buy a jack-knife and the salesman was playing checkers, the game was finished before the sale was made. The young people respected the aged. A man could borrow money on his note without collateral. It was just a nice, sweet, prosperous little town where everybody lived up to the Golden Rule and nothing ever happened."

"But you never went back."

"No. I wonder how many people do go back? I was fifteen when I left. I am fifty now. First I was too busy making money. Later on it seemed that I did not

care. At times I said to myself that I will go back but there really never seemed to be any appropriate time or any real reason. You see, my people there are all dead."

"I wish you would go."

"Why? Is that what you came for? Most peculiar!"

"Perhaps, but I wanted your opinion."

"Of what?"

"Of what has made the change. At the present time Glendale is the meanest, dirtiest, worst town in that part of the United States. Speaking in medical terms, and you will recall that I am a physician, it is a literal cancer on the face of the earth. The people there are just sick with every imaginable form of vice. Taxes are uncollectable, murders go unpunished, cruelty in every form is rampant, the people are cunning, dirty, and just plain criminals. The good people in the county avoid the place like they would a dose of poison. There is as much difference between the town you knew as a boy and the present town as there is between light and darkness. I wanted you to know it. It seemed that if you loved the place you were born in, the town where your family lived and died, that you might be willing to do something."

Harley smiled.

"I suppose that something like that has happened to every small inland town. Times have changed everything. People are simply not living the way they used to when I was a boy. Of course Glendale may be a little worse than other towns, but folks are just about the same all over. And after all, I do not see what I can do about it. Even if I could, what difference would it make, and why should I be interested?"

"Suppose I tell you that every Sunday a select crowd of Glendale citizens go to the graveyard and play poker on your mother's tombstone? Suppose I told you that the white marble is covered with filth?"

"I pay the sexton fifty a year to care for the family plot."

"I know. I talked to him. He laughed about it."

The rich man's face hardened as he snarled.

"I'll smash him. I'll tear the whole rotten crowd to pieces."

"Certainly. You are mad now. But I want to ask you two questions. What has made the change in Glendale? And how are you going to help me save it?"

"Why should it be saved?"

"Because it is sick, and the sickness is spreading to the surrounding country. I have charted the crimes committed in that county, plotted what might be called a crime curve showing the increase year by year. The thing that started in Glendale is spreading like the little waves spread when you drop a stone in the water. I cannot see an end to it. Glendale might be neglected, ignored, isolated; but you cannot do that to a county or to a state. Glendale has to be saved to save our national life."

"You take it too seriously, Doctor."

"No. Let me show you the statistics, the charts."

For two hours, the two men talked and studied the papers Dr. Riorden spread on the desk. As a sociological study, the data was well prepared and most interesting. At last the medical man gathered his charts together and put them back into the folder. He looked silently, questioningly at the rich man. Harley looked back at him. Silence.

At last the banker spoke.

"It looks bad."

"Certainly."

"How much money do you want? What are your plans? How can I help?"

"Do you want to help?"

"Yes. I loved my mother and I have very fond memories of my boyhood home."

"This is my plan. We will secure the services of a detective, the best we can find. The three of us will go to Glendale in some disguise. We will try to make a diagnosis. After that the cure will be easier. But first we must know what is the matter with the town. There will be

some expense, but the big thing I want you to give is your time."

"It would be easier to give the money."

"You would not say that if you saw your mother's grave."

"I'll go. How much money do you want to start with? How are you going to select the detective? When do we start?"

"I'll let you know in time. The important thing at present is to be sure you are with me in all this."

"That is the least of your worries!" cried Harley, and he meant it.

● Ten days later, the two men again met in Harley's office. They were both uneasy and impatient.

"I wonder why he does not come!" exclaimed Dr. Riorden. "The letter stated very positively that he would be here at two."

Just then the Circle clock boomed the hour. The door was flung open and in came two policemen dragging a struggling, squirming, squawking shrimp of a bowery rat.

"Sorry to bother you, Mr. Harley," apologized one of the officers, "but this dirty bum has been trying to get to your office for the last half-hour. He won't tell his business, but he has been making some wise-cracks about you and we thought you might want to identify him before we took him to the cooler."

"Never saw him," stated the banker tersely. "Just a new kind of panhandler. You take care of him."

As they started to drag him, the half-pint twisted one arm loose, reached in his rags and, with a swift gesture, threw a white carnation on the floor.

"Wait a minute!" called Dr. Riorden. "I know the man. You can leave him here. It's O.K."

"Are you sure?" asked Harley.

"Positive. You can go, officers, and thank you. I will see that the man is cared for."

The policemen out of the room, the Doctor turned to Harley and explained.

"The white carnation was the identification mentioned in the letter from the detective bureau. Who are you and how are you?" he asked the boy in rags.

"All right," was the reply, with a twisted smile. "Those officers were certainly rough. They nearly twisted my arms off. Your office is certainly well protected, Mr. Harley. I suppose that is one of the privileges of the rich, to be protected from the poor. My name is Taine, Taine of San Francisco. Here is my card."

"There must be some mistake," said Dr. Riorden slowly. "I asked the Bureau to send me the best detective they knew of, regardless of cost."

"They did," replied Taine quietly. "I am willing to admit that they did. There was no mistake. That is why I am here. Now if you do not mind, I will send over to the hotel for some clothes, and after I am better dressed, I will talk over the problem with you. I have no idea what you want me for, but that does not make any difference. I judge you wanted some question answered and that is why I am here."

Half an hour later, a well-dressed man, barely over five feet and weighing not more than ninety pounds, sat perched on a chair built for a two hundred pounder. Slowly, carefully, in great detail, for over two hours, Dr. Riorden went into every phase of the troubles of Glendale. At last he turned to Taine with a question.

"What do you think about it?"

"Must be something wrong somewhere."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Correct it. That is what you are engaging me for."

"Your confidence is startling, Mr. Taine," commented the banker.

"It is based on the fact that I have never failed. When do we start?"

"At once," replied the Doctor. "And now that we are through with the discussion, suppose we smoke. Have a cigarette, Mr. Taine?"

"Thanks, but I never smoke. I find that the nicotine is very injurious to the enamel of the teeth, and once that is gone, decay soon follows. While you smoke, I

will indulge in a piece of peppermint. It keeps the mouth clean and the mind clear. Suppose we make a few plans."

"How about your fee, Mr. Taine?" questioned the banker.

"My practice is to discuss that after the case is settled. I always charge what I think the service is worth. Personally I have little use for money, but my wife is very much interested in a church in San Francisco. She is President of the Ladies' Aid Society, and it gives her pleasure to give a trifle here and there. My income is always increasing, but she is equal to it. In fact she is very capable in some directions. But let us return to the problem of Glendale. My idea is something like this."

He explained his plan to them.

● A week later, a rather stout man in a well-worn suit entered the Bank of Glendale. It was a private bank with no outside affiliations. In fact it was a bank in name only. The owner had no employees and tended strictly to the entire business, which was to loan money to those who needed it provided there was a one hundred per cent chance to make at least ten per cent per month on the investing capital.

The visitor carried a shabby black leather bag.

"Can I open an account here?" he asked.

"I am always ready to take care of money," replied the banker with a twisted smile.

"Then here is five thousand in gold; count it and give me a receipt."

The banker counted it.

"Four thousand, nine hundred and eighty dollars," he said. "Not five thousand."

"I spent twenty coming here."

"Well, here is a receipt and some checks. They are only good in Glendale. This is not a regular bank. I just handle local business."

"That is O.K. with me. I am going to stay here for a while. Is there a hotel?"

"Yes. Sort of a one. On the other side of the street two squares down. By the way, have you seen the papers lately? Couple of days ago a man took five thousand in gold from a bank about fifty miles from here. Rather interesting. Thought perhaps you knew the man?"

"Perhaps I did," said the new depositor, "and perhaps I didn't, and did I or didn't I, what makes it so interesting? Perhaps that is why I am going to live in Glendale for a while."

"It is a good place to live in," answered the banker. "The law does not mean much here."

"So I have heard; so I have heard," muttered the stranger as he walked out of the bank.

The banker looked at him through the window.

"If he dies suddenly," he thought, "it may be hard to find anyone to claim that deposit."

The stranger went to the hotel and secured a room. For a few days he was a curiosity; later he became commonplace. He gossiped with the idle, played poker with a sweet bunch of gamblers and lost a lot of money, flirted mildly with the girls on the street, and once went to the cemetery.

The Strange People

● The Episcopal Church was on Main Street at one end of the town. It had been placed there a hundred years before with the idea that the town would grow. As a matter of fact, the town had never reached it as far as buildings were concerned, though a large per cent of the people reached it at least once a week. At least, a large per cent used to reach it. At this time, the Rector was surprised if fifteen attended a service; they were mostly old people who had established a habit of attending church, and the habit was not easily broken.

In back of the church was a wood. It might have been a pleasant recreation center, but instead it was a neglected jungle of dying trees and parasitic vines. On one side, up on a hill, was the Rectory, an unpainted rotting wooden house.

From it the land fell in a heavy slope ending in a deep, dank, dreary ravine, almost a sink-hole. At one time, a trim, neat boardwalk had connected house and church. This was now rotting with many missing planks.

The church, being made of stone, endured the changes of time better than the house, but even the church looked shabby. The stained glass window at the end showed the Three Wise Men bringing gifts to the Child in the manger, but one of the wise men had lost his head and parts of the gifts were replaced by a piece of ordinary window-glass. But the entire town looked the same way, so the decay of church and rectory did not seem out of place.

Over the wooden walk towards twilight walked a man. He stepped gingerly over a mud-hole and finally knocked at the unpainted oaken door. The Rector opened it. He was a Princeton graduate and could write, if he desired, three degrees after his name. He was tall, white-haired, and poorly shaven, with an ashy grey complexion. There was something about him that seemed to indicate that at one time he had been a gentleman. He opened the door and looked at his visitor coolly.

"Well," he said. "Well?"

"I am a Doctor," the stranger said, "Dr. Riorden. I am thinking of starting a practice in this town. I have been told that this place needs a physician. So I have come to call on you to ask for advice. Naturally, you would know about Glendale and its problems. May I come in?"

"A Doctor?" asked the Princeton graduate. "A Doctor? If you have any other place to go, you had better go there. I have buried a dozen people in the last year and all of them have been either murders or suicides. We don't need a doctor here. Our people don't get sick. They just die. But come in."

Dr. Riorden followed the man through the doorway into a long hall and through that hall into a back room. It evidently was a general purpose room, for there was a stove, a table, chairs, a sofa, some pictures, and food on a sideboard. Everything was dirty, dishes unwashed, the floor spotted, the stove rusty.

"You will have to pardon the way things are here," said the Rector, with a twisted smile. "The church is poor, and they have allowed their property to deteriorate. However, such hospitality as we have to offer is given to you freely. Sit down. No, not on that chair; it will break. The one in the corner is the only one that is safe."

"A quaint old town," remarked Riorden, more for something to say to take the strain off the situation. "Must have been a real town in the olden days."

"It is a good town now to live in for those that like to live in this kind of a town," the Rector replied. "There are certain things about it; perhaps you have noticed? But most of us who live here get along. Of course I was sent here; it was my duty to come."

Just then two children dashed in, the boy chasing the girl. Almost in the room the girl fell and the boy kicked her savagely. Instead of crying, she turned, seized his ankle and bit it. The father took the boy by the collar, slapped him across the mouth, dragged him to a window, opened it, and literally threw him out. He turned to the girl.

"Get out and stay out. Have you lost your manners? I should think you could behave yourself, seeing I have company."

He dusted off his hands and turned to the Doctor.

"Children will be children, and at times my temper gets the best of me. Will you have some coffee? There should be some cake somewhere."

"I do not want to trouble you."

"No trouble. Have some tobacco? I smoke too much. It seems to help me to forget. Now what was it we were to talk about?"

"The advisability of my practicing in Glendale."

"That was it. There is this to say. We have no physician here, so there is competition only from some of the neighboring towns, and we rarely see a Doctor.

You might do well here, if you were willing to do certain kinds of practice."

"Meaning?"

"You see, I am a priest; consequently I realize and admit the weakness of my congregation. They are to be congratulated on their vices. At times they consult me professionally. The better educated find my library charming. They claim it helps them toward a better and more varied life of sin."

"The man must be insane!" thought Riorden.

A step was heard on the porch.

"That must be Mrs. Sweetly," whispered the minister. "She comes and goes among my flock. She is a valuable influence on our richest men. Ah! My dear. Allow me to introduce Dr. Riorden, who is thinking of locating in Glendale."

● The Doctor acknowledged the introduction. The woman startled him with her beauty and her dress. A snow-white skin with dazzling red hair, a black velvet dress with extreme décolleté, scarlet lips and pendant crystal earrings. A million dollar woman in a ten cent house. She dropped gracefully on the broken sofa.

"Tired," she said, "and soul-wearied. The life in this place fails to bring the ultimate thrill."

"Even the banker?" asked her husband.

"He is growing impossible. Is there anything to eat?"

"I will make some coffee."

Smoking continuously, he started to make the coffee, talking as he puttered.

"Mrs. Sweetly has many social responsibilities. Card parties and intimate teas, at times with our masculine parishioners. Someday I will be forced to kill some of them, but at present I simply smile and dream."

"He has his diversions," explained the wife, "and though most of them are blonde and immature, he cares for them tenderly."

"Lambs of my flock," explained the Rector. "Let us cease our personalities and drink some coffee. We add a little brandy, Doctor. Have you ever tried it? With the lights out and the brandy lighted, things appear that are strange."

"He means that he looks like a fallen angel," added the wife.

"And you like Lileth. By the way, dear, the children are growing more and more brutal in their reactions. I am afraid that some day Donald will seriously injure Eunice, and perhaps spoil her beauty. It would be a serious financial blow to us. I wish you would reduce their allowance of leaves. At their age, they are really taking too many. Now in regard to Dr. Riorden's idea of becoming a resident of Glendale. Just why do you want to come here, Doctor?"

"Frankly because it is impossible to practice elsewhere. There are legal difficulties. I made a fortune by practices that were questioned not only by the medical societies but also by the law. So I brought the money here; that's all."

"We will help you spend it," sighed the Rector. "My dear wife has been most fortunate in this kind of social service. And now I will escort you to the street with a flashlight. It would not do for your neck to be broken, just yet, anyway."

"You must come again soon," added the social serviteer. "My husband is always out Tuesdays and Fridays from seven to eleven."

"And sometimes I do not return till midnight, my dear. Well, Doctor, suppose we go. I trust you will decide to stay with us. We need your services and your money."

"There are so many worthy charities," murmured Mrs. Sweetly, casually lighting a cigarette. "And charity with me begins at home. On your way back, my dear Charles, stop and gather a few fresh leaves. You know I prefer them young."

The two men started off through the dark briar-grown wood. Without a light, the boardwalk would have been an impossible snare.

"My wife is a wonderful woman," murmured the Rector.

"She seems to be," agreed Dr. Riorden.

"Without her help, we could not finance the Parish of St. James."

"I will be delighted to become a heavy contributor," insisted the medical man.

Just then a shrill shriek pierced the dank depression.

"That must be my friend Swanson beating his wife," commented Sweetly. The cry was repeated. "They live on the other side of the wood, but her voice carries on the night air. At times it disturbs me as I read. Now I will say goodnight. From here on you can find your way back to the Hotel. I presume you are staying there. The proprietor is a friend of mine. Have you met his daughter? Charming girl, but has a bad habit of splitting her infinitives. But that is a defect that can be overlooked. After all, *noblesse oblige*. We cannot all be lingual purists. And now goodnight. Come often to see us, on Tuesdays or Fridays or any other evenings that suit you. I have a library at your service."

● The next morning, Dr. Riorden met the New York financeer in his hotel bedroom.

"Well?" questioned Harley. "What do you think about it?"

"It is a mess. The whole community, as far as I can find out, is a stench in the nostrils of the state. Everyone here, even the little children, are affected. I called on the spiritual head of the church last night. He is a Princeton man, a gentleman of culture and education. His children are young barbarians, his wife a beautiful poison, and his home a pig-pen. And they do not seem to worry about it. They have abandoned most of the house because the roof leaks so badly, and do everything in the kitchen except sleep. Have you had much to do with women?"

"Not much."

"Then stay away from the Rector's wife. However, I think I am on the trail of a diagnosis. They eat the leaves of some kind of plant and it may be that they become addicts; their moral sense is twisted somewhat similar to that of the opium-eater. If we can determine that everyone here is eating the leaves of that plant and find out what it is, we may be able to do something. But we must be careful of our own food. For all we know, they may serve it with the food. I have the very idea. We can say we are diabetics or gastric ulcer cases and just eat oranges and bananas. Have you heard anything of Taine?"

"No. But the weekly paper says a tramp has been arrested and is working on the village streets in ball and chain. That may be Taine, or he may be the new waitress in the restaurant at the other end of town. I have not heard anything about the plant but I have seen enough of the place to believe anything you may say about it. The banker here is especially rotten. He took my deposit but he is limiting my withdrawals. I suppose he hopes I will be killed before I spend too much. Perhaps I had better disappear for a day or so and come back with some more cash. That may make him defer the plans for my funeral."

"You do that. In the meantime, I will try and locate the plant. Mrs. Sweetly may assist me. She likes the leaves young and tender. This is going to be an interesting study. Do you suppose they all are eating it?"

"I am not a Doctor," replied Harley. "But if eating it takes away from man, woman, and child every trait that makes for refinement in our civilization, then they all are eating it. I never saw so much deliberate, cruel vice as I have seen going on openly in this town. In some way, I cannot say that it is worse than sin; it is a mental cancer. Yesterday I saw a drunken man in the gutter and a woman went up and kicked him in the face with her pointed shoe. Everybody laughed. One man hollered, 'Good for you, Mame; kick him in the eye and make him see straight.' "

"I wish Taine were here," sighed Dr. Riorden. "He must be around somewhere. Think he might be the new waitress? Guess I will go down there and look her over. Queer chap, that man Taine."

"Suppose we go down to the restaurant and see the girl," suggested the New Yorker. "I guess there will be no com-

ment if we are seen together. Both being strangers about whom gossip is already saying the worst that can be said, it will seem the natural thing for us to become pals."

The restaurant, at the end of town, was dirty. In this characteristic it shared with the town, but the association of dirt with food appeared peculiarly repugnant to the visitors. It was so foul that even the flies seemed to be bored by the plethora of their surroundings.

Back of the smeared counter, the proprietor lounged.

"We crave food," stated Riorden, dully.

"That is why we are in business, friend. Susie Loo, get busy and feed these gentlemen. Do you all want a regular meal?"

"We want oranges and bananas," replied Harley.

"Huh?"

"Oranges and bananas," repeated Harley.

"Two of ham and eggs!" cried the man. "Where do youse think you are? Palm Beach? An' Susie Loo! Bring 'em some of the salad."

Ten minutes later the slattern slid the order on the table with two cups of dishwater coffee.

"Anything else?" she asked, and slowly winked one eye.

"Nothin' else," said Dr. Riorden. "Say, this ham looks tainted."

"So am I," she replied, as she slid a soiled piece of paper towards him, and left.

Harley, who was the nearest to the paper, picked it up casually and shaded it with his hand as he lighted a cigarette. He read:

Don't eat the salad. T.

They minced at the meal and then sauntered over to the bar to pay the bill.

"Fine meal," commented Harley, "but we did not eat the salad. It had some flies in it."

"Susie Loo!" howled the man. "Come out here. Didn't I tell you to always pick the dead flies out of the food before you served it? The dead ones, you idiot! The live ones can fly away when you move the plates. Whatcherwannado? Drive my customers away, dern you!" And with one blow in the mouth, he knocked her to the floor. She ran screaming to the kitchen.

"That will larn her, and come again. I will see that the flies are out the next time."

"At least we know where Taine is," commented Harley later.

"I wonder what he has found out?" whispered Dr. Riorden. "At least he is afraid of the salad. I wonder if it had those leaves in it?"

For the next forty-eight hours, nothing special happened. Harley saw little of Dr. Riorden, and neither of them saw or heard from Taine. The New Yorker had invested in some local property, sold to him by the local banker, and thereby may have saved his life. Dr. Riorden called again at the home of the Sweetlys and thereby nearly lost his life. It was after midnight, the beginning of the third day, when Dr. Riorden was aroused from a light sleep by hearing the door of his bedroom open. He sat up in bed, automatic in hand, and asked, "Who is it?"

"Don't shoot. It's just me, Taine. I have been hurt enough without suffering further from the hands of my loved ones. Where is Mr. Harley? Can you get him?"

"He is two rooms down. I can have him here at once. Shall he dress? Not any trouble, is there?"

"No. I just wanted to talk to you. Did you take my advice in regard to the salad?"

"We did. Nothing but oranges and bananas. I found out about the leaves soon after I arrived. Harley is a diabetic and I have something wrong with my stomach. We are both sick men and have to be careful with our diet."

Five minutes later the two men were conversing in whispers with a little soiled waitress.

"The whole town is eating the plant," began Taine. "They are serving it in the restaurants. As far as I can determine, there must be over a thousand people who take some every day. If it were not for

a rule of mine to be careful when I am in character, I would have had it fed to me the first day. The boss is rough with me, knocks me down and all that sort of thing, but he thinks I am a woman, and I guess you know how men are. He thinks I am eating the leaves, because I am acting differently, more common than I was. The next thing we have to do is to find out what it is and where it comes from."

"I tried to find out part of that," answered Dr. Riorden. "The preacher's wife gave me some. I promised her I would try them, but instead I sent them to a botanist. I received his answer today. He does not know what the plant or tree is, but he is sure there is nothing like it in America. I asked him to have a chemical study made of it, but that will take time."

"I think I know where it comes from," interrupted Harley. "It grows in that deep ravine in back of the church. I have seen children back there picking the leaves by the basketful."

Just then there came a pounding at the door.

"What is it?" demanded Riorden.

"This is the constable. Open this door."

● In walked the banker, the restaurant keeper, and a man with a large badge on his vest.

"Just as I told you," yelled the restauranteer. "There is the dirty wench. I seen her passing a note to these men. Made a date with them."

"I am surprised at you, Mr. Harley!" exclaimed the banker.

"It is the three of you for the hoosegow," declared the law.

"Come, come," placated Dr. Riorden. "It is not at all what you think. The little girl is going to marry my friend Harley. We were just wondering where we could find an officer to perform the ceremony. Now if our friend is a Justice of the Peace, there is fifty dollars in it for him. We like this town and want to stay here. I would like to invest a few thousand in the restaurant business, become a silent partner, and Harley is going to buy some real estate. Surely you gentlemen understand our position. Mr. Harley is quite a fool over Susie Loo. It was a case of love at first sight."

As he talked, Harley took the girl in his arms in a protecting attitude. The officer smiled.

"I'll marry you and you can get the license tomorrow. Did you say fifty or a hundred would be my fee?"

"A hundred," said Dr. Riorden. "I will pay that as a wedding present. Now in regard to that restaurant. Would twenty-five hundred be enough for a half-share in it?"

It ended up with everyone being delighted. Susie Loo was married to Harley. The officer received a check for his fee. Arrangements were made for the necessary business transactions on the next day, and the three trouble-hunters left in high glee.

"'And that,' said the little boy, 'is that!'" exclaimed Taine as he shut and locked the door. "That is the second time in my life I have been married, and I hope my wife will understand it when I tell her about it in San Francisco. Tomorrow you can buy me some clothes and I can take my proper position in Glendale society. I can even call on Mrs. Sweetly. But there is one thing I want to do more than anything else and that is some research work in the Carnegie library. There is another thing I must do after that and that is become acquainted with the Rector. He may tell me something if I am nice to him."

Harley laughed.

"If anyone had told me, two months ago, that I would be going through these experiences, I would have thought him insane. I am not sure yet but that I am. But I have some additional reasons now for finding a cure for Glendale. What a sweet bunch of rascals they all are. Well, at least we can all be together now and may be able to work faster."

"There is one thing we have to do," explained Taine. "These people must have a definite idea of just what the eating of

these leaves does to their personalities. They do not want anyone except addicts to live in Glendale. So it seems that we had better act in such a way that they will think we have started the habit. Tomorrow Harley can go shopping with me and we will buy some real snappy feminine clothing. Then I am going after the Rector and find out just what he really knows."

"You mean that you are going to vamp him?" asked Harley with a puzzled smile.

"Just that!"

"Do you really feel," asked Dr. Riorden, "that there is something about this that so far we have not suspected? Something additional to the mere eating of some poisonous plant? What is the idea of going to the library, Taine?"

"The human mind is a peculiar one, Doctor. You probably realize that better than I do. People know things and they are not satisfied till they see that knowledge in print. Sometimes the things they know are so terrible that they cannot put it into print and then they use cyphers, symbols, veil the idea in mysterious language, one example being the alchemists, or Pepys' diary or the messages Lord Bacon is supposed to have left in plays to show the future generations he wrote Shakespeare. Get the idea? Take the Jewish name for God. In a hundred manuscripts the authors talk about it with an idea that those who know the deeper mysteries will understand. Now I have an idea that at some time, someone knew something about this Glendale plant and put that knowledge in a book, and that book is in the local library. I am going to look for it."

"It may take you years!" cried the New York banker.

"At times you annoy me," sighed Taine of San Francisco. "You engage a man of international reputation, and then you seem to doubt his ability."

"You have confidence in yourself," said Dr. Riorden. It was partly a statement but there was a question mark in the background.

"I have!" said the little man, with a black eye and dirty feminine rags. "The reason I have is because I have never failed. Some day I will write my memoirs and then you will understand why I trust myself. I am unique in some respects, but I demand trust on the part of my clients. And one thing, gentlemen, you must remember. The moment I suspect that either of you are eating the leaves, or failing in the least to obey my orders, I leave this town and the case. Success depends on following my program. My life is very precious to me. I am not ready to die. The entire task of purifying Glendale is a dangerous one. So far we have lived because we have money. The men of Glendale do not know how much and they do not want us to die before they have it all. Now suppose you go to sleep and I will start working on my face."

"You look a mess with that face. Can I help you?" asked the Doctor.

"That face," replied Taine, "is largely make-up. Tomorrow I will look different as the wife of a wealthy man, supposed to be a slick bank robber. I hate these feminine parts, but I am rather clever in them. Now we have a program. Tomorrow I shop, vamp the preacher, and read books. Harley can buzz around Mrs. Sweetly, and I would advise him to be careful because I hear that the woman is unmoral rather than immoral. Dr. Riorden can rent an office and start the practice of medicine, and I guess that is a sweet mess in this town. If we are alive, we will confer tonight. I suppose, for the appearance of things, I will have to share Harley's room. Goodnight, and *don't eat any of those leaves!*"

Harley Weakens

● The three investigators met at nine that night in the Harley suite. Keyholes were covered and lights shaded.

"Have you found out anything, Harley?" asked the detective.

"Not much. I spent the afternoon walking with Mrs. Sweetly. She became communicative when I handed her a hundred dollars to go into the foreign mission field.

She wants me to start eating the leaves, says it will broaden my viewpoint of life, and contract my conscience. She feels that sin is just a name for expansive human emotions, or something like that. The plant grows in the ravine. It has no seeds, cannot be transplanted, and the earth where it grows becomes yellow. She offered to go with me and show me the damned thing if I would promise to eat some with her. I judge she is wearied of the banker and is anxious for new contributors—to the foreign missionary fund. Of course I showed the necessary interest. She seemed to be thrilled over my marriage; said it was just too romantic for words and wants to entertain us to a meal. That is about all."

"How about you, Dr. Riorden?" interrogated Taine.

"Oh! The day passed. I signed the necessary papers, paid the money, and now am half-owner of the Broadway Restaurant, special tables for ladies, regular meals served, with or without flies. We have engaged a new waitress to take Susie Loo's place. I have suggested some paint with new dishes, and some snappy pictures. My partner is really enthusiastic. We are going to have weekly meal tickets and a special supper for society every Saturday night. Perhaps we will have a nigger orchestra and dancing. I have my office and have had one patient, a little baby a year old. The mother acknowledged giving it a tea made from the leaves, thought it would strengthen the child, but, as far as I could tell, it is more apt to kill it. And that was all for the day."

"I found out something really worthwhile. At least I hope so," murmured Taine, "for at times, clues that are thought to be worth-while peter out. I found an old county history in the library. It had some Indian lore in the first chapter, most of which seemed to be tradition with little foundation. But there is evidence showing that the Indians knew about this plant and came here several times a year for a religious ceremony of some kind. The medicine men went into a trance and prophesied. There was a hint that a god was worshiped, but what the god was or where, was not known. That was all of importance. It is a small library, poorly kept, and the custodian did not trust me.

"My affair with the Rector was also interesting. It seems he is a lonely man whose wife does not understand him. He had heard of my being a waitress in the restaurant, of the forced marriage, and I guess he was a little surprised at my childish innocence; at least he seemed willing to help me win future salvation *via* his guidance. I did not want to accept his offer without adequate pay, and he finally offered to show me something no one else knew. There is a tunnel under the church and that tunnel leads to a cave. He says that he has been down there once and will show me the real sights of the underworld of Glendale if I am nice to him. Think of it. I have been places and seen things, but when he held me and talked to me about that cave I nearly screamed. I did shiver, and I think he was rather impressed with my feminine fears.

"There is one thing I am sure of. These leaves the people are eating are from a tree. I think that the cave has something to do with the tree. Perhaps you have noticed the cats. Everybody is raising cats. Why? That is something to think of. Here is a town of over a thousand people and everybody has cats.

"Perhaps they just like cats," suggested Riorden.

"No. That is not it. The cats are a part of the jigsaw puzzle, but just now that part does not seem to fit anywhere. Suppose we call it a day."

● The following day seemed just mere routine. The three men saw only a little of each other. That evening Taine called on Dr. Riorden in his office, for regular office hours had been started by the medical part of the investigating trio.

"You look worried, Taine," remarked the Doctor to the little woman in the flashy dress. "Things going wrong?"

"Yes. How is your car working?"

"Correctly, as far as I could tell at supper-time. Why?"

"Have it filled with gas and oil and put your things in it. I think that you are leaving town tonight."

"I am?"

"Yes. It is Harley. He has started to eat the leaves. We cannot trust him a day longer."

"Sure you are right?"

"Sure enough for all practical purposes. My idea is to knock him cold, tie him, and take him to a hospital. Probably a few days will bring him to his senses. No one here will worry much about it. The banker will just confiscate his deposits. He thinks they are stolen property, and, so long as no one knows it, what is the difference? You come back after you dispose of Harley. I will remain here in the rôle of a pretty, deserted wife, with unknown means. The two of us will finish the solution of the problem."

"But see here, Taine," protested the Doctor. "Harley is interested in this. He is the one who is financing it. We can't tie him up on suspicion. What do you know?"

"Nothing much. Only he spent an hour with me this afternoon trying to convince me that the investigation had better be dropped. His argument was that what the people of Glendale did was their own business and that Mrs. Sweetly was a fine woman who was not understood by her husband and that, as far as he was concerned, he wanted to help her all he could. Now when a man changes over night like that, something has happened to him. He may have eaten the leaves or he may have fallen in love, but in either case, he is worse than useless to us. He is not only useless, but dangerous. We are all going to the church tonight and at the first false move, I am going to blackjack him. You have the car handy and step on the gas. And you had better do as I tell you or you will be *minus* the services of the best detective in America. I say that because I have not met all of the secret service men in Europe and have to limit my statement."

Dr. Riorden sat in a deep study.

"She is a beautiful woman," he said at last with a sigh.

"I think that this is going to show that she is a beautiful Devil. You be careful, Doctor. First thing you know, you will be sorry for her and then I will have to be a lone wolf in this fight. I was rather counting on you. You get things ready and take supper with us at nine. Harley is throwing a party in our rooms and has asked the Rector and his wife. Mrs. Sweetly is bringing a friend of hers to keep you company. I guess you know what kind of a lady a friend of a lady like Mrs. Sweetly would be? That is a rather complicated sentence but I guess you can work it out. Be there at nine. After supper we are going to the church. Sweetly has promised to show me the entrance to the cave. Have some rope in your car—to tie Harley. Bye-bye."

As a social occasion, the supper was a great success. To the surprise of Dr. Riorden, the banker brought his wife, a large woman with exopthalmic eyes and an electric personality. That made eight in the supper party, and rather much of a mixture as far as personalities were concerned. Mrs. Sweetly's friend was a dark brunette, black hair, black eyebrows, heavy lashes, and apparently a rather dusky background. The supper, served by the restaurant, which was very appropriate considering that Dr. Riorden was a half-partner, was fair, the salad covered with a heavy oil dressing of generous portions. After supper someone suggested bridge for small stakes. Harley and Riorden lost heavily and after an hour paid their debt like gallant gentlemen and the party broke up. The brunette, who had evidently been annoyed at the Doctor's lack of appreciation, kissed her dear Mrs. Sweetly goodnight and disappeared with the banker and his wife. The remaining five accepted the pastor's invitation to do a little archeological work in the church. He had thoughtfully provided flashlights for the party and Dr. Riorden offered to drive everybody over in his machine.

Sweetly had a little trouble opening the side door of the chapel. But at last they were in and seated in a pew.

"All ready to listen to the sermon," giggled Mrs. Harley.

But Harley was sending messages to Mrs. Sweetly *via* the hands.

"There is, after all, not much to tell," began Sweetly, in a dull but toneful voice. "This church was built a hundred years ago. The architect seemed to be very generous in the matter of a basement. But the plaster used was not of the best and soon after I came here a part of the wall caved in. I discovered it one day and found that a tunnel had been walled in when the church was built. In odd times I explored that tunnel and found that it led to a limestone cave. I found other things there, which to certain types of personality would seem interesting."

Mrs. Sweetly yawned.

"If you don't mind, I am going to walk home. I have heard the story of the mysterious limestone cave so often that the repetition bores me. Perhaps one of the gentlemen will act as my escort?"

"If you will allow me to do so, I will," answered the New Yorker.

"Do you think your bride will excuse you?"

"Don't mind me," gurgled Mrs. Harley. "I will have to become used to my hubbie leaving me; besides, I am very anxious to see this tunnel and everything."

"If it is just a dark tunnel and a natural cave, I think I will miss it this time and go up to the house with Mrs. Sweetly and Harley," announced Dr. Riorden. "Then Harley will have company on the way back."

"I don't want company on the way back," growled Harley. "If you haven't anything better to do, you can sit in your automobile. I'll meet you there."

In this way, the party was divided. Two went to the Rectory, one to the automobile, and the Rector and Mrs. Harley down into the basement. Dr. Riorden almost fell asleep, roused with a start, looked at his watch, saw that it was past one, wondered what he should do, and then realized that the New Yorker had come back to the car.

"I am through with this persecution," declared Harley. "Just makes that lovely little woman miserable. She is unhappy enough as it is, having to live with that wretch of a husband. He must be insane to treat her as he does. I am going to take her to New York. Why should she stay here? She is brilliant, can do anything. Why should she be tied down to an insane man and two ugly brats?"

He sat down on the front seat beside Riorden who whispered to him.

"You are dead right. After all, what business is it of ours? Here comes Taine and the Rector. Say, you people were down there long enough to see a hundred caves. Sorry you have to leave us, Mr. Sweetly. We have had a pleasant evening which I hope will not be our last. Do you mind taking the back seat, Mrs. Harley?"

"I have had the most wonderful time," giggled the young flapper. "That man knows the most things."

"He must. Did you knock him cold?" asked the Doctor.

"I did. He was eating out of my hand."

"It would be a good thing if you could knock your husband cold," sighed Dr. Riorden as he started the car down the dark side street.

A minute later Harley slumped down beside the driver without even a moan.

"Got him!" exclaimed Taine. "Fortunately, he didn't have his hat on. My blackjack worked to perfection. Let me help you put him on the back seat. Better give him some morphine at your first opportunity. What is your plan?"

"A friend of mine runs a private hospital about a hundred miles from here. I will enter him as a private patient and keep him under mild sedatives and elimination for a week or so till we come back. I ought to be able to be back here in at least thirty-six hours."

"I am not sure that I want you to come back. Suppose you give me the address of the hospital and you stay there and take care of Harley. If I need you, I will write you full instructions. I learned a lot to-

night and I may be able to get along by myself."

"I don't like the idea, Taine. You are so little and everyone knows you. Better let me come back."

"No. Stop the car and let's move Harley. How peacefully he is sleeping. I hit him just hard enough, a very useful trick to learn. Give me the address and be on your way."

The next morning Glendale gradually recognized the fact that their three latest subjects of gossip had disappeared. They had been there a few days and now they were gone. But in leaving, they had left more than their memory. The banker, the restaurant owner, the Justice of the Peace, the Rector, and his better half had all profited greatly by their temporary visit. Their sorrow was not caused by the early disappearance of their guests but rather by the fact that they had not left more of their financial assets behind them.

It might be said that Glendale returned to normal.

The Source of the Leaves

● Three days later, a small nigger boy knocked timidly at the back door of the Rectory. Mrs. Sweetly opened the door and looked with some amusement at her visitor. He did not wait for any questions concerning his business.

"You all buy cats?" he asked.

"Cats?"

"Yes, mam. In this hyar towsack I have a right smart cat, and they done told me you were right proud to buy cats."

"What kind of a cat is it, Amos?"

"Er tom cat, blacker as I be, with yaller eyes, what shine in the dark, and since I draped him in this here towsack, he done little but spit and meow. That thar cat be eddicated; he's er knowing tom, an wilder en most cats."

"I'll look at him."

"Yes, mam. But when I take er string off he's gone, mam; he just air a wild cat."

"He won't get away from me," the woman laughed. "I know my cats."

She went into the house and came back with a wire cage and a pair of heavy leather gloves that went above her elbows.

"Give me that bag!" she ordered.

Without hesitation she opened the bag, plunged a gloved arm in and after a few seconds pulled out a half-strangled black cat. She held it up with the air of a connoisseur and then placed it in the wire cage.

"I will give you a quarter for him," she said with an air of finality. "It is a good cat but no cat is worth more than that to me."

"An' can I eat hyar?" asked the nigger. "I hain't eat for a right smart while."

"Coffee and dry bread. All we have. Come in the kitchen. Herbert, pour this nigger some coffee and give him some of those stale crusts."

"A nigger?" Rev. Sweetly asked with uplifted brow. "Wait on a nigger? My dear, at times I fear you have lost your sense of proportion. In fact, my darling, between one thing and another, I become slightly irritated. Why should I, a Princeton graduate, a descendant of one of the Signers who can trace his ancestry back to the Magna Charter, pour coffee for a nigger?"

"For two reasons, my dear Herbert. The first, perhaps is nonessential, but it is merely because I have asked you. The second is that I have just purchased from him a black cat of the masculine gender. He is a large cat and just the kind of a cat I have been looking for. The cats I have had for the last year are just cats. These town cats are deteriorating. This cat that the nigger brought is more than a cat. We will use him tonight and pleasure in the using."

"That is different. Come in, my boy. You may have been made in the image of a god, but if you were, that god was an ape. Will you have cream and sugar in your coffee or drink it black? And marmalade on your bread? And a cigarette between drinks?"

"You tend to him," ordered the wife, "while I phone to the banker. Will you join us at midnight?"

"I intended to spend a few hours with one of the flock."

"Bring her along We will have a foursome."

"No. She is too emotional. I am not sure she is ready. There will be just the three of us, and I would be better pleased if you left the banker out of the picture. I am fed up on him."

"Jealous, Herbert?"

"At times. In fact, when I have my headaches, the future seems dark. There was a time when hopes ran high. The month before I met you, I could have gone to St. John's in New York. And then we came here, and here we have stayed for twenty years. What are we? What has happened to us? What does it all mean? And how will it end? The children? Their future?"

She laughed, low, rippling, musical laughter, beautiful to hear were it not coming from the scarlet mouth of Hell.

"I have heard it so often, and of late it has become more maudlin. You did not have to come here. You did not have to stay. The trouble with you is that you have not been eating enough of the leaves. Six more a day with your regular number will give me a different husband and give you a higher vision, a loftier aim in life. As for our daughter? Why worry about her? She will marry the banker in two years. Now suppose we pause in our exhibitionism of family difficulties before this black idiot. You feed him and I will call the banker. If he wants to bring Marianna, he can bring her. If you want to bring your latest lamb, *you* can bring *her*. I will have the black cat. That will be all I want for an hour or so. Your other cats can look on."

"Just the three of us, my dear."

"Have it a trio if you like. At times you fret me. I wonder why I married you?"

"And at times I wondered why I asked you. Go ahead and eat, nigger! How about a piece of cheese pie? There is mould on it, but it is food none the less. Mould on a piece of pie. And we are scum on the earth. If you could decide, would you be mould or scum? Can you read, nigger? I have the finest library in this part of the state. Most of the books are written around the frailty of man. If you cannot read, you could look at the pictures. Lilith in every possible position whereby she can make this earthly paradise a Hell for man. You are young yet, nigger. Your life is all ahead of you. Take my advice. Go back to the jungles and climb a tree. Eat bananas, drink coconut milk, grope for ground nuts in the slime of the forest, climb into the sunshine and look blinkingly at the sun and wonder if you are kinfolk to a god. Sing in the daytime and howl shiveringly at night, but stay away from the women of your race. If one comes near you and she wants you to eat an apple, or leaves from the Tree of Evil, smash her skull in and hunt a new tree to live in. Never let her start. Be a misogynist, be lonely, starve for love, but stay away from a woman bringing food."

"Yesser," answered the blinking nigger. "This here cheese pie am right tasty. I could eat more pie like that, if youse has more, an more coffee."

Five minutes later he was walking down the decayed wooden path, an empty towsack in his hand and a quarter in his pocket.

● The plan finally called for just three persons and the black cat.

It was midnight in the cave.

They had gone down through the basement of the church into the tunnel and through the tunnel into the cave. Tall candles, seven in number, had been lit and in their location formed a seven pointed star. Sweetly and the banker sat on the floor near one of the candles. In front of them was a large white china plate filled with green leaves. As they waited, they occasionally selected a leaf and slowly chewed it.

From the ceiling of the cave dropped pendant a root of a tree over a foot thick. It dropped in a straight line to the floor and there buried in the clay. The root was smooth as though polished by centuries of friction. On one side, coals burned in

a brazier. On the beaten clay floor, on all sides of the tree, bones were piled in rotting, decaying fetor. Mainly little bones, they were, though here and there a larger one showed above the putrid mass.

● A little man walked into the office of the Manswick Hospital.

"Is Dr. Riorden in?" he asked.

"Yes. Your name and business?"

"Just tell him it's Taine, Taine of San Francisco. He will know what the business is."

There was an air of elegant fastidiousness about the little man. His clothes fitted perfectly, his necktie was a cravat instead of so much silk, and there was a symphonic harmony of color in everything he wore. A walking-stick, headed with a knob of ivory, suggested a slightly foreign touch. The student nurse, designated as a guide, was properly impressed, even if she was a full head taller than the visitor. He was shown into a private room. A man was in bed and another man was in the rocking-chair by his side.

The man left the rocking-chair and gazed incredulously at the visitor.

"Taine!" at last he gasped. "Taine of San Francisco. You surprise me. Upon my word, you look like a million dollars. I have seen you in several disguises. Is this one? Or is this your real self?"

"A trifle ornate," admitted the little man, smiling. "And how is Mr. Harley? I hope your headache did not bother you?"

The New Yorker smiled as he replied.

"Rather harsh treatment, Mr. Taine, but perhaps necessary. Dr. Riorden can tell you about the finer medical points of the case. As I remember it, I was a rather sick man, but am feeling better now."

"He was sick," agreed the Doctor. "Of course, in a general way, we knew what was the matter with him and what to do for him. We gave him the works, and for the last twenty-four hours he has been on the road to recovery. At least he has stopped cursing me for separating him from Mrs. Sweetly, and that shows the development of insight which is the primary desideratum in mental cases. So far no one is sure just what the poison is. They cannot identify it botanically, and I did not send enough leaves to permit a thorough chemical study. We do know from our observations on Harley that even a little of it makes a man change his viewpoint on life; whether that can be called insanity is a question."

"Insanity or not, they were very unpleasant people," interrupted Harley. "I have thought it all over during the last twenty-four hours and I am confident of one thing and that is that they were unpleasant people. Their entire viewpoint on life was unwholesome."

"It was more than that," continued Dr. Riorden. "There was a brutal disregard for all the things that lead men toward the stars. They seemed to have the accumulated evil of centuries. The Indians must have known about the effects of the leaves because the tribe that inhabited that part of America was renowned for their cleverness in torturing their captives. You see, Taine, I have been making use of my spare time here in doing some research following up the clue you found in the Carnegie library in Glendale. It appears they must have known about the properties of the leaves and made good use of them."

"But how was the secret lost for years?" asked Harley. "I am sure that they were not eating the leaves when I was a boy."

"How sure, Mr. Harley?" asked Taine.

"Simply because the town changed."

"How long did you live in the town?"

"I was born there. I left when I was fifteen."

"Did you know anything about the gossip of the town? Was there an outcast family there? A shiftless, no account, despised family?"

"No. Nothing like that. Wait a minute. I forgot the Teeters of Frog Run."

"The plot thickens," commented Taine smiling. "Now what about the Teeters?"

"Not much that is good. They were early settlers and no good. I never heard anything nice about a Teeter. Just poor

white trash, and not all white. Some of them showed their Indian blood. They were said to be badly mixed, white, Indian, Portuguese, negro, everything. There was even a rumor of a Chinaman living with one of the women back in the thirties."

"That all checks nicely," said Taine. "I am ready to tell you now; a day after I landed in Glendale I sent a full description of the Reverend Herbert Sweetly and his wife to my eastern office. The data I have received is not complete but is suggestive and fits in very well with the rest of the story. As a young theological student, Sweetly rescued a young girl from her own sinful inclinations and as a reward, she married him and he finally became the spiritual head of the Episcopal Church at Glendale. In this way she became the social leader of the community she had left as a girl."

"You mean she was born there?" asked the Doctor.

"Certainly. She was Virginia Teeter. When she was a little girl, she was thrown out of a store in Glendale and she determined to show the town that they could not do that to a Teeter and get away with it."

"How do you know all this?" demanded Harley.

"She told me. Of course, she could not come back to Glendale as a Teeter, so she came back as the bride of the new Rector, and even then she could not come back to the old Glendale, not with any satisfaction, so she poisoned the entire community. That is what made the change in the town. The leaves were there all the time, only people were not eating them."

"But how did she know about the leaves and their property?" asked the Doctor. "Certainly she did not discover it by accident."

"No. She knew about it. It seems that the Teeters always knew about it. They probably were told about it by one of their Indian ancestors. At least the Teeters kept on feeding the snake all these years."

"Come, come! Taine," urged Dr. Riorden. "Don't put on too much melodrama. We will accept some of your story but not that about a snake. What did they feed the thing?"

"Cats. But I know, as a matter of fact, that he could eat bigger things than a cat."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw him. Of course I was sure you would not believe me, but then you hired me to do a piece of work for you and you should have faith in me. I am just here to make my report and collect my fee. You told me to clean Glendale up and I did it. If you think you cannot believe me, go to Glendale and see for yourself. Of course the whole community is sick. They are drug addicts who cannot get any more of the drug, but the State Department of Health is in there, working on them. Some will have to be committed as insane, but the psychiatrists feel that most of them will recover. How long has it been since you brought Harley here?"

"Two weeks tomorrow."

"Then they have been without the drug for about eleven days. I had the Health Department on the job right away. Of course it was hard at first to convince them that there was need of it. Even now they are working on the theory that it is an epidemic of typhoid of unusual virulency. I felt there was no need of giving the sick people too unpleasant newspaper notice."

● Harley was silent. Dr. Riorden lit a cigarette. Taine thoughtfully polished the head of his cane. At last Harley spoke.

"It all is hard to believe; but tell me this. I know there was a cave and a tunnel and that the tunnel ended in the basement of the Episcopal church. But that church was built over a hundred years ago. The mouth of the tunnel was walled up. Sweetly told us he discovered it after he located in Glendale. If there was a snake there, how did it keep alive all that time? After the church was built? It had to eat."

"That was easy. The cave had another entrance, apparently a natural rock forma-

tion tunnel, and that tunnel opened out on a little stream that is still called Frog Run. The Teeters used that tunnel after the church was built."

"But didn't the people who built the church know about the other tunnel and the cave—and the snake?"

"You always are dragging in that snake, Mr. Harley," sighed Taine. "I see you doubt that part of the story. I was not there when the church was built, but the land on which it was built was owned by a Teeter. He probably homesteaded it, or it may have been in the family before the Revolution. At any rate, he sold the land to the new congregation for one hundred dollars in gold, and the deed is recorded in the court house. I saw it. He also helped to lay the foundation walls of the church. The old records show how many days he worked and what he was paid for his time. My theory is that he walled up the mouth of the tunnel and incorporated that wall with the foundation of the new church. In that way they kept it a secret, I mean about the snake and the Tree of Evil and the cats and all that sort of thing. The reason I think this is the fact is that there are two kinds of masonry down there. He probably walled up the tunnel, waited till the wall got dirty and moss grown, then sold the land to the church and no one except himself and probably his family knew what he had done."

"You say there were two kinds of masonry?" asked Dr. Riorden.

"Yes. That is in my report. In the old days when they made the morter for stone work or plastering, they mixed in hair to serve as a binder—horse or cow hair. I had no trouble in identifying that kind of mortar in the church basement. But in the plaster around the opening, there was another kind, much longer and finer, which I have positively identified as human hair, probably from the heads of women, and that, with some of the bones, and the fact that the Teeters had Indians in the family makes me think that now and then they scalped the ladies before giving them to the snake. Then when Amos Teeter, that was the name in the deed, decided to build a wall over the mouth of the tunnel, he just took a lot of the old scalps and used the hair."

"Where did this happen?" demanded Harley. "In Tartary or Africa or South America?"

"No," said Taine. "Right here in the United States. The trouble with you gentlemen is that you do not know what really is happening all around you. Not only a century ago, but this very moment. That is why I am a detective. I like to know what is going on. And then my wife gets ten per cent for her church activities, and sometimes more than ten, and the girls are going to college."

"And there was a snake?" demanded the New York banker.

"Certainly. I can convince you of that."

"Go on with the story," urged Dr. Riorden. "If you do not tell us what happened, you will have us bursting with curiosity."

"It is not much of a story," began Taine. "After you left, I felt that Mrs. Harley had better fade out of the picture; so she did just that. I wanted to find out about the cats, so I went and sold one to Mrs. Sweetly. It was a big, black tomcat and she gave me a quarter for it. I have the quarter in my pocket, if you want to see it; it's just an ordinary quarter. I found out that she was going to use that cat at midnight, and it looked to me as though she was going to use it in the cave. You see, I was in there with the Rector, and I suspected that was where the cats went, though at first I did not include the snake in the picture.

"Midnight came and the four of us were in the cave. Of course they did not see me, not right away. The Reverend and the banker came in first and lit the seven candles. I guess I did not mention them before. There were seven of them making a seven-pointed star. Big, fat candles about four feet high. The center of the star was the trunk of the tree. Near it was a brazier on a tripod with a fire burning in it. I don't know all about it, but it made an impression on me. The Rector and the banker sat down on the ground

and waited, and while they were waiting, they chewed the leaves, probably to get them in the proper frame of mind for the services.

"Then in came Mrs. Sweetly, and she was all dolled up in a white Grecian dress, and she carried a wire cage with the black tomcat in it. I was waiting for developments by that time. You know what I mean? Waiting to see what happened to the cat. She starts to sing a song, and all the time she is backed up against the taproot and looking towards a specially dark corner of the cave. I heard the snake before I saw it, but of course I did not know what was making the noise, which was like the rustling of a lady's petticoat only much louder. Of course, you gentlemen don't recall what the rustle of a lady's silk petticoat sounded like.

"Then the snake came out and started to coil around the root of the tree. Mostly he crawled behind the lady, but the last coil, just back of his head, he put around her. He was a big snake. I have his measurements, and when you see the figures, you will know that he was fairly big, not a baby by any means.

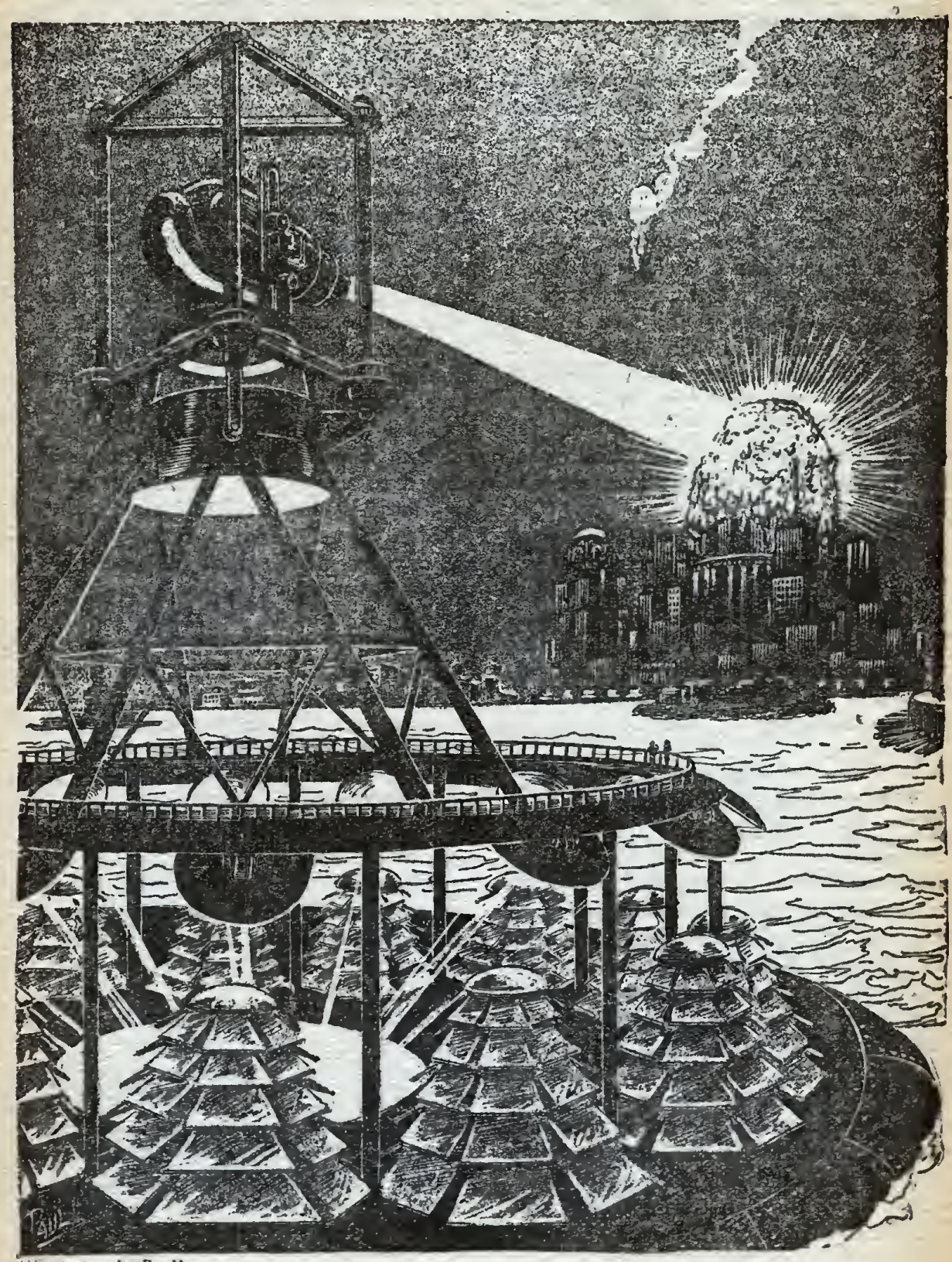
● "He was friendly with Mrs. Sweetly. No doubt she was a favorite with him. Even poor dumb animals know the hand that feeds them. He did not seem to pay much attention to the two men, just made his head wave around the woman's head and once in a while licked her lips with his tongue. She laughed at him and talked to him, and then she set the wire cage down on the bed of fire. Of course that singed the poor tomcat and he started in to howl and that got the snake all excited, and when the lady opened the top of the wire cage and the cat jumped out, the snake was ready for him; one gulp and down the red lane poor pussy went. I felt sorry for him, seeing I had sold him for a quarter to the lady in question.

"Naturally I thought that was going to be the end of the evening's performance. Mrs. Sweetly twisted her body out from under the coil of the snake and went over to the two men. The three of them talked, and while I could not hear all they said, I could tell that they were not in sweet accord. At last the preacher stood up, stretched himself, and without any warning, hit the banker on the head. Mrs. Sweetly just laughed, a sweet, girlish laugh, and then she helped him to take the banker's clothes off, and she personally scalped him, and made a good job of it. Then they dragged his body over near the snake, and when he saw the bleeding head, he uncoiled most of himself off the tree and wrapped around the unconscious banker and started to squeeze him. When the right time came, he just swallowed him. Of course it took a little time. It was a big snake, but then it was a big banker. That meal seemed to satisfy him, because he went back into his hole to take a nap.

"Mrs. Sweetly said she had to stay and take care of the snake till her daughter was old enough to be taught how. Apparently it was an hereditary position passed down from mother to daughter.

"When she said that about their daughter, he threatened to kill her, and she dared him to. Said he was too much of a coward, not enough of a man to kill a Teeter. I didn't want either of them to be killed, but I was especially anxious not to be killed myself; so I kept real quiet and close to the floor. Then he shot her. He must have been sure he had killed her or was overcome with remorse at hurting her, because he put the end of the revolver in his mouth and blew his brains out, or something. At least, when I went over, he was dead and she was bleeding to death. I tried to stop the hemorrhage, but it must have been mostly internal. I took her in my arms and held her head and we talked things over. As she knew she was dying, she told me the truth about things —how she had brought her husband back, started him to eat the leaves and finally seduced the entire town. Then she died and I felt rather alone in the world, just me and the snake, and the snake was not much company, being fast asleep.

(Continued on page 493)



(Illustration by Paul)

The peak glowed red, then white, then fell away molten.

ENSLAVED BRAINS

By EANDO BINDER

PART THREE

Conclusion

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE:

● Hackworth, an explorer in Africa in 1973, discovers his boyhood friend, Williams, who had been lost in the jungle for the past forty years and become a leader of a band of natives. Williams is brought back to civilization and is astounded at the tremendous changes that have taken place. There had been a terrific war shortly after he left America, much greater than the World War, after which a group of scientists seized the governments of America and Europe and set up Unitaria, a scientific organization which brought mankind to greater heights than he had ever before attained.

Hackworth learns that his daughter, who is in love with a young chemist named Terry Spath, is forced by the Unitaria to marry a scientist whom she had never seen before. She had rated so high in the government test that it was thought that her union with one of equal mentality would produce highly intelligent children. Hackworth, Williams, and Terry are horrified at this, never expecting that she would pass the test. Then Williams shows them a solution from an African plant that he had brought back with him. It was a drug that would put any living thing into suspended animation for an indefinite length of time. They would only awaken when commanded to do so by a designated person. This drug is administered to Lila, Hackworth's daughter, in order to stall off the marriage until something further could be done. The scientists of Unitaria are puzzled at Lila's peculiar affliction and put her in a hospital. She was told, by hypnotic influence, while going under the drug, to awaken only when Terry commanded her to.

Williams learns that machinery is controlled by brains taken from the skulls of dead people. Upon learning that his sister Helen's brain is controlling machines in Boston, he becomes infuriated and attempts to destroy the brain and deliver his sister into her rightful peace after death. He is imprisoned with Terry, who was with him, and sentenced to death, but M'bopo, the native he had brought with him from Africa, aids them to escape. They join an organization which intends to overthrow the Unidum, and Williams finally destroys the Boston Brain-control, but is being hunted by the authorities as part two ends. *Now go on with the story.*

● As this issue goes to press, we have already received scores of letters congratulating the magazine upon securing this thrilling, vivid, scientific novel.

After reading the story, you will reflect that not one illogical idea appears in it. Everything, no matter how fantastic, is a plausible outcome of things as they are today. It is as though the author actnally had a vision of the future and set it on paper.

By now, Williams, M'bopo, Terry, and Hackworth have become figures to live long in the realms of science-fiction. They are fighting for the right of humanity—they are devoting their lives to saving civilization from a tyranny which is more degrading than barbarism. They are trying to lift the veil from the eyes of the people so that they may see the evils perpetrated by the Unidnm, the so-called "Utopia" of 1973.

Herewith we present the conclusion of the novel and trust that the suspense has not been *too* trying on our readers.

CHAPTER XIV

The Mad Scientist

● The guide led them directly to Agarth who was looking over a sheaf of decoded messages which three men were constantly renewing from stacks of coded missives. He arose to greet them warmly.

"I had been wondering about you all day," he confided. "When Stevenson phoned—secret radio-phone, you understand—from San Francisco an hour ago that you were on the way here, I was relieved. To tell the truth, I thought that luck had gone against you and that the Unidum had you in prison."

"It was close at that," returned Williams. Thereupon he recounted the adven-

tures of the day. "But now tell us; how has it all turned out in general?"

"Splendidly!" cried Agarth, eyes aglow. "*Every brain-control in Unitaria* except a possible three, is useless! Reports from Europe came in immediately after the zero hour, and have been coming in all day. And from all over America, our agents have come back alive and successful. Only three Brain-controls we know nothing about, for the operatives assigned to them have not arrived or phoned. Possibly they failed and were captured; or they might have been killed by guards in escaping. However, we can call the whole thing highly successful. Already the public news-casts have hinted that there is a gigantic revolution of some sort on hand. The Unidum as yet has made no official move."

Agarth turned back to his work. "If you will excuse me, I am very busy. Get a good night's rest. Tomorrow will see us all together for the open announcement of the Brotherhood."

While waiting for the call to conference which was to take place in the afternoon, Terry and Williams, in wandering around the next morning, met Bromberg in a corridor. Preoccupied and care-worn though he looked, he recognized them instantly and stopped to greet them as warmly as Agarth had the night before.

"I heard about your safe arrival from Major Agarth," said Bromberg. "Quite a little adventure you had! But you did your duty, and we're proud of you, as we are of all the gallant operatives who yesterday initiated our first blow against Moller and his tyrannical tribe. Hah! Two thousand brains know a peace that has been denied them for five long years! If we accomplish nothing else, at least we have done that. Yet we will accomplish much more; I feel it, I *know* it! Already the whispers of unrest and social heaving have hissed throughout Unitaria. Quiet citizens who have long hated the Enslavement of the Brains in their hearts, but have never dared protest, are now awakening in courage. The Unidum will find the mob commending our first step and growling at any attempt to call it treason. This afternoon, praise be to God! —we will thunder it to all Unitaria!"

He was gone then and Terry and Williams looked at each other in mutual admiration for the eloquent Professor Bromberg and his ideals. Unless unforeseen circumstances thwarted him, he would most surely take the threat of tyranny from Unitaria. He would become the Martin Luther of 1973.

From that time on, Terry and Williams felt themselves caught up in a whirlwind of events that resulted from the first move of the Brotherhood against the Unidum. Perhaps no one, least of all they, knew what the immediate future was to bring. Bromberg and Hagen were almost stubbornly over-confident that the Unidum would stroke its collective chin and proceed to abolish the cankerous Brain-control Act and revise the Eugenics Law. Agarth and other officers expected some days or weeks of procrastination in the government reform with probably an attendant political revolution.

October 14th, 1973.

Williams took in the scene with sparkling interest. It was a large rock-bound chamber far below the ground level, one used decades before for massing and instructing troops which were to sally forth against the besieging enemy. Near one wall on a wooden dais were the two Generals; Hagen was seated quietly in deep thought, Bromberg pacing up and down with a short, rapid stride, nervous hands clenched behind his back. On a table near him was a microphone, its red signal dark. Grouped about the dais in a half-circle were all the officers of the Brotherhood then in America, grim-faced, conversing in whispers. An air of tenseness overhung the assemblage.

After moving among the men with a word or phrase here and there, Agarth came to the side of Williams and Terry.

"We're waiting now for connection to the Universal Broadcast system," he confided. "It will carry Bromberg's speech to every corner of Unitaria. What better way to announce the Brotherhood than to

present it to the citizens *en masse?* Official documents will go to the Unidum after the broadcast."

"Isn't it rather dangerous doing that?" asked Williams. "Suppose the Unidum traces the wave and decides to crush the Brotherhood in one stroke! If these men" —he waved a hand about the room— "were taken from the organization, there would be nothing left!"

"But they can't trace the wave," informed Agarth. "We have not gone ahead blunderingly. From here Bromberg's voice will be carried by *wire* to an amateur 'ham's' broadcasting antennae far to the east. From there it will connect to some sub-station of the Universal Broadcast system. At any moment now, one of our many Brothers who are radio staff men will complete the connection."

"Are these underground strongholds all unknown to the masses at large?"

"In the main, yes. Most of these military hide-outs are totally camouflaged and located in places untilled and unused — barren spots. The original Japanese blue-prints and maps were destroyed long ago. The Unidum will find itself threatened by forces invisible and practically undetectable. It will not be able to ignore us because our very existence means the seed of revolution. And—"

Agarth stopped as a sudden silence fell over the room. The red signal light on the microphone was flashing brightly. Every eye turned to General Bromberg, who ceased his nervous pacing and eagerly took a position before the instrument.

His aide stepped to the dais. "Silence, officers of the Brotherhood, while General Bromberg speaks!" he cried.

A little man whose dark eyes gleamed brightly in a care-worn face, Bromberg rang out the words that were to change history.

"Citizens of Unitaria! A crisis is upon us! Forty years ago our ultra-nation came in existence, under the instigation and leadership of a scientific government which came to be known as the Unidum. 'Uni' from unity, and 'dum' from duma or power—the *power of unity!* And so it has proven. United in common interests and privileges, Europe and America have tremendously advanced along the paths of civilization. With petty national animosity wiped away like a deceiving fog; with a standard tongue replacing the confusion that was occasioned by dozens of languages; with every state working hand in hand toward the common good, and with a central governing power both strong and sagacious, Unitaria stands unquestionably the best and greatest community of human beings of all time.

"But a crisis is upon us! The citizens must now decide between passive acceptance of governmental mistakes, or active resistance to them. Foremost among such mistakes is the Brain-control act. I, Professor Bromberg, and my colleague, Doctor Hagen—exiled three years ago by the Unidum—declare to all the world that the Brain-control Act is more hideous and heinous than the Spanish Inquisition of past history! Every unfortunate brain used to run machinery like a mechanized robot, although dead medically, lives an after-life of perpetual, agonizing *hell!* Memories of life, sub-conscious impressions of their slavery, and a desire for release, torture those brains every minute of every day. The Unidum will deny it, but it is true.

"The Undium will tell you that the use of dead brains, which can do no good rotting in underground coffins, will make life for the living easier and pleasanter, as the machines are gradually equipped with Brain-controls. They will increase leisure time, shorten working hours, and make life pleasant and free and happy.

"Yes, but think once, citizens of Unitaria! Think of a future in which Brain-controls run all machinery. Think of a happy, care-free, leisurely life—*and then think of a purgatory after that life in which your enslaved brain, remembering that previous heaven, labors second after second, hour after hour for years!* You would then pray for death—and it would be denied you. What good to live a life of ease and plenty when its price is a horrible nightmare from which there is no

release till the very nerves of your brain burn out from torment? What good to live like a god when the death that comes eventually is merely a door to a more dreadful Hell than even Dante could have described? Ask yourselves, each one of you, if the accounts would be squared at such a price!

"The answer can only be—NO! Yet the Brain-control Act is an official statute. The Unidum, having once adopted it, has defended it tenaciously even though its inhumanness has been demonstrated, despite the efforts of certain unselfish men who have tried to fight it. Accordingly, it was foreseen years ago that there must be organized opposition. Doctor Hagen and myself are the heads of an organization that is pledged to end the *enslavement of the brains!* We appeal to you, the citizen masses, to uphold our principles and bring the Unidum to realize its terrible mistake.

"We, the Brothers of Humanity, have already taken the first step. Yesterday, as doubtless all Unitaria knows by now, our operatives poisoned every brain in every Brain-control in our land. They are useless, ruined. *And they must never be used again!* That is the task we place before all of you. The Unidum must be made to realize, by petitions, notices, mass opinions, that no longer can we tolerate such a potential doom of evil as the use of brains in machinery. It is up to you, citizenry of Unitaria, to complete what we have begun. *Go!* And do not shirk or hesitate in fear; remember that no government, however powerful, can outface a massed public opinion.

"That is the end of my message. I will not speak with the voice of our Brotherhood again unless conditions require it. *Do not forget, however, that we are a highly organized group and are absolutely determined to end the enslavement of the brains!*"

● Perspiring and trembling, but obviously elated, Bromberg turned from the microphone to be greeted with a lusty cheer from the officers. His eloquence had stirred them all more than ever before.

Agarth, hardly breathing throughout the speech, exhaled deeply.

"My friends," he said to Williams and Terry, "that speech will go down in history as one of the greatest pieces of oratory of all times. By tonight, every citizen of Unitaria will have heard it. No matter that the Unidum will try to suppress it from repetition, both in print and by radio; it will go by word of mouth from those who have heard."

"Do you mean to say that it will be suppressed?" asked Williams.

"Certainly. It was only by a trick that it was broadcast today; an elaborate trick in which our operatives opened the broadcast channels for those few minutes that Bromberg talked. It took much planning to accomplish it. From now on, however, the Unidum will see to it that no printed copies of it are circulated, and they will guard the broadcast channels like a hawk. But too late! All Unitaria has heard or will soon hear."

"You say that the Unidum will suppress it. You do not expect immediate acquiescence then?"

"Personally, I don't," said Agarth after some hesitation and a quick look around. "Bromberg expects mass opinion to carry the day, but I—I know the masses better. Some will hesitate; some will shrink at the thought of opposing government; many will wait to see what others do. I think the Unidum will not retract the Brain-control Act till there is some sort of conflict—some bloodshed!"

And Agarth proved right. The next day an official answer was given by the Unidum to the document sent to it demanding—by the authority of the Brothers of Humanity backed by the Will of the People—repeal of the Brain-control Act. The Unidum decree stated that Professor Bromberg and Doctor Hagen, and their compatriots, names unknown, had spoken treason and were rebels, to be hunted down as such.

It was the evening of the third day after the broadcast that Agarth came upon Williams and Terry in their room. He

was in a fever of excitement. His glinting eyes reflected inward uneasiness.

"Everything has turned topsy-turvy," he said, nervously lighting a cigarette. "Unitaria is in an uproar. The masses, instead of uniting in their opinions, have begun a squabble, which has paralyzed action. The Unidum has been pouring poison into their ears now for three days. It has refuted our statements, distorted the facts, called us anarchistic rebels seeking power, and has begun investigations that will soon be sending hundreds of men to death without trial for treason. Great Heavens! Who would have thought that it could be? Even Bromberg is beginning to admit that Molier has done more corruption and gained more dictatorial power than any of us thought. He has embedded himself so solidly and gained so many adherents that nothing short of assassination or warlike revolution will shake him loose. In war was the Unidum conceived; must it die that way too?"

Agarth broke from a trance that had come over him. "Come, general meeting of all officers. Tonight we must decide—"

The great room with the dais was even more crowded than it had been the day of the broadcast. Practically every officer of the Brotherhood was there, many having come from Europe at the signs of brewing trouble.

Bromberg was conversing with several higher officers. Finally he raised a hand for silence and addressed the assemblage.

"As you all know," he began, "the Unidum has struck back viciously. Executive Molier, tyrant that he is, is playing for the highest stakes. We have been informed by our spies that he has solidly organized the Scientists whom he has baited with lust for power, and that group holds the entire Unidum in its iron grasp. With Jorgen as his first lieutenant, he is organizing a war offensive against us.

"And, Brothers of Humanity, *we must defeat him.* We will be fighting the dread power of the whole Unidum with all its resources; but, on the other hand, we will soon have thousands flocking to our banner. In a few days we will have a completely equipped broadcast station set up and through it the mobilization of our military forces will begin. But our first move must be to take over the whole western coast as base territory. This will not be hard, for already our plans are complete, and we will be striking ahead of the Unidum. The Pacific hyp-marine fleet is ours now. The crews, instigated by our agents, of over half the fleet are ready to renounce the Unidum. Our search for secret underground strongholds in the past year has revealed to us a long string of them from Vancouver to Mexico. We will man them with troops as fast as we can recruit men. The Federation of Asia stands willing to supply us with armament any time we ask for it.

"It will mean hard work, men—hard work and bitterness and bloodshed. But better a brief time of that than a dark future of tyranny. We are not fighting the Unidum or its principles of peace and co-operation; *we are pitting ourselves against Molier, the tyrant!* Ostensibly, we are enemies of the Unidum. But once the power of Molier and his group is broken, hostilities must cease. We are not seeking the complete disruption of Unitaria, which would result if we carried our schemes too far.

"Technically, our compaign will have only the purpose of holding off disbandment of our Brotherhood till mass opinion rises to the point where the people, with a thunderous voice, will demand repeal of the Brain-control Act. That it eventually shall, is inevitable, for our agents will pour secret literature into the public channels, which will reveal not only the terrible threat of Brain-enslavement, but also the scheming of Molier. Once the people see the connection between the Eugenics Law and the Brain-control Act, there is nothing that can prevent the downfall of Molier's group.

"But we must work fast—faster than Molier. That he realizes his predicament is evidenced by the swiftness with which the Unidum declared our status as rebels. There will be no sleep tonight. Each of you officers must report to Major Agarth

by midnight tonight and be assigned to definite work. You are excused till then. General Hagen and myself, with the majors, go into immediate conference."

● Back in their room, Terry wiped a perspiring brow. "Whew! This is getting to be a big thing. War! Revolution! A month ago I suspected nothing of this, had not the slightest inkling that there could be a conflict. Of course, there were always rumors—rumors that the Unidum was becoming tyrannical, that secret plots against the Brain-control Act were being fomented, that trouble was brewing. But the suddenness of the whole thing! The utter secrecy with which the Brotherhood worked!"

"It had to be, Terry. With as powerful and watchful a government as the Unidum, they had to organize very carefully. As a result, the first blow struck has had a staggering effect on the Unidum. Just look how quickly they are retaliating, because they know the Brotherhood is no idle threat. By the way, what armament does the Unidum possess? Is 1973 armament much different from that of 1933? Those are things I know little about."

Terry sat down and drew a chair close to Williams. "The equipment of today is not much different from that used in the All-Nations War of 1936-38, because since then there have been no major wars. Between the super-nations of today there exists an armed peace. The Federation of Asia is perhaps better armed than Unitaria but there can be no war; the resources of Europe would thunder down on Asia from the back.

"Unitaria has several fleets of armed hyp-marines that take the place of the old-time battleships and dreadnoughts. She has also a sizeable fleet of bombing and fighting aircraft. Ground artillery is a thing of the past. Very little of it has been manufactured since the last war. All in all, the Unidum is little better prepared for any sort of warfare than we are."

"But suppose," suggested Williams, "that they swept their air fleets across the Rockies from the east and cruised hyp-marine fleets on the coast. Couldn't they gradually squeeze us into defeat?"

Terry shook his head vehemently. "You remember Bromberg saying Asia stands ready to supply us with armament. The Unidum fleets will meet fleets of our own. As for the hyp-marines, the Pacific fleet seems ready to join us. I presume that the Brotherhood, knowing that it must have protection from the coast if revolution came, made particular efforts to influence those crews of the Pacific fleet. No doubt the spy agencies will cripple the Unidum's fighting forces day by day in the same way."

Williams thought a moment. "I only hope their plans work out."

"I'll pray for it," said Terry fervently. Suddenly his eyes flashed. "Don't you see, Williams? If the revolution is successful, not only the Brain-control Act will go by the board, but also the Eugenics Law! Lila will be saved for me. I will go back when peace is restored and the decree nullified, a free man—and Lila a free woman!"

Williams nodded. "No doubt about that, Terry. And if every Brother of Humanity had the incentives you and I have, victory would surely be ours."

Terry knew that Williams' incentive was to see the abolishment of the Brain-control Act. Sleeping at the older man's side for so many nights, Terry had heard him mumbling at times. And always he had said: "Helen, I swear it! Never another Brain-control, if I live to prevent it!" Whether he said it in his sleep or not, Terry did not know. He surmised that it was some sort of firm inner resolve that put itself into words at times when his subconscious mind had the ascendency.

CHAPTER XV

Aboard the Sansruns

● A cold October wind chilled Williams as he stepped from the warm interior of an auto and crossed a stretch of rocky ground that extended into dim distance, at the heels of a silent guide. Revealed

in the moonlight were mountains far to the east. They trudged on, zigzagging around rocky barriers till there loomed before them an immense boulder with a queer shape. Here at one side of it the guide thumped the ground with his heavy boot. It sounded hollow.

Suddenly and mysteriously, the boulder rolled away as lightly as a feather to reveal an opening in the ground from which streamed a dim light. Williams smiled in appreciation as he saw a lever-arm extending from the pit to the inside of the cardboard "boulder"; decidedly it was something original in the way of camouflaged underground entrances.

"The password," mumbled a face from the pit below.

"Liberty in life and death! Marshal Williams to see Major Agarth."

The guide stalked away to his sentry duty. Williams clambered down the wooden steps, thankful for the draft of warm air that met him. The man below saluted respectfully and pulled the lever handle that swung the imitation boulder into place.

"This way, sir. Major Agarth is expecting you."

Several short corridors and descending inclines brought them to a door labeled "Headquarters." The guard opened the door and watched Williams with interest as he stepped inside. He had become quite well-known in the past two weeks for his activities in the Nevada skirmishes.

"How are you, Williams?" cried Agarth, springing up from his map-strewn table. "You certainly look well, thinner though."

"And tougher," laughed Williams. "Two weeks of flying and jumping around have put me in physical trim."

"You seem to be enjoying all this," said Agarth wonderingly. It was hard to understand a man of his none-too-few years taking to the rigors of military life so complacently. He could not see the forty years of Africa in the man, nor could he understand the battle-joy that had sunk into his soul in a land of fierce Zulus.

"In a way, yes," agreed Williams. "I like to be in the right and to fight for it. And we certainly are in the right."

"Let me congratulate you on that Nevada coup, Marshal Williams. Where did you ever conceive such a brilliant move?" asked Agarth, admiration in his tones.

Williams sat down and lighted a cigar before answering. "Africa taught me that, major. When a large force of Zulus once threatened to break through my meager line of Bantu warriors, I figured my chances and tried a simple trick, confident that their ferocity would overcome their judgment. At dawn, half my warriors sneaked by the Zulu encampment, purposely careless. The enemy pursued with a triumphant shout. But it changed to a howl of alarm when the other half of my zealous Bantu plunged into their rear, taking them by complete surprise. In the Nevada skirmish, I did the same thing, substituting the Unidum ships for Zulus, and our own craft for Bantu warriors. Then the anti-aircraft guns at Desert Point picked them off by the dozen, making it easy."

"You speak lightly of it, yet I know as well as any of us that if the Unidum fleet had broken through there, Base Number One would have been open to attack. General Bromberg made no wiser move than when he appointed you squadron commander of the Nevada fleet."

Williams flushed with pleasure and waved a deprecating hand. "Thank you, major. Yet I have done no more than my best, which is what every Brother of Humanity is doing."

"Yes, we are all doing our best," said Agarth, a bit haggardly. "But how little we have gained. So far, we have been on a desperate defensive. No loss is small gain, they say."

"Come, cheer up," said Williams at the despondent look which Agarth tried unsuccessfully to hide. "After all, the moral victory is ours so far. The Unidum boasted to crush the rebellion in one week. Here it is *two* weeks and no fleet of theirs has crossed the Rockies to stay. And then

the naval battle three days ago: the Atlantic fleet of the Unidum retreating after losing two ships."

"Only because the Unidum realized the foolhardiness of pressing forward at great loss. The Federation of Asia, you know, only too eagerly watches the internal strife of Unitaria. If the hyp-marine fleets were badly crippled, we could expect attack from the Orient. In fact, our purchasing agents in Asia who buy the aircraft and ammunition have been pestered continually by the foreign diplomats who wish to help us in our revolution in a more material way—you know, alliance. But the Generals, knowing the ulterior purpose of the Federation of Asia, refuse to consider it. As Bromberg so clearly puts it: 'We are fighting Molier and his tyranny, not the Unidum.' If Asia were in this, she would immediately begin a poison gas campaign, which, thank God, will not be used in this revolution. Unless —unless the fiend Molier, in his wrath, forgets what few better principles he has, and— But no, he would not dare."

"What reports from our propaganda operatives?" asked Williams.

"There we have more optimistic tidings," returned Agarth brightening. "The public, groomed by the literature which exposes Molier, Jorgen and their cohorts, is fast organizing under our agents' leadership and preparing to present a weighty petition not only to cease the civil warfare, but to have a Unidum impeachment. Europe especially is heaving and muttering against Molier. I have heard that street-corner speakers even in the heart of New York are denouncing him in no uncertain words. Williams, I believe that if we hold out another two weeks, Molier will be a broken despot!"

"Then hold out we shall," said Williams confidently. "If you hold your corner up here in Oregon so that Canada is blocked, and I my niche down in Nevada to block off a Mexican sally, the Unidum won't find a crack to crawl through. Kessel, Brighton, and Walter have held the front along the Rockies without a sign of weakening."

Agarth nodded. "Hold out two weeks —just two weeks!" He changed his tone. "By the way, how is young Spath and that black servant of yours; what do you call him—'Umboko' or 'Mopoto'?"

Williams chuckled. "Well, as for young Spath, he's fine. Has a good head on him, too. I knew that all the time, so when General Bromberg gave me commandership without mentioning Terry, thinking him too young for responsibility, I made him my chief aide. On board our ship in the past two weeks, he has helped me make vital decisions. I left him in charge of the fleet when coming here. As for the black man—it's M'bopo or Mobopo—he has come to be a perfect valet to me. Like a shadow, he follows me around and anticipates my slightest personal wish. I saved his life in Africa once; he is my voluntary slave. He's outside in the car, as I thought it unnecessary to bring him in for these few minutes."

Agarth opened his mouth to speak when a sharp buzz filled the air. He tripped the radio-phone lever.

"Major Agarth speaking."

"Hello, major," came from the loudspeaker. "General Bromberg calling. Has Marshal Williams arrived there yet?"

"Yes, he is right here now."

"Ah, good. Then listen to me, both of you." The voice became fraught with excitement. "Flash report from Operative B-66 in New York: new offensive planned by the Unidum! Large fleets are preparing for attack at every point of the front —*at dawn tomorrow!*"

Agarth and Williams looked aghast at one another.

"We must plan defences," came the general's voice again. "We must hold them or all is lost!"

For another half hour, they spoke, desperately concerned in repelling the formidable threat of mass attack by the Unidum forces.

* * * *

"Terry, it looks very bad," said Williams as their plane, the flagship, led its fleet to a temporary re-fueling center in southern California. "That titanic mass

attack two weeks ago by the Unidum marked the turning point. Up till then we held them on the other side of the Rockies. Now Agarth has been pushed south; our eastern front buckled inward and we have been shoved north from Mexico. If the compressing and squeezing continues, our defeat is inevitable."

"But Williams, our string of underground strongholds! They are impregnable from air attack. As long as we hold them—"

"To no avail, Terry. If we hide in them, the enemy can cut us off from supplies and starve us out. The underground strongholds are admirable as infantry bases, as they were used in the All-Nations War. But in this type of aerial warfare that the Unidum has launched, they are white elephants.

"Molier evidently saw from the first that if he allowed the Brotherhood to recruit a large infantry, the civil war might be drawn out to great lengths, because then the entire west coast could have been cut off from Unitaria. Accordingly, he attacked swiftly with air forces, knowing that aerial warfare is the quickest and most decisive way of deciding the issue. It has only been a month since the start of the revolution, and already the campaign is coming into its final stages."

"But surely all hope isn't lost for us?"

"No. If the tide of public opinion sweeps high enough, the Unidum will be forced to cease hostilities and arbitrate. And any sort of arbitration is a victory for the Brotherhood. Indications are that already the Unidum—or more properly, war-dictator Molier—is at odds with public sentiment. His authority is near a break. That's why he's pressing us so ferociously; if he can defeat our forces before the break, he will be doubly powerful and will probably oust Executive Ashley and become sole dictator."

The radio-phone buzzed at his side and Williams picked up the receiver.

● He listened, exchanged a few words, and then turned a grave face to Terry. "The Unidum has completed its embargo on the Pacific! We are cut off from Asiatic ammunition and war-supplies!"

"But our own hyp-marine fleet—"

"Can do nothing," finished Williams. "The Unidum has concentrated almost its entire hyp-marine forces in the Pacific. They far outnumber ours."

"The Federation of Asia will declare war!"

"No, Terry. Molier has bought them off!"

* * *

In the largest chamber of the underground stronghold near San Francisco there was much turmoil and whispering. It was a night five weeks after the poisoning of the brains and all the highest officers of the Brotherhood were assembled for emergency council. There was a general note of despair rampant in the atmosphere. The Unidum had relentlessly driven the rebel forces inward from the north, south, and east. Barely five hundred miles in each of those directions were the large fleets of the Unidum, at bay with the rebel fleets which had not been reinforced from Asiatic channels for a week. All general merchandise air traffic had been halted in that region; supplies of all kinds, especially fuel for the war-craft, were increasingly hard to obtain for the revolutionists.

Throughout Unitaria feeling ran high against the Unidum and a growing mass of people were demanding that the warfare stop and the government accede to the original demands of the Brotherhood. But Molier had refused to listen and had fortified the Capitol with anti-aircraft guns and warcraft. This step bid fair to disrupt Unitaria, for Europe was prepared to secede at a moment's notice. Molier, maddened at the sudden bursting of his ambitions, cared nothing of what happened. His one thought was to crush the rebellion in America and take it over under his control. His group of co-plotters in the Unidum, Scientists who fervently wished they had never listened to him but who were too deeply involved to back out, held control of authority and issued the orders which daily drove the rebels

backward. Yet the responses to military commands were not as prompt as they should have been; even the war-plane crews, long trained to obey orders without question, were sulky. For two days there had been no move on either side. Everything hung by a hair . . . .

General Bromberg, a broken and haggard man, walked up and down the dais, haranguing the nearby officers fitfully. That he felt all was lost was evident in his face. Agarth was near him, apathetic in dismay. Williams touched his arm. Agarth gave him a wan smile in greeting.

"Blasted hopes are all we have left, Williams," he said.

"There are some of us who still have the spirit to fight," said Williams with a tone of slight reproach.

Agarth replied wearily. "Fight? Fight for what? Victory now would be bitter irony. It is too late; it should have come sooner. Europe is ready to secede and is arming to fight the Unidum. Molier has done irrevocable damage. He has embittered the very name Unidum to the people."

"But if Molier and his cohorts were out of the way, could not the Unidum regain its former prestige?"

"Who knows?" returned Agarth blankly. "Personally, I think this thing has gone out of our hands. The entire stability of Unitaria has been undermined. There is rioting every day in big cities. The worst of it is, there is no unified action. The Brotherhood's proclamations and Molier's propaganda have become confounded in the mass mind till they don't know which is what."

"But a once-again integral and uncorrupt Unidum—would that not cure all evils?"

"Certainly, man," replied Agarth a bit sharply. "But here are we, doomed to certain defeat. And with us dies the leadership that could have saved Unitaria from Molier and tyranny. With the Brotherhood destroyed, Molier will do one of two things: despotize Unitaria or plunge Europe and America into a war that will be ten times worse than this one we have gone through."

Williams mused for a moment. "Molier—tyranny. No Molier—no tyranny."

"What's that you say?" queried Agarth.

Williams eyed him a moment. "Molier is human. If he were assassinated, then—"

"Are you mad? The Capitol has been fortified; Molier has a bodyguard—has had one since the beginning of the revolution. You would have to be a magician to kill him."

"Then I'll be one!" cried Williams, eyes glinting strangely. "Agarth, I want your authority and permission to leave base here. Give me ten fast ships and twenty men, and full tanks of fuel."

Agarth stared speechlessly. It was at the tip of his tongue to ask: "Are you deserting?" but he thought better of it. Williams was not the kind of man to think of his own safety. He thought too of referring the decision to Bromberg, but one look at that distracted, nervous man decided him otherwise. After all, what difference would it make? The ten ships and twenty men could not stay the end, absent or present.

Agarth nodded. "Go if you will."

Williams turned to go, hesitated, and held out his hand to Agarth.

"We met under strange circumstances," said Agarth. "Perhaps we part similarly."

"And perhaps *not!*" added Williams.

"Of course, I am coming along," said Terry who had stood by silently.

Williams looked into his eyes. "Of course," he agreed, "and M'bopo too. Just like before, Terry—us three. This might be our last great adventure together."

"How will we get past the Unidum lines?" asked Terry as they left the room with its hum of conversation.

"Fly over widely spread at our ceiling. I doubt that they'll pursue if they do happen to see or hear us. Might figure we're deserters."

A swift plane took them eastward till they sighted the glare of sky-probing searchlights. Landing, they were in the midst of what remained of a formerly great fleet. It was Williams' own fleet, the

one he had commanded for four hectic weeks of maneuvering against the enemy.

The word flew from tent to tent that the commander wanted to speak to his men on some mysterious matter. With an alacrity born of their respect for him, they hastily dressed, for most had been sleeping at that late hour, and assembled where one of the dimmed searchlights had been turned to light the ground.

● Williams looked over the crowd with a feeling of pride. These were the men with whom he had held the south Nevada frontier against the Unidum for many weeks. They had no uniforms; they were dressed in civilian clothing, for there had been no time after the declaration of martial rebellion to design, buy and distribute uniforms. But on the breast of each was pinned a silver and blue enamel emblem which all members of the Brotherhood wore. And in the face of each, disheartened though many were, showed an eagerness and determination that would have caught the throat of even the most disinterested onlooker.

"Men, I need some of you tonight," shouted Williams so that all could hear, "on a mission of great danger. We are ringed in by the enemy and it is only a question of days, perhaps merely hours, before the final battles. Back at the base our leaders are planning the last desperate defensive. But perhaps something can be done. Daring may sometimes accomplish what might and main cannot stop. I want twenty men to come with me . . . . *to New York!*"

A confused murmur arose among the ranks that quickly became cheers and shouts of commendation. Then a bellowing voice roared from the men.

"Why can't we all go along, commander, if you're figuring on storming the Capitol?"

"No," shouted Williams as an approving babel followed. "No. First of all, ten ships have a chance to cross the enemy lines whereas the fleet would not without becoming engaged in a battle to the finish. Secondly, this is a strategic move; numbers will not help it along."

Men began crowding forward now, seeing that only a few could get picked, each asking to be one of the chosen. Williams looked helplessly at Terry; how to choose, under the circumstances?

"Take only those who are not married," suggested Terry.

Williams immediately shouted for all those married to return to their tents, as they were automatically eliminated. With some murmuring and hesitation, these men left. Williams looked over the thirty-odd men searchingly. All were young and impatiently eager. The service they had seen, flying and gunning and occasional bombing of unguarded and temporary bases, had only whetted their appetites for adventure and danger. Williams reflected that if he were to lead them across the Pacific, they would storm Asia without a thought of backing down. And yet their blood was not all fire and steam; they had joined the Brotherhood in sincere adherence to its aims and principles. The motto "Liberty in Life and Death" meant as much to them as the thrill of fighting for a cause.

Not to waste any time, Williams personally picked out his twenty. In another half-hour, eleven ships, twin-motored and all with full tanks, arose with a roar of helicopter screws. Under radio-phone command from Williams' ship, they separated widely and bored swiftly eastward, climbing steadily.

In their own plane, Terry was in the pilot seat while Williams sat before the radio instruments. M'bopo, as imperturbable as ever, sat near his master against the wall.

"We won't have to worry much about searchlights," said Williams as the enemy lines drew near, "because it's slightly cloudy up here, enough to conceal us. But a mechanical ear and high-flying scout-sentries could detect us."

This was spoken to Terry; into the mouthpiece he barked: "Full speed over the lines at ceiling. If pursued, maneuver

to escape. Report immediately if forced to give battle."

Flying over land invisible in the gloom of night, Williams saw coming up the horizon the blue-white glare of searchlights whose beams could probe into the stratosphere itself. Where the beams were absent in long stretches to north and south, he knew that the uncanny "mechanical ears" were there, which could detect under excellent conditions a single ship miles above. At their terrific speed, the enemy line swung directly below them.

Suddenly an aimless beam swung purposefully in their direction, probed fitfully through wisps of cloud-mist, and then gave it up.

"One of those damned ears heard us, all right," muttered Williams. "They tried to lime-light us. Wonder if they'll do anything?"

After five minutes had passed, he knew that they would not. No swift little scout had zoomed up from the ground, guided by radio directions from the operators of the mechanical ears, to hang on their tail like an unshakeable bulldog, spotting them to back-line armed chasers. Now it was too late; even the uncanny mechanical ears could no longer detect them as the distance between ran into dozens of miles.

A confused babel came from the radiophone. Williams put his fingers to the selector dial and tuned in each of his men separately. They all reported safety and no pursuit.

Williams snapped the multiple-wave switch, contacting all his men at once.

"We're all through and no pursuit. Draw together now on the line between Base Number One and New York. Cabin light on at full. Altitude three miles."

He snapped off the radio and raised his voice so that Terry could hear above the engines' drone. "Get on the line between Base One and New York, Terry, where we'll group with the other ships. Altitude three miles." He switched on the cabin lights full and bright. At either wing tip and at the tail of the ovoid cabin, bright crimson lights flashed on. In fifteen minutes, blurs of light triangulated with red points appeared in all directions. At Williams' orders, the approaching ships took up a flying V and stepladder formation, with his ship at the apex.

The ten ships which Williams had picked to accompany him on his mysterious mission were Sansruns, second in speed only to scouts, equipped with two machine-gun nests in the open-air on either side of the top of the cabin where the wings joined to the body. Hung in a rack below the cabin, and worked by levers inside, were six small drop-bombs. Such ships were used for destroying bases of the enemy or blowing up ammunition dumps, being fast enough to escape all but armed scouts, and armed enough to have a good chance against the better-armed combat ships. Their tank capacity was very great in that they often had to forage long distances. In the revolution, that type of ship had been little used—most of the battles had been engagements between combat ships—and consequently were in excellent condition.

At their height, which was above the commercial lanes, no other ships were sighted as hour after hour they pierced the night. In the monotony of the trip, not one man was along but who wondered to what they were going. That it was to be some amazing feat of daring, they all sensed, heading into the very heart of danger. Williams himself, the only man who had such knowledge, wondered how it would turn out.

CHAPTER XVI

The Sun-power Weapon

● The miniature fleet approached New York from the south, having veered from its direct course two hours before. Yet it did not turn in the great metropolis' direction, but skimmed the clouds east of it. As the first faint xanthic glows of dawn appeared, Williams contacted his men on the general wave and rapidly ran through a series of twice-repeated commands. Then he spoke to Terry and M'bopo.

Looking at the beauty of dawn suf-

fusing the eastern sky, heralding the coming of a late autumn sun, Williams noticed, a half-quadrant away, a spreading fan of shimmering rays of light centered from a spot on the wide bed of ocean. He looked at it wonderingly, thinking it to be an *aurora borealis* till it occurred to him that it was south of the sun.

"What is that mysterious light?" he asked of Terry.

"I've been noticing that," replied the young chemist. "It can only be the sun-power experimental station which they must have moved westward since we last saw it from the stratosphere ship that time we crossed the Atlantic. You see, the giant raft it's set up on is powered to move just like any ship. I have heard the sun-power they produce there is used somehow to propel it; steam-power and water-screw, I suppose."

"But—that light! From the distance and its visibility, I would say that it's billions of candle-power."

"Billions of heat calories, too!" supplied Terry. "I think I know the reason for it. They produce an enormous amount of sun-power, and having no use for it at present since they are concerned merely with improving the capacity till it will be commercially practicable, most of it is radiated away into the sky in the form of light and heat. Each night, I suppose, they cast off the excess energy of the day in that way."

Williams' eyes had widened thoughtfully. A train of thought started in his mind that was abruptly terminated at Terry's words:

"Here we go—down!"

The eleven planes, almost as one (for the pilots had been forewarned), hummed downward from the misty heights, like phantoms in the ghostly light of grey dawn. An immense fingered structure loomed up toward them, only partially illuminated as night lights were gradually turned off. Before their altitude lessened by half, great New York was visible as a crown of light, beside it to the east the lime-whiteness of the Unidum Capitol. Then it was all cut off by the contracting horizon as they plunged lower.

"We're discovered already," said Terry, pointing to where a wheeling scout ship with the Unidum emblem on its wings swung in a great circle and sped away toward New York. "They could recognize our ships immediately by their foreign design as part of the rebel forces."

"No matter," said Williams quietly. "Once landed down there, we're safe for the time being."

Onto the deserted landing roof of the Long Island Tide-station, the tiny fleet landed. Williams told his men through the radio-phone to stay with their ships till further orders. Then he motioned to Terry and M'bopo to follow him.

At the door which led to the corridors below, Joe Manners stood waiting, a mixture of consternation and bewilderment on his face. Greetings were terse.

"I got your call during the night," said Manners. "But for the life of me, I can't figure out—"

"We're here for a little grimmer purpose than that last time," vouchsafed Williams. "Before, it was just our lives we were concerned with; now much more is involved."

"But you're not safe here!" cried Manners nervously. "This whole region is patrolled by Unidum scout ships. They'll see your ships here and attack—"

"Attack? They'll think twice before they try it. How can they attack ships on a roof? And they won't dare to try any bombing."

"No, they won't," agreed Manners, calming down. "I see the simpleness and yet effectiveness of that part of your plan. Strange that the Unidum, so concerned in protecting the Capitol, should leave the tide-station here open to attack."

"That's just it," said Williams. "They had no suspicion that this might happen. It's always the obvious that escapes notice. I banked on that. If there had been armed opposition awaiting us as we descended—well, I was prepared to sell my life dearly." He shrugged. "What matter whether back at Base One waiting for a

sure defeat, or here taking a long chance at—"

"At what?" prompted Manners. Both he and Terry showed their curiosity.

"That I don't know yet," returned Williams much to their utter amazement. "I must know a few other things first, then some sort of workable plan will come out of it all. I came here just to be within striking distance of Molier—the man who must be put out of the way or stripped of power and authority."

"Good God!" gasped Manners. "You mean that you came here without having definite reasons?—without higher authority? Of course, I know that you are a marshal in the Brotherhood, and a commander in the air forces, but surely you are under orders from General Bromberg—"

Williams shook his head. "Strictly on my own, except that Major Agarth sanctioned my leaving with ten ships. You may as well know—I think Terry knows already—that I am a great believer in inspirational effort. When there is trouble to be remedied, I get as near the root of it as possible, worry a couple of plans till they crystallize, and then go to it."

His eyes s o f t e n e d introspectively. "Aren't all things like that—even life itself? Great plans often go awry; the crusade against Brain-enslavement for instance has come to an impasse. It is the spur-of-the-moment things that often shape the future. Africa taught me that. M'bopo has faith in that doctrine, too."

He shook himself as though to shake off a trance. "But to leave philosophical discussion. I saw back there at Base One that little could be done to forestall the defeat of our military forces. Accordingly, I figured here something might be done. On that chance that I could take over the tide-station and nestle down comparatively secure for a few hours, I came here. It was while talking to Agarth that it came to me: no Molier — no tyranny."

"You mean—?"

"I mean that my sole aim now is to *get* Molier!"

"But how, man?" asked Manners with an inflection that intimated it was impossible. "The Capitol is fortified with anti-aircraft guns, surrounded by watchful warcraft; Molier is behind all that, bodyguarded, unreachable."

"To *get* Molier," repeated Williams quietly as though he had not heard. "Assassination, impeachment, overthrow—something!"

"Which is what the Brotherhood has been trying for over a month!" There was a note of scorn in his voice, as though he considered Williams a fool with mad aspirations. "Everything has been tried—everything! Andrew Grant, myself, hundreds of others, under-cover operatives of the Brotherhood, have tried to incite the people, the military men, the influential heads of industry, *the Unidum itself!* What has happened? No one knows. All motives, aims, and propaganda have become hopelessly gnarled. Europe will secede to escape the tangle in America. All we do know is that Molier still plots, although only the Lord knows what, as all Unitaria is cracking apart under the stress."

"Hasn't the exposure of Molier and his group as evil-workers weakened his power at all? Surely that should cause his impeachment."

"Not yet. Think once; his accusers are Bromberg and Hagen, outlaws by Unidum decree. They are rebels, about to be defeated. Molier is legally and technically innocent. Besides, he has somehow convinced the weak-willed Executive Ashley that the Brotherhood is a sheep in wolf's clothing. Accordingly, even the non-Scientific part of the Unidum follows his dictates. It's a most vicious circle of intrigue."

"A most vicious circle," repeated Williams reflectively.

"And there's nothing we can do," maintained Manners despondently.

"That I'm not sure about," returned Williams stoutly. "First of all, a few questions: this tide-station produces all the electrical current, not only of various cities, but of the Capitol. Right?" At a

nod from Manners, he went on: "And at the throw of a switch or two, you can cut off that supply?"

"Yes, but—"

"No buts at a time like this. There is no one to prevent such a move on our part, is there?"

"No one. The station's employees all work below in the generator and machine rooms; they are not allowed up here in the top section. I am king of the tide-station. Of course"—he glanced apprehensively through the doorway into the sky where several striped ships hovered high in the air—"there may be interference from *them!*"

● Williams followed his glance and shrugged. "If they should try any attacking maneuvers, my men will know what to do. And we have all the advantage—stationary aim, massed guns, highly-experienced gunners—"

He turned. "You have a radio with which you can contact the Capitol?"

"Yes, in the control room."

The cheerful brightness of early morning had now overspread all the region. On the blue blanket of endless ocean, an occasional buff or silvery hyp-marine skimmed the waves. Williams' eyes softened a moment. How serene and undisturbed things looked! How peaceful. And yet, the affairs of men had come to a crisis. There was a lurking Nemesis that the light of sun and the cheer of day could not dispel like morning mists.

"Now a very important question: Have you any food?" He smiled. "I can't think or reason properly when I'm hungry."

The well-stocked larders of the tide-station were made to yield breads and cakes and cold meats. Probably the pantry keeper below, whose duty it was to furnish edibles for the many workers in the depths of the tide-station, was surprised that the superintendent in the sanctum above should suddenly have the appetite of thirty men. But it was for him to obey, not to question.

Williams and Terry passed the food around to the men, who accepted it with grins and thanks. While they were eating, grouped about him on the roof, Williams spoke to them.

"Men, we're about as safe right here as we could be anywhere, probably safer than if we were back at Base One. Those fellows up there"—he jerked a thumb in the direction of circling Unidum ships—"won't try any bombing, and they can't attack without danger of smashing to get in machine-gun range. What our next move will be depends on certain things. Till then, stay here with your ships."

As Terry and Williams entered the master control-room of the Tide-station where Manners awaited them, a clicking sound was heard.

"The Unidum call-signal!" gasped Manners paling. "The first thing they'll want to know is why rebel ships are here!"

Williams stood a moment in furious thought. Then his voice rang clear and commanding. "Manners, I'll take the call. You get over to your switchboard and put your hand on the switch that shuts the current off that goes to the Capitol."

"Great Heavens! What good—"

"Do it!" said Williams quietly, but there was a wealth of command in his voice. "This is the time for initiative and action. What the result will be, I cannot say, but a chance is always worth taking."

"But Williams," protested Terry. "I think myself that it can lead to nothing."

"As your superior officer in the Brotherhood, I command you both under the circumstances."

Manners hesitated no longer but ran to the control-board where finger-flipped switches could do magic with thousands of kilowatts of electricity.

Williams strode before the wall radiophone and tripped the loud-speaker lever. Immediately an authoritative voice rang through the room.

"Unidum Capitol calling Joe Manners, superintendent of the Long Island Tide-station. Eleven ships, apparently part of the rebel forces, are at present on the landing roof. The Unidum demands an explanation."

"And the Unidum will get an explanation," returned Williams with emphatic tones. "The tide-station is at present in my hands, a marshal of the Brothers of Humanity."

"That much we surmised. The Unidum accordingly demands that your rebel ships leave or there will be consequences."

"Leave? Do you think we are playing a game? We are here to stay. If you care to attack, try it. But I would advise you not to. Only one or two of your ships can maneuver over the roof at one time—and my gunners are experts."

There was a confused murmur from the phone for a moment as though several persons were discussing the matter in whispers. Then again spoke an articulate voice.

"The Unidum is prepared to make an offer, due to the fact that the tide-station is . . . . ah, under our special consideration. We offer to waive aside any charges of treason against you, if you will quietly surrender yourselves to the Unidum. We will send over a sealed and signed exemption at but a word of your acceptance."

Williams laughed harshly. "You take us for traitors! The answer is *no!*"

"Then we shall take steps—"

"I think you had better listen to me," interrupted Williams. "Unless a demand of mine is granted, Joe Manners at my command, *will cut off the electrical current that normally goes to the Capitol!* The result of that you can surmise—your heating equipment will cease to function; your elevators will not run; the inoperation of the ventilating system will turn the air foul in every inner chamber; a dozen other little things will paralyze the internal workings of the Capitol. Even your radio-phone system will be useless. Furthermore, it is very easy to overload the transformers at the Unidum Capitol from this tide-station, and ruin them. Would you care to suffer all those calamities for several days before the damage could be repaired?"

Confusion again from the loudspeaker; then the voice. "What is your demand?"

"Impeachment of Executive Molier according to the charges of the Brotherhood!"

First there was dead silence from the Capitol, then a babel of voices and shouts. The listeners (apparently there had been many) seemed engaged in some sort of heated debate. Williams looked significantly, almost exultantly, at his companions. "That was like a bombshell exploding at their feet."

● The confusion from the loudspeaker grew tumultuous. Snatches of words indicated that the Brotherhood had friends in the heart of the Unidum. Finally a roaring voice was heard: "Fellow Scientists! This has gone far enough. The Brotherhood has demanded impeachment of Molier! The people have cried for it! It should be—"

"Silence, you fool!" These words, a flurry of shouts, one unmistakable groan, then a click and silence from the loudspeaker.

Williams gripped the back of a chair tightly. Had his daring demand turned the tide of opinion in the Unidum? Had the delicate balance of affairs been disturbed or reversed? What was going on back of that cryptic silence from the Capitol? He sweated in agonized impatience.

Suddenly the radio-phone clicked on again. A voice, deeper and more resonant than the other had been, rang out, vibrant with suppressed fury.

"As for you fools at the tide-station, now that affairs here have been settled, there will be no answer to your childish demand. I will send a hundred ships to rake you with bullets and destroy you, if it takes all day!"

A click and silence.

"That was Molier himself!" spluttered Manners.

"And you heard what he said," cried Terry. "A hundred ships hammering at us—we're doomed!"

Williams looked from one to the other. They shrank back at the sudden livid fury in his face. *"Sarto je Bru!* He has become a veritable monster!" Actual

tears of rage and disappointment were in his eyes as he swung toward the superintendent. "Manners, burn out the Capitol transformers; we will keep our promise!"

Manners would not have thought of remonstrating after a look at the irate man with sun-tanned skin and flashing blue eyes. He permitted himself only a sigh of reluctance as he threw certain switches. Then he fingered a numbered dial and turned it slowly. The needle of an indicator began to climb its scale. Up and up it went, slowly, steadily. It passed a red mark, went a few points beyond, and then suddenly swung back to zero.

"It's done," said Manners chokingly. "The Capitol . . . . transformers burnt out . . . . fused . . . ." He stopped, swallowed painfully, and looked miserable.

Williams looked at him curiously. Understanding came to him. Manners had been superintendent of the tide-station for twenty years. It had been his chiefest pride to keep the gigantic power station running smoothly and efficiently. It must naturally be hard for him to deliberately spoil his long record of faithful service and superintendence.

"I'm sorry, Manners," said Williams in a softened voice. "I know how you feel. But it had to be. All this is part of something bigger than our personal affairs."

Then his voice became hard again. "Molier asked for it and got it. Let's go, Terry. We're leaving. You, Manners—"

"I stay here," said the superintendent firmly. "Whatever comes, I'll take my chances. Goodbye, Williams—for I think this time it is goodbye."

Fervent handclasps and then they were gone. When they jumped into their ship, Terry pointed silently westward where a massed group of warcraft winged its way. "Full gun, men!" barked Williams into his radio-phone. "Follow this ship."

With an answering roar, the eleven ships arose and flew to the east, out into the stretches of ocean. The pursuing craft, heavier and less speedy, fell to the back and soon gave up the chase. Their report would be to headquarters: "Eleven rebel ships left the tide-station and headed east, apparently to seek a refuge in Europe or Iceland." The matter would end there, for they could never be expected to reach Europe. If they turned back, the three scout ships tailing them would report and they would get a warm welcome. Either way the rebels were doomed, as they could not land on water.

It was those same three scout ships that Williams eyed reflectively, hanging on their rear. For his present purposes, they were obnoxious. He called his ships on general wave and tapped out a short message in secret code. It called for maneuvers often successful in eliminating scouts if they were not too wary and clever. A moment later his ships separated into two groups suddenly, one of them decelerating with dragging helicopters; the other cutting upward. The scouts, their speed unchecked, careened past the first group, veered upward frantically to run into a leaden hail from the other group whose men had clambered to the guns a moment before. The wide bosom of the ocean accepted three more humans to join the many in her watery depths.

"That's that," said Williams.

"Now tell me before I burst," cried Terry, "where we're heading. We can't reach Europe on empty tanks."

"You remember, Terry—I do things on the spur of the moment. My present inspiration or madness, or whatever you choose to class it, is the desire to *capture and take over control of the sun-power station,* which we will reach in an hour or so."

"And do what with it?" asked Terry astounded.

But Williams, instead of answering, snapped the radio-phone lever and appraised his men of the same thing. He spoke at some length, outlining their method. That there might be military opposition, Williams knew. Again it might be merely a matter of cowing the persons aboard into submission.

The incredible stupendousness of the sun-power station became apparent more and more as they drew near. It appeared

to be a hopeless jumble of skeleton towers surmounted with glinting umbrellas of mirrored apparatus, immense areas of curved surfaces, and large drums of what seemed broken glass—all scattered about over the giant raft which supported everything on the ocean's surface. Small it might be in comparison to the limitless expanse of ocean, but certainly one of the largest of man-made things on earth's surface.

Circling around at a convenient height, Williams took in the affair as a whole and noticed the center of the raft, an area of two or three acres, taken up with wooden structures which could only be the living quarters of the denizens of this veritable artificial island. Several black figures had already issued from the buildings and stood staring upward. Beside the buildings was a cleared space, obviously a landing field, in which reposed several aircraft.

"Damn!" muttered Williams as he noticed some of the craft were warships. Then he breathed easier; there were only five fighting ships there below.

He turned to the radio-phone: "Ready for battle, men!"

At his instructions, Terry dipped low over the buildings as though to drop a bomb. There was much scurrying below among the figures, and uniformed men ran toward the armed combat ships. They were accepting the challenge!

One by one, the Unidum ships arose to where the waiting rebels poised. Eleven to five. Yet it was not to be an unequal skirmish, for the Unidum ships had three guns each, one throwing a small high-powered shell, and were manned fully. Williams cursed that he did not have the full complement of men, two gunners and one pilot to each ship.

Below, Williams noticed a strange thing. The structural conglomeration beneath was sliding away quite out of keeping with their motion. Then it dawned upon him that the people on the sun-power station were simply moving away from the scene of intended battle. With whatever titanic engines it had, it was drawing away, so that falling airplanes would not smash and ruin expensive apparatus.

Williams spoke into the phone: "Take altitude! No formation—pick out your antagonist and duel him—these will be my only orders—*and in the name of God, do your best!*"

Terry turned startled to see Williams clambering up the short steel ladder to the trap which opened to the top-side of the plane and the machine-gun nests. Then Terry turned back to his controls grimly; on him—on his handling of the ship—as much as on the man above—would depend their immediate future.

CHAPTER XVII

The Reckoning

● At a mile above the water's surface, and well clear of the sun-power station which had moved from underneath, the battle took place. The chiefest reliance of the rebels was their superior speed and flexibility and their advantage in numbers. But each of the Unidum ships had three grim gunners to train on an enemy. Where the real advantage lay could not be said before the engagement.

To Williams, inexperienced with a machine-gun, it seemed like a scene from bedlam. There was the ululating roar of speed-shifting motors, the *rat-a-tat* of guns, the flare and sharp report of small-shells, the crazy gyration of the plane under him, the biting cold of rushing air, the feeling of helplessness in a strange, open perch—all tended to unnerve him so that he winced when a striped ship warped near with spouting guns. Then, like a flash, it all cleared. There was reason in Terry's manipulations; there was a gun in his hand; there was a flicker of target now and then. Bullets, timed right, would . . . .

His finger pulled; his arm vibrated; his hand guided the handle, pointing the muzzle at a striped ship that swung downward past them. He shouted aloud when one of the gunners slumped into his cockpit. First blood! A flash from the big

gun, and something shrieked past his ear. *Sarto!* That was close! But now to buckle down to earnest work; he must keep his eyes all over every second and swing the gun without hesitation. And so it went on for what seemed hours, but were minutes in reality.

Williams' appeal to his men had not been in vain; they fought their best, and it was just a little better than the best of the Unidum airmen. Ship after ship spun out of control and fluttered to the waiting ocean, or caught fire to fall like a meteor. Two ships remained, both rebels; all the others were gone.

Williams descended to the cabin, cold and disheveled. "We've won out, Terry. But at . . . . a price." He shook his head as though to clear his mind of gloom. He called the other ship via phone: "Descend and follow. We take over the sun-power station immediately."

The reply from the other ship was delayed for a while. Then a voice, gasping and pain-filled: "Yes, commander . . . . we descend . . . . soon now . . . . gunner killed . . . . wounded . . . . goodbye and . . . . good luck . . . ."

Williams saw from the window that the other ship was behaving erratically. It bespoke the weakening hand of a dying pilot.

"But you've not died in vain," said Williams softly. *"I swear it!"*

Somehow the dying pilot heard it. His reply was pushed through tremulous lips: "Thanks . . . . commander."

The other ship lurched drunkenly, poised as though saluting the flagship, then plunged downward.

"Well, Terry, it's up to us." Williams' voice was husky. Then it changed: "Where's M'bopo?"

"Why, he followed you out! Didn't he—"

"Lord! Then that was the end of him. Must have fallen; I didn't see him."

Already numbed at the many deaths that had been crowded into the past hour, the loss of the black man, although more personal, hardly did more than shake a few faltering Bantu phrases from Williams. Then he breathed deeply and fastened his attention to the approaching sun-power station.

Terry landed the ship without hesitation and he and Williams stepped out with pistols in hand, menacing the small crowd already gathered before the ship. To one side, a half-dozen men with blue capes waited expectantly. To these Scientists, Williams addressed himself.

"This sun-power station is now in the hands of the Brotherhood, or the rebels, as we are called. Since your armed escort is gone, you have no choice but to recognize my authority."

"We realize that," spoke one of the Scientists, glancing past and beyond Williams. "And furthermore, we are glad of it!"

"You mean — glad to be in rebel hands?" queried Williams incredulously.

"Certainly. We would never have let those five Unidum ships attack your forces had we been able to prevent it. Let me explain—but first of all, will you please order that man of yours away from the gun; he looks ready to open fire any minute!"

Williams whirled and gasped—with joy. In one of the gun cock-pits, looking very foolish, was M'bopo himself. With his hands on the gun, he looked indeed ready to spout flame and lead.

"Come down from there, you fool!" shouted Williams in Bantu dialect, when shocked surprise was over. The black man clambered from the gun cupola and leaped to the landing floor. He straightened up, frozen but grinning, as his master heaped imprecations on him to cover up his real feelings of joy and relief that he was alive. After a rapid exchange of native dialect, Williams strode back to the Scientists.

To Terry he explained that M'bopo had followed him out on the cabin roof before the battle, had seen him work a machine gun, and had thereby himself taken over the other gun. What effects his bullets had had, no one could say.

Williams turned to the impatient Scientists. "Now, sirs, if you will explain—"

"Just this," said the one who had acted as spokesman before, "we, of course, on board this experimental sun-power station, have been in touch with national events via radio news, and have from the first favored the Brotherhood. We too see the insidiousness of the Brain-control, and the future threat of brain-enslavement. Practically all our lives we six Scientists here have labored to produce power from the sun, and our goal is near. Despairing indeed was the news that the tyrant Molier was making a bid for absolute dictatorship. When the Brotherhood announced its opposition, and military revolution broke out, we hoped and prayed Molier would be broken. Apparently"—his voice became heavy—"it can't be done."

"And perhaps it can!" contradicted Williams. He continued eagerly at their blank looks. "I think, with your help, with your pledges to give me any and all aid, the tide may be turned yet!"

"In behalf of my colleagues and myself, I give that pledge right now," said the Scientist. His fellows nodded vigorously.

"Would you even" — Williams paused and swept an eye around at the jungle of towered apparatus surrounding them —"willingly endanger all this—your life work?"

The Scientist swallowed but answered quickly. "We Scientists of the sun-power station here have more than once wished in the past month that we could save Unitaria from threatened evil, *even at the price of . . . . of all this!* So now, we stand by our unwritten agreement. But in what way can the labors of science serve in the matter?"

Williams countered with a question: "How soon can you reach New York with this motored raft?"

The Scientists murmured in surprise. Finally the spokesman said: "Possibly by dawn tomorrow."

"Now a very important question," continued Williams. "Can you swing those night beams which throw off excess sun-energy in any direction?"

The Scientist pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Yes, with a little alteration in machinery, it could be simply done."

"Good!" cried Williams exultantly. "Now, have you an all-wave transmitter?"

"In the building there," pointed the Scientist.

"I must get in touch with General Bromberg," shouted Williams by way of excuse as he madly dashed to the building pointed out. A man seated before the control panel of an all-wave radio looked up quizzically.

"Eighteen point two centimeters; full power. *And hurry!*" barked Williams. "Ask for General Bromberg."

● Terry stepped into the room just in time to begin coding a message that Williams wrote hastily. The Brotherhood's code, which had never been worked out by the baffled Unidum intelligence service, had a key word which changed its vowels every ten hours by the clock. Once the progressive system of change had been memorized, it was simplicity itself to code a message that would be safe from enemy understanding.

The voice that answered from Base One was that of Agarth. "Who calls?"

"Williams—Marshal Williams."

"Great guns! Is it possible? I had no hope of hearing your voice again. General Bromberg is ill in bed, Williams."

"Well, then listen, Agarth! Take down this code; I'll give it twice."

The message translated was: "You must hold out at Base One till dawn tomorrow. Fight as you've never fought before if necessary! But *hold out!* The sun-power station is in my hands. It is the most powerful and invincible war-machine in the world! With it at dawn tomorrow I will threaten to burn the Capitol to a cinder if Molier is not arrested and ousted from power. The victory is ours, if all goes well!"

A code came back that Terry worked out.

"What is it; what is it?" begged Williams almost frantically.

Terry read: "Will hold out if Hell falls!"

* * *

The grey of dawn revealed a huge bulk standing before the front faces of the Capitol of Unitaria. Like a sentient giant from another world, the sun-power station frowned majestically over the seat of government. Buzzing aircraft hovered like flies, darting and spinning in curiosity. Suddenly a blinding beam of light shot upward from the internal mazes of the station, and two unlucky ships whiffed into flame. The beam swung awesomely downward, frightening away hundreds of ships—down—down—down—till it just barely touched the peak of a dome on a Capitol building. The peak glowed red, then white, then fell away molten.

What internal revolution occurred in the Capitol after the ultimatum was delivered, the watchers aboard the sun-power station did not know. That the Unidum had finally and completely fallen away from Molier, they did know. That the incubus of evil dissolved before the threat of extinction, they also knew. That the Unidum was prepared to call off hostilities against the Brotherhood, and negotiate with its officials, was a third known fact. But what and why the incident of the next hour resulted, was not to be known till many days later.

In the second hour after dawn, a ship arose from a roof-landing of the Capitol, engines beating frantically, as though to escape were a matter of seconds. From somewhere—no one knows just where—came the flash and report of an anti-aircraft gun. A part of the rising ship's wing crumpled and threw it out of balance. For a few seconds the ship gyrated madly downward. Then the pilot must have regained partial control, for the ship righted part way. Sagging in the air, about to plunge ocean-ward any moment, it miraculously kept an even keel and finally coasted downward to land in the very center of the man-made island of sun-mirrors.

Hurrying figures approached it. From the badly smashed cabin crawled a tall and gaunt figure. His clothing indicated that he was, or had been, one of the two executive-heads of Unitaria. His blue cape betokened him a Scientist. He straightened up to face a group of men who gasped upon recognizing him.

Standing at the head of the group was a robust figure whose tanned face indicated that he had known rigorous climates. The gaunt figure, wild-eyed, poured out a flood of words. The tanned man answered, pointing a stern finger as though in denunciation. The gaunt figure again broke out in torrentous language, and the other man made a threatening move toward him.

Of a sudden there was a flurry of action. The gaunt man's hand whipped into his robe and came out with a tiny tubular object. It pointed straight for the tanned man and from it came a dull blue flash. But the killing charge of the lightning pistol did not find the mark for which it had been aimed. A figure whose skin was black had a second before leaped between the two men. It was he who sagged to the wooden landing lifeless.

For a moment every person in the tableau froze, as though time had stood still. Then with a shout, the tanned man leaped for the gaunt man, a quivering rage apparent in his manner of motion. The figures came together, twisted, contorted. The gaunt man seemed to have an unnatural strength, like the strength of a madman, so that even the other's steel muscles were matched. Suddenly the blue flash again appeared. The gaunt man lay stretched.

The tanned man looked at his vanquished antagonist a moment, then turned to kneel beside the figure of the black man, reverently.

Thus died Molier, arch-tyrant of 1973.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Last Scientist

● Earl Hackworth could hardly control his voice. "Tell me all about it, Dan and Terry. Good Lord! Don't you realize that I know very little of what really happened to you two after we separated at

the tide-station! How did you get away? How did you meet Agarth? How—"

"All in good time, Earl," said Williams. "The thing now is—Lila!"

"Oh, yes, yes," agreed Hackworth, calming down. The excitement of seeing his two closest friends again after weeks of separation—and eternities of events—had thrown him into a turmoil. "Let's go then to the hospital. I was there just yesterday. She's sleeping as peacefully as ever, Terry."

"What a relief," breathed Terry, "that the drug held out through all those weeks. Dear girl—!" His eyes softened with tender thoughts and memories.

"But Williams," he turned to the other, "Agarth called, don't you remember? He will be here—and I guess some sort of parade in your honor with him—to take you to the Capitol to witness the ceremonies which take the Brain-control Act and the Eugenics Law from the statutes, and the formal announcement of Europe's agreement to veto secession."

"Terry," answered Williams slowly, "you've been with me through thick and thin. You've stuck with me even when it seemed I had gone mad in my moves. I'd feel like a deserter if I didn't go along with you now."

"But Agarth will—"

"Hang Agarth—at least for the time being! Come on; I must see the awakening of Lila."

So they went. During the drive, no word was spoken. Terry, face aglow with an eager light, seemed lost in dreams. Williams, with something of brooding melancholy in his eyes, seemed enervated, depressed. For the first time that Hackworth could remember, he began to show that his years were not so few. Williams had not once mentioned the dramatic events of the day before on board the sun-power station. But M'bopo was to be buried in state; that much he had specified.

Hackworth stopped his auto before the Unidum Hospital. "Miss Lila Hackworth, Room 2024," said Hackworth to the attendant.

"I'm sorry, sir," said the white-clad woman, "but she's gone!"

"Gone? Gone! GONE!" The word seemed to echo and re-echo in thunders. It was Terry shouting the word incredulously. Williams placed a restraining hand on his shoulder.

"You must be mistaken," said Hackworth confidently. "I saw her just yesterday. She's that 'sleeping' case, you know."

"I know, sir. But she *is* gone!"

"Great Heavens, explain what you mean!" cried Terry.

The woman attendant turned pale and cringed. "Oh, I knew I shouldn't have let him do it—" She seemed about to become hysterical. But the fierce gleam in Terry's eye bolstered her spirit to defiance. "What else could I do? Last night Professor Jorgen came and took her away! He is superintendent of Unidum hospitals and has authority."

"But last night—he had not a shred of authority," said Terry. "He is one of the group to be exiled—but I suppose you people here in the hospital didn't know that."

"No, sir. Furthermore, he had a pistol in his hand, and the look in his eyes—horrible!" The woman attendant lowered her voice. "He was stark mad—insane! We didn't dare try to stop him."

"But why should he come here and take Lila away?" asked Hackworth tremulously.

"In insanity," spoke Williams, "sometimes just a little idea grows to mountainous proportions. Perhaps the exasperation of being balked in marrying Lila for so long, transmitted itself into his madness, and has now become his sole lunatic aim.

"Where did he take her?" he asked of the woman.

"I don't know, sir. But he has a private summer home at Edgewood, in the Catskill Mountains. And his plane, when it left here, went straight north."

"Let's go," said Williams, once again the leader. "That's the first place to look for him."

A half-hour later, Hackworth piloted his Sansrun away from New York to the

north. Terry sat pale and drawn. "Hurry, Hackworth!" he cried agonized when they had barely worked free of New York air traffic. "That madman might kill her, or mutilate her if we don't get there in time."

"Not that," soothed Williams. "He probably took her to his home, tried to wake her unsuccessfully by the usual methods of waking sleepers, and by now some other fancy will be occupying his distorted brain."

Not a mile east of Edgewood, in a quiet setting of hills and forest, they found Jorgen's woodland retreat, after a landing and inquiry in town. Hackworth brought his ship down in the landing space and they saw another ship there that could only be Jorgen's.

At the front door, Williams held up a hand and whispered to the other two. "Rather than ring the bell or knock, and thus let him know we are here, it would be best to look in all the windows carefully. Hearing us land, he may be waylaying us with a gun."

Williams, with a lightning pistol in his hand, led the way. The low, rambling cottage had many windows at each of which he paused and looked in stealthily. None of them showed anything. They completely encircled the house.

Williams looked puzzled. "Looks completely deserted, as though it's been shut down since summer and since undisturbed. Could it be that he isn't here after all?"

"But his ship there! He must be here. Is there an attic or basement?" suggested Hackworth in careful whispers.

Williams thought a moment. "Come on, we'll try the door."

It opened squeakily to reveal a dusty hallway.

"Look! Tracks in the dust!" said Terry eagerly.

Williams nodded and followed them. He wondered that the madman had not come to meet them. The tracks led to an open door from which streamed artificial light. There were steps leading downward and a faint tinkling sound rose from below. An unmistakable odor came to them—a chemical laboratory!

Williams threw caution to the winds and raced down the steps and into the door at the bottom, Terry not a step behind.

"I've been waiting for you," said a calm voice, bringing them to a halt. "No, don't shoot. I have this needle above the girl's heart!"

Professor Jorgen, heavy-browed and thin-lipped, stood over the limp form of Lila on a couch, her hospital robe awry. In his hand he had a large hypodermic, poised over her breast. A downward thrust would pierce her heart.

● In the utter silence as the three glared, Jorgen continued through lips drawn in an expression half snarling, half smiling. "I heard your plane land and surmised it must be someone come for the girl. This girl was to be my wife, but for a strange malady. *She's mine, do you hear?*" His voice ended with a maniacal shriek.

"Just a minute, Professor Jorgen," said Williams. "Perhaps—"

"Stop! Nothing you can say will interest me. You must listen to what I have to say." The unholy eyes gleamed with devils. "A strange malady has put this girl into a trance, as though a witch had cast an evil spell upon her. But it is no sorcery. No. Science can cure her. I am a Scientist!" His voice had a remnant of former pride in it. "Since last night I have been working with my chemicals. Hour after hour I labored, knowing I must succeed in awakening her before she died of under-nourishment."

He squinted his eyes as though about to reveal a great secret. "I succeeded but a few minutes ago. In this hypodermic is a fluid that will awaken her. Yes, yes! It will! You can't stop me, either. And when she awakes, I will marry her, because she loves me! Ha, you didn't know that, did you?"

The voice had become taunting and Williams felt Terry straining forward. He gripped his arm and breathed a word

in his ear. "Wait!" He looked back at the insanely gloating madman. That needle above her heart—if that hand would but draw away for a brief second . . . .

"Professor Jorgen," said Williams loudly and quickly. "You mistake us. We do not come for the girl."

"What do you say?" barked the insane Scientist suspiciously.

"I say we care nothing about the girl. We are here in behalf of the Unidum. Due to your past services, you are to be given your freedom. You are not to be exiled!"

For a moment mad eyes bored at Williams with uncanny cunning. They seemed to be reading behind the words. Then the expression changed. Slowly a look of perplexity replaced the suspicion. Williams watched like a hawk—that hand . . . .

The madman seemed pondering the words he had heard. "Not exiled," he muttered softly. "Free. They won't prosecute me!" Indecision overspread his face. He looked at the girl's face and quickly back to the three men with a flash of suspicion again. "This girl means nothing to you? Do you all swear it?"

A few seconds stretched out into a dozen eternities, while the lunatic blinked, alternately suspicious and incredulous, and perplexed. Then his hand which had poised so long over the girl's heart, drew slowly upward. Williams watched as inch by inch it raised, as the insane mind of the Scientist gradually gave credence to the statement.

The moment had come. A dull blue flash leaped from Williams' upraised pistol to the madman. Terry screamed and dashed forward, for with tiger-like quickness, the maniac had plunged the needle straight for Lila's heart! Even in his death, he had taken her along!

Terry slumped to his knees beside the couch and broke into dry sobs. To have all things lead to this hour of sorrow was irony of the bitterest.

"Lila! My love! Am I too late to call you back to life?"

Her pallid face looked like the face of death itself and the heart-broken youth bowed his head in numbing sorrow. He did not notice the two men behind him whisper excitedly; nor did he notice the fluttering of the girl's eyelids. Dulled with the mists of long sleep, the soft brown eyes fastened to the grieving face beside her and cleared suddenly.

"Terry! Darling!"

A moment later Terry descended from the clouds enough to wonder about that death-stroke that he had apparently seen pierce the girl's heart. Hackworth pointed to Lila's breast. The hypodermic, driven downward by a hand suddenly bereft of life within, had merely tangled in the gown without so much as scratching the girl's skin.

Williams, tears of happiness in his eyes, turned to his cousin as the young couple again embraced with endearing words to each other.

"We can wait upstairs, I think, Earl," he said. "I really feel quite unnecessary down here now, don't you?"

THE END

THE FALL OF THE EIFFEL TOWER

By Charles de Richter

(Continued from page 419)

had told no more than the truth; there was anxiety in all those faces, an anxiety that drew the attention.

In its monotonous voice, the loud-speaker was telling the news of the day, and the crowd was listening, motionless and silent, or talking only in low voices.

Jean Sorlin drew the curtain into place.

"And if the people begin to really fly from the city, I wonder what will happen to that crowd of people, so quiet out there now, who aren't able to leave. When I think that you have without the sligthest doubt, touched the heart of the whole mystery, and that your brain simply refuses to function . . . ."

He halted suddenly, and pivoting on his heels, turned toward Louis Berson.

"Berson, I think I have it!"

In his eyes there was the little flame of light that spoke of success.

He clapped his reporter on the shoulder.

"Berson," he said again, and his voice had a note of triumph in it, "I tell you I have it. Do you know Sankar?"

Without understanding the reason for this sudden explosion, Louis Berson shook his head.

"No? Never mind. You are going to meet him in five minutes. He lives a few doors from here. Hand me that radio."

Picking up a blue-colored receiver which lay among a dozen others on the desk, Berson held it out to the editor-in-chief.

The latter dialled a number, waited a couple of moments, biting his lower lip, and finally gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"Hello. Is this you, Sankar? Good, I was afraid you had gone out. Tell me, my friend, I need you, can you come over at once? Yes, right away. Here, in my private office. Good. Thank you; I'll see you in five minutes then."

Replacing the receiver and sitting down again at his desk, Jean Sorlin looked at Berson with a smile.

"My dear Berson, I don't know whether there is or is not something interesting behind that granite wall you spoke of as being present in your head. But I can tell you very certainly that before a quarter of an hour is over, I will have blown up that wall, and in spite of yourself, I will have found out what lies behind it. And I have a little idea that I will not be wasting my time."

Louis Berson, who had not moved from his position by the window, turned toward the arm-chair in which he had been sitting, and fell into it again.

He knew that if his chief had resolved not to tell him about it, it would be in vain to ask questions.

Nevertheless, as he lit a cigarette, he did not resist the temptation to launch one question in an ironic tone:

"Are you going to have me disincarnated? Because if you are, I would like to know about it in advance, so I can make my will."

Jean Sorlin looked at him hard, and the reply was both brief and decisive.

"Hypnotism, my boy! That's all."

"Not such a bad idea at that," approved Louis Berson.

And settling himself in his armchair, with his eyes closed, he began to smoke his cigarette, wondering what they would discover.

Facing him, Jean Sorlin was again dictating orders into the machines about him.

(Is the terrible destruction really being caused by termites? Don't miss next month's instalment.)

THE MAN FROM BEYOND

By John Beynon Harris

(Continued from page 435)

Goin shrugged his shoulders.

"Heaven knows. A very long time, that's all we can be sure of. The continual clouds . . . . And did you notice that he claims to have tamed two of our primitive ancestors?—Millions of years."

"And he warns us against Earth." Dagul smiled. "It will be a shock for the poor devil. The last of his race—though not, to judge by his own account, a very worthy race. When are you going to tell him?"

"He's bound to find out soon, so I thought I'd do it this evening. I've got permission to take him up to the observatory."

"Would you mind if I came too?"

"Of course not."

● Gratz was stumbling among unfamiliar syllables as the three climbed the hill to the Observatory of Takon, doing his best to drive home his warnings of the perfidy of Earth and the ways of great companies. He was relieved when both the Takonians assured him that no negotiations were likely to take place.

"Why have we come here?" he asked when they were in the building, and an assistant in obedience to Goin's orders was adjusting the large telescope.

"We want to show you your planet," said Dagul.

There was some preliminary difficulty due to differences between the Takonian and the human eye, but before long he was studying a huge, shining disc. A moment later he turned back to the others with a slight smile.

"There's some mistake. This is our moon."

"No. It is the Earth," Goin assured him.

Gratz looked back at the scarred, pitted surface of the planet. For a long time he gazed in silence. It was like the moon, and yet . . . . Despite the craters, despite the desolation, there was a familiar quality. A suggestion of the linked Americas stretching from pole to pole . . . . a bulge which might have been the West African coast . . . . Gratz gazed in silence for a great while. At last he turned away.

"How long?" he asked.

"Some millions of years."

"I don't understand. It was only the other day—"

Goin started to explain, but Gratz heard none of it. Like a man dreaming, he walked out of the building. He was seeing again the Earth as she had been; a place of beauty, beautiful in spite of all that man had made her suffer—and now she was dead, a celestial cinder.

Close by the edge of the cliff which held the observatory high above Takon, he paused. He looked out across an alien city in an alien world towards a white point which glittered in the heavens. The Earth which had borne him was dead . . . . Long and silently he gazed. Then, deliberately, with a step which did not falter, he walked over the cliff's edge . . . .

THE END

THE TREE OF EVIL

By David H. Keller, M.D.

(Continued from page 465)

"Of course the case was working out rather well, better in a way than I had expected. But I still had the tree and the snake to take care of. I knew about the tree and had brought along a saw to cut the root. I even had dynamite because I had decided to close up the mouth of the tunnel. At that time, I did not know about the other entrance. You see, Mrs. Sweetly told me about that.

"I did not want to come into personal conflict with that snake, and at the same time, I was sure that Mr. Harley would not want me to leave it suffering in the cave with no way of getting out; so I fixed a fuse to a piece of dynamite and threw it in front of his nose and tried to make a noise like a tomcat. He woke up and evidently thought it was dessert time, because he swallowed the dynamite, and at the proper moment, his head was blown off his body. Of course, I did not stay to see that, because I was not sure how he would feel if he was just hurt a little without being killed.

"After that I started to saw through the tree. I cut its taproot through in two places about four feet apart. From what I know about trees, that will kill it. It took me a long time to do that, because the root was hard. Then I carried that piece of root out through the old natural tunnel to Frog Run. I came back and got the snake's head. I had to drag that out; big as a bushel basket. Then I went back and took some pictures. Thought you would feel better if you had some. And I measured the snake; I will give you the measurements. The greatest circumference was where the banker reposed. I came out into the beautiful sunshine, and after the episodes of the night, it looked more beautiful than ever, and when I reviewed the whole case, I was glad it was ended and I thought of my quiet home in San Francisco, and my daughters and my wife so interested in her church work, and I really became rather homesick, only I had to go and see a dentist first."

"A dentist?" asked Dr. Riorden. "What has a dentist to do with your story?"

"I had to get a pair of forceps. I bought an old pair and went back to Frog Run and pulled six of the big teeth out of that snake's mouth. Then I went to Pittsburg with the piece of taproot and had three canes made, one for each of us, and each cane has two teeth worked into the head. I thought you would like one. Just alike, and here is mine. Some day you will hear of the name of Glendale, and you will say, 'Curious! Something happened at Glendale, but just what was it?' Then you can look at the cane and you will remember about the Tree of Evil and our lost forever friends in the cave. I have your canes downstairs."

Harley looked at the cane and the six-inch fangs.

"You have the photographs and the measurements?" he asked.

"Yes, everything, with my written report, is in this brief case."

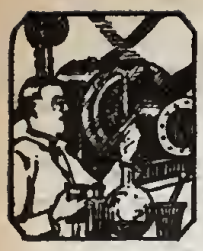
"I'll take your word for it, and thank you. How much do I owe you for your services?"

"Twenty-five thousand. I usually charge more, but this was such an interesting case that I can afford to shade my fee."

"I will write a check at once. I guess it is worth it. The trouble is that no one will believe the story. Have you anything else to say, Mr. Taine?"

"Nothing. If they don't believe you, show them the cane. Oh! There was one thing I did you may be interested in. I skinned a piece of the snake and had a handbag made for the wife. I will put the check in the bag and hand it to her when I go home. She will be right pleased to have a bag like that, with a check and me home again."

THE END



Science Questions and Answers

THIS department is conducted for the benefit of readers who have pertinent queries on modern scientific facts. As space is limited, we cannot undertake to answer more than three questions for each letter. The flood of correspondence received makes it impractical, also, to print answers as soon as we receive questions. However, questions of general interest will receive careful attention.

THE ASSOCIATE SCIENCE EDITORS OF WONDER STORIES
are nationally-known educators, who pass upon the scientific principles of all stories.

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Dr. Joseph S. Yoshioka
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Evolution and Astronomy

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

A question has bothered me for a long, long time. Evolution goes along with all things. Will the lower animals some day be as intelligent as men, and more so, later? And another: Are all the planets, asteroid belts, and meteor belts in a single plane? If they are on the same plane with each other, could we not avoid the asteroids by "zooming over them" in a space-ship?

STUART AYERS.
Lewiston, Idaho.

(Your question on evolution leaves room for endless discussion and conjecture. We have seen the paths of evolution in the past, with men and animals alike, and can only imagine what they will be like in the future. Perhaps one of the most interesting animal evolution studies is that of the horse. We can trace it so far back, that we find originally a small, five-toed creature. Later the animal became larger, but had only three toes. Today it is even larger, and has but one toe, or "hoof" as we call it. The material of the hoof is similar to that in finger- and toe-nails. That is why the horse feels no sensation when being shod.

We have seen articles showing future men with large heads and frail bodies, as they are likely to evolve with civilization. Millions of years ago, man was supposed to have been classed with the ape. In that case, it is likely that millions of years from now the ape will have evolved into man. But where will man be in that day? He may be super-man, or he may be wiped off the surface of the earth long before the ape has evolved into man, if the ape is not wiped out before he has the opportunity! The most intelligent animals, and those best adapted to progress, will most likely evolve into creatures as intelligent as man is today before the others. The monkey family is naturally far above all others. Dogs, cats, and mice are perhaps the next in line. While ants, bees, and termites have wonderful social systems, it is probably not the sort of intelligence we see in the higher animals. Insects work entirely by instinct, while the higher animals can use their individual minds for individual action. Insects, when out of their environment, are entirely lost, while dogs, for instance, can adapt themselves to suit new conditions.

Except for minor differences, all of the planets but Pluto are in practically the same plane. However, the asteroids move in all directions, so it would be very difficult to "zoom over them" in a space-ship.—EDITOR.)

The Fourth Dimension Again

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

I would like to know what is meant by the "fourth dimension." This is one question I could never fathom. The mathematics master at our school seems rather hazy about it, so I thought maybe you could explain it more fully.

In your stories you talk of space-ships increasing their speed while in space. How can this be so? We know that, the thinner the atmosphere gets, the more difficult it is for an aeroplane to fly, because of the low air resistance. The same as when you hold a toy boat out of water, its propeller races around at twice its speed, whereas in the water it drives the boat along, while its propeller revolves at a greatly reduced speed.

Then, getting back to the rocket, how can it regulate its speed out in space where there is no air and no resistance? I do not know much about science, seeing that I am only 15 years old, but I see a lot of other readers asking questions, so I thought it would be a golden opportunity to get mine answered too.

WILLOUGHBY HAMILTON,
Victoria, Australia.

(We have discussed the fourth dimension many times in these columns. It is only natural that your instructor should be hazy about it. No one can say what it really is. It is beyond our natural environment and we can only theorize and conjecture. Some call it time, or duration. That is, an object to exist must have length, thickness, and width, the three well-

known dimenelons, and duration, the fourth dimension. That is, you can freeze water into, say a three-foot cube of ice. The next day you can melt it. When you describe the ice, you muat also tell WHEN it existed. When the fourth dimension is given this definition, it is no ionger fantastic or impossible.

Rocket-shipa do not require air to fly—in fact, atmosphere is a serious obstacle to their operation. Experiments prove that recoil, the action of rockets, is independent of air or gravity. Rocket-ships are worked in an entirely different manner from aircraft which use propellers.—EDITOR.)

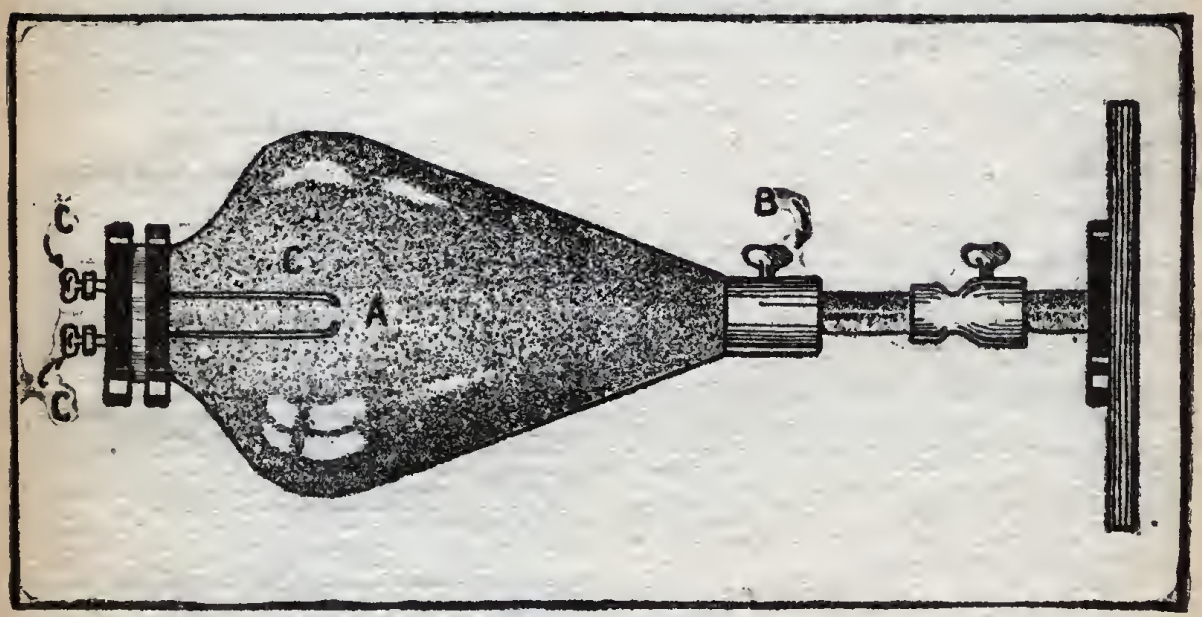
The Eudiometer

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Would you kindly explain just what the eudiometer is, and its use, in your science department?

VICTOR MCCAFFERY,
Germantown, Pa.

(Henry Cavendish invented the eudiometer during the eighteenth century, as a result of his studies of hydrogen, or "inflammable air," as he called it. This instrument is illustrated on this page. With it, Cavendish combined ordinary air with hydrogen, producing water. He prepared 195 volumes of oxygen and 370 volumes of hydrogen in a bell-jar. He filled the pear-shaped jar [A] with this mixture and then closed the tap [B]. A spark was sent through the terminale [C C] and the gases combined, as they do in the ordinary electroiysis experiment. However, the water resulting from the hydrogen and oxygen was distinctly acid. Nitric acid, due to the unavoidable presence of nitrogen from ordiuary air, caused impurity in the water.—EDITOR.)



Objects in Space

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

In reading one of your science-fiction tales, I learned that the acceleratiou of gravity of the sun amounts to .070 feet per second, squared, at a distance of approximately 93,000,000 miles from its surface. Am I to infer from this, that the velocity of an object in spaco would *double*, its rate of speed in a fall toward the sun, during every second of flight?

At what distance from the sun would its temperature be equivalent to that of the torrid regione of the earth?

At what distance from the sun would its gravitational attractiou be equal to that at the surface of the earth?

Could an object at a distance, say, of 175,000 miles from the eurface of the earth, if deflected on its course, be in such a position that it might be attracted into the sun?

Also, can you give me an estimate concerning the duration of such a fall and the maximum rate attained, per second?

Is it considered probable that radio waves would be seriously influenced at decreasiug distance from the sun? Due to magnetic storms and etc.?

If you can give me information on these subjects, I will be very much obliged to you.

M. H. ASQUITH,
Philadelphia, Pa.

(An object in space falling toward the sun, while it would move faster as it drew nearer, would NOT double its velocity every second. Its velocity would increase, eecond by second; the rate, or "acceleration," increasing as it neared the sun.

The temperature of an object on its way to the sun would reach that of the torrid regions of earth, depending on the materiai of which the object was constructed, on leaving our atmosphere.

The gravitational attraction of the sun on an object would be equal to that it would receive on the surface of the earth, at a distance of 1,866,000 miles approximately, from the surface of the sun.

An object MIGHT be attracted into the sun if it were distracted from its course at a distance of 175,000 miles from the earth, depending on planetary positions.

The duration of a fali from the earth to the sun, according to Lewis, would be about sixty days and the maximum speed attained would be over 380 miles per second.

We do not know how radio waves are affected near the sun. All of our observations up to the present time have been confined to the surface of the earth, under a heavy blanket of atmosphere. There are various theories of how radio waves are affected by the electrical energy constantly emanating from the sun.—EDITOR.)

The SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE

—a department conducted for members of the international SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE in the interest of science-fiction and its promotion. We urge members to contribute any item of interest that they believe will be of value to the organization.

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IN our June department, we announced that David H. Keller, M.D., the favorite author of thousands of science-fiction fans, would give ten of his original manuscripts to the first ten members of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE, as the first act in the organization. In the following issue, July, we announced the winners and printed the rules for securing the manuscripts.

To date, seven of the ten winners have written to Dr. Keller and secured the manuscripts. They were presented as follows:

"The Ivy War" to Kenneth Sterling, Member Number Four.

"A Twentieth Century Homunculus" to George Forbes, Member Number Six.

"Euthanasia Limited" to John Theodore Wiese, Member Number Two.

"The Air Lines" to Stephen R. Tucker, Member Number Eight.

"The Steam Shovel" to Harry Boosel, Member Number Ten.

"The Rat Racket" to Jacob K. Taback, Member Number Seven.

"The Pent House" to George Gordon Clark, Member Number One.

Robert Hart, William H. Dellenback, and Frank Phillips, Jr., Members Number Three, Five, and Nine, respectively, have not as yet claimed this valuable gift. These three should write to Headquarters for Dr. Keller's address immediately and follow the rules outlined in the July number before the offer is withdrawn. An autographed letter accompanies each manuscript.

MEMBERSHIP CERTIFICATES

The certificates belonging to several members have been held up because of their failure to read the application very carefully. If you have sent in your application but have not as yet received your certificate, read over the page in this issue describing the essentials to see whether or not you have failed to do everything specified. No member can join a Chapter until he has his certificate to prove that he is a member.

AN APOLOGY

In our July issue, we stated that "every letterhead has the name of the member printed on it." This statement was an error. At the low price at which these letterheads are sold, we find it impossible to print individual names. To do so would cost the members much more than the act would merit. An illustration of the letterhead and envelope, along with the seal and button, appears on the page describing the essentials.

A DISCOUNT TO MEMBERS

We have several hundred of Paul's original inside illustrations which have appeared in WONDER STORIES and many of his covers on hand. At one time we gave our readers these originals upon request as special courtesies. However, years ago we found the requests all too numerous, and, to the fairness of all, we have been forced to charge for them. For a long while we have been receiving a cash price for them and the supply might soon be exhausted, leaving for sale only those as they are used in the magazine. We now offer a 20% discount—one-fifth off—to all members of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE who wish to add these valuable Pauls to their collections. All those interested are requested to write to Headquarters for prices.

SCIENCE FICTION TALKS

After the Chapters of the LEAGUE are formed and organized, various members will want to give speeches to the local members. These talks will not only concern authors and their abilities in certain lines, and other purely science-fiction topics, but also their personal opinion on the probability of science-fiction themes and how they believe man will develop in the immediate and far future.

Professor Walter B. Pitkin of Columbia University, during a recent speech reviewed in the May 26th issue of the *New York Times*, described what he thinks it will be like to look back from the year 2034. He observes the past century (the future to us) through the "hyperzootic ooze controls of a time broadcaster." In 1947, according to his predictions, all corporations will combine into the Life, Liberty, and Happiness Co., which will offer everything for a small monthly payment from each customer. He humorously states that all governments will die out and all politicians will be put in asylums. On July 4th, 1961, the last fly-swatter will be burned at the Chicago Exposition. War and sickness will be things of the past. By 1966 we will have climate control. By 1999 men will work only ten hours per week. He also declares that by the year 2034 there will be 5,000,000,000 people on the earth.

Professor Pitkin gave reasons why he thinks these things will come about. By studying modern social and business trends, you can conjecture these things for yourself.

FROM MEMBER NUMBER FIVE

Following is part of a recent letter from William H. Dellenback, showing the characteristic enthusiasm the members have for the organization:

"I guess I might as well take opportunity to express my views on the LEAGUE. Of course, I'm for it, hook, line, and sinker.

"Bnt hurry up with that button, because that's really one of the big things i Take my case: Here I am, riding through Chicago's Loop twice every day on the elevated train. And I have been doing that for a year, BUT, never once have I seen anyone reading anything approximating a WONDER or any of the others. Why is this? Where are all these scientifictionists? Of the hundreds of faces I see

every day. I've often wondered how many are stfans. Buh-leave me, when that button arrives, out it goes right on the old coat lapel, proudly too—and ever and anon, the old eagle will glance up from the pages of the stf manuscript it is perusing so avidly, to scan with burning orbs the breasts and bosoms of sundry fellow passengers, in hope of catching, implanted thereon, the striking, gleaming colors of the interplan—aw, why go on."

In this paragraph, Mr. Dellenback brings out a point that we have failed to mention. The lapel buttons will identify the members, so that, when among strangers and feeling lonely, they may come upon other members accidentally and make new friends. When one member sees the handsome button on another, he will know that he has found a lover of fantasy and will undoubtedly make many friends in this manner.

CORRESPONDENTS

Here is the first list of members who would like to start an immediate correspondence with others. Any member is free to enter his name upon the list, telling just who he would like to write to (ages and sex), where they should live, and perhaps what they should be interested in.

George Gordon Clark, 8709 15th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., Member Number One, wishes to correspond with other members, of both sexes, between the ages of eighteen and twenty. Location unlimited.

James Noel Mooney, 416 W. 118th St., New York City, N. Y., Member Number 220, would like to receive mail and personal visits to discuss science-fiction from anyone living in New York City, between the ages of 14 and 18.

William H. Dellenback, 1855 Rosedale Ave., Chicago, Ill., Member Number Five, wants to correspond with members of both sexes, from 16 to 20 years of age, living in Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. During the month of August, address him at Tarry-A-While Cottage, Epworth Heights, Ludington, Mich.

Stuart Ayers, 1411 10th Ave., Lewiston, Idaho, Member Number Sixty, wishes to communicate with members between the ages of 15 and 17 in the state of Idaho.

Newby Crowell, 600 W. Franklin St., Monroe, N. C., Member Number 291, would like to correspond with boys between the ages of 17 and 20 who are interested in science and amateur journalism. Location unlimited.

Paul Freehafer, Box 12, Payette, Idaho, Member Number 294, who is looking forward to the day when the LEAGUE has 120 million members, will be glad to strike up an acquaintance with members between the ages of sixteen and twenty living in Washington, Oregon, California, and Idaho.

Alfred Brotman, 2400 Presbury St., Baltimore, Md., Member Number 83, wishes to write to other members between the ages of sixteen and twenty. Location unlimited.

Albert Casper, 199 Belmont Ave., Newark, N. J., Member Number 320, would like to correspond with members between the ages of fifteen and eighteen years, preferably those that live in Newark and thereabouts.

Leo Rogers, 616 Jefferson Ave., Buffalo, N. Y., Member Number 190, wants to hear from men between the ages of twenty-five and thirty in any part of the world.

This correspondence list is for members of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE and those entered are warned against questionable letters they may receive from others. If your entry does not bring the results you desire, make your next one take in a wider field, either in ages, locality, or hobbies. No entry will appear two months in succession for the same member. By notifying Headquarters when the issue appears containing your name, you may have it repeated the second month following, and by doing this every two months, have the entry six times per year. However, you will probably not wish to do this, for you are likely to secure all the correspondents you desire with the first insertion.

CHAPTERS

Here we give you a paragraph from a recent letter written by Waldo M. Streman, who is evidently ignorant of the existence of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE, or at least was at the time he wrote the letter:

"Los Angeles, my present home, is so large and impersonal a city that it is hard to find congenial company—at least I haven't yet heard of a place where scientifically and sociologically (but largely non-technical) imaginative people congregate periodically. There must be several thousand regular and intermittent WONDER STORIES readers in the city, and among the total number there must be a dozen or more men, women, boys, and girls, who would be highly pleased to create an informal Scienceer's Club. (I take exception to the spelling of *Scienocera;* it seems to me that the word should connote *Science Seers.)* I shall be grateful if the editor will publish this letter so that intellectually lonesome scientifictionists may learn of a focal point. It will perhaps be possible to organize in a small way a scientifiction writers' club for the purpose of group study of our own and others' stories, with better subject matter and technique our aim. I by no means intend that only writers and would-be-writers get together on this; rather, I propose and encourage the creation of two closely related groups, one literary and the other mainly social, with scientifiction and human welfare our common interests. (It may be worthy of note that I consider WONDER STORIES and the earlier sister magazine, or cousin magazine, to be responsible for my several years' social consciousness, dating from my sixteenth year. I am now twenty.)

"My hotel room is not a highly recommendable gathering-place for more than about four persons, but in the absence of any other organizer, I am willing that anyone interested call on me or write, and I shall try to act as a sort of clearing-house for suggestions. Stir yourselves, Angelenos! Let's make something interesting and worth-while if we can! And girls! I have never met a girl scientifiction reader, by the way, and if there is such a rarity, it makes her especially welcome to attend discussions or meetings that may arise."

Now Mr. Streman, who is not of course a member of the LEAGUE at the present time (or he would not have written this letter) will be exceedingly pleased, we are sure, to learn that the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE is going to give him just what he wants—an opportunity for all science-fiction fans to meet and discuss the subject. If he sends in his application for membership immediately and declares that he would like to be Director of the Los Angeles Chapter of the LEAGUE, we will publish his name in this department in our November issue, providing that no one else beats him to it in the city. In that case, he will still have the opportunity to join the Chapter, though not as Director.

The following letter came to us as quite a pleasant surprise and we take great pleasure in printing part of it in these columns. It is from A. V. Bleiden of Shanghai, China.

"Reading carefully the rules and regulations in your May issue of WONDER STORIES, I wish to congratulate you for this fine idea of your SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. Being a reader of your magazine for years, I certainly learned much through your pages. Now I know a few men in Shanghai and we already have what you may call a club, but which is just a close circle of a few interested in this sort of stories. There are ten of us, and no matter that we have three Russians, four Chinese, one German, one American, and one Englishman, we all speak English.

"Now I'd like to have your permission to start the Shanghai Branch of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE, and what I am proposing to do is:

"1. To announce the establishment of the Chapter in Shanghai.

"2. To get some space for our Club where we could meet regularly.

"3. To have meetings of members every week (where each member will bring his friend as a guest, which will help to get more members).

"4. See if it will be possible to broadcast short stories of science-fiction through the radio.

"Will the permission be granted? Will you kindly inform me on what condition shall we have SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE badges and stationery, as you should understand it's impossible to send for a badge directly to you for every member or new members. Kindly reply to your opinion on the idea."

We have already replied to Mr. Bleiden's letter and have sent him several applications for membership into the LEAGUE. He already has enough members to form the Shanghai Chapter, considering the location. All other members we may secure in or around Shanghai in time to come are invited to write to A. V. Bleiden at 208 Avenue du Roi Albert, Shanghai, China, or visit a meeting and join the Chapter. When this Chapter is properly organized, we will announce it in this department.

J. R. Ayco, Member Number 286, wishes to form a Chapter of the LEAGUE in the Philippine Islands. We would like our readers there, who have not already joined the LEAGUE, to do so, so that they may become a part of the Philippine Chapter of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. All interested members should write to J. R. Ayco at Bacolod, Neg. Occ., Philippine Islands.

All Denver readers interested in forming a Denver Chapter of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE should get in touch with Olon F. Wiggins immediately, at 2418 Stout St., Denver, Colorado.

Milton A. Rothman wishes to form the Philadelphia Chapter. All members who would like to join write to him at 2500 North 5th St.

When a reader would like to become a part of any Chapter, he must first join the parent body, then send in his name and address to the Director (the one who wishes to form the Chapter he wants to join). Such persons should live in the district in which the Chapter is located so that they can attend meetings.

If yon wish to form a Chapter, let us know, and we will publish the fact. When you have a number of names on yonr list of those who want to join the local Chapter (wait at least three weeks or a month for these after the issue appears containing your name) send the list to us and, providing all the names are entered as members at Headquarters, the local Chapter will be declared. Do not apply to start a Chapter in any city mentioned already in these lists. One Chapter in each city (except Greater New York) will be enough to start with. Later on, more will be organized when demand warrants it.

We will give yonr Chapter an official name and nnmber. From then on, the name and address of your Chapter will be printed in every issne of WONDER STORIES, so that those who become members of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE from time to time, who live in your neighborhood, may join, increasing the size of the Chapter. Dues or fees of any kind *may* be charged within local Chapters, in order to carry on special activities, only upon the agreement of all the members. Those members who do not wish to contribute, will not be expelled from either the Chapter or the LEAGUE by not doing so. In other words. all contributions mnst be voluntary, though a specific amount may be decided npon. This will be done only within local Chapters—there will be no dues or fees of any kind conducted hy the LEAGUE Headquarters. Treasuries accumulated by this method may be used to issue pamphlets, hire halls or lecture rooms, or any other reasonable thing that the Director and local members see fit to use it for. This also includes outings, parties, etc. The Director or his appointee will be the presiding officer at each meeting. Assistant Director, Secretary, and Treasurer may also be elected by the local members. However, accurate minntes must be kept, a duplicate of which will be sent to Headquarters within one week after the close of each meeting. Important activities recorded in the minutes will be discussed in this department, which will be the voice of the LEAGUE and all its Chapters. Meetings may be held at any frequency, everything to be decided by the local members. All helpful suggestions made by members during any meeting will, of conrse, be recorded in the minutes and therefore prove of value to other Chapters. There is to be no competition between Chapters—they are to co-operate, and perhaps, after a while, we will have a grand convention somewhere with delegates from the various Chapters. Would yon like to be a Director of a local Chapter of the LEAGUE? There will be very little responsibility on your part, and it is not hard to find a meeting place. If you can't start off with a lecture room or hall, or one of the members' homes, then you can meet in the nearest public park until the Chapter is larger and can afford something better.

We would like to receive volunteers for Directors in the following cities as soon as possihle: Boston, Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, Detroit, Cleveland, Baltimore, Washington, Chicago, Buffalo, St. Louis, San Francisco, and Los Angeles in particular—and, of course, any other well-populated area. If we receive more than one volunteer from any particular city or area, we will honor the first. If you have volunteered and your name does not appear in the next issue of WONDER STORIES, hut someone else's in that district instead, send your name immediately to him and join his Chapter. You will then be the first one considered when a second Chapter in the city is needed or a new Director for the one you have joined. We hope to receive msny volunteers. This is the best way you can show your enthusiasm for the LEAGUE at the present time. Form a Chapter and make it something to be prond of—a credit to the LEAGUE.

LEAGUE SUGGESTIONS

Here are a few advance suggestions of how you can help the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE:

(1) If yon wish to form a local Chapter of the LEAGUE, get a newspaper to print a notice in the society or club section. They will do this free of charge and it will aid you in securing many members.

(2) Send to Headquarters all the suggestions that you believe will improve the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE and its activities. You may have some valuable ideas that will greatly aid the cause of science-fiction. This department will appear monthly in the magazine and will be used as the voice of the members and executives, so do not hesitate to use it freely.

(3) If you are a student in high school or college, try to form a Chapter of the LEAGUE in the building, with students as members. Most educational institutions allow for clubs of all sorts and would be pleased to harbor one more, especially one with standards as high as the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. These school Chapters will be treated in Headquarters as any other Chapter. In order to form a Chapter of the LEAGUE, send your name to us with those of all other members who wish to form the Chapter and the name under which the Chapter will be known. We will send you an officially signed certificate, confirming the existence of the Chapter with its number.

(4) Try to write editorials propounding the merits of science-fiction in general and place them in your local newspapers. Stress the fact that science-fiction is educational and broadens the minds of the readers.

(5) Study science-fiction carefully and form a series of conclusions in your mind as to its merits and accomplishments. Organize your ideas so that you can talk freely and convincingly to potential followers on the subject. Be able to tell at a moment's notice just what it is and why yon are an enthusiastic advocate. This, with Suggestion Two, is very important to the purpose of the LEAGUE. All members who are instrumental in securing any special attention to the LEAGUE will receive due acknowledgment and will find that it will be profitable to them to be so mentioned.

Rome was not built in a day, we have often been told, and the same can be said for the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. Organized only a few months ago, it has not had time to develop as yet. Plans will materialize as we go along. The LEAGUE has one prime purpose—to spread the worthy gospel of science-fiction. That is the basis of the LEAGUE, and its goal will not be reached nntil everyone knows of science-fiction and respects it as the most powerful literary force in the world. We can hardly hope for this for a long time to come, but every scheme, plan, or idea that will aid us in reaching that goal is welcome. New ones will be broached every month by the executives and members—will yon do your part? We do not expect every member to have an inexhaustible reservoir of ideas but we will appreciate all suggestions offered.

If yon have not as yet joined the LEAGUE and wish to do so, yon will find application blanks in another part of the magazine.

IN this department we shall publish every month your opinions. After all, this is your magazine and it is edited for you. If we fall down on the choice of our stories, or if the editorial board slips up occasionally, it is up to you to voice your opinion. It makes no difference whether your letter is complimentary, critical, or whether it contains a good, old-fashioned brickbat. All are equally welcome. All of your letters, as much as space will allow, will be published here for the benefit of all. Due to the large influx of mail, no communications to this department are answered individually unless 25c in stamps, to cover time and postage, is remitted.

Mr. Ray Replies

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

You are to be congratulated on the high type of reader-mind that is so well evidenced in the columns of "The Reader Speaks." Truly, your magazine must appeal to the more serious-thinking element of the reading public. While I like, also, to class myself as a "veteran reader" of Gernsback Publications, I have never written to these columns before, as I placed myself in the category of a student who could learn more by observation than by participation. However, in your April issue, I noted a very masterly criticism of my story, "Today's Yesterday," which appeared in the January WONDER STORIES. Mr. Andrew Lenard has, indeed, presented his case well and with such conclusiveness that I hesitate to take issue with him on several points. Nevertheless, an author is supposed to know whereof he speaks, so if I have been careless in the delineation of some technical points in my story which readers below the average of those of WONDER STORIES might overlook, I now offer my abject apologies for not including them in the story itself.

In Mr. Lenard's first objection, he practically answers himself, for he says: "The picture must have been formed in the light filament itself and, therefore, be of scarcely noticeable smallness. But even in this case, the picture in the filament must have a sound origin in the mike," (not necessarily, as I shall show presently) "as a microphone is only sensitive to sound and not to light. But remember the mike was disconnected from the set and could not give any impressions. However, I must say that these speculations can be overcome by saying that the huge coil itself picked up impulses which formed the image in the filament. Nothing was said of this in the story. But if the author comes out with this explanation, I must yield."

I disagree with Mr. Lenard on the point that a "picture in the filament must have sound origin in the mike," for, as a microphone merely transforms sound waves into electrical impulses, the cable would carry these impulses to the filament, regardless of whether they originated in the mike or in the huge coil itself. I think Mr. Lenard will note that at no time were pictures recorded on the sound track unless the coil of the mine-set was energized by a connection, accidental or intentional, with the electrified cables of the recorder. Ref: Pages 610-613-614-617.

In the matter of the illustration, I am afraid that I shall have to ask Mr. Lenard's forbearance. I will have to admit that "the illustration shows the film occupying the whole projection area," whereas, in the story (page 615), "tremblingly he watched as the *narrow* track appeared on the screen." In America it is not the usual custom for magazine editors to submit proofs to the author, so the latter rarely sees the illustration prior to publication. In this case, it is unfortunate that Mr. Winter chose this particular scene to illustrate, but since it is some three thousand miles from New York to Hollywood, there is a possibility that Mr. Winter has never seen a sound track. It is only in the studios that the sound track is ever projected on the screen and then only for the purpose of scanning for scratches, imperfections, and other "bugs" that would mar the audibility, so I think this error is excusable.

And now, we come to the vital point of the criticism. To again quote Mr. Lenard: "The sound film runs through the recorder with equal speed. A moving picture can only be photographed if the film motion is intermittent and the transporting height between stops and goes—24 times per second—equals the height of the projection aperture. *This is in fact the fundament of movie making.*" (The italics are his.) "Therefore, with a standard sound recorder and a standard projection machine, no moving pictures can be produced. The picture on the screen would be a badly blurred line."

Sorry, Mr. Lenard, but I can't concede you that point. While I have been connected with motion pictures for the past fifteen years in varied technical capacities, I have no wish to set myself up as an authority on the subject, so I refer you to H. H. Selden, Professor of Physics, New York University, in his article, "Taking 40,500 Photographs Per Second," appearing in *Science and Invention* for June, 1931. Professor Selden says: "The picture . . . . is one of those taken by the Japanese scientist, Baron Shiba, director of engineering of the Aeronautical Research Institute of Japan and was filmed at the astonishing rate of 40,500 pictures per second . . . . Of course, it would be absolutely impossible to take any such pictures . . . . with anything that even resembles the usual motion picture camera. . . . . To build a mechanism to jerk the film into place 40,000 times per second would be hopeless. Even though we were to construct it, the film would not stand the rough treatment. . . . . Exact details of the camera used have not as yet been given out by the Japanese scientist, but it is generally known that the *film runs steadily* over revolving drums and is not jerked repeatedly into place as in ordinary motion picture photography. . . . . How are we to make our successive exposures? This is done by using a light source which, in itself, is *light source and shutter as well*—an oscillatory spark. The spark gap is made to form a part of a tuned oscillatory circuit. The film is in place for an exposure—the spark flashes and goes out. While it is off, the *continuously running film* reaches the position of the next exposure. Again the spark flashes and the next exposure is made."

This stroboscopic method is by no means new, but has been in use for various purposes for some time; for example, the analytical study of the operation of high speed mechanisms. Now, Mr. Leonard, if direct current were used for recording, you would be entirely correct in your premise, but when a 25-cycle alternating current is used, the light impulses—25 per second—so nearly coincide with the speed of a camera—24 exposures per second—that a sound track may be viewed over a standard projector with little difficulty. It is true there is a steady progression of one frame per second; that is, the exposed area of a sound track, under these conditions, is slightly shorter than the height of the projection aperture, which causes a constant downward motion of the sound track on the screen; but as this is so slow, there is absolutely no indication of blurring and anyone accustomed to viewing films under all conditions has no difficulty in observing details, even to the tiniest scratches on the track. I trust this answers your question.

The above phenomenon is so familiar to us in the studios, who have viewed sound track on the screen hundreds of times, that I must plead guilty to having been careless in not making this point clear in my story. I hope the readers will forgive my remissness.

I was greatly interested in Mr. Lenard's pictures and, judging his abilities as a writer from his very interesting letter, I am sure we would all welcome a few science-fiction stories from his facile pen.

RICE RAY,
Burbank, Calif.

(We are very pleased to publish this interesting and instructive letter from Mr. Rice Ray, our author, who seems to have quite a knowledge of the motion picture business. Burbank and Hollywood are both suburbs of Los Angeles. We regret that the artist misinterpreted the author's idea in drawing his illustration for the story. We watch them very carefully and errors rarely leak in. If Mr. Lenard has anything more to say to Mr. Ray, we would like to receive his letter for an early issue.—EDITOR.)

S.W.S. Was Best

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

Well, well, WONDER STORIES is over five years old! Time certainly slips by fast. It doesn't seem very long since I bought my first copy, which happened to be the July, 1929, issue. Now that was a real magazine. What authors it boasted!—Jack Williamson, Irving Lester and Fletcher Pratt, David H. Keller, and Harl Vincent. Every story was great, stories which surpass present-day science-fiction as the sun outshines the stars. This goes for practically the entire first year of SCIENCE WONDER STORIES. You cannot say I think this because it was the first science-fiction I had ever read, for it was not. I had been reading this type of literature for over three years before SCIENCE WONDER appeared. No arguments whatsoever can make me believe that the WONDER STORIES of today can even equal, let alone better, good ol' S. W. S. Now I do not mean that the science-fiction you are giving us now is poor. It is mostly good, and some of it is very fine, but the stories of the first volume are still better.

Bnt enough of that. I have just finished reading the June issue. The best story was "The Doorbell" by Dr. Keller. "Into the Infinitesimal" was good. The other two short stories were only fair. I cannot comment on "Druso" as I am waiting until I get all three parts before I read it.

ROY F. PHILLIPS,
Martins Ferry, Ohio.

(Somebody started something when he said that the old SCIENCE WONDER STORIES was better than the present magazine. It seems as though he put an idea into the heads of many of our readers. We still have many of the authors who wrote for us five years ago. But, then, everyone has a right to his opinion—this is a free country.

We seldom put out an issue of WONDER STORIES containing one of Dr. Keller's stories, in which his yarn is not acclaimed the best in the book. Readers will be glad to continue the adventures of the famous Taine of San Francisco, science-fiction's best-loved detective, in "The Tree of Evil," which appears in this issue.—EDITOR.)

Lutwin vs. Kaletsky

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

I'm writing this letter for two reasons, (1) to tell you why I read WONDER STORIES and, (2) to let Mr. Milton Kaletsky know how his last letter of criticism impressed me.

I read WONDER STORIES for a great many reasons . . . . it's a new type of literature, it's refreshing, stimulating, educational; it makes you think, wonder, gasp, exclaim; it is not dry, stale, wild, thoughtless; it takes scientific imagination to comprehend its real literary values; in other words, WONDER STORIES is great, unbeatable, and unapproachable by any other science-fiction magazine. One can buy a WONDER STORIES magazine for the infinitesimal sum of twenty-five cents . . . . but when one buys the magazine, he knows he is *NOT* getting trash, but is getting many times the price of the magazine. My newsdealer gets twenty-five copies of WONDER STORIES every month, taking only fifteen copies of the other science-fiction magazines . . . . yet he sells WONDER STORIES before the others. I, for one, greatly appreciate WONDER STORIES. If a copy of WONDER STORIES cost five dollars instead of twenty-five cents, you could depend upon me to buy it . . . . and if I didn't have the five dollars, I'd make sure that my newsdealer held the magazine until I got the money. Which can all be boiled down to the fact that WONDER STORIES is the best thing on the market and the readers, with a very few exceptions, realize this.

Now it most certainly is not my intention to create an atmosphere of animosity between Mr. Kaletsky and myself, but his last letter "got my blood boiling." I realize that Mr. Kaletsky is a fellow to be respected, taking into consideration the fact that he is a veteran WONDER STORIES fan. He gets my respect . . . . I will not begrudge him that. His letters to "The Reader Speaks" show thought and intelligence and I read them with keen delight. But when he refers to me as having "illogically" based my argument against him upon a "fallacy" . . . . that's the "straw that broke the camel's hnmp!" Firstly, I did not write my letter as an argument, but as a letter from a reader of WONDER STORIES and, therefore, a defender for it against all unjust critics. Mr. Kaletsky's letter, which appeared back in last year's November issue—the letter which started all this—knocks the authors in general and the Editor in particular . . . . just because a few scientific errors occurred in some of the stories. Science is a very ticklish subject and a few errors *must* get by occasionally. Mr. Kaletsky, who seems to know his science, always manages to detect some error or other. He writes to WONDER STORIES and gives everybody connected with the magazine a piece of his mind. It can easily be seen that the authors and the Editor are not to blame. Authors write all sorts of scientific stories . . . . they're not perfect, of course—neither are Mr. Kaletsky and myself, for that matter. It wouldn't be a bad idea to let Mr. Kaletsky edit the magazine for a few months . . . . I wonder how many complaints from observant readers would come in? Maybe none, but, on the other hand, maybe a box car full of them. Secondly, I did not base my argument upon a fallacy . . . . the reasons are rather obvious. Whether or not I have been illogical remains to be seen. That's enough of that.

Mr. Editor, I think that THE SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE is the greatest thing that ever happened in the science-fiction field. You certainly can depend upon me to do my darndest to see that its purposes are carried out accordingly. Believe me when I say that WONDER STORIES *is* the best magazine on the market. And now the obvious request. . . . . information on Epaminondas T. Snooks!

TED H. LUTWIN,
Member 26 of S. F. L.,
Jersey City, N. J.

(Well, this Lutwin-Kaletsky controversy is starting to show signs of a real argument. If you two fellows remain gentlemen and keep the field clear of personalities, we'll be glad to let you continue slinging mud at each other's ideas [merely a metaphor] via WONDER STORIES. Mr. Kaletsky, will you defend your first-love, science?

Thank you, Mr. Lutwin, for your kind words about WONDER STORIES and the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE—we know you are sincere in your beliefs. Mr. Snooks is well and wishes to be remembered to all his constituents.—EDITOR.)

If He Were King

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

If I were the King of this world (which I can assure you that I am not—yet) there are several things I would do to make it better, among which are:

I would shoot all editors who tell readers that their suggestions towards betterment of the magazines are inadvisable or impossible.

I would trim the ears of all readers who want the edges trimmed. Then I would trim the editors' ears for not trimming the edges.

I would make WONDER STORIES come out with a really wonderful cover every month, such as the one on the June issue.

I would also make W. S. alter that cover in certain ways. Namely: If you must have a strip at the top, put your price and month up there, along with the name of the editor. Then put the NRA emblem and the Gernshack emblem either in the title box, or at the right-hand side of it, close together.

Next, I would make you eliminate that strip altogether along with everything in it.

Then I would make you take the advertisements off the back cover, and have you put a sort of rear cover there, wherein it shows the scene just the opposite from the front cover, i. e.: The front cover would portray a man facing you, while the back cover would show him with his back to you, that way giving the reader the idea that you can see all around him at the same time.

I would make you change that messy contents page to something more simple. Instead of arranging the contents list in order of their appearance (so to

speak) arrange them in groups. If you try to answer differently, I would make you read paragraph two again.

I would banish all readers who pick stories to pieces, heckle other readers, etc., and then I would go along with them, for that is my favorite delight.

Finally, I would write the editor of every magazine every month, and if they didn't print every letter of mine, I would banish them along with readers who got sick of seeing me "in print" so often.

BOB TUCKER,
Bloomington, Ill.

P. S.: I also would shoot everybody who believes what I say in this letter, for almost everything is *impossible!* There ain't no sech animal!

(About all we can say is that we're glad you're not King—if only because of the last sentence in your third paragraph. Evidently, if you were King, money wouldn't mean a thing, according to the radical changes you would make in WONDER STORIES. However, your "p.s." settles everything. We'd have our ears trimmed if we didn't obey your commands and be shot if we did.—EDITOR.)

Constructive (?) Criticism

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

I have just finished reading the "Reader Speaks" of the June issue. Having been a reader of every copy of Gernsback's Science Fiction Publications since the first one, I would like to add my opinion to the controversy that seems to be developing over comparisons of SCIENCE WONDER STORIES to WONDER STORIES.

In my opinion, the SCIENCE WONDERS were better than the issues that came after. There was something about them that was different and superior. They were fresh and clean in appearance. The stories on the whole were better, the illustrations were better, the covers were better. It was not merely the newness of the publication that creates that impression either. I did not form my opinion until a few years after, when I investigated after noticing that W. S. was losing its interest.

The chief trouble with WONDER STORIES is its general make-up. And that is something you should have been aware of a long time ago. Let's start with the cover and work through it, comparing all the way with the other science-fiction publications.

The cover is invariably by Paul. Now Paul is an excellent artist, but he has definitely lost his skill in cover designs. The covers for the original stf. mag. and the early WONDERS by him were good. They were interesting and attractive. The modern covers have reversed that. They are so gaudily colored and so hackneyed in the picture they portray so as to definitely repel the stf. fan. Red backgrounds, yellow backgrounds. The same expressionless people combating monstrosities or fooling with regulation type space-ships or doing sundry asinine things that every reader has seen a dozen times. Take the June cover. A row of people dressed in clothes worn on dozens of planets and times and dimensions as we have seen time and again, walking up a platform under a ray machine that is as familiar as the bathroom sink. A row of buildings in the background that we know well enough to find our way around in blind-folded. The old red ball in the sky that hangs in the sky of a myriad worlds. And to top it off, a brilliant yellow background. Look at the other magazines. Now, honestly, if you were an average reader, which would you pick to buy if you had all three lying side by side? The one that hurts your eyes and offends your taste with its suggestion of sameness or the ones that look clean and new?

Next. Open to the table of contents. Here is a mystery. Why is it that with the exact same size sheet, with an even smaller print, the contents of WONDER STORIES is uninteresting, dark, hard to read, and not in the least bit outstanding? That drawing above the date line is sickening. If those mopey faces are supposed to represent the average reader, then we had all better lie down and die. Look at your rivals. Large print, lots of space, easily read and easy to look at. And with the terrifically long table of contents, what does it all boil down to? WONDER has only five stories to its rivals' six and seven. I would suggest you swallow your pride and imitate your competitors. Take off that heading. Pull up the date line. Omit all the listing of the small fill-ins like "Heavy Water" and "Forthcoming Stories." Give lots of space to the story headings.

Next. Editorial. This is all right. It's the way the contents should look.

Next. The story pages. The print you use is the worst of all the magazines I have ever read. It is too heavily inked. It is too closely spaced. The whole page is distinctly dirty looking. Again compare open pages of the other two. You will find all three are different, but while the others are easy to read and inviting, those of WONDER STORIES are a definite eye-strain. Study the individual letters and you will see why. Each letter and word is smeared and blurred so as to be in a gray background and not a white one. This is the underlying cause for all WONDER'S lack of appeal. The only thing I could suggest would be to dump all your type and buy a new set or if that may be wrong, get a new press. I don't know anything about printing, so these suggestions are only guesses. Take them and study the situation. It is surely curable some way.

Next. The illustrations. Paul, Winter, Saaty. All good artists. But their work is spoiled by the same thing that hurts your printing. In addition, Paul is falling down. He used to be an excellent artist all the time. Now he is only occasionally good. His pictures are black and hackneyed, (yes, pictures can be so as well as stories), to a distressing degree. Once in a while he makes a good picture, most of the time, very dull ones.

Next. The letter department. You need a magnifying glass to read it. In addition to tiny type, the usual blurring kills it. A fine example of what not to read. See if you can do something about it. Larger type will do the trick.

And finally let's get down to the stories themselves. Because of the faults enumerated above, I have found myself steadily discouraged after thumbing through each new issue and definitely put out of mood to read anything. I know it will mean eyestrain and annoyance. My heart sinks at the thought of tackling that terrible type and nerve-racking blackness. So as a result, I doubt if I have read a complete issue in the last two years. I always do read something in it. I can say that. But it has to be good before I will risk it. I can say right here that I doubt if I will ever read "Adrift in the Void" or "Druso" in the latest issue just to make an example. And I wouldn't read "Into the Infinitesimal" either except that I like micro-cosmic stories very much. I expect a reasonable chance of being let down after I have read it. All too many of your stories leave that impression. (It's the makeup as much as the story itself that helps cause that feeling). But don't think that you don't print some excellent ones too. Dr. Keller's are always good. And one or two of the others are really excellent. But for the most part, they are punk.

Look at the May issue. I have read "Xandulu." It is patterned very perceptibly after the "Moon Pool" and not as enthralling by a long shot. On the whole, it was good. And that is all I read. "Traders in Treasures"—I won't waste my eyesight on it. Why couldn't you have printed a real story instead of wasting space like that? "Earthspot"—another to add to the collection of Second Deluge stories. "The Tone Machine"—another phony weapon. "The Great Cloud of Space"—another story of destruction from space and the Earth desolated. Why should I read any of them? I've read them all before under other names.

And now for "Druso." I didn't read that and I never will. A story by a man living in a nation where they have denounced all things that have gone to build up civilization. Where they have followed a scheme of hatred, militarism, paganism, intolerance, anti-liberalism, mental slavery, and a false and discarded theory of racial superiority. You ought to be proud of yourselves working to advance those causes by patronizing their writers. "Interplanetary Bridges" is an example of the close nationalistic view the Germans have.

Now in closing, don't take these criticisms as ill-meant. I assure you that they were not written in malice. They were written with the best of intentions after looking through the June issue. But I do mean them seriously. Please, for the love of science-fiction, improve your publication! It is the worst of its type. It is a disgrace to its field as well as to Gernsback, the father of modern science-fiction. Make it better! Change your make-up! Do something! But do it quick. I would like to read your magazine some day. So would hundreds of others. Where is Gernsback, asleep? What have you been doing, Mr. Hornig? You are a fan. Can't you see the troubles? Make WONDER STORIES worthy of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE.

DONALD A. WOLLHEIM,
New York City, N. Y.

(We believe that several of Mr. Wollheim's criticisms are unfair and grossly exaggerated. First you object to our general make-up, which most of our readers agree is distinctly indivldual and a great improvement over other publications.

We have been assured that Paul's ability is increasing rather than falling off. It is only natural that an artist should develop a better style as he goes along. His work would naturally improve as he becomes more experienced. The brilliant covers, which you object to, are the best newsstand sellers. We depend a lot upon them, and they bring in many new readers each month. This proves to us that our covers do not repel the eye or repel the chance reader. However, different kinds of people like different kinds of covers, hut we have found that the dull ones you refer to at the conclusion of your fourth paragraph are not nearly as attractive as the ones we are now using. Paul was long ago acclaimed the peer of all science-fiction artists. Certainly, he has been in the game longer and had more experience, which makes this conclusion logical.

Perhaps there is something wrong with your eyes, for the cover hurts them and the print is not readable. Or you may have received a defective copy of the magazine, lf the pages were "dirty," as you say, and unintelligible. In this case, always return it to our subscription department and a good one will be sent to you. The smaller type used in the letter department allows more wording per page and more pages left for the stories. It would not do the eyes any good to read the entire magazine if it were in this small type, hut a few pages of it we do not find objectionable. If we receive sufficient complaints, however, we will have a larger point type used in the departments.

Yon say that a story must be good before you will read it. How do you know whether it is good or not until after you have read it? You cannot judge a story by its name, anthor, or outward appearance. We try to arouse interest in the story in our "blurb," and partly acquaint the reader with the nature of the tale.

Thongh you do not like most of our material, we are glad to see that you do like Dr. Keller's work. What do yon think of onr short stories, such as "The Man From Ariel" in our January issue? You have an entirely incorrect impression about "Druso," which only goes to show that you can't judge a story until you've read it. "Traders in Treasures" was a hrand new idea, never before used. If you do not like old ideas rehashed, as you say, then you certainly should not miss those that are not. We wish we could "waste" more space on such stories.

We are glad that you intend your criticisms to be constructive, and we can see by your last paragraph that you did not intend your letter to be cranky. Of course, if we received condemnations from all sides, we would be convinced, but when we receive praises from the majority and complaints from a few, we know that the minority have a waning interest—but they always come back.

We would like to know what other readers think of Mr. Wollheim's letter. We will, as ever, print complimentary letters and otherwise.—EDITOR.)

The Proposed Annual

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

As a reader of long standing of your magazines (I ean remember as far hack as "The Man on the Meteor" by Ray Cummings in old Science & Invention), I would appreciate the printing of this in The Reader Speaks.

I find that the policy of the present Managing Editor is a great improvement over the preceding one. Mr. Hornig seems to be able to select much better material in an all-round manner.

I think tbe idea of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE is a good and worthwhile step forward. I am submitting my application simultaneously with this letter, hy the way. The rocket insignia will he useful to me in a way that is qnite different from merely showing my connection with the LEAGUE . . . . I am a member of the American Interplanetary Society!

In reading the replies to some of the letters printed in the magazine, I see that you intend to publish an Annual, or something to that effect. You state that you will publish a number of stories that have seen the light of day in older issues of WONDER STORIES. If you do so, will yon not print at least two *new* stories for us who have all the old ones? You see, being a Science Fiction Fan has its drawbacks, because if you placed only reprints from previous numbers on the market, the SFF would be forced to bny even though he felt cheated.

KENNETH B. PRITCHARD,
Pittsfield, Mass.

(We are glad to have a member of the American Interplanetary Society belong to the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE, and equally as glad that yon see an improvement in WONDER STORIES.

Our idea of putting only reprints into the proposed annual is just the opposite of what you seem to think. If we put a couple of new stories in the book, with the reprints, *then* the old fans would "be forced to bny it," but if it contains only reprints, they won't have to worry about adding it to their collections, for they already have the stories in the old magazines. Our sole purpose for putting out the annual will be to allow the new readers to read the good old stories which are now out of print.—EDITOR.)

Suggestions

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

What's going on down at your offices? Have you hired Qzkjrbga of Mars or 94X-57Z of Jupiter to edit your magazine? I can't help but admit that WONDER STORIES is certainly hitting on all rocket tubes. If you keep this up, everyone who keeps a graph of WONDER STORIES will have to saw a hole in their roofs to continue!

The cover of the May issue was nifty, for it was original and (this is important) colorful. I almost fainted when Joe Hennigar said, "*Paul is rotten!*" If you ask me, I think *Morey is one of the poorest artists out, if not the poorest!* Phew! It's a wonder to me his letter didn't burn a hole in the paper.

"Adrift in the Vold" gave me a vague feeling of the old type WONDER STORIES. Those interplanetary stories are always welcome. John Pierce, the author, won second prize in a contest in the old SCIENCE WONDER, remember? I hope he writes again in the near fnture.

"The Doorbell" puts more classical literature into science-fiction and stops one from thinking that every story has to have a plot on another planet to be classified as such.

Kaye Raymond's story, "Into the Infinitesimal," was enjoyable, but it seemed to lack something. I understand the life of the flame creatures, which is very logical; however, I don't understand what its brain was. It certainly couldn't just be mental vibration; it would surely have to be solid matter.

I have only one fault to find with WONDER STORIES, or rather, two. The illustration on the contents page is great and should never be discarded, hut can't you fix it to print less heavy? I earnestly beg of you to follow Jack Darrow's suggestion and list first, only the editorial, stories, "The Reader Speaks," "Science Questions and Answers," and the Book Reviews. Then *after* them put any news items, announcements, etc.

Don't condemn any "scientifunnyarns" like "Brain-Eaters of Pluto," for I'm sure a great majority of your readers found much enjoyment in it. You know that you can't please everyone.

I don't have to say a word about the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE because it speaks for itself (I bet in Martian, at that!)

DAVID A. KYLE,
Monticello, N. Y.

(The fans that keep graphs of the improvement of WONDER STORIES had better start sawing holes in their roofs, as Mr. Kyle suggests, for we have many excellent stories still in store and others coming in every day.

In "Into the Infinitesimal," the author's idea was that the flame-creatures' brains were of pure thought. Thought, we know, is nothing solid, and our brain is only a container. It is possible that thought can exist without brain.—EDITOR.)

A Survey of the Reprint Question

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

Since the old, old question of reprints has been brought to the fore once more, may an *ab initio* reader of WONDER STORIES air his findings on the subject? I have made a sweeping survey of readers' letters as published in several hundred science-fiction magazines during the past seven years and have discovered some interesting facts concerning the reprint question. In the first place, approximately 95% of all readers expressing an opinion on the subject are in favor of reprints—with reservations. Reprints of Poe, Verne,

Wells, and the other ancients are positively *not* wanted. Neither are reprints of stories that have already appeared in the magazine. Now here is the striking fact about the reprints that *are* wanted and wanted badly: practically all are stories which have appeared in the "All Story" and "Argosy-All Story" between 1912 and 1922. The following is a representative list of those stories which are in the greatest demand:

A. Merritt, "The Metal Monster" and "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" (sequel to the famous "Moon Pool");

Ray Cummings, "The Girl in the Golden Atom" and its sequel, "The People of the Golden Atom";

Gerrett Smith, "On the Brink of 2000" and "After a Million Years";

Victor Rousseau, "Messiah of the Cylinder," "The Draft of Eternity," "The Sea Demons," and "The Eye of Balamok";

George Allen England, "The Fatal Gift," "The Golden Blight," and the famous trilogy, "The Afterglow," "Darkness and Dawn," and "Into the Great Oblivion";

Homer Eon Flint, "The Planeteer," "King of Conserve Island";

Austin Hall, "The Rebel Soul" and its sequel, "Into the Infinite"; and the masterpiece written by the last two authors jointly, "The Blind Spot";

J. U. Giesy, "Palos of the Dog-Star Pack," "The Mouthpiece of Zitu," and "Jason, Son of Jason," a magnificent interstellar trilogy.

Now, Mr. Editor, if you are going to give us reprints, why not give those stories which we, the readers, want? The genuine science-fiction enthusiast has been searching for the stories in the above list for years and it is safe to say that 99% of them have been unsuccessful, since only one, to my knowledge, Cummings' "Girl in the Golden Atom," has appeared in book form and that is long out of print. These stories are not old-fashioned, out of date. On the contrary, all are masterpieces of imaginative literature and deserve to be called the modern classics of science-fiction. They should be made available to the immense group of lovers of this type of literature which has grown up since they were published. New readers as well as the old-timers will enjoy these stories and they should materially boost your circulation. This covers one of your objections to reprints in your statement of a year or so ago. Your other objection, as to publishers and their fear of injury to book sales, does not apply since the only ones to appear in book form is out of print. All that remains is to secure the permission of the copyright owners, in this case, the Frank A. Munsey Co. This should not be impossible since statements accompanying the stories giving information as to the place of original publication should boost the sales of the present Munsey Publications. Besides, in the early days of your old magazine you reprinted other stories from "All Story" and "Argosy-All Story" (witness, "The Moon Pool"; "The Face in the Abyss"; "The Treasures of Tantalus"; etc.) All these stories proved great favorites with your readers and are still discussed in terms of the highest praise. What more assurance can you ask for? Please consider the points I have endeavored to bring out and give us a definite answer on the reprint question. At least, let us know if you will do all in your power to obtain reprint rights of these stories which have been in demand among science-fiction fans for years. I repeat that these stories are not personal preferences but a list of those which have been requested most frequently by readers desiring reprints. What do you other readers say?

CLAUDE A. DAMES, JR.,
St. Louis, Mo.

(We must admit that the novels you mention are really masterpieces of science-fiction and the best liked of all those of the old days. They will go down in history and live as long as science-fiction itself. You do, in your letter, show that you have made an exhaustive study of the subject and knock down a couple of our arguments. However, there are two points that *do* remain and make it hardly possible for us to reprint these stories. The first, and most important, is that, at the present time, the copyright owners of the stories you name will not sell second magazine rights to those novels. It is possible to secure permission to use shorter and less important stories, but not the masterpieces you mention. They will not allow them to be republished in magazine form, although they could come out in book form. Perhaps you could convince some good book publisher to reprint them. We would certainly like to see them come out in this way, if only to satisfy those fans who want them. When there is sufficient demand, they will no doubt be printed in this form, and you will undoubtedly get them some time in the future.

"Authors must eat" explains our second reason in three simple words. It would cost us much more to reprint these novels, if we could, than it does to secure modern novels by our present authors, who must find sufficient markets for their material. We would like your letter and our answer here to settle the reprint question, and hope that our readers can see our reasons.—EDITOR.)

A Kind Word from Australia

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

About nine months ago, I came across one of your magazines in a book-shop in Brisbane and ever since I have been on the look-out for your publications.

I have had the January issue and I am at present looking forward to the February issue with that "longer" new serial, "Exile of the Skies." Just enjoyed finishing "Evolution Satellite" which was also a good serial. Get some more stories like:

"The Call of the Mech-men," "Inquisition of 6061," "The Revolt of the Scientists," "The Mystery of Planet Deep," "The Visitors from Mlok," "Moon Plague," "Men Without Shadows," and the "Island of Unreason."

And as for Manning's "The Man Who Awoke," it shows what a very fertile mind Mr. Manning has, and I would like to hear more about his works in your, or I should say "our" magazine.

In some of the older issues I picked up around the town, I was impressed by stories like "The Isotope Men" and "The Third Vibrator." I wish you would have more stories of this type printed nowadays. (Of course, this is my opinion and may not be that of thousands of others of your readers.)

I got quite a shock when your 15c types came out (not that it made any difference in price to us, but the size, and also I am afraid the quality, well "wow," and I was sure glad to get your 25c copy back again.)

Of course, your volumes come out here rather irregularly but lately I have been able to get your numbers every month. I wish it were every week.

Say, can't you start an air service between America and Australia, so that we can be up-to-date with WONDER STORIES instead of several months behind? As far as magazines and so forth are concerned, out here we are very, *very* isolated. Or what about a "Rocket Service," quicker still.

Several of my friends read the copies of WONDER STORIES I get and are very interested, but these magazines are so hard to get here in Brisbane that they lack the opportunity to buy them for themselves (this probably applies in many places, so look at the circulation you are losing.) My only wish is that I had come upon WONDER STORIES years earlier.

I suppose I had better stop my nonsensical yappings now or you, poor Editor, who have to read this drivel, will be bored to death.

THOMAS MALLETT,
Brisbane, Australia.

(We are always glad to print letters from the antipodes and respect your choice of favorite stories. Laurence Manning is one of our staff authors and you will see much more of his work in WONDER STORIES.

You can easily receive WONDER STORIES regularly every month, and at lower cost, by subscribing to the magazine—your friends can do likewise. So you see, you needn't worry about it any more. You will find the subscription information on the contents page.—EDITOR.)

He's Perfectly Satisfied

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

This is my first attempt to write to your excellent magazine. I have been a very enthusiastic, if rather inconstant, reader for several years.

I have no criticisms to make and no suggestions to offer. I shall not pan the covers or the illustrations; I never pay any attention to them anyway. The magazine would suit me just as well, but no better, if they were left out entirely.

Some of the stories I have liked and some I have not liked so well. However, I realize that you can't please everyone. So, if you will just keep at the same pace you have been going, I will not complain. About three-fourths of the stories please me, and that is as much as any *one* person ought to expect. Don't you think so? I don't begrudge the time spent in reading the other fourth.

I have no definite predilection for any certain type of story. The qualities that make a good science story, in my estimation, are; first, accurate science, that is, accurate in the sense that it does not violate any *known* scientific laws; second, realistic portrayal; third, novelty of ideas; fourth—I put three relatively unimportant qualities into one group here—adventnre, romance, and plot. I am sure that a great many people will take issue with me on that attitude. But—that's my story and I will stick to it.

Here are some of the stories that I have liked. I rank them in approximately the order named:

1. The Man Who Awoke—Manning.
2. Revolt of the Scientists—Schachner.
3. Men of the Dark Comet—Pragnell.
4. The Exile of the Skies—Vaughan.
5. The Isotope Men—Pragnell.
6. The Mystery of Planet Deep—Dye.
7. The Third Vibrator—Harris.
8. The Fatal Equation—Stangland.

I am not against time-travel stories. As I see it, there are two logical methods of time-travel. The first is physical travel into the fnture. In this case, there is no chance of return. Once we attain the future, we are there to stay—physically, at least. The path into the future is a one-way street. Travel into the past, however—which is the second logical method of time-travel—is altogether different. We may go into the past and return to the present at will; bnt it is only our perceptions that travel. Physically we remain in the present.

"But," some one says, "we are doing that already. We travel each day twenty-four hours into the future; and our memory goes into the past and returns at will."

Sure—that's why I say those two methods are logical. There only remains to speed up in some way our rate of travel into the future, so that we may travel a few thousand years while others travel a day or an hour; and time-travel is an accomplished fact. It might be that we could decelerate our rate of living, which would accomplish the same end. Or it might be possible to remove ourselves from the realm of space-time until such time as we wished to return. I will leave the details to someone better equipped to handle them than I am.

As regards to travel into the past; our memory only deals with such happenings as we, ourselves, have experienced. What we desire is some means of observing events that took place at any point of time, that is, past, and at any point in space. Who knows—some such means may be devised.

There is one field of possibilities for science-fiction that seems to have been overlooked—biological stories. There are thousands of different forms of life, all evolved from a few forms, or possibly *one* original form of life. What strange and unheard-of forms might not be evolved in the future, if the path of evolution were to be directed by the intelligence of man. This might be effected in a comparatively short time if some scientist should devise a means of creating gene mutations at will. Anyway, I think the idea contains wonderful possibilities for a story. If I had anything more than a common school education, I would be tempted to take a crack at it myself. Perhaps I will anyway, if I can collaborate with someone who does have the necessary education.

I have all the 1933 issues of WONDER STORIES except the November, also January, February, and April, 1934, numbers. I also have every issue of EVERYDAY SCIENCE AND MECHANICS from March, 1933, to April, 1934.

And now, Mr. Editor, I hope I haven't stayed too long. If you will only print this, I promise you I won't bother you any more—for a long time, at least. More power to WONDER STORIES.

GEORGE W. GREENE,
Mercedes, Texas.

(We are glad to see that you are so well satisfied with WONDER STORIES and that three-quarters of the stories are to your liking. As you say, we can't please everyone with all of our tales.

Your estimation of the qualities that make good science-fiction coincides with ours completely, except that you put "adventure" and "plot" as unimportant ones—they are really two of the most important.

You certainly do illustrate iogical means of time-travel, though, of course, time-travel in science-fiction must be in some way against the normal workings of nature, and not the two ways that we can't avoid. We can be rather sure that travel into the past will never be accomplished, or there would be passages in history recording the visits from men of the fnture. Either this or no one will want to land in our time, which is less likely. The past cannot be changed, though we have read passages in stories of the old days of great rulers who declared that so-and-so "was not and never had been" when they became peeved at anyone. That the past can hé changed is even more fantastic than time-travel itself, perhaps the most wild-cat of science-fiction themes.

We present biological stories whenever we receive good ones. Really interesting and instructive ones are indeed rare. Recently we gave you "The Land of Mighty Insects," an excellent tale about ants, containing much good science of myrmecology.

Evolution *is* directed by the intelligence of Man, perhaps not always intentionally and not always for the best. Evolution is such a slow process that no practical experiments can be carried out by scientists among the higher organisms, although much has been done with one-celled creatures. Dr. Keller's very first story, "The Revolt of the Pedestrians," published by Mr. Gernsback over six years ago, is the best example of the future development of man, physically, caused by his machine age, that we can think of at the moment. Dr. Keller's outlook, though pessimistic, is the most logical. In his tale, he shows us how the increased use of vehicles will provide insufficient exercise for our lower members, so that they will gradually emaciate and the day will come when we cannot use our legs when necessity arises. This theory is also advanced in "Twenty-five Centuries Late" by Phiiip J. Bartel, soon to be published.—EDITOR.)

About Covers

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

This is the first in a series of letters about the faults of your magazine and their remedies.

Maybe you don't know it, but a cover that is *natural* stands out much better than a loud one. Your covers are terrible—not that it is Paul's fault. But who ever heard of a red sky?—or a purple one for that matter? You think they attract people, do you? Well, let me tell yon they don't. People notice them and think, "Well, there's one of those cheap mags—look at that blurry cover."

On the other hand: A cover that is *natural*—in natural colors—draws attention. The small size, with a natural colored cover besides the other blurry ones would certalnly show off the latter—would attract many more people.

Can't you imagine a light blue sky—fleecy clouds, green grass—the beauty is what connts—naturalness.

No, you can't deny the facts. Try it at once and see how your circulation jumps. J. H. HENNIGAR,
East Tawas, Mich.

(It is easy to see by your letter that you mean everything for the good of the magazine, but at the same time have had no experience in publishing science-fictlon magazines, and we have had years of it. In the first place, we could not have *natural* covers with green grass, fleecy clouds, hlue sky, etc., because it would be misrepresenting the magazine. The magazine is not *natural;* the scenes are not *natural*—they are alien and should be pictured as such. A magazine devoted to *natural*, everyday subjects would probably do very well with covers of the type you suggest—they would be illustrating the nature of the contents.

Now, yon contradict yourself when you say that a natural cover stands out better than a ioud one. The interpretation of the word "loud" in the phrase means outstanding and showy—protruding above all others. Certainly, a person wearing loud clothes is noticed hy everyone, and those dressed like all the rest cause no special attention. Therefore, loud covers, hy the very term, stand ont and attract attention.

We know, from years of experience, just what type cover goes over the best—attracts the most newsstand scanners, and at the same time represents the magazine. They must have lurid backgrounds with alien scenes of action.

What is your next fault and remedy? Perhaps you really have some helpful hints in mind. We would iike to hear from you further.—EDITOR.)

His Three Cents' Worth

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

I have been a reader of WONDER STORIES since the good old days of SCIENCE WONDER and I feel that it is about time I put my three cents' worth into "our" colnmn.

The April issue was the best you've published in a long time. Here's how I rate the stories.

1. "Xandulu" by Jack Williamson. Williamson is one of my favorite authors.
2. "The Menace from Space" by John Edwards. Something new.
3. "The Land of Mighty Insects" by A. C. Stimson. Let's have a sequel.
4. "The Last Planet" by R. F. Starzl. Glad to see him back to "our" mag.
5. "Moon Devils" by John B. Harris. His stories are always welcome.
6. "The End of the Universe" by Milton Kaletsky. I didn't like this one because it was too short. Please don't print such short stories.

In an answer to a letter you said that your format was different from others. I agree with you. If a person was looking at a newsstand, he would see almost all the magazines with smooth edges. One magazine would stand out, WONDER STORIES with its crooked edges. WONDER STORIES was always different!

Where's Francis Flagg? Is he still living? Get him to write a story for us once in a while. I'm glad to see David H. Keller back. Now, Editor, I'm going to make a request. In the May and June issues of WONDER STORIES for 1931 there was a serial called "Utopia Island." This story was the best I have ever read in any magazine or book. I consider it better than some of H. G. Wells' epics. The author of this story was Otfrid von Hanstein. I know that we're going to get a serial by Friedrich Freksa, but I'll never be satisfied until we get a story by Otfrid von Hanstein. Now that A. K. Barnes has returned to our mag., I wish he'd write some more stories about his scientific reporter, Darrel.

Congratulations to WONDER STORIES as it begins its sixth year. May it live a million more.

MILTON SHAPIRO,
New York City, N. Y.

(According to latest reports, Francis Flagg is still a mortal. He's been ill, though. We have not received any stories from him in quite a while.

We find that most of our readers like our short-shorts, especially when they have O. Henry endings. —EDITOR.)

Another Rating

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

I was greatly surprised to see in "The Reader Speaks" of the May issue a graph of the same type I had made myself. I am enclosing a copy of my graph so that you can compare it with Mr. Torrance's. I hope you will forgive its crudeness, as it was hastily made. My method of rating is as follows:

AA—Extraordinary
A—Excellent
BB—Fine
B—Good
CC—Fair
C—Poor

After studying Mr. Torrance's graph, I believe his 2 rating equals my B rating, his 3 my BB, and his 4 my A.

There are nine gaps in the chart. This is caused by the fact that these issues have fallen prey to the inevitable borrower and I have not yet reprocured them. I have marked each issue according to Volume and Number.

ROY F. PHILLIPS,
Martins Ferry, O.

(Rather than reproduce your graph in these pages, which cannot be complete with the gaps you mention, we will say a few things about it here. Mr. Phillips classes our very best issues as August, 1929, February, 1930, March, 1933, and March, 1934. He believes the poorest ones were dated March, 1930, October, 1931, and September-October, 1933. Average issues were June, 1930, November and December, 1930, February, June, July, and August, 1931, January, February, November, and December, 1933.—EDITOR.)

On Our June Issue

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

I have just finished your June issue. On the whole, the mag was swell. Below is what I think of the stories.

Into the Infinitesimal—Very good.
The Doorbell—Another swell Keller yarn.
Cosmic Calamity—A short story with a surprise ending.
Adrift in the Void—Excellent.
Druso (both parts)—Excellent.

Believe me, your June issue is the best I've read in a long time and I have been reading W. S. since Nov. 1932, and since then have not missed a single copy.

But say, editor, why don't you reprint some of the swell stories that were in your mag years ago. One I would like to see reprinted is "The Final War." (I don't know the author's name, but you should.) I see, editor, that we both have the same first name. I bet your mother and father named you after me. (I am 18 years old.)

Yours, until the sun grows cold.

HUGO VERDY,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

(We intend to reprint stories from the old issues of WONDER STORIES in the proposed annual, but stories as recent as 1932 will not appear in the first issues. Most of them will be from 1929 and 1930. Carl Spohr wrote "The Final War."—EDITOR.)

Coblentz Best on Satire

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

After reading the July WONDER STORIES my hopes were again revived. It seems that science fiction is still progressing. The standard is again raised. The last several issues were not very good. In the June issue "The Doorbell" by Dr. Keller was good. I always enjoy a story by Dr. Keller. It was a rather expensive form of murder, though very ingenious. "Druso" started out very good but ended up flat. There was hardly any interest at the last. "Enslaved Brains" starts off very good and promises to be a classic. "A Martian Odyssey" was by far the best story this month. I am waiting for that sequel. It would make a good series of stories. That little short story "A Hair Raising Tale" was good until the last when it turned out to be a dream. Most stories like that are spoiled by some perfectly silly ending. We get all set for a good story and then the author has to let us down in such a manner. A perfectly good plot ruined. It was all right as a burlesque though the satire was not very obvious. Stanton A. Coblentz is the only master of satiric science fiction.

"The Reader Speaks" is the best part of the magazine. I read this part before reading the stories. The editorial "Wonders of Automatism" was very well written and very thought-provoking. The insects may be fortunate in not having to learn how to perform the various activities that they carry on but this does not show that they have any intelligence. Too many writers and scientists give the insect, particularly the ant and the bee, credit for its intelligence. On the contrary, the insect has no special amount of intelligence and has no capacity for learning. Therefore while the insect may overrun us, it cannot take our place. The insect has lived for millions of years and it has built up no great civilization. It lives by instinct, not intelligence. The rat has a good chance of evoluting into a thinking rational creature while the insect hasn't. Still it is good fun thinking and reading about the future inhabitants of the earth, be they insects or men.

The cover for the July issue was well drawn in minutest detail. It was perhaps the best cover of the year. Why don't you hold a poll every year in order to decide the best cover of the year?

I am sending in my application blank for the S.F.L. I think that your SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE is a most excellent idea. If all the WONDER STORIES readers would join, science fiction would go over with a bang. Will the other science fiction magazines have any say-so in the S.F.L. or will it remain an exclusive WONDER STORIES *feature?* In any case, I am sure it will work and I will do all I can to help.

NEWBY CROWELL,
Monroe, N. C.

(The last few paragraphs in "Druso" had no direct connection with the story at all and could easily have been ignored without detracting from the merits of the story. The epilogue was only an afterthought for those readers who like to think about the story after they have read it. We believe that it was a fitting conclusion.

Thank you for your co-operation with the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE—EDITOR.)

(Continued on page 507)

THE SCIENCE FICTION SWAP COLUMN

A department for the buying, selling, and exchanging of fantastic literature. Only ads of this nature accepted. Rates 2c per word. No discounts. Cash should accompany all orders. Advertisements to appear in the October issue must be received not later than Aug. 4th. Send all communications to WONDER STORIES, SWAP EDITOR, 99 Hudson St., New York City, N. Y.

FOR SALE

A COMPLETE set of Argosies from April 1904 to July 1912, professionally bound into 24 volumes. Also copies from 1896 to 1898. Write if interested. Adessa, 18710 Wyoming Ave., Hollis, N. Y.

DR. DAVID H. KELLER'S new story, "Rider by Night"—never before published. Limited edition, ten cents each. Rush order if you want your copy. FREE! —With each copy we will give a copy of Clark Ashton Smith's "Epiphany of Death"—also never before published—limited time only. Don't wait!—Charles D. Hornig, 137 W. Grand St., Elizabeth, N. J.

"WORLD BELOW," "Purple Cloud," excellent condition, 75c each, postpaid. J. L. Burt, 204 South Shelby, Greenville, Miss.

CLARK ASHTON SMITH presents "The Double Shadow and Other Fantasies"—a booklet containing a half dozen imaginative tales. Price, 25c each, prepaid. Clark Ashton Smith, Auburn, Calif.

"HOW TO WRITE a Science Fiction Story" and "Celebrities I've Met"—information on science-fiction notables. Both for 10c. Charles D. Hornig, 137 W. Grand St., Elizabeth, N. J.

COLLECTORS!—Add one or more of my original manuscripts to your collection. I am offering for sale such stories as "The Human Termites," "The Conquerors," "The Evening Star," "The Menace," "The Metal Doom," and others—all the bona fide typescripts. All stories are full novel length. What am I offered? David H. Keller, M.D., 55 Broad St., Stroudsburg, Pa.

WONDER and Amazing Stories Magazines, monthly and quarterlies for sale cheap. Send for list. Louis Leibovitz, 3835 Cambridge, Philadelphia, Penn.

ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS by the world-famous Paul, those reproduced in WONDER STORIES. Inside drawings, $5.00 each, cover paintings, $15.00 apiece. Special 20% discount to all members of the Science Fiction League. Send all orders to WONDER STORIES in care of the Art Sales Division, 99 Hudson St., New York City, N. Y.

"THE Kingdom of the Worm" by Clark Ashton Smith and "The Ancient Voice" by Eando Binder—never before published. Limited edition, ten cents each. Charles D. Hornig, 137 W. Grand St., Elizabeth, N. J.

WANTED

FOLLOWING Undamaged Wonder Magazines—July, Aug., 1929; June, July, Dec., 1930; March, May, Sept., Dec., 1931; May, June, 1932. State price. John Turchik, 1547 W. 30th, Ashtabula, Ohio.

WEIRD TALES for July 1925 and August 1926, also the covers of certain issues, also Amazing covers. What do you want for them? Charles D. Hornig, 137 W. Grand St., Elizabeth, N. J.

EXCHANGE

WILL SUPPLY any magazine in exchange for Wonder Stories, Amazing, or Weird Tales. Will also pay cash if necessary. Zahy, 244 West 74th St., New York City, N. Y.

SWAP ADS bring results. Use them. Only two cents per word.

BOOK REVIEWS

CREATION'S DOOM—by Desiderius Papp. 288 pages. 37 illustrations. Stiff cloth cover. Size 6"x8⅝". Publisher: D. Appleton-Century Company. $3.00.

Though not an actual science-fiction story, this book would certainly be enjoyed by every lover of fantasy. It is a prophetic vision, or a group of prophesies, concerning the future of the earth and the ultimate and inescapable death of mankind, and finally, of the planet and the sun itself.

The book is in three parts: The Future, The Catastrophe, and The End. The opening chapter shows us how astronomers discover the death of a star (a nova) every once in a while, and while the occurrences are rare considering the number of suns in the universe, it may well happen to our sun, which catastrophe would promptly annihilate the earth with most of the other planets. The rest of the first part deals with the past life on earth and the future civilizations of man. The author shows how one race had to make way for another, the ruling creatures of the planet growing, thriving, and dying. Finally man made his ascent and is, according to the author, approaching the top of the scale. The most intelligent being ever to exist on the earth, his civilization will rise to the greatest heights, though, like all others, the creature man will some day meet extinction.

The second part of the book deals with how the doom of mankind may come about—either by the supremacy of other animals, the action of natural forces upon the earth, or the destruction of the world. He deals mostly with the actions of the past, showing the possibility of recurrence. He pictures Atlantis sinking below the waves, prophesying that the same may occur to the continents we now inhabit. Huge comets or meteorites may wipe out our cities and population. The earth may collide with another planet, or the sun with a star.

The last part of the book considers the probable successors to man, suggesting that ants will very likely wipe out our race, being well adopted and perfectly organized. Then the ants and termites will have a war to the extinction of one or the other. However, man may remain supreme until the destruction of the earth itself, but in any case, he will surely meet his end some day.

The book is written in a fatalist's viewpoint rather than a pessimist's. Papp's arguments are so logical that we can't get away from them or shake them off as impossible or fantastic. The author propounds many theories and prophecies which have been used in science-fiction hundreds of times, proving that authors of fantasy usually write on the probable developments of the future. The book is composed in a non-technical vein so that, in places, it reads just like any science-fiction story, and we suggest that you get hold of this book if you like to speculate upon the changes that will take place in the future.

SEVEN FAMOUS NOVELS—by H. G. Wells. 860 pages. Stiff cloth cover. Size 6"x8½". Publisher: Alfred A. Knopf. Price $2.75 net.

This is a collection of the seven best stories written by H. G. Wells—"The Time Machine," "The Island of Dr. Moreau," "The Invisible Man," "The War of the Worlds," "The First Men in the Moon," "The Food of the Gods," and "In the Days of the Comet."

For years, science-fiction fans have been asking for reprints. They have deluged the magazines with letters pleading for the works of the famous masters of the art, headed by H. G. Wells. Each story in this book is easily worth the price of the entire volume.

The type, though very readable, is smaller than in regular novels and is set in double column, making the book about six times as large as an ordinary one at a single price.

Most science-fiction readers class H. G. Wells as their favorite author, for though his best work was composed decades ago, it has not grown out of date, like many fantastic tales written around the time, and is today just as thrilling and new as those printed in the science-fiction magazines. His style never grows tiresome and his stories are thoroughly enjoyable from the beginning to the end. Though we may read tales by hundreds of other authors, we always come back to Wells, to his distinctly different manner of composition which no one has succeeded in imitating.

His stories never read like fairy-tales. They are human and psychological. He allows one scientific impossibility in his stories, and then shows us how human beings would act under the circumstances, whether we are visited by Martians or terrorized by the close approach of a comet. The social theories propounded in "The Time Machine" are so logical that the tale stands out more like a true vision of the future than a vivid fantasy.

"The Invisible Man" and "The Island of Dr. Moreau" are nearest the type of material we are getting from other authors at the present time, though infinitely superior to most of them in science and general literary merit. In these tales, especially "The Island of Dr. Moreau," the author dwells more on the scientific angle than the social aspects.

We heartily recommend this volume, the best science-fiction book value in years, to all lovers of the fantastic. Here you can secure Wells's best novels all under one cover, for the first time.

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 505)

Courtesy to All

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

I am one of the hundreds of new readers who have discovered W.S. lately. I indeed consider myself lucky to have fonnd such an interesting magazine. It happened about eight months ago, when I hastily bought a magazine to enjoy on the train. I have not missed an issue since, and not only that, I have introduced this new and interesting form of stories to several other readers.

While looking over "The Reader Speaks" column, I became interested in a letter from a reader who said that he had heen a reader of W.S. for five years and therefore stood a good chance of getting his letter in the colnmn. Surely he does not think that because he was more fortunate to be an old reader that he had more right to have his letter published than some of the newer readers. It is my opinion that the new readers receive every courtesy that the old readers receive. After all, it is the new readers that are turning to W.S. every month who are really making the magazine.

Why have you received so many complaints about "The Brain Eaters of Pluto"? As for me, I think the story was humorous. Can the readers not enjoy a little humor once in a while?

Maybe I do not know art when I see it, but I cannot see why Paul gets so much praise. I think Winter is much the better artist. Let's have more stories by Manning, Keller, Pierce, and Binder. I thoroughly enjoy the short-shorts, and especially the German novels, such as "Druso."

Just one more brick-bat before I close. I don't understand how snch a superior magazine as W.S. can afford not to trim the edges. As it is, W.S. looks like just another cheap novel magazine, which we all know it is not.

As a whole, however, I think the magazine goes a long way in pleasing every reader, and that's what really counts.

F. P. PRATT, JR.,
Salisbury, N. C.

(We try to be courteous to all of our readers—new and old ones alike. We make no differentiation. When an old reader states that he has more of a right than new ones, he really means that having read science-fiction so long, he should know what is good and what is hackneyed. The new reader sometimes is overcome with such a great fascination for all science-fiction stories that they are all new to him, and therefore he cannot tell, for a while, which ones are really new and which ones are not. Usually the first stories we read remain our favorites, for the effect of *newness* they had upon us when we first read them never leaves us, even though we have read better stories since that we do not like as well.

If the rough edges on WONDER STORIES are the only things that make the book look like "cheap novel magazines," we are perfectly satisfied. We believe that our format is distinctly different and immediately reveals the fact that WONDER STORIES is not just another pulp.—EDITOR.)

(Continued on page 508)

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 507)

An Ardent Fan

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

Congratulations! A magazine that can keep up the good work that WONDER STORIES has kept since it was put on the market, deserves congratulating.

Your stories are excellent; your authors superb!

Those readers who complain about stories, "They're no good," "Not scientific," etc. get on my nerves; they at least ought to appreciate a little change in literature. Our mag would only print the best in science fiction.

The SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE is a great achievement. But I still come back to say: Keep up the good work in all your branches of stories.

"Druso" promises to become a great novel. Give us more of the German or any foreign science fiction.

Tell me, what has become of the QUARTERLY? I'm missing it terribly. When are you going to put it out again?

I remain an ardent Science Fiction Fan!

CHARLES SCHOLL,
North Bergen, N. J.

(We are pleased to receive letters like yours, without brick-bats, though, of course, we wouldn't feel at peace with the world without our share of pannings.

We do not know at the present time when or if the QUARTERLY will be revived. The law of supply and demand regulates the publication of science-fiction.—EDITOR.)

"Druso" a Masterpiece

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

You have certainly found a real master in Friedrich Freksa, author of "Druso." If the remainder of the story continues with the same force as the first chapters, you are going to have a masterpiece there. The plot unfolds in true literary style. The characters are real, throbbing human beings. A few more stories on that order will soon put WONDER STORIES in the spotlight.

"Green Cloud of Space" had real feeling. That is the kind of story that all magazines need today. Yarns like that, with real, genuine human interest, are what the public is crying for. No one is interested in a story that tells about Jones and Brown doing this and that and the other thing, unless the reader knows and feels the trials and tribulations that the characters undergo, emotionally and spiritually. You have hit the idea in "Green Cloud of Space."

The other stories were all good yarns, with the last chapter of "Xanduiu" winding up a really fine serial. "Earthspot" and "The Tone Machine" were both fine, with real depth.

But just a moment. Here's one where somebody must have gotten their wires crossed. "Traders in Treasures." (!!) Perhaps Mr. Snooks was not trying to be funny, but unless I'm very, very sadly mistaken, he either was giving vent to a very perverted sense of humor, or the printers were too lazy to print the beginning, the plot, or the anti-climax. I read the (?) three times, and finding it impossible to figure it out, went to bed with a bad headache.

JAMES L. BUSEY,
Seward, Alaska.

(We like what you say about "Druso" and agree with you through most of your letter, until we come to the last paragraph. "Traders in Treasures" has a very deep and hidden meaning, but we think that most of it is cleared up in the blurb. If you read that along with the story once again, we think that you will have no trouble in understanding it. Mr. Snooks was not trying to be funny at all when he wrote the story, oddly enough.—EDITOR.)

A Sequel to "Martian Odyssey"

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

WONDER STORIES is *not* my favorite magazine, but I enjoy it because the stories are similar to those printed in all *sf.* magazines around 1928. For months now, I have been hunting for a typical story of this period, and I believe that "Martian Odyssey" has hit the spot. It is a story for the sake of the fiction and not for its science. Please give us a sequel. Weinbaum has a grand imagination.

Please allow me to put in a kind word for "The Brain-Eaters of Pluto." Stories of this type *occasionally* are a relief from serious stuff.

I am not a regular reader of any science fiction mag, but I get my hands on considerably more than half of the grand total, but strange to say, I haven't read a single one of Mr. Herbig's fifteen best stories. But perhaps that's my fault. I never start at the first page and read through to the back, and seldom even read all the stories. The illustrations, I think, have a lot to do in determining which ones I read. At first I didn't like Winter at all, due to his "Moon Plague" illustration and mixing Paul's interpretations of moon people with his, but he's improving.

And now I have a suggestion that has probably already been carried out in part: There are two sides to every dispute, and generally, only two, so here is my idea: Why not leave W. S. as it is and print a quarterly based entirely on the other side of the various readers' disputes? It would contain reprints only, cover by Winter, new sort of title page, plenty of time-travelers, etc.

Brickbat—despite your new policy: W. S. still isn't progressive enough. Why not try thought-variants?

Pleading—don't abandon the Martians altogether.

Bouquet—for the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE.

Cut out stories like "The Last Shrine."

Cover was good, but looks more like it was intended for "Enslaved Brains."

Your movie reviews are good, but please don't review either books or pictures that you don't consider really top-notch.

What's happened to the rest of that series "Passing of the Planets?" Surely other planets besides the moon and Venus have, or some day, will pass.

JACK SPEER,
Comanche, Okla.

(You will be pleased to learn that a sequel to "A Martian Odyssey" was written before the original story was published. The name of the sequel is "Valley of Dreams" and will be published in a very early issue. We personally believe that the sequel is at least as good as the first story.

We are sorry that you think our stories the type printed around 1928. We consider them new, for the most part, and have our new policy for this purpose. We have been the greatest influence, we think, in helping science-fiction to evolve into something better.—EDITOR.)

SFL Member No. 34

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

Maybe I'm wrong! In my last letter I said, "Yours 'till Ackerman, Darrow, and Kaletsky fail to get a letter in 'The Reader Speaks.'" Now, the very next month, Ackerman and Kaletsky are missing. I notice that Ackerman has not had a letter in any science-fiction magazine this month. I'm worried.

The covers are getting better each month. I doubt if even C. A. Smith can describe my feelings when I open the package containing WONDER STORIES. The cover for "Voice of Atlantis" is beautiful, gorgeous, superb, and all the other big words. The patch of white in the corner gives an extra special effect. The illustration does not have much to do with the story, but who cares?

The stories are superb. I wouldn't even attempt to classify them as they are all super-excellent. "Druso" has a swell ending, although the appendix is way over my head. I think the story would have been just as good without it. "A Hair Raising Tale" is one of the best short-shorts you have had. "A Martian Odyssey" would have done credit to any of the old masters of science-fiction. "Voice of Atlantis" disappointed me somewhat. It was excellently written, but there was not enough action in it. "Enslaved Brains" is a masterpiece as most of the serials are.

(Continued on page 510)

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued on page 509)

I was going to call you down for not sending me my SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE certificate and pin, but I just got my certificate today, and as my pal Ray Marlella tells me that you explained to him about the delay, everything is all-x. I am very grieved at not being among the first ten, but I am pleased to see that I am at least Number 34. As you wish to know whom I want to correspond with, here is the data:

I would like to get in touch, personally if possible, with readers in my neighborhood who wish to form a chapter of the League.

As for reprints, I would not advise printing stories that are available in book form. "The Face In the Abyss" can be obtained at the public library, so I see no reason why it should be reprinted. I would like to see "The Metal Emperor" as I have one part of it in SCIENCE AND INVENTION. Speaking about old stories in SCIENCE AND INVENTION, I have recently obtained the one with the second Dr. Hackensaw's Inventions. I also have one part of "The Man On the Meteor." I have an ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER from 1919, but there are no stories in it.

I am glad to see that a cartoon by Joe Shuster is coming. If he is the same one that does the cartoons for EVERYDAY SCIENCE & MECHANICS, it ought to be swell.

I, too, would like to see the return of Clark Ashton Smith. Just because of those two unfortunate stories you printed, he isn't as bad as some readers make him. Remember "Marooned in Andromeda," the Singing Flame stories, and those others. Some readers just don't appreciate art.

Yours till WONDER STORIES is published on thought-machine records.

MILTON A. ROTHMAN,
Philadelphia, Pa.

(Ackerman and Kaletsky are still writing letters, though we can not always get one in each issue. You seem perfectly satisfied with most of the magazine, and that satisfies us.

We have put mention in the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE Department of your desire to start a chapter of the LEAGUE in Philadelphia and hope that all of our Philadelphia members will join. It is co-operation of this kind that will make the LEAGUE a success. —EDITOR.)

In the "Wee Sma'" Hours

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

It is 2.30 in the morning, and as I gaze from the laboratory window into the blue vault of the heavens where a million stars are sparkling like the cold fire of so many far-off diamonds, my mind goes soaring upward to join the wandering hosts of science-fiction adventurers as they flash through the void in their speeding space-ships—as they face unknown perils on uncharted and unexplored worlds, scattered throughout the boundless realms of the universe.

To quote the Planet Prince:

"And my mind goes soaring upward,
Far beyond our dreary keu,
To a desert, dying planet,
And a dying race of men."

Have just finished reading the July issue. It is very good. However, I hardly believe it is on par with the May and June issues.

The final installment of "Druso" was a smashing conclusion to a wonderful story. This story places Mr. Freksa on a pinnacle far above the average science-fiction writer. Hope we will be seeing some more of his work soon.

Laurence Manning's "Voice of Atlantis" was fine. Heretofore I have not been a time-traveling enthusiast, but this story was different. Mr. Manning has presented us with a very conceivable means of accomplishing the most fantastic of the fanastical, time-travel. I enjoy stories about the fabled Atlantis very much. In fact it was a story of this type, "The Sunken City," that started me reading science-fiction. Winter's illustration of the Atlanteau scene is good.

Stanley Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey" is the best interplanetary story I have read in a long time. It is exceedingly well written and refreshingly differ-

ent. We are waiting for the sequel, Mr. Editor. Paul's illustration for this story was good, as usual.

"The Last Shrine" by Chester D. Cuthbert was fair. Just a bit dull. Winter's illustration for this story was not so good either. It is not my intention to start throwing Irish confetti, but this is about the worst piece of work I have seen by Winter.

The new serial, "Enslaved Brains" by Eando Binder, has started nicely. Believe it will be as good as our last three serials or Mr. Binder's "Green Cloud of Space."

Am glad to know that we are going to be able to secure reprints. This has been a sore spot with me for a long time, though I never mentioned it before. I would like to obtain a reprint of "The Sunken City" that I mentioned in an earlier paragraph. I have forgotten what magazine this story appeared in.

In closing let me propose a toast to science-fiction as a whole, but especially to WONDER STORIES and our good old Ed.

D. R. WELCH,
Austin, Tex.

(Your first paragraph is very picturesquely written and shows that you have the real science-fiction spirit and that you know how to express it. Fantasy fans can look at the stars and see more than just points of light.

We hope that you find Eando Binder's "Enslaved Brains" at least as good as his "Green Cloud of Space." We have several other of his stories in our hands for early publication. His next story, "The Thieves From Isot," will probably appear in our October issue.—EDITOR.)

Whereas It's Still to Come

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

Mr. President (ye Editor); Ladies and Gentlemen of Stf. "fanland" . . . .

Whereas, WONDER STORIES in the past few months has improved amazingly as to quality of stories, artistic work, and makeup, and

Whereas, WONDER STORIES has acquired a new Managing Editor of unprecedented ability, and

Whereas, in the January 1931 issue of said magazine the Editor in a comment to a letter in "The Reader Speaks," stated that only $100 stood between the rough edges and the smooth, and that the company would gladly donate the required $100 for the improvement of the magazine, and

Whereas, it is the policy of WONDER STORIES to improve the magazine, whenever possible, at the request of the governing body (the readers), THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED THAT henceforth the edges of WONDER STORIES shall be trimmed smooth as was the former nine by twelve size.

As to the July issue, I might say that it would take *some* magazine to equal it. It is positively remarkable. I never knew that such excellent stories could be written. I had begun to lose a little of the attraction I had for WONDER STORIES, when, back in 1931 and '32 and early '33 the stories seemed to be losing their vitality and punch. During that time there were only a few outstanding narratives. Adversely, today they are *all* outstanding.

The illustrations are much improved. You have the right idea in letting Lumen Winter do the figure work, and Paul the general illustrating. Paul is excellent. There is no doubt about that. He is vividly imaginative, but "variety is the spice of life," and Winter and Schneeman can supply that variety. However, just to be different, why not a cover by Winter? I know Paul has done all of them in the past, and excellently too, but there gets to be a sameness that is undesirable. Let the two artists alternate.

And for the praise—the ace story in this issue was "A Martian Odyssey." Continue prevailing until we get that sequel. There are innumerable questions left to be answered. More from Mr. Weinbaum.

Also a couple of "hurrahs" for the enlarged readers' columns, the *swap* column, and the Movie Reviews.

And remember, we're all satisfied except for those smooth edges; but I'm still praying for the day when I can see the ol' WONDER nine by twelve.

LEWIS F. TORRANCE,
Winfield, Kan.

(There is very little comment we can make on your letter. You are satisfied with practically everything and reflect the opinions of most of our readers.

(Continued on page 512)

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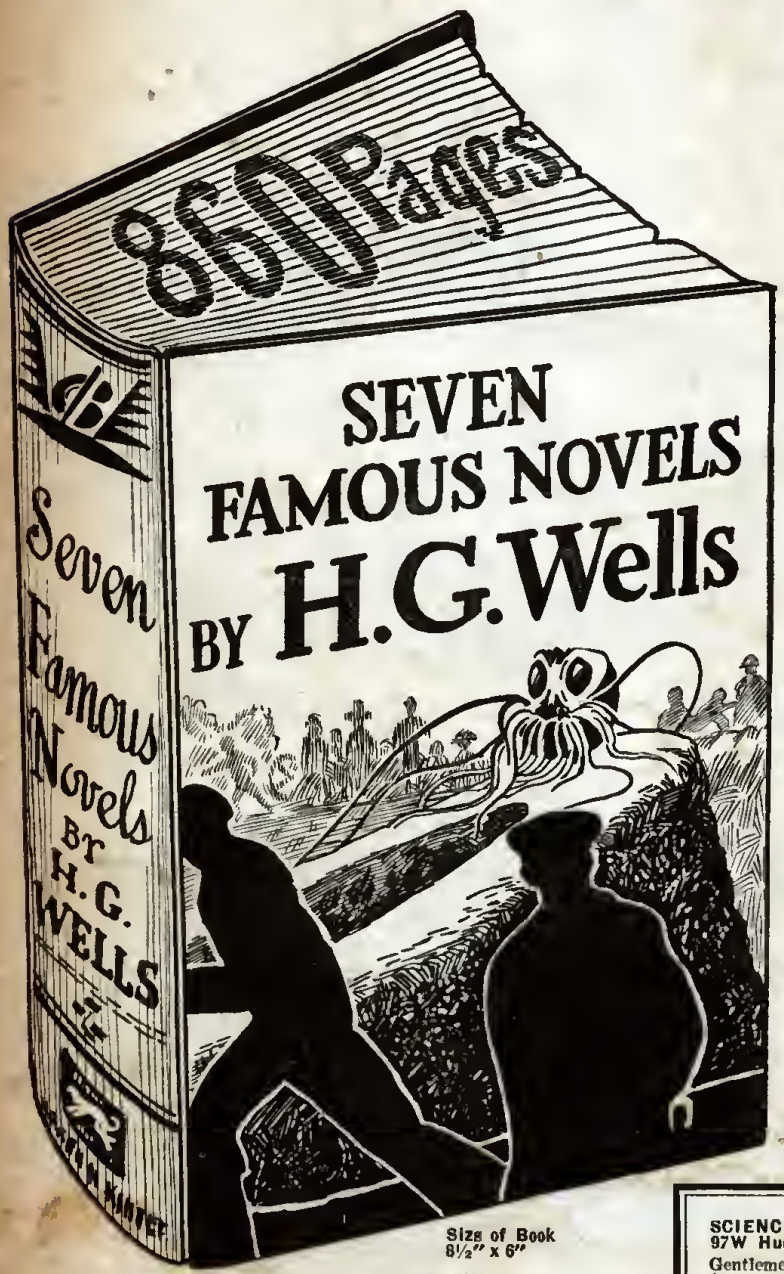

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A special addition to this book is a preface by H. G. Wells which will prepare you to enjoy it to the fullest extent. Read the most masterful versions ever written of a voyage into the future, the first trip to the moon, a man who could make himself invisible but couldn't "come back", hostile visitors from Mars, terror caused by the close approach of a comet, and other thrilling adventures. Words are inadequate to describe the mental enjoyment derived from this book. You must read it for yourself. You will cherish it as a priceless possession in the years to come.

SCIENCE PUBLICATIONS
97W Hudson Street, New York, N. Y.

Gentlemen: Enclosed you will find my remittance of $2.75 for which send me, POSTAGE PREPAID, one copy of **"SEVEN FAMOUS NOVELS by H. G. WELLS."** (Send remittance in check or money order. Register letter if it contains cash or unused U. S. Postage Stamps.)

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The THIRD SEX! Man or Woman?

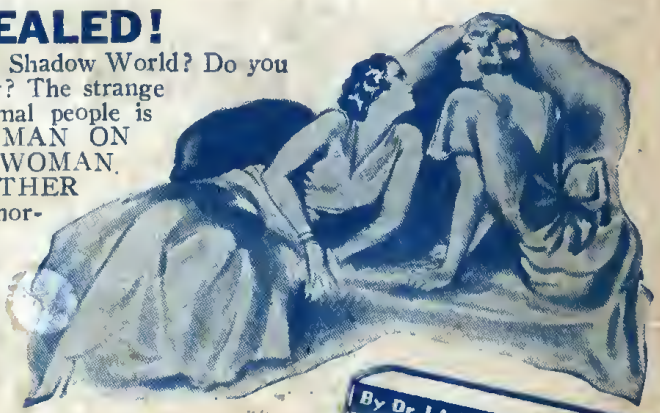
For hundreds of years men and women have talked with hushed voices about "STRANGE PEOPLE"—men who are not men—women who are not women. No one has ever *dared* to talk out in the open about it. Is it any wonder that the shocking, lurid facts of this great social evil are unknown to the great mass of men and women? Is it any wonder that strange nick-names are commonly used to describe these creatures.

A DOCTOR CASTS THE LIGHT OF TRUTH ON THE STRANGE, EXOTIC WORLD OF TWILIGHT MEN AND WOMEN!

Now a Doctor has dared to tear away the veil of mystery. In blunt, understandable words he describes the unbelievable facts. "STRANGE LOVES," A Study in Sexual Abnormalities, by Dr. La Forest Potter, noted authority, is a document so weird, so startling, as to amaze the civilized world. Dr. La Forest Potter, the author, is a late member of the New York County Medical Society, Massachusetts Medical Society, Boston Gynecological Society, Associate Professor of Rhinology, Laryngology, and Otology, New York School of Clinical Medicine, and the author of many well known works.

THE TRUTH REVEALED!

Can you distinguish these men and women of the Shadow World? Do you know that their number is constantly increasing? The strange power these men and women wield over normal people is almost unbelievable. Dr. Potter says, "NO MAN ON EARTH HAS A CHANCE AGAINST A WOMAN ONCE SHE HAS SUCCUMBED TO ANOTHER WOMAN." Actual clinical cases reveal the abnormal ties and the unnatural desires and erotic reactions of these twilight men and women! There are records that actually prove that men have been MADE INTO ABNORMALS. A startling, provocative indictment against the false modesty that has been responsible for the growth of the most fantastic, strange amatory curiosities among savage and civilized races.



STRANGE LOVE

Dr. Potter tells about the hidden, secret passions that dominate these women's exotic lives. He talks about the tragic duality of the effeminate man—half man—half woman. He delves deep into the ages—relates the bestialities and savageries practiced by the old Egyptians, Hindoos, Greeks, Assyrians and Romans—the sensuality that was ascribed even to the Greek Gods, to Zeus, Apollo, Hercules and Jupiter—the growth through history from ancient countries to France—to Germany—to its tremendous spread through the United States.

MUST THESE SUBJECTS BE CLOTHED IN SILENCE FOREVER?

Fearlessly, openly, the meaning of many misunderstood subjects is brought under the searchlight of truth. Sadism—Necrophilia—Phallic Worship—Sodomy—Pederasty—Tribadism—Saphism—Uranism—the normal man and woman will refuse to believe that such abnormalities exist and have been practiced through the ages.

ASTONISHING DISCLOSURES ABOUT THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS MEN

How many of the famous men of history were considered "odd"? Socrates, Plato, Caesar, Virgil, Oscar Wilde, Leonardo da Vinci, Lord Byron, Tchaikowsky, the musician, Walt Whitman, the gentle, lovable poet, Napoleon—men and women of all kinds in all stages of life.

FOR MATURE, SOPHISTICATED READERS OF THIS MAGAZINE!

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 511)

Smooth edges will come in good time, but we intend to keep Paul on the cover. His covers have characterized WONDER STORIES since the very first issue and we fear the book would not be recognizable without this feature. Furthermore, we are sure that most of our readers would object to such a change.—EDITOR.)

Send your letter in to

THE READER SPEAKS

Let us know just what you think of the magazine ● Criticisms, commendations, and brickbats cheerfully received.