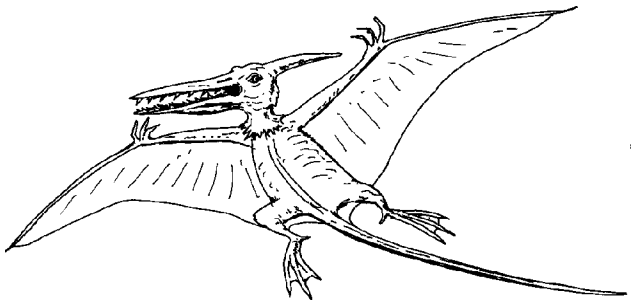
Strange Creatures VI

Double Take

Edited by
Chad Arment



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This Electronic Publication includes short stories from a number of sources. The current publisher has attempted to retain all pertinent text, but format changes were necessary. Internal links have been created for the table of contents.

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Editor's Note

This particular collection includes both pure cryptofiction and tales which are peripheral to the genre. Several stories involve fakes and frauds. Other tales involve unusual varieties of known species, but are included because they represent a serious search for the unusual and unknown.

The stories included again include both familiar and relatively unknown authors. Jacobs is best known for his classic horror tale, "The Monkey's Paw," Andersen for his numerous children's stories. Buchan's WWII spy thrillers were well-received, and he does justice to the tale include here.

One especially interesting story here is Adams' "The Flying Death." Adams invented a fictional protaganist, Average Jones, who starred in other short stories. Jones was a scientific detective, and elements of that are easily noticeable in this tale, although Jones is absent. Apparently, the story elements in "The Flying Death" fermented in Adams to such an extent that only a few years after publishing this short story, (1903), he expanded the concept into a full-fledged novel of the same title.

I was surprised to find two tales which revolved around the concept of living pterosaurs. Usually, they take a backseat to living dinosaurs and only play a small role when used in "lost world" settings. (Remember Jurassic Park? They didn't even bother to put them in the movie.) The venomous, bioluminescent pterosaur in Sloane's story is especially intriguing as an early example of taking paleontology's reconstructions just a few steps further.

This volume's title is easily explained. After collecting these stories, it became obvious that they formed natural pairs. So, read them together and see for yourself how different authors played out similar ideas.

As always, I continue to solicit tales for inclusion in future anthologies.

Contents

The Pterodactyl

Thomas Charles Sloane

Sheldon, my associate in the strange adventure I am about to relate, was an ex-Army officer, who, in some Indian campaign, had been shot through the knee, the injury producing a permanent lameness. By reason of this disability he had retired with honour from the service some years before our acquaintance began.

He was a large, powerful man, with a vigour of speech and manner which conveyed the impression of strong virility. His forehead was seamed with an ugly scar which, I understood, had been inflicted by some scalp-taking savage. I presently discovered that his mind, direct and soldierly, possessed a marked vein of poetry and that the rough camp-life on the frontier had not obliterated a delicacy of feeling and an exquisite taste for the beautiful and marvellous which, in hours of repose, lent flavour and entertaining variety to his conversation.

It was this circumstance, coupled with his military experience, which soon led us in the Gun Club to follow his lead in many matters, and when he suggested an autumn excursion into the mountains of Virginia for turkey and other game, we readily took up the idea. It thus happened that late in October, 1900, we found ourselves at the little station of Brownhills, where we were met by Hank Bowls, who was to act as guide and chief huntsman for the party.

It had been arranged that we should take up quarters in an old Log house some twenty miles distant, in the very heart of a mountainous, wooded region.

At nightfall of the following day we reached our destination. Though the old house had been put in some repair for our reception, the collapse of the chimney rendered a fire impossible, so we were obliged to establish our kitchen in the open air. While reconnoitring with this object in view my attention was specially attracted by a tall hickory at the side of the house, the limbs of which partly overhung the roof.

Some hours after we had turned in we were all wakened by a shout from Cummings who, I discovered on sitting up in my bunk, was standing in the middle of the room, gazing intently at the rafters.

What in Heaven's name is the matter with you, doctor?" I called, leaping to the floor.

Before Cummings could reply, a low, ominous growl, accompanied by a sniffing sound, came down from the roof.

A panther!" cried Hank. "I reckon its the same that carried off Dobbin's calf last week—and he's a big one! Hold up!" he shouted, grasping Cummings by the shoulder, as the doctor was making for the door. "Don't go out, or the brute will be upon you, teeth and claws!"

The panther, if panther it was, which had remained silent during this monologue, sniffed and growled again in the same low, menacing manner, as if resenting Hank's untimely interference; and I noticed by the sound that he had shifted his position to a point almost over the door.

Sheldon, who had seized a lantern, now began to grope about the room in quest of a gun, and then I suddenly remembered that all the guns stood without at the corner of the house near the tall hickory I have mentioned.

"It's certain death to go out there!" declared Hank, positively. "The infernal brute will be on you like a thunderbolt in a fit!"

The brute without, irritated, no doubt, by the sound of our voices, now uttered a louder and more threatening growl, and we could hear his claws tearing at different parts of the roof, as though seeking the best means of ingress to his prey.

Without having noticed Sheldon in particular, I afterwards remembered that he had been the last to quit his bunk on Cummings' alarm, and had stood with blanched face as though petrified with terror—incommensurate, or so it seemed to me, with his character and the extent of the danger. Having mastered himself, he now seemed for the first time, to think clearly. Seizing a pillow of straw, he stepped swiftly to the door and stood with his hand on the latch listening, as though to locate the exact position of the panther, now tearing and clawing savagely at the roof. My blood curdled as I realized that the savage animal was exactly over my head; but before any of us thought of fathoming Sheldon's purpose he had cautiously opened the door. I saw the flicker of a match, and the next instant the blazing pillow held above his head, Sheldon leaped towards the guns.

The panther immediately ceased tearing at the roof above me. I could hear the scraping of its claws as it bounded towards the farther eave, where, with a scream of dismay it paused.

I dare say fifteen seconds elapsed—to us it seemed a quarter of an hour—before Sheldon reappeared, still bearing his shield of flame, but with two guns and a quantity of cartridges. Scarcely had he closed the door when I heard the panther drop to the ground, the next instant it threw itself with a yell of baffled fury against the stout timbers.

"Open on him!" cried Cummings, excitedly.

"The shot will never cut through the door!" retorted Hank. "But the rest of us can hold it against him while the Major fires through the crack."

While he was speaking we had placed ourselves in position, holding the door very slightly ajar. At the next attack of the furious animal Sheldon discharged his gun, as it appeared to us, into the panther's very throat.

There was a moment's silence. Then a long-drawn, rising wail, which pierced our ears like a knife. It was repeated across the clearing, again and again, at successively greater intervals, till it seemed to die away in the heart of the woods.

"He's gone!" said Hank.

"But not dead," rejoined Sheldon.

Cummings then told us how he had heard the panther alight on the roof, probably from some overhanging limb of the hickory.

A few splinters of wood below the eaves, the deeply-scored claw-marks in the rough door, and a slender trail of blood across the clearing and into the woods were the visible traces which the morning revealed of our savage nocturnal visitor. Hank, who followed the trail some distance into the woods, discovered nothing further. And so the incident closed—but for the consequence to which it led.

It had fallen to my lot to remain on guard during this first day, and with my nerves still somewhat shaken I was by no means displeased when Sheldon, excusing himself to the others, expressed his intention of bearing me company.

After sitting for an hour in almost unbroken silence, gazing listlessly into the woods, he abruptly asked:—

"Do you ever imagine you have lived before?"

I parried the question,

"It is probable, Hossman, that you will think me unreasonably superstitious if I tell you that, like some doting old woman, I have been unnerved by a dream. A dream, too, which, like the wild imaginings of a drunken man, centres about a strange, unnamable, impossible monster, which by me and those with me seems to have been regarded with fantastic terror and reverence."

I waited, silent, knowing not what to say.

Presently he continued:—

"In one shape and an other this dream has occurred three times. First, when I was at Tucson; that night my brother and his entire command were massacred on the Gila by the mountain Apaches! The second occasion was five years later, at Yuma: next day a despatch announced my wife's death in hospital in Philadelphia! Last night it came again, for the third time, and Cummings' cry of alarm seemed so confused with the cries of others from the world of shadows that I was scarcely able to shake off the horrible illusion that I was in the temple at Dion, struggling for my life before the God of the Caves."

He regarded me with a smile—rather forced, I thought—and paled visibly as he continued:—

"One is seldom conscious in dreams of any circumstance antedating the situation in which one finds oneself, so that who I was and whence I came were things of no moment. I found myself traversing a path over rugged hills, scrambling amid blackened rocks, and diving into gloomy canyons, from one of which I presently emerged upon a broad highway and mingled with a throng of gaily-attired travellers, who seemed bent upon some festival, the import of which beneath the stratum of consciousness I fully understood. The way was strewn with fragments of red cloth and dyed quills—the confetti of the carnival. A kind of screechy, querulous music was produced by those around me upon some reed-like instrument held to the lips, and here and there I noticed the coppery gleam of a weapon which some disarranged garment had exposed—

a circumstance that I marked with a feeling of interest. In and out through the throng ran groups of girls intent upon the pranks and merriments of youth, accosting with perfect freedom and entire absence of bashfulness any whom they chose. One of these young women, in passing, favoured me with a coquettish fillip upon the cheek, and as I caught the bright smile in her dancing eyes my heart warmed toward her, though I felt that some about me regarded the freedom with disfavour. A little later, on passing me again, she purposely slipped. As I aided her to rise I ventured to impart a salute upon her cheek, which was immediately suffused with a deep blush, though this, I fancied, was in no way due to resentment. Instantly, however, a tall, black-robed man near me turned, and, without warning, levelled a blow at me with a short axe of bronze. It narrowly missed my head, but caught my feathered head-dress, which fell to the ground; and I noticed that, whereas the heads of all were decorated with many-coloured plumes, none were red save mine.

"'Son of a priest!' muttered my assailant, in tones vibrant with hate, 'will not the fruits of the land suffice you that you must needs ravish the blossom?'

"Then another interposed:—

"'By the fire of the Bird, 'tis Torqua and the daughter of Narbin! Put up your weapon! See you not that he flies with the red eagles of Dion?'

"With the easy grace of a courtier the speaker stooped and restored to me my fallen helmet, but as he turned away he spat upon the ground, and I knew that his hate envenomed the dust. Before I could acknowledge either the affront of the one or the mock courtesy of the other we were forced apart by those attracted by the incident, and I heard on all sides low-spoken words of reproof:

"The armed men of Narbin—armed in spite of the priestly edict—were on the road to Dion to offer sacrifice to the God of the Caves. If this offering were accepted, I knew that the blood of our order must flow around the altars and that a new priesthood would arise to minister among the people. If only they could be apprised before the hour of sacrifice, the crafty men of Narbin might be undone. I pressed forward, thinking to enter Dion in advance of the plotters, but soon found this hope vain; at every step some fresh incident revealed their numbers and their insolence. After having been pricked in the arm by the dagger of a stranger, without other provocation than the mere movement to pass him, I realized that I was walking under the menace of death, and that I

was a prisoner, not, perhaps, in chains, but held far more securely by a thousand unspoken threats lurking in every glance and gesture of my companions.

"We were now approaching the city, its spiked and embattled walls already casting their shadows across our way.

"Before passing through the great gate I glanced toward the field of mounds, and observed with foreboding that workmen were busy upon the great mound of Chalma, which contained the tumuli of the priests. I wondered if the spirit of revolt had infected the officers of the city, for I knew that this mound was only opened for the reception of the most exalted dignitaries. My companions had by this time gathered about me in such a manner as to guard me on all sides, and thus intercept any communication, either by look or sign, which I might attempt to hold with others.

"Thus we reached the many-terraced slope at the base of which stood the temple. Through the gloomy portals we swept, and then, in utter silence and darkness, passing along its sinuous passages, we emerged at last into the great hall of sacrifice, said to be in the heart of the mountain. Here we prostrated ourselves, and in the hush, broken only by the half-audible voices of the distant priests, I ventured a stealthy glance about me.

"To the right, and far in front, sputtered and smoked the altar of invocation, near which stood a grey-bearded old man, of whose flesh and blood I was the sole surviving remnant. His voice alone must summon the God of the Caves. I hoped that by some miracle dumbness might fall upon his tongue, that it might fail to do its familiar office, and thus that the sacrifice might be for that day at least postponed. At no great distance yawned the cavernous way through which the monster god must come, and I strained my gaze to pierce the solid blackness, while my ears seemed splitting in the effort to hear the first soft beat of a muffled wing. To the left of this opening, in many loops and folds, hung the great scarlet curtain, behind which was solemnized the last mysterious rite, the translation of the favourite of Heaven, without pain or death, into the realms of everlasting felicity. Then the murmur of the priestly ritual suddenly ceased, and a clear, strong note from a shell trumpet pealed through the vast hall. In the train of its echo a thin voice rose:—

"'O God of the Caves, we await thee!'

"Like the pattering sound of many raindrops, or the rustle of a million leaves,

swelling into the deep, full tone of some mighty cataract, rose the murmur of the multitude:—

"'O God of the Caves, we await thee!'

"Again that thin voice:—

"'Out of the profound darkness wert thou born, O Winged Flame of Heaven!'

"And again the soft thunder of the response:—

"'And thou comest to us as a light for ever.'

"At intervals, from some far-off chamber deep in the foundations, I could hear the distant beat of the drums with which the priests sought to persuade the reluctant deity, whose wont it was in time of displeasure to feign a deep slumber from which only the most vehement supplication might arouse him.

"At length out of the inky gulf there stole a faint phosphorescence, suffusing, very gradually, the satiny blackness with the hue of moonshine. Then a mighty, unearthly voice, as through a tunnel rolling, cried:—

"'Let none look up!'

"The glimmer grew into a flood of pale, tremulous radiance, which streamed forth into the hall, illuminating the intervening space and touching hundreds of forms in the prostrate multitude. Then a rhythmic, stealthy sound, like the very footfall of Silence, crept around me, and in the awe of Eternity I pressed my hands to my eyes.

"When at last I ventured one swift glance, I beheld, suspended from the lofty wall, above and beyond the Veil of the Transmutation, a huge, bird-like shape, with great, extended wings, which shed a shower of mild sparkles as if bejewelled with myriads of fireflies. There it hung, slowly swaying, pendulum-like, to and fro, so that the lustre of its presence came and went in great, deliberate throbs of light, while its green eyes scanned with indifferent glance the levelled ranks of its mute, motionless worshippers. Whoever came beneath the spell of those mesmeric eyes, for him earth was at an end, for he was the favourite of Heaven, the groves of singing birds, in the pleasant valleys which are under the world, beckoned him to bask for ever in the shade of their immortal verdure. Thither

would he be borne through the dark and bewildering mazes of the subterranean ways by the benignant but awful God of the Caves. For many minutes this silent, terrific contemplation continued, until my very flesh seemed to be quivering and tense. I wondered where was the elector of the sacrifice, for I knew such matters were all prepared beforehand, and that the favour and preference of the hierarchy were sure credentials to the favour of Heaven. Suddenly that thin voice rasped through the stillness:—

"'O Seneschal of the Elect! has the blood of the youth of Dion turned to water that none dare claim thy approving glance?'

"A contagious sigh, like the stirring of some vagrant wind, rustled through the multitude. I felt my nerves relax, and with the return of ordinary perception I became aware of a slight struggle to my right, as though someone were being forcibly withheld. Then in hoarse, suppressed tones came the words:—

"'Die, then, accursed fool!'

"This was followed by a gurgling, smothered cry, and, raising my head, I saw a form half rise on its hands and pitch forward, while an arm was suddenly withdrawn; before the form fell I saw the haft of a dagger in its back. At the same moment a slight murmur swept through the hall, and now, to my left, a slender figure had arisen and stood swaying in unison with the motion of the great bird.

"I became so absorbed in this singular pantomime as to forget momentarily the horrible incident I had just witnessed. Not for some minutes did I recollect and realize its significance. Meantime the slender figure continued its rhythmical movements, until from the green eyes shot scintillating gleams like the atoms of a dissolving emerald. Then, as the figure began to walk slowly like one in a trance, I perceived that it was a maiden, and it needed not the low comment of those about me to tell me it was the daughter of Narbin. Moving among the prostrate people whom she saw not, and who, in profound awe, made way for her, her charmed eyes riveted on that supernal form which now had ceased to sway, she reached the open space and passed beneath the Veil of the Transmutation. Then, guided by unseen hands, the great scarlet curtain fluttered between. There was a heavy swooping sound, a shimmering palpitation of sparkles as of the incandescent dust of meteors, then a long, loud, shrill, heart-shattering cry—the God of the Caves had disappeared into the screened sanctuary!

"Not until that moment, when the men of Narbin were already on their feet and the vaulted dome seemed rocking with the acclamation of the multitude, did I comprehend the crafty manipulation by which, in the very presence of the pontiff, the daughter of Narbin had been substituted for the elector of the sacrifice, and the acceptance of the God of the Caves secured, as it were, with the sanction of the very priesthood it must annihilate, since their offering had not been deemed worthy. Once, in the days of Chalma, a youth, the pawn of some malcontent faction, had been wrested from behind the great curtain, and another, a priest of the reigning order, proffered and accepted in his stead. Might I not venture to re-enact this miracle of history? I saw the bewildered, uncertain movement of the priests, the consternation of my venerable kinsman. Already the black plume of Narbin was nodding near the altar of the invocation. I knew that the opportunity had come—nay, was passing—and rising with a new, fierce valour in my veins, I seized a spear, sprang forward, and rushed under the Veil. There I paused. The God of the Caves had descended, and now at my feet stretched one mighty wing, like a many-wrinkled gauze of gold, through whose translucent folds ran a complex network of red veins as in some gorgeous patterned fabric. The body, insignificantly small in comparison, lay huddled in the midst. By the rapid palpitation of its radiance and the eager, convulsive shuddering of its outline I knew that the daughter of Narbin was beneath. As I stood the creature raised its head, its beak dripping with the blood of a horrible repast and transfixed me with a long, steady gaze.

"Many moments must have passed thus. Then my blood, congealed at first with terror, resumed its natural flow and warmed in my veins till fear forsook me, and I would have approached nearer the magnetic loadstar of my being had I not shrunk from profaning with my foot the golden livery it seemed to wear.

"Suddenly a jeering voice broke in upon the spell:—

"'Thinks Torqua to become the beloved of the God? Not you, aspiring youth, but at some future day, perhaps. For the God of the Caves has looked upon you, and none may cheat him!''

"At the same instant I was violently withdrawn by a powerful hand, and found myself without the sanctuary. What carnage was here! Around me lay the mangled corpses of a hundred priests, seized, weaponless as they were, and butchered at their own altars. The aged pontiff had fallen where he stood, and his bleeding head—the starting eyeballs glazed with horror and the mouth

fallen open, with the silly tongue protruding—had been thrust upon the brazen staff of his office and fixed to the altar of the invocation. The air still rang with the shouts of contending men and reeked with the odour of death; I knew that for the time anarchy was abroad in the city. Above me swung the copper axe of Narbin. I threw up my arms, for I possessed not even a dagger, and strove to flee. But 'twas a vain effort. Down hissed the cruel blade, ripping through my shoulder like the tusk of a mastodon, so that I stepped upon my own arm as I ran. Falling thus, I rolled under the stone chair of the pontiff, and ere the last blow fell, bringing the awful blackness of oblivion, I seemed again to gaze into two great green eyes, ringed with red circles and scintillating like portentous stars entangled in a palpitating cloud of moonlight."

As Sheldon finished this recital I found myself spellbound. His look, as of one who spoke from some inner prompting; the fervid flow of unaccustomed eloquence; the solemn mimicry of priestly incantation, and the swift expression of fear, reverence, and horror which impressed his features, were the words and actions of another age, through which I saw, as through a crevice in a wall, the violent political upheavals and barbarous pageantry of some prehistoric race.

.As he finished, he half turned, looking behind him. And I, too, found my eyes involuntarily seek the ground as if to behold the severed arm of Torqua, with its quivering fingers clutching at the tainted air of those ancient shambles.

When at last Sheldon recalled me from my reverie his ordinary manner had returned; but his words then I have since pondered long and often:—

"We called it a dream, Hossman. Let us say, rather, it is a memory."

Not until the return of the others compelled my mind to move in other channels was I able to fully shake off the nightmare of antediluvian horror which the tale of Torqua's fate had provoked.

Hank, it seemed, had, at a point some two miles distant, unexpectedly come upon the trail which he had lost in the morning, leading through the bottom of a ravine into some rocky lair, into which, he believed, the panther had crept either to die or recuperate its energies. I was pleased to observe that Sheldon manifested a sportsmanlike interest in the narration. It was agreed by all that the courage and ingenuity he had displayed on the preceding night entitled him to the pelt, for those of our party best versed in woodcraft were convinced

that the panther might be traced to its present hiding-place, and, if not already dead, easily dispatched.

Guided by Hank, we proceeded in company along the creek bottom, arriving without incident at the mouth of the ravine, where we easily picked up the trail. It was arranged to divide into three parties, Sheldon and I beating up the ravine, while the others skirted along the high ground at either side. By this means we thought that the panther might soon be started, while, if it endeavoured to quit the ravine it was certain to find a vigilant enemy on either hand.

A tiny fleck of crimson, visible from time to time upon some fragment of stone or fallen log, guided us for a considerable distance along the brink of a slender rivulet which had possessed itself of the bed of the ravine.

Near this point we began to climb among the bushes and rocks which concealed the course of the rivulet. A little way up the slope we found that the stream emerged abruptly from a slanting fissure in the face of the rock, and here a final bloodstain seemed to indicate the panther's last retreat.

We determined to explore the fissure, but before plunging into it Sheldon lighted the lantern he had brought in anticipation of just such a contingency.

Within, we found ourselves at once entangled in a mass of dead bushes which so choked the path that we were forced to wade in the shallow bed of the stream. The steep slant of the walls soon rendered an upright position impossible, and we were obliged at last to fall upon all fours.

Moving in this manner, we presently entered a sort of flume or sloping tunnel, so narrow that I began to fear we might become hopelessly wedged in. I was on the point of suggesting a retreat, when Sheldon, who was in front, with a laboured grunt and exclamation of relief suddenly moved freely forward. Following him with an effort, for I was by no means so active as he, I found myself able to stand, though still nearly knee-deep in icy water. When he had relighted his lantern, which for some time he had been carrying in his teeth, and which had been extinguished by the suddenness of his release from the granite prison, we found ourselves in a sort of grotto through which ran the stream we were following.

Though loath to oppose Sheldon, I yet shrank from prosecuting farther what now seemed to me a foolhardy quest: I remembered that night was at hand,

that a heavy storm of rain was threatening, and that our companions were quite ignorant of our whereabouts. Another objection I was at the time ashamed to formulate: on the farther side of the grotto my eyes lit upon a tumbled heap of earth and rock accidentally fashioned into the shape of the head and open jaws of a toad, from which issued the stream like a greedy tongue ready to lick up a hapless insect. This excited in me a sensation of the most intense repugnance and fear.

Through the throat of this gigantic fossil-like structure we would be obliged to pass, and I felt it an omen of evil that Nature had provided the mysteries beyond with so forbidding a threshold. Undeterred by such reflections, Sheldon had already preceded me, and I presently heard him calling from the inner cave.

Thither with reluctance I followed, and soon entered a large chamber, the silence of which was intensified rather than broken by the tinkle of a slender waterfall, a leap in the course of the stream which, after all, had an exterior source, and entered the cave in this manner from some point above.

Finding nothing here, we continued our search for some distance, until we came to a splintered and jagged parapet overlooking what appeared to be a vast gulf of impenetrable gloom, into which the original wall might at some remote period have fallen. Leaning over this, we discovered, by the aid of the lantern, a wide-spreading declivity thickly strewn with loose stones, but owing to our feeble light we were unable to guess to what depths it might reach. Sheldon wished to descend, but, yielding to my counsel, we determined upon a more careful inspection of the chamber in which we were, and in the course of this made a most singular discovery. Traced as if by a pencil of fire upon the grey surface of the rock was the blackened outline of a colossal bat, with wings widely extended as though clinging to the wall. After some scrutiny I fancied it bore an exaggerated resemblance to pictures and descriptions I had seen of an ancient monster, the pterodactyl. It was almost as though one of those creatures had reposed upon the spot.

To my conjecture Sheldon replied with many eager questions, though he forebore to allude to an idea which I now believe was in his mind as well as my own—namely, the resemblance of the tracing to the monster of his dream.

Although this Satanic portrait was probably nothing more than a fantastic accident, it seemed to hold our attention with so gruesome an interest that I quite lost count of time, until, suddenly, my ear was impressed by an unusual

sound. The tinkling waterfall had changed its tone: the tiny rivulet was now a brawling stream. It needed little reflection to explain this. The storm without had at last broken, and now, from the heights above, a thousand rivulets were all streaming together into their wonted channel.

Filled with alarm, I hurried to the outer grotto, where I found what I dreaded. The tunnel through which we had squeezed our way had become the flume of a copious torrent, and all thought of egress in that direction was now out of the question: we would, without doubt, be prisoners for some hours!

This dilemma apparently rather pleased Sheldon than otherwise, though he professed much regret. His words however had a ring of insincerity about them, and were, or so I imagined applied rather to me than to himself. Almost immediately he returned to the contemplation of the outlines so strangely burned upon the wall, and his growing abstraction and the look of concentration in his eyes filled me with vague apprehension so that I felt an inexplicable sensation of relief when he suddenly broke silence.

"Well, Hossman, I like the poster; suppose we wait for the play?"

Knowing that we must have several hours before us, and not being over-fond of the mood which Sheldon's sinister raillery betokened, I was not loath to join him in a further exploration of the cavern.

Returning, therefore, to the parapet, we began to pick our way among the loose fragments of rock which covered the declivity. One of these, slipping from beneath my foot, after rolling for several seconds struck at the bottom with a bound and plunged with a hollow splash into some invisible water. Other pieces dislodged by its descent began to grind and slide threateningly, and, fearing a granite avalanche, we bore off in haste to the left, and soon reached a wide platform freer from *débris*, from which a short, steep slope reached to the edge of a dark pool.

So murky was the water that it received the ray of the lantern with scarce a glint, and, but for the plunging stones, we might have supposed ourselves on the brink of a bottomless volcanic shaft. This pool I afterwards discovered to be of great extent; but, although my feet circumscribed the whole circuit of its infernal shores, I am to this day unable to guess its exact size.

Before continuing our course I made a careful survey of our position trying to fix any prominent peculiarities well in mind. Moving a large stone into a

conspicuous position, I leaned my gun against it for a landmark, it being apparent this maw of darkness might conceal some immeasurable labyrinth.

As usual Sheldon preceded me, bearing the lantern above his head. In this manner we proceeded for more than an hour. I began to think that the circuit of the lake must be nearly completed, and now scanned the reaches ahead in momentary expectation that the next cape in the irregular shore must bring into view some mark of our starting-place.

While thus engaged my eye was arrested by what seemed to be a reflection of the lantern from the surface of the lake at a considerable distance. After a little, observing this with greater intentness, I felt my limbs suddenly stiffen with weird fear—for these eccentric movements were not those of Sheldon's lantern. Who then, or what was it, moving off there through the thick gloom above the black water—here and there, to and fro—in quick lines and slowly-executed circles, like some erratic star bewildered in a universal night and wandering through pathless space? Then I noticed its pulsating glimmer as of a firefly, and the Horror that has no name clutched at my throat. Was the creature of Sheldon's dream cruising upon this inky sea? Was this the infernal bird of the caves that glutted its craw with the flesh and blood of human sacrifice? Were we in the presence of the winged reptile, fit accomplice of canting hypocrisy and priestly oppression, in whose name unknown millions had sunk degraded to the mud and expired in despair?

On slid the accursed thing through many moments of wavering and objectless flight, and when at length it neared the shore it was far behind us, so that I was unable to distinguish more than its luminous outline.

"Do you know whom it is seeking?" asked Sheldon.

Poor wretch! I had almost forgotten his existence. Now I realized in an instant what an evil moment had befallen us.

Turning, I grasped his arm. Even as I did so, his gun, slipping from his nerveless hand, splashed into the water. I reached after it, and thrust in my arm to the shoulder; then, clutching by the brink, lowered myself, feet foremost, and felt for the bottom. If only it had caught on some projection of the side!

How vain was my hope! In that black hole there was neither side nor bottom!

Fortunately, we still had the lantern. Seizing Sheldon, who now lagged limply behind, I pressed forward. If we but could find the other gun, this devilish divinity which had outlived the youth of the world and the evil age of its own sway might be shorn of its terror for all time.

That we were in the haunt of a living pterodactyl I was certain; and equally certain was it that the creature was able amid the darkness to light its own path. Then, I reflected, after all, Nature abounded with creatures similarly able to emit a luminous phosphorescence. Though this was not a known property of the pterodactyl, yet there was little very startling in the discovery, nor was it strange that this attribute, linked to its forbidding aspect, should have powerfully impressed the hearts and minds of primitive men.

Suddenly all trace of the phosphorescence vanished—hidden, no doubt, by some intervening spur. The creature had disappeared on the shore between us and the cave.

That cave! I shuddered with uncontrollable terror as the shadow seared upon its wall recurred to my imagination.

As my excitement gradually abated I felt more and more the encumbrance of Sheldon's fainting steps. I had half borne him, as it seemed, an interminable mile, and still there was no sign of the stony slope or the gun at its foot. The character of the shore, too, had changed; the comparatively smooth ledge which overlapped the lake had given way to great broken steps, over which we climbed with great labour, and I was now continually obliged to assist my companion, who seemed to lack all energy for any effort. Against my judgment, I was forced to admit that he needed repose, and while in this mind I came upon a deep sort of recess in the rock well suited to the purpose.

Entering this I obliged him to lie down, and, having extinguished the lantern, I placed myself at the portal. After some time Sheldon fell asleep, and I heard him muttering broken words and phrases of a strange tongue. Then I, too, overcome by weariness, nodded into that calm which resembles death in all but the- awakening.

I am convinced that I had not slept for more than ten minutes at the outside when I started up. My first thought was of Sheldon. He was not there! I felt for the lantern. It, too, was gone! About me the darkness lay dense as a velvet pall, and a terrible thought burned into my brain. In this fearsome place Sheldon

had deserted me! Once, only, I called:—

"Sheldon!"

Though I stifled my very heartbeats to listen, no responsive sound came to my listening sense.

The situation was fraught with the most dreaded perplexities. Yet I must live— and to live I must go on.

Creeping upon my hands and knees along the edge of the rocks, I groped my way for endless minutes, rising many feet above the lake, until the bones of my knees cut through the flesh and my palms were raw from the rough stones.

Suddenly this miserable progress was stopped. A great rock rose before me, lying full to the verge. I stood up to lean against it, but immediately recoiled. At my pressure it had yielded!

Filled with a new dread, I began to creep around it, and had moved but a few yards when, with my right hand advanced like the hoof of an animal, my left suddenly slipped from beneath me. Clutching desperately at the edge, with a superhuman effort I brought myself back to an erect position. I had all but fallen over the brink. How was this? I had followed the brink on my right; here was another on my left!

A little reflection dispelled the mystery. The great table along which for the last hour I had hobbled and crept here ended in a slender point. What was beneath—the shore or the lake?

I lit a precious match and held it till the flame burned to the finger, peering intently downwards into the gloom.

I could discover nothing. The abyss into which I had all but fallen was bottomless! I felt well-nigh paralyzed with the peril of my position. My brain grew giddy; the whirling darkness was streaked with fire. I flattened myself upon the ground and shrank against the unstable rock. The poise of its enormous mass was disturbed. It lurched heavily, grinding on the edge, then tumbled headlong.

Seconds of awful suspense ensued. Then up from the depths came a

far-off, hollow boom. Tremors shook the ground again and again. Then, what sickening sensation was this? The earth moved; it slid, grinding and rasping, into the thundering depths; jarred, as though from the heaving shoulder of a struggling giant, I was hurled many yards into the water.

Dazed and astounded though I was, terror gave me strength and despair courage. I swam for my life, though the lake was rocked with great billows; but when I had reached the shore I feared to climb upon it. I believed that the abyss which separated the lake from the rocky table along which I had journeyed had closed. What effect would this settling of the foundations have upon the walls around? After long waiting through minutes devoid of incident I clambered up and sank in utter exhaustion upon the ledge.

Listening to the restless lapping of the still unquiet water, the torpor of fatigue enchained my senses, and, in a horrible waking dream, Torqua, with the epaulettes of a soldier, and Sheldon, with the cunning face of a priest, peered down upon me out of the hooded darkness, until at last they seemed to lean together above my body and blend in one. Then a thin voice cried:—

"Out of the darkness wert thou born, O Winged Flame of Heaven!"

Immediately many murmurs, that seemed to be rolling and reverberating through vast aisles, made answer:—

"And thou comest to us as a light for ever!"'

Again that horrible thin voice:—

"Is the blood of the youth of Dion turned to water—"

But—Hark! Another!

"Halloa!"

And again—this time louder:—

"Halloa!"

Surely that was not the voice of a dream, nor the cry of a wraith in the caves of the ghosts? I sat up and listened. A far-off sound, like the dull crack of a

whip, came to my ears.

Sheldon! Surely that was Sheldon, and he had found the gun!

In a voice so shaken that the sound went wavering on like a succession of broken echoes, I gave an answering "Halloa!"

The silence was dumb.

"Sheldon!" I shrieked, mustering all my strength into one great cry.

Then came an answer, distant and indistinct—but it was no echo.

Forgetful of the darkness, of the abyss, of the insidious monster whose reptile presence had chilled and tainted the air about me, I hurried forward, careless alike of path or obstacle. Suddenly, turning an angle of the shore, I stopped in astonishment. Scarce a hundred yards away, dazzling the air with brandished lanterns were two figures. As I paused, they shouted.

I could hardly believe my eyes. Neither of the figures was that of Sheldon. Instead, Cummings and Hank stood before me. Me they had not discovered in the darkness, and I saw that they both faced in another direction. Shouting out as I advanced, I hurried forward.

Cummings and Hank barely turned to recognise me. Then the former, in a voice hoarse with excitement. exclaimed:—

"In Heaven's name, Hossman, what is that?"

Moving from beneath a projection, of which in the gloom I had been unaware, I gazed upward. At about two hundred yards distance, to the left poised in space and sowing the air with rills of pale radiance, hung the pterodactyl; it was so near that the low humming of the wings was quite audible. In such wise did it maintain itself that it seemed scarce to move, being intent upon some object beneath which was beyond our vision.

Hanging thus in mid-air, the mighty sweep of its lambent wings, over the edge of which protruded its gleaming claws—the cruel set of its crocodile mouth tense with the strain of a devilish concentration—the ominous poise of its enormous head, and the curve of its snake-like neck—all were such as might

well inspire terror in mere mortals.

As I stared with fascinated gaze I presently became conscious that it was very gradually moving towards us as though pulling on some invisible cord.

Then, O horror! above the rocky shoulder of a cape we had passed some hours before now made visible by this infernal light, appeared the face of a man!

"Sheldon!" gasped Cummings.

Climbing, with uplifted eyes, Sheldon, for it was indeed he, mounted to the crest. Then extending his arms as if in supplication, we distinctly heard the invocation of the priests of Dion—

"O God of the Caves, we await thee!'"

"What is he saying?" muttered Hank.

The pterodactyl, with a sudden movement drew back in such a manner as to fully expose its body and blunt tail, spotted and ringed with phosphorescent dots as though clad in a cuticle of fire.

"It's going to drop. Shel—don! Shel—don!! Shel—don!!!" shrieked Cummings.

At his shoulder Cummings held a gun, and almost with the cry came the report. But the bullet sped far below its mark, and found another for which it was never intended. I saw Sheldon start—half turn, sway where he stood, then—pitch forward into the lake. At the same instant, like a meteor, down darted the pterodactyl, clapping the water with its wings. Then rising, with a discordant screech of fury, it spun round and round in a rage of disappointment, until, perceiving us, it suddenly turned full on us, its green eyes aflame with vengeance, snapping its ponderous jaws with incredible speed the while, and hissing like an enraged goose as it sped towards us.

"It's the Vulture of Hell!" screamed Cummings, throwing aside his gun. Bounding up the stony slope with the agility of a hare, he disappeared.

Through all this I had stood without the power of motion, beads of agonized

sweat bursting from my very brain it seemed.

Now, with no time for retreat, I dropped to the ground and concealed myself beside the very rock against which some hours before I had leant the gun which had just dealt death to poor, infatuated Sheldon. Here, unnoticed, I lay as the monster passed me in its pursuit of Cummings. In a short time it returned and began circling about above the spot where Sheldon's body had disappeared. As it passed over me a second time there dropped upon my hand a fleck of red froth, which I hastily wiped away. It must have contained a virulent poison, for from that momentary contact it has continued to affect me to this day.

To attempt to recover Sheldon's body was clearly as dangerous as it was futile. Therefore, with a low call summoning Hank from his place of concealment, we made our way by stealth up the slope, through the cave where was the portrait, and so out through the toad's mouth to the grotto.

Here Hank and I found Cummings lying unconscious. Between us we dragged and bore him through the flume, now comparatively clear of water, to the outer air; and there, with some difficulty, we revived him. But there was madness in his eyes, and I hailed the return of insensibility, when it speedily came, with a sigh of relief.

A little later, pausing to rest by a pool, I was startled to find that my hair was absolutely white.

That night Cummings raved incessantly, and we were obliged to guard him by turns. The next day, through a drizzling rain, we tramped to Brownhills and took train for our homes.

It was many weeks before health of either mind or body was securely mine again. Often, in the stillness of night, I would leap from my bed with cries of terror, living over again in dreams the awful experience which had brought to Sheldon death, to Cummings madness, to myself blanched locks.

Two years later Dr. Cummings died in a sanatorium. His attendant told me that at the last moment he fancied himself still fleeing from a great, winged monster of fire, which in his ravings he called the Vulture of Hell.

It has been conjectured that some creatures of the reptile world may hibernate for ages. If so, perchance in some dark, silent abyss the pterodactyl sleeps still.

Of that remarkable infatuation which Sheldon had termed a memory little may be said. As for the weird fatality of his career, which has made the dream of one life and the climax of another so closely coincide, it has never ceased to excite the marvel of my mind. Fancy has wrought in me his epitaph. and much musing has made the thought less strange:—

Torqua.
Priest Of Dion.
Twice To Human Knowledge, He Escaped A Terrible Immolation.
Rest To His Soul,
Though Such Reprieves Be Transitory,
For
What Destiny Has Ordained Surely
Fate Will Fulfil.

The Flying Death

A Story in Three Writings and a Telegram

Samuel Hopkins Adams

Part I.—The Tracks in the Sand

Document No. 1. *A Letter of Explanation from Harris Haynes, Reporter for "The New Era," off on Vacation, to his Managing Editor*

Montauk Point, L. I.,
Sept. 20, 1902.

Mr. John Clare
Managing Editor, The New Era,
New York City.

My Dear Mr. Clare: Here is a case for your personal consideration. You will see presently why I have not put it on the wire. If it resolves itself into anything sufficiently reasonable to print, there will be time for that later; at present it is—or, at least, it would appear on paper—a bit of pure insanity. Lest you should think it that, and myself the victim, I have two witnesses of character and reputation who will corroborate every fact in the case, and who go farther with the incredible inferences than I can bring myself to do. They are Professor Willis Ravenden, expert in entomology and an enthusiast in every other branch of science, and Stanford Colton, son of old Colton of the Button Trust, and himself a medical student close upon his diploma. Colton, like myself, is recuperating. Professor Ravenden is studying the metamorphosis of a small, sky-blue butterfly species of bug with a disjointed name which inhabits these parts but is rapidly leaving in consequence of his activity and ardor in the hunt.

We three constitute the total late-season patronage of Third House, and probably five per cent. of the population of this forty square miles of grassland, the remainder being the men of the Life Saving Service, the farmer families of First, Second, and Third Houses, and a little settlement of fishermen on the Sound side. There's splendid isolation for you, within a hundred miles of New York. A good thing, too, if the case works out into something big, for there is little danger of its reaching any of the other newspaper offices.

This afternoon—yesterday, to be accurate, as it is now past midnight—we three went out for a tramp. On our return we ran into a fine, driving rain that blotted out the landscape. It's no trick at all to get lost in this country, where the hillocks were all hatched out of the same egg, and the scrub-oak patches out of the same acorn. For an hour or so we circled around. Then we caught the booming of the surf plainly, and came presently to the crest of the sand-cliff, eighty feet above the beach. As the mist blew away, we saw, a few yards out from the cliff's foot, and a short distance to the east, the body of a man lying on the hard sand.

There was something in the huddled posture that struck the eye with a shock as of violence. With every reason for assuming, at first sight, the body to have been washed up, I somehow knew that the man had not met death by the waves. Where we stood the cliff fell too precipitously to admit of descent; but opposite the body it was lower, and here a ravine cut sharply through a dip between the hills at right angles to the beach. We half fell, half slipped down the abrupt declivity, made our way to the gully's opening, which was almost blocked by a great boulder, and came upon a soft and pebbly beach only a few feet wide, beyond which the hard, clean level of sand stretched to the receding waves. As we reached the open a man appeared around a point to the northward, saw the body, and broke into a run. Colton had started toward the body, but I called him back. I didn't want the sand marked up just then. Keeping close to the cliff's edge, we went forward to meet the man. As soon as he could make himself heard above the surf he hailed us.

"How long has that been there?"

"I've just found it," said Colton as we turned out toward the sea. "It must have been washed up at high tide."

"I'm the patrol from the Bow Hill Station," said the man briefly.

"We are guests at Third House," said I. "We'll go through with this together."

"Come along, then," said he.

We were now on a line with the body, which lay with the head toward the waves. The patrol suddenly checked and exclaimed, "It's Paul Serdholm." Then he rushed forward with a great cry, "He's been murdered!"

'Oh, surely not murdered," expostulated the Professor nervously. "He's been drowned, and—"

"Drowned!" cried the patrol in a heat of contempt. "And how about that gash in the back of his neck? He's the guard from Sand Spit, two miles below. Three hours ago I saw him on the cliff yonder. Since then he's come and gone betwixt here and his station. And—" he gulped suddenly and turned upon us so sharply that the Professor jumped—"what's he met with?"

"The wound might have been made by the surf dashing him on a sharp rock," I suggested.

"No, sir," said the patrol with emphasis.

"The tide ain't this high in a month. It's murder, that's what it is—bloody murder," and he bent over the dead man, with twitching shoulders.

"He's right," said Colton, who had been hastily examining the corpse. "This is no drowning case. The man was stabbed, and died instantly. Was he a friend of yours?" he asked of the patrol.

"No; nor of nobody's, was Paul Serdholm," replied the man. "No later than last week we quarreled." He paused, looking blankly at us.

"How long would you say he had been dead?" I asked Colton.

"A very few minutes."

"Then get to the top of the cliff and scatter," I said. "The murderer must have escaped that way. From the hilltop you can see the whole country. Keep off that sand, can't you? Make a detour to the gully."

"And what will you do?" inquired Colton, looking at me curiously.

'Stay here and study this out," I replied in a low tone. "You and the Professor meet me at Sand Spit in half an hour. Patrolman, if you don't see anything, come back here in fifteen minutes." He hesitated. "I've had ten years' experience in murder cases," I added. "If you will do as you're told for the next few minutes, we should clear this thing up."

No sooner had they disappeared on the high ground than I set myself to the solution of the problem. If you will look at the rough map inclosed, you will see how simple it should have been. Inland from the body stretched the hard beach. Not one of us had stepped between the body and the soft sand into which the cliff sloped. In this mass of rubble, footprints would be indeterminable. Anywhere else they should stand out like the stamp on a coin.

As we approached I had noticed that there were no prints to the north. On the side of the sea there was nothing except numerous faint bird tracks extending almost to the water. Taking off my shoes, I followed the spoor of the dead man. It stood out, plain as a poster, to the westward. For a hundred yards I followed it. There was no parallel track. To make certain that his slayer had not crept upon him from that direction, I examined the prints for the marks of superimposed steps. None was there. Three sides, then, were eliminated. My first hasty glance at the sand between the body and the hills had shown me nothing. Here, however, must be the evidence. Striking off from the dead man's line, I walked out upon the hard surface.

The sand was deeply indented beyond the body, where the three men had hurried across to the cliff. But no other footmark broke its evenness. Not until I was almost on a line between the body and the mouth of the gully did I find a clue. Clearly imprinted on the clean level was the outline of a huge claw. There were the five talons and the nub of the foot. A little forward and to one side was a similar mark, except that it was slanted differently. Step by step, with starting eyes and shuddering mind, I followed the trail. Then I became aware of a second, confusing the first, the track of the same creature. At first the second track was distinct, then it merged with the first, only to diverge again. The talons were turned in the direction opposite to the first spoor. From the body to the soft sand stretched the unbroken lines. Nowhere else within a radius of many yards was there any other indication. The sand lay blank as a white sheet of paper; as blank as my mind, which struggled with one stupefying thought—that between the body of the dead life-saver and the refuge of the cliff no creature had passed except one that stalked on monstrous clawed feet. You will appreciate now, Mr. Clare, that this wasn't just the thing to inflict upon a matter-of-fact telegraph editor, without preparing his mind.

My first thought was to preserve the evidence for a more careful examination. I hastily collected some flat rocks and had covered those tracks nearest the soft sand when I heard a hail. For the present I didn't want the others to know what I had found. I wanted to think it out, undisturbed by conflicting theories.

So I hastily returned, and was putting on my shoes when the Bow Hill patrolman—his name was Schenck—came out of the gully.

"See anything?" I called.

"Nothing to the northward. Have you found anything?"

"Nothing definite," I replied. "Don't cross the sand there. Keep along down. We'll go to the Sand Spit Station and report this."

But the man was staring out beyond my little column of rock shelters.

"What's that thing?" he said, pointing to the nearest unsheltered print. "My God! It looks like a bird track. And it leads straight to the body," he cried in a voice that jangled on my nerves. But when he began to look fearfully overhead, into the gathering darkness, drawing in his shoulders like one shrinking from a blow, that was too much. I jumped to my feet, grabbed him by the arm, and started him along.

"Don't be a fool," I said. "Keep this to yourself. I won't have a lot of idiots prowling around those tracks. Understand? You're to report this murder, and say nothing about what you don't know. Later we'll take it up again."

The man seemed stunned. He walked along quietly, close to me, and it was no comfort to feel him, now and again, shaken by a violent shudder. We had nearly reached the station when Professor Ravenden and Colton came down to the beach in front of us. Colton had nothing to tell. The professor reported having started up a fine specimen of his sky-blue prey, and regretted deeply the lack of his net. If anything but a butterfly had bumped into him I don't believe he would have noticed it.

Before we reached the station, I cleared another point to my satisfaction.

"The man wasn't stabbed. He was shot," I said.

"I'll stake my life that's no bullet wound," cried Colton quickly. "I've seen plenty of shooting cases. The bullet never was cast that made such a gap in a man's head as that. It was a sharp instrument, with power behind it."

"To Mr. Colton's opinion I must add my own, for what it is worth," said Professor Ravenden.

"Can you qualify as an expert?" I demanded with the rudeness of rasped nerves, and in some surprise at the tone of certainty in the old boy's voice.

"When in search of a sub-species of the Papilionidæ in the Orinoco region," said he mildly, "my party was attacked by the Indians that infest the river. After we had beaten them off, it fell to my lot to attend the wounded. I thus had opportunity to observe the wounds made by their slender spears. The incision under consideration bears a rather striking resemblance to the spear gashes which I then saw. I may add that I brought away my specimens of Papilionidæ intact, although we lost most of our provisions."

"No man has been near enough the spot where Serdholm was struck down to stab him," I said. "Our footprints are plain; so are his. There are no others. The man was shot by some one lying in the gully or on the cliff."

"I'll bet you five hundred to five dollars that the autopsy doesn't result in the finding of a bullet," cried Colton.

I accepted, and it was agreed that he should stay and report from the autopsy. At the station I talked with various of the men, and, assuming for the time that the case presented no unusual features of murder, tried to get at some helpful clue. Motive was my first aim. Results were scant. It is true that there was a general dislike of Serdholm, who was a moody and somewhat mysterious character, having come from nobody knew whence. On the other hand, no one had anything serious against him. The four clues that I struck, such as they were, I can tabulate briefly.

(I.) A week ago Serdholm returned from Amagansett with a bruised face. He had been in a street fight with a local loafer who had attacked him when drunk. Report brought back by one of the farmers that the life-saver beat the other fellow soundly, who went away threatening vengeance. Found out by 'phone that the loafer was in Amagansett as late as five o'clock this afternoon.

(II.) Two months ago Serdholm accused a local fisherman of stealing some tobacco. Nothing further since heard of the matter.

(III.) Three weeks ago stranded juggler and mountebank found his way here, and asked aid of Serdholm; claimed to be his cousin. Serdholm turned him down. Man returned next day. Played some tricks and collected a little money from the men. Serdholm, angry at the jeers of the men about his relative, threw

a heavy stick at him, knocking him down and out. As soon as he was able to walk, juggler went away crying. Not since seen.

(IV.) This is the most direct clue for motive and opportunity. Coast-guard Schenck (the man who met us at the scene of the murder) quarreled with the dead man over the daughter of a farmer, who prefers Schenck. They fought, but were separated. Schenck blacked Serdholm's eye. Serdholm threatened to get square. Schenck cannot prove absolute *alibi*. His bearing and behavior, however, are those of an innocent man. Moreover, the knife he carried was too small to have made the wound that killed Serdholm. And how could Schenck—or any other man—have stabbed the victim and left no track on the sand? That is the blank wall against which I come at every turn of conjecture.

Professor Ravenden, Schenck, and I started back, we two to Third House, Schenck to his station. Colton remained to wait for the coroner, who had sent word that he would be over as soon as a horse could bring him. As we were parting Schenck said:

"Gentlemen, I'm afraid there's likely to be trouble for me over this."

"It's quite possible," I said, "that they may arrest you."

"God knows I never thought of killing Serdholm or any other man. But I had a grudge against him, and I wasn't far away when he was killed. The only evidence to clear me is those queer tracks."

"I shall follow those until they lead me somewhere," said I, "and I do not myself believe, Schenck, that you had any part in the thing."

"Thank you," said the guard. "Goodnight."

Professor Ravenden turned to me as we entered the house.

"Pardon a natural curiosity. Did I understand that there were prints on the sand which might be potentially indicative?"

"Professor Ravenden," said I, "there is an inexplicable feature to this case. If you'll come up to my room, I should very much like to draw on your fund of natural history."

When we were comfortably settled I began.

“Do you know this neck of land well?”

“In the study of a curious and interesting variant of the Lycæna pseudargiolus, I have covered most of it, from here to the Hither Wood.”

“Have you ever heard of an ostrich farm about here?”

“No, sir. Such an enterprise would be practicable only in the warm months.”

“Would it be possible for a wandering ostrich or other huge bird, escaped from some zoo, to have made its home here?”

‘’Scientifically quite possible. May I inquire the purpose of this? Can it be that the tracks referred to by the patrol were the cloven hoof-prints of—”

“Cloven hoofs!” I cried in sharp disappointment. “Is there no member of the ostrich family that has claws?”

“None now extant. In the processes of evolution the claws of the ostrich, like its wings, have gradually—”

“Is there any huge-clawed bird large enough and powerful enough to kill a man with a blow of its beak?”

“No, sir,” said the Professor. “I know of no bird which would venture to attack man except the ostrich, emu, or cassowary, and the fighting weapon of this family is the hoof, not the beak. But you will again pardon me if I ask—”

“Professor, the only thing that approached Serdholm within striking distance walked on a foot armed with five great claws.” I rapidly sketched on a sheet of paper a rough, but careful, drawing. “And there’s its sign manual,” I added, pushing it toward him.

Imagination could hardly picture a more precise, unemotional, and conventionally scientific man than Professor Ravenden. Yet, at sight of the paper, his eyes sparkled, he half-started from his chair, a flush rose in his cheeks, he looked briskly and keenly from the sketch to me, and spoke in a voice that rang with a deep under-thrill of excitement.

"Are you sure, Mr. Haynes—are you quite sure that this is substantially correct?"

"Minor details may be inexact. In all essentials, that will correspond to the marks made by something that walked from the mouth of the gully to the spot where we found the body, and back again."

Before I had fair]y finished the Professor was out of the room. He returned almost immediately with a flat slab of considerable weight. This he laid on the table, and taking my drawing, sedulously compared it with an impression, deep-sunken into the slab. For me a single glance was enough. That impression, stamped as it was on my brain, I would have identified as far as the eye could see it.

"That's it," I cried, with the eagerness of triumphant discovery. "The bird from whose foot that cast was made is the thing that killed Serdholm."

"Mr. Haynes," said the entomologist dryly, "this is not a cast."

"Not a cast?" I said in bewilderment. "What is it, then?"

"It is a rock of the Cretaceous period."

"A rock?" I repeated dully. "Of what period?"

"The Cretaceous. The creature whose footprint you see there trod that rock when it was soft ooze. That may have been one hundred million years ago. It was at least ten million."

I looked again at the rock, and unnecessary emotions stirred among the roots of my hair.

"Where did you find it?" I asked.

"It formed a part of Mr. Stratton's stone fence. Probably he picked it up in his pasture yonder. The maker of the mark inhabited the island where we now are—this land was then distinct from Long Island—in the incalculably ancient ages."

"What did this bird thing call itself?" I demanded. A sense of the ghastly ridiculousness of the thing was jostling in the core of my brain, a strong shudder of mental nausea born of the void into which I was gazing.

“It was not a bird. It was a reptile. Science knows it as the Pteranodon.”

“Could it kill a man with its beak?”

‘’The first man came millions of years later—or so science thinks,” said the Professor. “However, primeval man, unarmed, would have fallen an easy prey to so formidable a brute as this. The Pteranodon was a creature of prey,” he continued, with an attempt at pedantry which was obviously a ruse to conquer his own excitement. “From what we can reconstruct, a reptile stands forth spreading more than twenty feet of bat-like wings and bearing a four-foot beak as terrible as a bayonet. This monster was the undisputed lord of the air; as dreadful as his cousins the earth, the Dinosaurs, whose very name carries the significance of terror.”

“And you mean to tell me that this billion-years-dead flying sword-fish has flitted out of the darkness of eternity to kill a miserable coast-guard within a hundred miles of New York, in the year 1902?” I cried. He had told me nothing of the sort. I didn’t want to be told anything of the sort. I wanted reassuring. But I was long past weighing words.

“I have not said so,” replied the entomologist quickly. “But if your diagram is correct, Mr. Haynes—if it is reasonably accurate—I can tell you that no living bird ever made the prints which it produces, that science knows no five-toed bird and no bird,” whatsoever, of sufficiently formidable beak to kill a man. Furthermore, that the only creature known to science which could make that print, and could slay man or a creature far more powerful than man, is the tiger of the air, the Pteranodon. Probably, however, your natural excitement, due to the distressing circumstances, has led you into error, and your diagram is inaccurate.”

“Will you come and see?” I demanded.

“Willingly. I shall have to ask your help however, with the rock. We would best sup first, I think.”

It was a hasty supper. We got a light, for it was now very dark, and, taking turns with the lantern and the Cretaceous slab (which hadn’t lost any weight with age, by the way) we went direct to the shore and turned westward. Presently a light appeared around the face of the cliff, and Colton hailed us. He was on his way back to Third House, but of course joined us in our excursion.

I hastily explained to him the matter of the footprints, the diagram, and the fossil marks.

"Professor Ravenden would have us believe that Serdholm was killed by a beaked ghoul that lived ten or a hundred or a thousand million years ago," I said recklessly. "A few years one way or the other doesn't make any odds."

"I'll tell you one thing," said Colton gravely. "He wasn't killed by a bullet. It was a stab wound. A broad-bladed knife or something of that sort, but driven with terrific power. The autopsy settled that. You lose your bet, Haynes. Why," he cried suddenly, "if you come to that, it wasn't unlike what a heavy, sharp beak would make. But—but—this Pteranodon—is that it?—Oh, the devil! I thought all those pterano-things were dead and buried before Adam's great-grandfather was a protoplasm."

"Science has assumed that they were extinct," said the Professor. "But a scientific assumption is a mere makeshift, useful only until it is overthrown by new facts. We have prehistoric survivals—the gar of our rivers is unchanged from his ancestors of fifteen million years ago. The creature of the water has endured; why not the creature of the air?"

"Oh, come off," said Colton seriously. ''Where could it live and not have been discovered?"

"Perhaps at the north or south pole," said the Professor. "Perhaps in the depths of unexplored islands. Or possibly inside the globe. Geographers are accustomed to say loosely that the earth is an open book. Setting aside the exceptions which I have noted, there still remains the interior, as unknown and mysterious as the planets. In its possible vast caverns there may well be reproduced the conditions in which the Pteranodon and its terrific contemporaries found their suitable environment on the earth's surface, ages ago."

"Then how would it get out?"

"The violent volcanic disturbances of this summer might have opened an exit."

''Oh, that's too much!" I protested. "I was at Martinique myself, and if you expect me to believe that anything came out of that welter of flame and boiling rocks alive—"

''You misinterpret me again," said the Professor blandly. "What I intended to convey is that these eruptions are indicative of great seismic changes, in the course of which vast openings may well have occurred in far parts of the earth. However, I am merely defending the Pteranodon's survival as an interesting possibility. My own belief is that your diagram, Mr. Haynes, is faulty."

"Hold the light here, then," I said, laying down the slab, for we were now at the spot. "I will convince you as to that."

While the Professor held the light I uncovered one of the tracks. A quick exclamation escaped him. He fell on his knees beside the print, and as he compared the to-day's mark on the sand with the rock print of millions of years ago, his breath came hard. I would not care to say that I breathed as regularly as usual. When he lifted his head, his face was twitching nervously.

"I have to ask your pardon, Mr. Haynes," he said. "Your drawing was faithful."

"But what in Heaven's name does it mean?" cried Colton.

"It means that we are on the verge of the most important discovery of modern times," said the Professor. "Savants have hitherto scouted the suggestions to be deduced from the persistent legend of the roc, and from certain almost universal North American Indian lore, notwithstanding that the theory of some monstrous winged creature widely different from any recognized existing forms is supported by more convincing proofs. In the north of England, in 1844, reputable witnesses found the tracks, after a night's fall of snow, of a creature with a pendent tail, which made flights over houses and other obstructions, leaving a trail much like this before us. There are other corroborative instances of a similar nature. In view of the present evidence, I would say that this was unquestionably a Pteranodon, or a descendant little altered and a gigantic specimen, for these tracks are distinctly larger than the fossil marks. Gentlemen, I congratulate you both on your part in so epoch-making a discovery. "

"Do you expect a sane man to believe this thing?" I demanded.

"That's what I feel," said Colton. "But, on your own showing of the evidence, what else is there to believe?"

"But, see here," I expostulated, all the time feeling as if I were arguing in and against a dream. "If this is a flying creature, how explain the footprints leading

up to Serdholm's body, as well as away from it?"

"Owing to its structure," said the Professor, "the Pteranodon could not rapidly rise from the ground in flight. It either sought an acclivity from which to launch itself, or ran swiftly along the ground, gathering impetus for a leap into the air with outspread wings. Similarly, in alighting it probably ran along on its hind feet before dropping to its small fore feet. Now, suppose the Pteranodon to be on the cliff's edge, about to start upon its evening flight. Below it appears a man. Its ferocious nature is aroused. Down it swoops, skims swiftly with pattering feet toward him, impales him on its dreadful beak, then returns to climb the cliff and again launch itself for flight."

All this time I had been holding one of the smaller rocks in my hand. Now I flung it toward the gully and turned away, saying vehemently:

"If the shore was covered with footprints I wouldn't believe it. It's too—"

I never finished that sentence. From out of the darkness there came a hoarse cry. Heavy wings beat the air with swift strokes. In that instant panic seized me. I ran for the shelter of the cliff, and after me came Colton. Only the Professor stood his ground, but it was with a tremulous voice that he called to us:

"That was a common marsh or short-eared owl that arose; the Asio accipitrinus is not rare hereabouts. There is nothing further to do to-night, and I believe that we are in some peril remaining here, as the Pteranodon appears to be nocturnal."

We returned to him ashamed. But all the way home, despite my better sense, I walked under an obsession of terror hovering in the blackness above.

So here is the case as clearly as I can put it. I shall have time to work it out unhampered, as the remoteness of the place is a safeguard so far as news is concerned, and only we three know of the Pteranodon prints.

It is now 4 A.M., and I will send this over by the early wagon, which takes stuff to market. Then I'll get a couple of hours' sleep and go back to the place before anyone else overruns it with tracks. It has come on to rain, and the trail will be wiped out, I fear, except the spots still protected by my rock shelters. Professor Ravenden is going to write a monograph on the survival of the Pteranodon. So there is one basis for a newspaper story. If he can afford to

identify himself with that theory, surely we can.

It seems like a nightmare—formless, meaningless. What you will think of it I can only conjecture. But you must not think that I have lost my senses. I am sane enough; so is Colton; so, to all appearances, is Professor Ravenden. The facts are exactly as I have written them down. I have left no clue untouched thus far. I will stake my life on the absence of footprints. And it all comes down to this, Mr. Clare: Pteranodon or no Pteranodon, as sure as my name is Haynes, the thing that killed Paul Serdholm never walked on human feet.

Very sincerely yours,
Harris D. Haynes.

P.S.—I shall send for a gun to-morrow: and if there's any queer thing flying I'll try to get a shot at it.

Document No. 2. A telegram.

Montauk Point, N. Y.,
8 A.M., Sept. 21, 1902.

John Clare, Managing Editor,
New Era Office, N. Y.

Haynes mysteriously killed on beach this morning. Stab wound through heart. Send instructions.

Willis Ravenden,
Stanford Colton.

Part II. The End of the Trail

Document No. 3 (A). *Extract from letter written by Stanford Colton to his father, John Colton, Esq., of New York City. Date, September 21st, 4 P.M.*

.... So there, my dear dad, is the case against the Pteranodon. To your hard business sense it will seem a thing for laughter. You wouldn't put a cent in Pteranodon stock on the word of an idealistic, scientific theorist like old Ravenden, backed by a few queer marks on a beach. Very well, neither would I. Just the same, I ducked and ran when the owl flapped out from the cliff. And I wonder if you wouldn't have been trailing us to shelter yourself, had you been along.

Now as to poor Haynes. I was the last person to speak to him. He woke me out of a troubled dream walking along the hall at six o'clock this morning.

"Is that you, Haynes?" I called.

"Yes," he said. "I'm off for the beach."

"Wait fifteen minutes, and I'll go with you," I suggested.

"If you don't mind, Colton, I'd rather you wouldn't. I want to go over the ground alone, first. But I wish you'd come down after breakfast, and join me."

"All right," I said. "It's your game to play. Good luck. Oh, hold on a minute. Have you got a gun?"

''No," he answered.

"Better take mine."

"You must have been having bad dreams," he said lightly. "A good night's rest has shooed the Professor's Cretaceous jub-jub bird out of my mental premises. Anyhow, I don't think a revolver would be much use against it, do you? But I'm much obliged."

I was now up and at the door. "Well, good luck," I said again, and for some reason I reached out and shook hands with him.

He looked rather surprised—perhaps just a bit startled—but he only said: "See you in a couple of hours."

Sleep was not for me after that. I tried it, but it was no go. The Stratton family almost expired of amazement when I showed up for seven o'clock breakfast. Half an hour later I was on the way to find Haynes. I went directly down the beach. Haynes had gone this way before me, as I saw by his tracks. It was a dead-and-alive sort of morning—gray with a mist that seemed to smother sound as well as sight. I went forward with dampened spirits and little heart in the enterprise. As I came to the turn of the cliffs that opens up the view down the shore I hallooed for Haynes. No answer came. Again I shouted, and this time as my call drew no answer I confess that a clammy feeling of loneliness hastened my steps. I rounded the cliff at a good pace and saw ahead what checked me like a blow.

Almost at the spot where we had found Serdholm, a man lay sprawled grotesquely. Though the face was hidden and the posture distorted, I knew him instantly for Haynes, and as instantly knew he was dead. There's a bad streak in me, dad, and it came out right there, for I had wheeled to run before I realized the shame of it. Then, thank God, I caught myself, and stopped. As I turned again my foot struck a small rock. It wasn't much of a weapon, but it was the best at hand. I picked it up and went forward to the body, sickening at every step.

Haynes had been struck opposite the gully. The weapon that killed him had been driven with fearful impetus between his ribs, from the back. A dozen staggering prints showed where he had plunged forward before he fell. The heart was touched, and he must have been dead almost on the stroke. His flight was involuntary—the blind, mechanical instinct of escape from death. To one who had seen its like before, there was no mistaking that great gash in his back. Haynes had been killed as Serdholm was. But for what cause? What possible motive of murder could embrace those two who had never known or so much as spoken to each other? No; it was reasonless: the act of a thing without mind: inspired by no motive but the blood-thirst, the passion of slaughter. At that, the picture of the Pteranodon, as the Professor had drawn it, took hold of my mind. I ran to the point whence Haynes had staggered. Beginning there, in double line over the clean sand, stretched the grisly track of the talons. Except for them the sand was untouched.

So great an access of horror possessed me that I became, for the moment,

irresponsible. Perhaps it was instinct that sent me to the sea. I ran in to my knees, dropped on all fours, and not only plunged my head in, but took great gulps of the salt water. The retching that followed cleared my brain. I was able to command myself as I returned to the body of Haynes. Yet it was still with an overmastering repulsion that I scanned the heavens for wings; and when I came to climb to the cliff's top, for a better view, three several times my knees gave way, and I rolled to the gully. Nothing was in sight. Again I returned to the body, now somewhat master of myself. A hasty examination convinced me that Haynes had been dead for some time, perhaps an hour. There was but one thing to do. I set off for the house at my best speed.

Of the formalities that succeeded there is no need to speak; but following what I thought Haynes's method would have been, I investigated the movements of Schenck, the patrolman, that morning. From six o'clock to eight he was at the station. His alibi is solid. In the killing of poor Haynes he had no part. That being proved, sufficiently establishes his innocence of the Serdholm crime. Both were done by the same murderer.

Professor Ravenden is now fixed in his belief that the Pteranodon, or some little-altered descendant, did the murders. I am struggling not to believe it, yet it lies back of all my surmises as a hideous probability. One thing I know, that nothing would tempt me alone upon that beach to-night. To-morrow morning I shall load up my Colt's and go down there with the Professor, who is a game old theorist, and can be counted on to see this through. He is blocking out, this afternoon, a monograph on the survival of the Pteranodon. It will make a stir in the scientific world. Don't be worried about my part in this. I'll be cautious to-morrow. No other news to tell; nothing but this counts.

Your affectionate son,
Stanford.

P. S.—Dad, couldn't you do something to help Haynes's people? Not financially—I don't believe they need that. If they're anything like Haynes, they wouldn't accept it anyhow. But go and see them, and tell them how much we thought of him here, and how he died trying to get at the truth. I've written them, but you can do so much more on the ground.

Document No. 3 (B). *Statement by Stanford Colton regarding his part in the events of the morning of September 22, 1902.*

This is written at the request of Professor Ravenden, to be embodied with his report on the Montauk Point tragedies. On the morning of September 22d (the day after the killing of Harris Haynes) I went to the beach opposite Stony Gully. It was seven o'clock when I reached the point where the bodies of Haynes and Serdholm were found. Professor Ravenden was to have accompanied me. He had started out while I was at breakfast, however, through a misunderstanding as to time. His route was a roundabout one, bringing him to the spot after my arrival, as will appear in his report. I went directly down the shore. In my belt was my revolver.

As I came opposite Stony Gully I carefully examined the sand. It had been much trodden by those who had taken the body of Haynes to the house. Toward the soft beach and the gully's mouth, however, there had been no effacement, though there was a slight blurring effected by a mild fall of rain. My first action was to look carefully about the country to discover any possible peril near by. Having satisfied myself that I was not threatened, I set about inspecting the sand. There were no fresh marks. The five-taloned tracks were in several places almost as distinct as on the previous day. Fortunately, owing to the scanty population and the slow transmission of news, there had been very few visitors to the scene, and those few had been careful in their movements, so the evidence was not trodden out.

For a closer examination I got down on my hands and knees above one of the tracks. There was the secret if I could but read it. The footprint was in all respects the counterpart of the sketch made by Haynes, and of the impress on the Cretaceous rock of Professor Ravenden. I might have been in that posture two or three minutes, my mind immersed in conjecture. Then I rose, and as I stood and looked down, there suddenly flashed into my brain the solution. I started forward to the next mark, and as I advanced, something sang in the air behind me. I knew it was some swiftly flying thing; knew in the same agonizing moment that I was doomed; tried to face my death; and then there was a dreadful, grinding shock, a flame with jagged teeth tore through my brain, and I fell forward into darkness.

Document No. 4. *The explanation by Professor Willis Ravenden, F.R.S., etc., of the events of September 20, 21, 22, 1902, surrounding the death of Paul Serdholm and Harris Haynes, and the striking down of Stanford Colton.*

Of the events of the three days, September 20, 21, and 22, 1902, at Montauk Point, culminating in my own experience of the final date, I write with some degree of pain due to the personal element in my own attitude toward the case, and, as such, unworthy of a balanced intelligence. It is the more difficult for me to recount equably these matters, in that I was shaken, at successive moments of the *dénoûment*, by many and violent passions: grief, fear, horror, and, finally, an inhuman rage which shamefully rankles in my memory. Yet what I here set down is told with such fidelity as I can achieve, bearing due reference to the comparative value of the elements, and without, I trust, unnecessary circumlocution or undue obtrusion of my own sentiments and theories.

Upon the death of my esteemed young friend, Mr. Haynes, I made minute examination of the vestigia near the body. These were obviously the footprints of the same creature that killed Serdholm, the coastguard. Not only the measurements and depth of indentation, but the intervals corresponded exactly with those observed in the first investigation. The non-existence of five-toed birds drove me to the consideration of other winged creatures, and certainly none may say that, with the evidence on hand, my hypothesis of the survival and reappearance of the Pteranodon was not justified.

Having concluded my examination into the circumstances of Mr. Haynes's death, I returned to Third House and set about embodying the remarkable events in a monograph. In this work I employed the entire afternoon and evening of the 21st, with the exception of an inconsiderable space devoted to a letter which it seemed proper to write to the afflicted family of Mr. Haynes, and in which I suggested for their comfort the fact that he met his death in the noble cause of scientific investigation. In pursuance of an understanding with Mr. Colton, he and I were to have visited, early on the following morning, the scene of the tragedies. By a misconception of the plan, I started out before he left, thinking that he had already gone. My purpose was to proceed to the spot along the cliffs, instead of by the beach, this route affording a more favorable view, though an intermittent one, as it presents a succession of smoothly rolling hillocks. Hardly had I left the house when the disturbance of the grasses incidental to my passage put to' flight a fine specimen of the Lycæna pseudargiolus, whose variations I have been investigating. I had, of course, taken my net with me,

partly, indeed, as a weapon of defense, as the butt is readily detachable, and heavily loaded.

In the light of subsequent events I must confess my culpability in allowing even so absorbing an interest as this that suddenly beset my path to turn me from my engagement to meet Mr. Colton. Instinctively, however, I pursued the insect. Although this species, as is well known, exhibits a power of sustained flight possessed by none other of the lepidopteræ of corresponding wing-area, I hoped that, owing to the chill morning air, this specimen would be readily captured. Provocatively, as it would seem, it alighted at short intervals, but on each occasion rose again as I was almost within reach. Thus lured on I described a half-circle, and was, approximately, a third of a mile inland, when finally I netted my prey from the leaves of a Quercus ilicifolia. Having deposited it in the cyanide of potassium jar which I carried on a shoulder-strap, I made haste, not without some quickenings of self-reproach, toward the cliff. Incentive to greater haste was furnished by a fog-bank that was approaching from the south. Heading directly for the nearest point of the cliff I reached it before the fog arrived. The first object that caught my eye, as it ranged for the readiest access to the beach, was the outstretched body of Colton lying upon the hard sand where Serdholm and Haynes had met their deaths. He was barely within my scope of vision, the nearer beach being cut off from sight by the cliff line.

I may say, without intemperance of expression, that for the moment I was stunned into inaction. Then came the sense of my own guilt and responsibility. Along the cliff I ran at full speed, dipped down into a hollow, where, for the time, the beach was shut off from view, and surmounted the hill beyond, which brought me almost above the body a little to the east of the gully. The fog, too, had been advancing swiftly, and now as I reached the cliff's edge it spread a gray mantle over the body lying there alone.

Already I had reached the edge of the gully, when there moved very slowly out upon the hard sand a thing so out of all conception, an apparition so monstrous to the sight, that my net fell from my hand, and a loud cry burst from me. In the gray folds of mist it wavered, assuming shapes beyond comprehension. Suddenly it doubled on itself, contracted to a compact mass, underwent a strange inversion, and before my clearing vision there arose a man, dreadful of aspect indeed, but still a human being, and, as such, not beyond human powers to cope with. Coincidently with this recognition I noted a knife, inordinately long of blade and bulky of handle, on the sand almost under Colton.

Toward this the man had been moving when my cry arrested him, and now he stood facing the height with strained eye and bestially gnashing teeth.

Here was no time for delay. The facile descent of the gully was out of the question. It was over the cliff or nothing, for if Colton was alive his only chance was that I should reach his assailant before the latter could come at the knife. Upon the flash of the thought I was in mid-air, a giddy terror dulling my brain as I plunged down through the fog. Fortunately for me—for the bones of sixty years are brittle—I landed upon a slope of soft sand. Forward I pitched, threw myself completely over, and, carried to my feet by the impetus, ran down the lesser slope upon the man.

That he was obsessed by a mania of murder was written on his face and in his eyes. But now his expression, as he turned toward me, was that of a beast alarmed. To hold his attention, I shouted. The one desideratum was to reach him before he turned again to the knife and Colton.

The maniac crouched as I ran in upon him, and I must confess to a certain savage exultation as I noted that he had little the advantage of me in size or weight. Although not a large man, I may say that I am of wiry frame, which my out-of-door life has kept in condition. So I felt no great misgivings as to the outcome. We closed. As my opponent's muscles tightened on mine I knew, with a sudden, daunting shock, that I had met the strength of fury. For a moment we strained, I striving for a hold which would enable me to lift him from his feet. Then with a rabid scream the creature dashed his face into my shoulder, and bit through shirt and flesh until I felt the teeth grate on my shoulder-blade. Not improbably this saved my life and Colton's. For, upon the outrage of that assault, fury not less insane than that of my enemy fired me, and I, who have ever practised a certain scientific austerity of emotional life, became, to my dishonor, a raging beast. Power as of steam flashed through every vein; strength as of steel distended every muscle. Clutching at the throat of my assailant I tore that hideous face from my shoulder. My right hand, drawn back for a blow, twitched the cord of my heavy poison bottle. Shouting aloud I swung the formidable weapon up and brought it down upon his head with repeated blows. His grasp relaxed. I sprang back for a fuller swing and beat him to the ground. The jar was shattered, but such was my ecstasy of murderousness that I forgot the specimen of pseudargiolus, which fell with the fragments and was trodden into the sand.

In my hand I still held the base of the jar. My head was whirling. I staggered

backward, and with barely sense enough left to know that the deadly fumes of the cyanide were doing their work, flung it far away. A mist fell like a curtain somewhere between my eyes and my brain, befogging the processes of thought. That Colton was now sitting up, I knew to be a hallucination. Colton was dead—Colton was dead, said the spirit of murder deep in my brain, and it remained for me to kill his slayer. The world reeled about me, so I dropped to all fours and crawled to the man. That Colton should seem to have arisen, and to be staggering toward us, further enraged me. It was but fair that he should not interfere until I had finished my work. There was blood on the man's face—my blood and his—as I set my fingers to his throat. Another moment and I should have had the murder of a fellow-man on my soul, but an arm slipped under my chest, and a voice gasped:

"In God's name, Professor, don't kill the poor devil!"

My hold relaxed. I felt myself lifted, and then I was lying on my back, looking into Colton's white face. I must have been saying something, for Colton replied, as if to a question:

"It's all right, Professor. There's no pseudargiolus or Pteranodon, or anything. Just lie quiet for a moment."

But it was borne in upon me that I had lost my prize. "Let me up!" I cried. "I've lost it! It fell when the poison jar broke."

"There, there," he soothed, as one calms a delirious person. "Just wait—"

"I'm speaking of my specimen, the pseudargiolus." The mist was beginning to lift from my brain, and the mind now swung dizzily back to the great speculation. "The Pteranodon?" I cried, looking about me.

"There." Colton laughed shakily as he pointed to the blood-besmeared form lying quiet on the sand.

"But the footprints! the footprints! The fossil marks on the rock?"

"Footprints on the rock. Handprints, here."

"Handprints!" I repeated; "Tell me slowly. I must confess to a degree of bewilderment to which I am not accustomed."

"No wonder, sir. Here it is. I saw it all just before I was hit. This man is Serdholm's cousin, the juggler. He's crazy, probably from Serdholm's blow. He's evidently been waiting for a chance to kill Serdholm. That rock in the gully's mouth is where he waited. You've seen circus-jugglers throw knives. You know with what marvelous skill they do it. Well, that's the way he killed Serdholm. In his crazy cunning he saw that footprints would give him away, so he utilized another of his circus tricks and recovered the knife by walking on his hands. Perhaps the snipe tracks hereabout suggested it."

"But Mr. Haynes? And yourself?"

"I don't know why he wanted to kill us unless he feared we would discover his secret. I escaped because I was going forward as he threw, and that must have disturbed his aim so that the knife turned in the air and the handle struck me, knocking me senseless."

Here the juggler groaned, and we busied ourselves with bringing him to. He is now in an asylum, with a fair chance of recovery.

Mr. Colton is entirely recovered from his experience, as am I, except for an inconvenient stiffness in the muscles of my right shoulder where I was bitten. My physician advises that I train myself to manipulate the capturing-net with my left hand. After a long search I found the remains of the pseudargiolus specimen, with one wing almost intact. It may still be of aid in my work on the structural changes of this species. My monograph on the Pteranodon, it is hardly needful to state, will not be published. At the same time I maintain that the survival of this formidable creature, while now lacking definite proof, is none the less strictly within the limits of scientific possibility.

Willis Ravenden.

Manmat'ha

Charles De Kay

One day the breeze was talking of grand and simple things in the pines that look across the lower bay at Sandy Hook. The great water spaces were a delicious blue, dotted with the white tops of crushed waves; to the left, Coney Island lay mapped out in bleached surfaces, while beyond and seaward, from the purple sleeve formed by the hills of the Navesink, the Hook ran a brown finger eastward. A hawk which nests among the steep inclines of Todt Hill shot out from a neighboring ravine and hung motionless, but never quiet, in the middle distance.

Birds and beasts will make closer approach to a person clothed in dun-colored garments; therefore it was not odd that the hawk should not notice my presence on the pine needles near the crest of the hill. After steering without visible rustle of a feather through the lake of air before me, he stooped all at once, grasped a hedge-sparrow that had been shaking the top of a bush far down the slope, and, rising, bore it to the low branch of a pine not far from my resting-place.

The sun had fallen in a Titanic tragedy of color beyond Prince's Bay. The fierce bird, leisurely occupied in tearing to pieces the little twitterer, was a suitable accompaniment to the bloody drama in the clouds. Watching keenly, I gradually began to picture to myself the sensation of walking unseen to the murderous fowl and suddenly clasping his smooth back with both hands. How startled he would be! But in truth the thought was only a continuation of another that had been floating through my mind while the hawk was wheeling. Unconsciously I had been mumbling to myself from the Nibelungen,—

"About the tameless dwarf-kin I have heard it said,
They dwell in hollow mountains; for safety are arrayed
In what is termed a tarn-kap, of wondrous quality;
Who hath it on his body preserved is said to be
From cuttings and from thrustings; of him is none aware
When he therein is clothed. Both see can he, and hear
According as he wishes, yet no one him perceives."

The magic cloak, the tarn-kap, I reasoned, with my eyes on the cruel bird,

was only a symbol after all, something physical to make real that invisibility which we cannot readily conceive. But suddenly—could my wish have been felt?—the hawk gave a hoarse croak of fright, dropped his prey, and, springing heavily into the air, was gone.

He had not looked at me, he had not seen or heard me, nor could I see, far or near, the slightest cause for his terror. But I heard! Sh-sh-sh—I was aware of a light step in the needles under the tree he had left. Straining my eyes to watch the ground, surely, surely, in a line passing close to my couch, the needles and thin grass were pressed down, as if by a weight applied at even distances! I had remained motionless as a figure of stone, but when a tuft of hepatica, blooming late where the shade was deepest, fell crushed near my hand, I reached out. As luck would have it I was too conscious, too much ashamed at my own folly to act decisively. I did not grasp, I reached out—and touched a living thing.

On such occasions there comes at first the exuberance of joy; then doubt. I had long debated the possibility of invisibles. As far back as I can remember, elfin tales produced an awful wonderment upon my imagination. On long May nights have I not often stolen from the house to watch for elves? A moon after a rain was to my thinking the best for such mysterious beings, when everything was hazy with an imperceptible mist, when the dogwoods had flooded the landscape with sheets of reflected white, and somebody was drawing one veil after another slowly past a golden shield in the sky. On such nights, more than once, a boy might have been seen creeping on tiptoe through the open woods, over the great clearing, to the hilltop, where, if anywhere, brownies must play. But none did he espy, nor did the chance-flung cap ever fall upon his eager, outstretched hands. And if in later years the subject still fascinated me, it made me feel what the grown man realizes always more clearly, that fables and fairy tales rest on a solid groundwork of fact. Why, when so many other legends have been verified, should this universal tradition of vanishers and invisibles prove entirely false?

It occurs to one very soon that animal life does exist of so transparent a texture that to all intents and purposes it is invisible. The spawn of frogs, the larvæ of certain fresh-water insects, many marine animals, are of so clear a tissue that they are seen with difficulty. In the tropics a particular inhabitant of smooth seas is as invisible as a piece of glass, and can be detected only in the love season by the color which then mingles in its eyes. On reflection a thousand instances arise of assimilation of animal life to their surroundings, of

mimicry of nature with a view to safety. Why, then, by survival of the most transparent, should not some invisible life of a high grade hold a secure position on the earth?

Pondering thus, I had been startled not a little by coming now and again on facts that seemed to bear this out. Strange tracks through untrodden grass suggested footsteps of the unseen. Flattened spaces of peculiar shape in the standing rye, where human beings could not have intruded, looked marvellously like human visitation. Or I lay concealed and watched the crows in a road-side field. What was it caused them to look up suddenly and flap away on sooty-fringed wings? No bird, beast, or man came. Then the rats, scampering about under a dock like so many gaunt Virginia swine: all at once came a flurry of whisking tails, and they were off! Yet I had not stirred, nor did anything move on the dock above. Nevertheless all seemed to realize a common danger, a noise of some kind,—perhaps a step? Again, you sit like a block while a snake basks unconscious in the sun, and may watch many hours without event; but sometimes it happens that he raises his head, quivers for an instant his double tongue, and slides off the stump into a bush. At such times put your ear to the earth. Do you not distinguish—or is it all imagination—a sound, a brushing?

It availed me little, then, that I should have considered the subject, or have even gone the length of debating how a man might attain invisibility. Now that I had a tangible proof of the existence of such beings, I was crushed by misgivings. Like many a man before the supposed impossible, I questioned my own sanity. As to the impression, however, the object I had touched or fancied I had touched was at once hard and soft, smooth and rough; I recalled it as each of these in turn, for it was moving, and at the moment of contact bounded away as if at the shock of a galvanic current. To my excited mind the dusky woods were becoming oppressive, and so, like the hawk, but slowly and pondering, I betook myself home.

Who that has walked or run through autumn woods at night has not sometimes looked curiously over his shoulder at the sound of following steps? It always proves to be dry leaves whirled after you in your rapid course; but this evening my gait was slow, and the leaves of last year were hard to find; nor could I account, except on the ground of nervous illusion, for the pattering that followed in my rear. Yet there it was, albeit so gentle that had I not stretched every sense to the utmost I am confident no sound would have penetrated to my consciousness. And it was evident that I was thoroughly imposed upon by it, for when the small, irregular pond was reached, which, with a cypress-scattered

hillock, occupies the highest point of the main hill to the westward, I halted a moment and considered. How, thought I, will this unseen attendant cross a piece of water? Throwing off my shoes I waded over a shallow arm of the pond, and sat down to watch. Presently in the twilight two wedges of ruffled water were discerned advancing swiftly across the surface,—just such tracks as serpents make in swimming,—a light touch was heard on the bank, and all was still. But then a sudden disgust, unreasoning and childish, mastered me completely; a wave of doubt greater than before filled me with disdain of my own imbecility, and I hastened through the orchard to my home, and flung myself into an arm-chair near the window.

The place I had selected long ago as a quiet refuge was a low veranda farm-house, hidden away from north winds under the crest of a hill, and crept over by many rods of honey- suckle. Events had so affected me that I considered nothing left in life but an alternation of hard work and of utter retreat from humanity, and had disposed me favorably toward the ancient apple orchard, and the meagre vegetable and flower garden, which alone remained of a former farm. The barns, the plowed lands, and the fences had disappeared. Only a heavy stone wall with flagged top, which protected the garden from the road, reminded one of a former powerful owner. From the veranda no house was visible; the eye had to travel many miles across the flat lower country to the bay before the distant ships recalled a busy world.

Here, beside myself, lived no one save Rachel, a woman whose Indian origin made it impossible to guess her age. Although she claimed for herself the purest descent from an Indian tribe of a headland a hundred miles to the eastward, and although her features were not without strong marks of her claim, yet in strict truth she was so much mixed with African blood that with most persons she would pass for a negress. Rachel had a talent for cooking breakfasts and suppers from little apparent supply; she was taciturn to speechlessness, hence our intercourse was never marred by discord; and while her box was kept supplied with strong tobacco, a slender meal of some kind was never wanting; and it was served in silence.

For two years Rachel and I had lived in this silent, limited partnership. My home was cool and soundless as the grave, a place in which the mind could stretch its shriveled wings, where everything could be done mechanically and without fear of a sudden jar into disagreeable reality. When of an afternoon I stepped from the hurrying world into the first quiet woods on the way to my home, a great door swung to behind me and another life began, in which

Rachel's figure and swarthy, heavy-featured face had long ceased to interfere with my meditation.

This night, however, before the meal was served, the kitchen door opened and my housekeeper's inscrutable dull eyes rolled around the walls of the room; then it closed. What had happened? Why on this night had Rachel noticed my arrival? At supper I broke our unspoken compact and addressed her.

"Rachel, what made you look in just now? Has anything happened?"

The woman made no reply, yet there was evidence in her manner that she was groping for an answer. Presently to a second demand she made a reply that startled me:

"Heard two of you."

So, another ear had detected the steps as well as my own! Then the being, whatever it was, must be in the room, possibly at my elbow; or, seated perchance on that chair before me, was regarding me steadfastly! Except for the excitement bred of a new sensation, it was not a pleasant thought; nevertheless, I pulled a second chair to the table and filled a second plate with food; then, with my eyes fixed on the plate, continued the meal. It was all in vain. Nothing further was seen or heard.

This was my first definite encounter with that unseen which I would have called a spirit had I been a spiritualist. But I could not force myself to the gross materialism of calling this invisible existence a spirit, for tangibility was a quality I could not associate with pure spirit, and I had touched it.

Having once followed me, it seemed thenceforth to take up quarters in my house, at least for the evening and morning hours of the day, and strange as it was, I soon learned to regard the presence of a third person as an established fact; indeed, I came to believe that in some instances a faint breathing might be detected. Nevertheless I would not leave anything to the possibilities of imagination, but was always experimenting, with a view to prove still more clearly that there was no illusion possible. To this end a brass and steel rod, fitted between the floor and a projection from the wall, was connected with an indicator which moved in a large are when the slightest touch shook the floor. By this means my ears were reinforced by sight.

I also began systematically to conceal from the unknown guest the fact that I suspected its presence; but at last the point was reached where, to protect my own reason, it must be settled whether it was all a series of illusions or a sober truth.

For by dint of thought a scheme had been perfected, and on a Sunday morning, when as usual Rachel had disappeared, no man has ever known whither; when, according to its custom, the strange visitant had also, to all appearance, withdrawn,—on a Sunday morning I hastened to put my plan in action. On the main floor in the rear of the house was a chamber, into which the sounds had sometimes intruded, which was small, bare, and lighted by one deep window looking directly out on the orchard. This window I had grated strongly with heavy wire on the outside, where the orchard hill rose steeply from the house; and over against the window, in the wall between chamber and dining-room, was a high closet, in which I had stored a strong net, such as fishermen use for their seines. Fastening stout wires to the ceiling from one end of the room to the other, to be used for slides, and rigging several small blocks above the window and near the floor, I stretched the necessary ropes from closet to blocks and back again, laid everything ready for instant use, cleared the room of furniture, and awaited events.

There was no fear of interruption from Rachel, for during the years we had lived together I had never seen her on a Sabbath. Every Monday she was at her post, although laboring under some excitement, which showed itself in mutterings and a certain wild gesture that I had learned to attach no importance to. There was no fear that I should not have the invisible to myself.

Evening came to close a sultry day with growls of distant thunder and sudden flares of light behind Navesink Hills; the bushes drooped languidly; only the tree-toads were clamorous, and their jubilee was a mournful one on every side. I was sitting by the west window with my head on my breast, and, now that the crisis had come, almost apathetic to the presence itself, when its approach took place. It seemed to stop near my chair, as if it regarded me closely. I had been before in singular predicaments, but it seemed to me this was the most trying. I felt that I must look very pale, but with an affectation of indifference I arose, walked across the room and entered the bed-chamber. In a moment I understood that the unseen had likewise passed the sill and had entered the room; then I slammed the door, locked it, and put the key in my pocket.

Everything had been made ready to cope with a material and not a supernatural being; still it was purely a venture, and at no previous time had there seemed so little hope of success. Nevertheless not a moment was lost in hauling out the net and placing it in position across the room so that it hung straight, filling the space between wall and wall, and ceiling and floor. Then I began to draw it down the room by means of the ropes, and on the axis of the chamber, so that its edges passed smoothly along ceiling, walls, and floor. The anxious moment was at hand.

All the running gear had to be worked evenly; at the same time every nerve was strained in order to detect the slightest bulge in the upright net, should it come in contact with a tangible body.

Until three quarters of the room had been sifted nothing occurred. Then I saw the edge against the left-hand wall carefully drawn aside; to spring forward and close the opening was the instinctive work of a second. Terror combining with a fierce delight lent me an extraordinary force; I drew with convulsive power on the ropes. Every moment an invisible hand seemed to lift the net at some point, but each attempt was luckily frustrated. At last the movements ceased, and I drew the net flat against the farther wall. With feverish haste my hand travelled over its entire surface; the net was scanned in profile for the impression of a body, but there was none. The game had either escaped or withdrawn into the deep window-seat.

Now came a moment for breath, and for reflection. Again the cynical cloud of doubt folded me in. Dupe of my own morbid imagination, I should stand convicted of monomania in the eyes of any reasonable being who should see my actions. Then it was best, was it not? to tear the net away; or should I deliberately pursue to the utmost a plan begun? Never before had I so clearly felt a dual existence urging to opposite courses of action, as if the body's instinct commanded an advance, while the mind, assailing the whole proceeding with ridicule, was for giving up the game. But for all that it was a good sign that I began to feel a slight awe at the near possibility of a discovery. For I retreated to the door, unlocked it, and stood irresolute; then returned again to the window, without strength to come to a decision.

But while I pondered, a low, chuckling noise startled me, and Rachel stood by my side, erect and with features full of energy, her dull eyes blazing, and her short straight hair tossed about; in her hand she brandished with exultation a carved rod hung with bright claws and shells, with lappets of fur and hair; and

at her and it I gazed with speechless amazement. Had she too gone mad? She took a few steps, as if in a rude dance, and shook the stick, and while her eyes glared into mine she nodded her head to the time.

''Bad spirit!" she muttered. "I have known, I have heard. But this is strong Wabeno."

As she shook the talisman, which clinked and rattled like the toy of a devil, I snatched the medicine stick from her hand and motioned her to the door. Thither she retreated, muttering words of an unknown tongue, and when it closed upon her I flung the stick angrily on the floor. But hope had come, and decision as well, although from a despised quarter; I was resolved to finish the undertaking at all hazards.

The wild flames of the distant storm still lighted everything at intervals with an intensity now greater and now less. When the sheet lightning flashed strong, the square cage formed by the wire outside the window-seat and the fish-net within stood out clear against the northern sky. With dilated pupils I began to examine the inclosed cube of air. During one particularly long and vivid flash,—there, in that corner, was there not a heap, a translucent shape, indistinguishable in quality or form? It was enough. Swiftly as wild beasts when they spring, I raised the net, leaped into the window, and grasped toward the corner where I thought I saw the mass.

II.

A thrill runs through the nerves of an entomologist when he puts his hand on a specimen unknown, undescribed. The hunter trembles when he espies in the thicket the royal hart whose existence has been called a fable. My emotion was all of this, intensified; nearer, perhaps, to the feeling of the elected mortal who has discovered a new continent. For I had discovered a new world.

Had I not cause for exultation? I sat on the window-seat in the alternate light and darkness, with one hand clenched, the other arm curved in the air; my left held fast a slender wrist, while my right was cast about a pair of delicate shoulders; the invisible but tangible figure was crouched away into the smallest space in the corner of the window.

With awe I now realized that my capture was a woman. The delicate

moulding of the shoulders and hand was proof enough, but I also felt on my arm a light flood of the silkiest hair. This was a shock to one who had lived apart from women for several years, and had good cause to expect nothing but disaster from their influence. For a moment the impulse was strong to release the captive; luckily reason prevailed, and I tightened my grip on the frail prize, whose frame was shaken with sobs and whose bearing denoted the most abject despair. I gave many timid reassurances by word and hand before the sobs came slower and fear began to loose its hold. As she raised her head I took occasion to pass my right hand lightly over her face. Rendered sensitive by strong excitement, my palm read her features as the blind read the raised print of their books, and of this at least I was sure: the features were human, straight, the eyes large; a full chin and a mouth of unspeakable fineness were divined rather than felt by my flying touch; but I found no trace of tears.

After this I do not know how long we sat. It seemed peaceful and homelike, so that I wondered how it was possible so quickly to forget wonder. A protective warmth toward the creature whose soft breathing came and went; slower and slower near my face took a quiet hold on all my senses. At last the gentle head drooped like a tired child's, the delicate shoulders heaved in a long, peaceful sigh, and to my amazement the strange captive fell asleep in my arms.

So while she slept I sat motionless and thinking, thinking. Who was she? whence and of what order of beings? What was her language; how and how long did she live. Was she really alive in our sense of the word, that is, human with the exception of her transparency? and was her shape like that of ordinary mortals, or did she end in some monstrosity like a mermaid? Such were the questions agitating me when interruption came with a knock at the door. My captive awoke and instinctively started away, at the same time giving a low, articulate cry; but I held her firmly, and called to Rachel to bring me a certain relic of slavery which had been brought from the South. I had profited by the discovery my prisoner's awakening furnished: the invisible, I argued, could articulate, then why should she not understand and speak the language of the people among whom she was found? Accordingly a few rapid questions were put to her, which were unanswered. Then I bethought me of a proof that at any rate she understood my words.

"My dear child, it is mere perverseness in you to refuse an answer. I am sure you understand. You are in my power for good or evil, and if you refuse to speak I must consider you worthy of the following treatment: you shall be made an example to the crowd of the reality of invisible life."

Under cruel treatment of this kind, conjecture became certainty; I felt her shudder at the idea, and she laid her hand appealingly on mine. This was all I wanted; speech was now a mere affair of time.

Rachel entered with the rusty handcuffs and handed them to me as if she were conscious and acquiescent in what I did. Not a feature moved, only her eyes shone with inner excitement, in a way I had seen before, while I clasped one link about the unseen wrist.

"Pardon," I whispered, "I do not know you yet. I cannot trust you."

My daily work ceased. To the few inquiries from the great city Rachel had evasive answers ready; they were soon over, and I was left to experience the fascination of a beautiful woman whom I had never seen nor could hope ever to see. To be sure, in certain lights and under certain angles of reflection an indistinct outline of a not large, slender girl, which told of pure contours, could be made out, but this was like following the glassy bells that pulsate far down in the waves of northern seas, or the endeavor to catch the real surface of a mirror. Moreover, the slim captive herself resented any attempt to gain acquaintance with her through the eyes. But by degrees the reserve which had taken the place of her terror melted away before gentle and respectful management, and from her own lips I learned much concerning her marvelous race, before the love which presently overwhelmed us put an end to the cooler interests of reason. Thus she astonished me by speaking of her race as widely spread through almost every inhabited land. They never work or educate their children; their food, which is chiefly in liquid form, is taken from the stores laid up by human beings, and such education as they get is picked up by continual contact with mortals. While their passions would seem to be calm, their only laws relate to the observance of secrecy as to their presence on the earth. To secure this end they meet at stated periods and renew their solemn vows, keep a watch upon each other, and disperse again to a settled or wandering life, but one always dependent on the labors of other beings. This alone would explain the paramount importance attaching to secrecy. And as it is impossible to keep always all hint of their existence from human beings, the penalties for disclosure in the latest days have increased to far greater severity than was used in simpler ages; Manmat'ha could not be brought to tell me the fate which awaited her should it be discovered that she had revealed the great secret of her nation, and the very quiet with which she gave me to understand how vast was the danger impressed me more than the most violent words.

It must have been the pain that the thought of any harm befalling her produced in me, which opened my eyes to the strength of my passion. The time for questions had passed, and the days were long only that we might love. One day glided after another unheeded, while we strolled about the neighboring woody hills to catch a broad glimpse of the sea from this point, or to examine in that swampy valley the minute wonders of life in plants and insects. At an early stage of our intimacy I had begged to free her wrist from the handcuffs, but she had implored me to continue at least the appearance of slavery, to serve, in case of need, as a partial excuse for violation of her vows. This did not prevent her daily disappearance during the middle hours when the sun was strongest; but these absences only served to give a time for reflection on her beauties and to involve me deeper in the love which now mastered all my thoughts. There was one subject which was long in broaching, but when the necessary courage was summoned, found in Manmat'ha neither objection nor response. She did not comprehend its force. The subject was our marriage.

I had resolved on legal marriage, even if it were necessary to be content with only one witness to the ceremony; that witness could be no one except Rachel. My housekeeper had regarded my preparations and subsequent conduct with a consistent interest and without the least shadow of surprise, and once I remarked that she had caught sight in the twilight of a cup raised without hands; yet no hint fell from her lips to make me feel she was intruding on my affairs. The old blur was in her eyes; the only change in manner was her treatment of me: she regarded me with a kind of awe. And after it had proved abortive to tell her something and not all, because the pleasure of unbosoming myself of so much love was too great to restrain, I found Rachel not only full of faith, but even surpassing me. She looked upon Manmat'ha as a supernatural being, and plainly invested me with reflected holiness. Some sort of worship she thought due to Manmat'ha, whilst I, as high priest and mortal consort, was entitled to a share; and indeed it was with some difficulty that I persuaded her not to show her faith by uncouth rites. It was as if her life had been a preparation for some such affair as this, and found her enthusiastic, but not astonished.

Our favorite resort was the couch of pine needles looking south from the hillside where we first met. The same hawk, to me the most blessed of birds, would often sail as before in the middle distance, or night-hawks would cut their strange curves in the evening sky. Far out beyond, sea-gulls, mere specks of white, would wheel and plunge into the bay, and at our backs the woodcock, shy enough in any other presence, would whir fantastically through

the woods. All nature was the same, but I was no longer its solitary admirer, for I held in my arms a gentle framework of delight such as no other man before or since has known. She was finer than the finest silk, smoother than the smoothest glass, as if the rays of light, falling on the amazing texture of her skin, found no inequalities from which to reflect.

One evening we had been drawing in long breaths of that delight of which the woods and the great bowl of landscape before us were so full, and I had been trying to convince Manmat'ha of the importance of the marriage ceremony. "What," I asked with some trouble in my heart, "what will they do to you in case members of your nation discover your position? I do not mean to ask you what you would not tell me before, but what would be their first step?"

"They would imprison me somewhere under a guard," said Manmat'ha. "It would be many months before a tribunal could be collected together, and still longer before I should be judged. What my fate would be then, it is not well to say."

Had I desired, there is little doubt that I could have compelled Manmat'ha to tell me all she knew, for I had found that my will was much the stronger. But what was curiosity compared with the delight of warming her into responsive love? When I now covered her delicious lips with kisses, she returned the pressure, instead of merely suffering me, as at first, with a mild surprise.

"My first love and my last!" I whispered. "They shall not get you from me while I am alive, if they will only give us warning; but if they rob me of you, I shall follow your trace and rescue you, if it be to the bottom of the sea!"

Manmat'ha laughed a pleased laugh. We both started at an echo, a moment after, which seemed to come from the lower hill, below where we sat. There was no echo possible in that direction.

"Manmat'ha!" I whispered, "tell me quickly! Is some one coming?"

She sat apparently unable to speak, but trembling and cold to the touch. I had enough presence of mind to take her up and place her on the other side of the pine, on the ground, and throw my coat carelessly over her. As once before I heard passing steps, but now my more practiced ear caught them distinctly. They came lightly up the steep hill and stopped a moment at a little distance from the tree. With eyes fixed on the ocean I waited in an agony of suspense, assuming the most unconscious air of which I was capable. The steps hesitated

only a moment; then they passed lower and lower into the upper wood. For half an hour neither of us moved; at last, taking heart, we stole home.

The event set me thinking. If at any moment we were liable to be discovered and separated, the marriage must take place at once. A consumptive hastens his wedding, a wounded tree is quick to bear, and the night we had experienced taught me how slight was the thread on which my happiness hung; but Manmat'ha was calm with a maidenly content with little, which in my hasty resentment at even a suspicion of opposition to my plan, I was ready to call indifference.

When we entered I could tell by the unfailing sign of Rachel's eye that she was agitated. Later in the evening I heard her chanting in a discordant undertone an ancient formula of her savage ancestors, and therefore it was with some misgivings that I called and informed her that to-night she was to be the sole witness, by touch, if not by sight, of the lawful ceremony of wedlock between Manmat'ha and me. She listened in an awestruck silence, and left the room abruptly. As no calling was of any avail, we were compelled to wait her pleasure, which I did with great impatience; and when at last she did return, it was in a shape grotesque almost beyond recognition. Her face and arms were painted white and red in broad bands of coarse pigments; an old embroidered robe fastened over one shoulder, with a close-fitting skirt of buckskin, formed her whole attire. She had put feathers in her hair, and with flaming eyes shook her favorite talisman, the medicine-stick. At one bound she had returned to her ancient state of savagery.

Finding Manmat'ha regarding her with interest, I did not oppose the further proceedings. It struck me that it was not displeasing to my invisible love to receive divine honors even in this wild rite, so I held my peace. She seemed to receive them as her due.

The moon had risen, and gave light to the room through window and open door; flooded by its rays, Rachel moved slowly across the room, uttering in guttural tones a broken chant whose meaning I might have once interpreted, but could not now. On a different occasion I might not have been an entirely unsympathetic observer of the singular sight, but here passion had overcome curiosity. I was an impatient lover. With my arm about Manmat'ha, and filled with earnest emotions, I could not help a feeling of disgust at the monotonous discord and frantic gestures of the last of a superstitious race.

“This must end, Manmat’ha,” I groaned. “I can wait no longer.”

As I spoke, the Indian woman grew ungovernable in wild excitement.

“They are on you! They are here!” she screamed.

I felt Manmat’ha stiffen in my arms with deadly terror. Resistless hands dragged us apart and held me absolutely motionless in spite of the deadly agony which filled me, while Manmat’ha’s stifled shriek arose from midway across the room.

“Rachel!” I cried. “For God’s sake, Rachel, bar the door!”

My cry roused the woman from a stupor; she sprang to the door. I heard the noise of many light feet, the sound of a blow, a heavy fall; then a deep silence came.

Bounding from the spot to which unseen hands up to that moment had pressed me, I sprang from the room and followed into the night. The earth reeled past me in my swift flight, until I suddenly stopped myself to ask where I was going. Where indeed? As well follow the wind. Wild as was the hope that moved me to return, I hurried back again to the house. Rachel alone, clad in her poor Indian finery, the medicine-stick broken by her side, lay stretched out dead in the moonlight.

No-Man's-Land

John Buchan

Chapter I

The Shieling of Farawa

It was with a light heart and a pleasing consciousness of holiday that I set out from the inn at Allermuir to tramp my fifteen miles into the unknown. I walked slowly, for I carried my equipment on my back—my basket, fly-books and rods, my plaid of Grant tartan (for I boast myself a kinsman of that house), and my great staff, which had tried ere then the front of the steeper Alps. A small valise with books and some changes of linen clothing had been sent on ahead in the shepherd's own hands. It was yet early April, and before me lay four weeks of freedom—twenty-eight blessed days in which to take fish and smoke the pipe of idleness. The Lent term had pulled me down, a week of modest enjoyment thereafter in town had finished the work; and I drank in the sharp moorish air like a thirsty man who has been forwandered among deserts.

I am a man of varied tastes and a score of interests. As an undergraduate I had been filled with the old mania for the complete life. I distinguished myself in the Schools, rowed in my college eight, and reached the distinction of practising for three weeks in the Trials. I had dabbled in a score of learned activities, and when the time came that I won the inevitable St. Chad's fellowship on my chaotic acquirements, and I found myself compelled to select if I would pursue a scholar's life, I had some toil in finding my vocation. In the end I resolved that the ancient life of the North, of the Celts and the Northmen and the unknown Pictish tribes, held for me the chief fascination. I had acquired a smattering of Gaelic, having been brought up as a boy in Lochaber, and now I set myself to increase my store of languages. I mastered Icelandic, and my first book—a monograph on the probable Celtic elements in the Eddic songs—brought me the praise of scholars and the deputy-professor's chair of Northern Antiquities. So much for Oxford. My vacations had been spent mainly in the North—in Ireland, Scotland, and the Isles, in Scandinavia and Iceland, once even in the far limits of Finland. I was a keen sportsman of a sort, an old-experienced fisher, a fair shot with gun and rifle, and in my hillcraft I might well stand comparison with most men. April has ever seemed to me the finest season of the year even in our cold northern altitudes, and the memory of

many bright Aprils had brought me up from the South on the night before to Allerfoot, whence a dogcart had taken me up Glen Aller to the inn at Allermuir; and now the same desire had set me on the heather with my face to the cold brown hills.

You are to picture a sort of plateau, benty and rook-strewn, running ridgewise above a chain of little peaty lochs and a vast tract of inexorable bog. In a mile the ridge ceased in a shoulder of hill, and over this lay the head of another glen, with the same doleful accompaniment of sunless lochs, mosses, and a tortuous water. East and west and north, in every direction save the south, rose walls of gashed and serrated hills. It was a grey day with blinks of sun, and when a ray chanced to fall on one of the great dark faces, lines of light and colour sprang into being which told of mica and granite. I was in high spirits, as on the eve of holiday; I had breakfasted excellently on eggs and salmon steaks; I had no cares to speak of, and my prospects were not uninviting. But in spite of myself the landscape began to take me in thrall and crush me. The silent vanished peoples of the hills seemed to be stirring; dark primeval faces seemed to stare at me from behind boulders and jags of rock. The place was so still, so free from the cheerful clamour of nesting birds, that it seemed a *temenos* sacred to some old-world god. At my feet the lochs lapped ceaselessly; but the waters were so dark that one could not see bottom a foot from the edge. On my right the links of green told of snake-like mires waiting to crush the unwary wanderer. It seemed to me for the moment a land of death, where the tongues of the dead cried aloud for recognition.

My whole morning's walk was full of such fancies. I lit a pipe to cheer me, but the things would not be got rid of. I thought of the Gaels who had held those fastnesses; I thought of the Britons before them, who yielded to their advent. They were all strong peoples in their day, and now they had gone the way of the earth. They had left their mark on the levels of the glens and on the more habitable uplands, both in names and in actual forts, and graves where men might still dig curios. But the hills that black stony amphitheatre before me—it seemed strange that the hills bore no traces of them. And then with some uneasiness I reflected on that older and stranger race who were said to have held the hilltops. The Picts, the Picti—what in the name of goodness were they? They had troubled me in all my studies, a sort of blank wall to put an end to speculation. We knew nothing of them save certain strange names which men called Pictish, the names of those hills in front of me—the Muneraw, the Yirnie, the Calmarton. They were the *corpus vile* for learned experiment; but Heaven alone knew what dark abyss of savagery once yawned in the midst of this desert.

And then I remembered the crazy theories of a pupil of mine at St. Chad's, the son of a small landowner on the Aller, a young gentleman who had spent his substance too freely at Oxford, and was now dreeing his weird in the Backwoods. He had been no scholar; but a certain imagination marked all his doings, and of a Sunday night he would come and talk to me of the North. The Picts were his special subject, and his ideas were mad. "Listen to me," he would say, when I had mixed him toddy and given him one of my cigars; "I believe there are traces—ay, and more than traces—of an old culture lurking in those hills and waiting to be discovered. We never hear of the Picts being driven from the hills. The Britons drove them from the lowlands, the Gaels from Ireland did the same for the Britons; but the hills were left unmolested. We hear of no one going near them except outlaws and tinklers. And in that very place you have the strangest mythology. Take the story of the Brownie. What is that but the story of a little swart man of uncommon strength and cleverness, who does good and ill indiscriminately, and then disappears? There are many scholars, as you yourself confess, who think that the origin of the Brownie was in some mad belief in the old race of the Picts, which still survived somewhere in the hills. And do we not hear of the Brownie in authentic records right down to the year 1756? After that, when people grew more incredulous, it is natural that the belief should have begun to die out; but I do not see why stray traces should not have survived till late."

"Do you not see what that means?" I had said in mock gravity. "Those same hills are, if anything, less known now than they were a hundred years ago. Why should not your Picts or Brownies be living to this day?"

"Why not, indeed?" he had rejoined, in all seriousness.

I laughed, and he went to his rooms and returned with a large leather-bound book. It was lettered, in the rococo style of a young man's taste, *Glimpses of the Unknown*, and some of the said glimpses he proceeded to impart to me. It was not pleasant reading; indeed, I had rarely heard anything so well fitted to shatter sensitive nerves. The early part consisted of folk-tales and folk-sayings, some of them wholly obscure, some of them with a glint of meaning, but all of them with some hint of a mystery in the hills. I heard the Brownie story in countless versions. Now the thing was a friendly little man, who wore grey breeches and lived on brose; now he was a twisted being, the sight of which made the ewes miscarry in the lambing time. But the second part was the stranger, for it was made up of actual tales, most of them with date and place appended. It was a most Bedlamite catalogue of horrors, which, if true, made

the wholesome moors a place instinct with tragedy. Some told of children carried away from villages, even from towns, on the verge of the uplands. In almost every case they were girls, and the strange fact was their utter disappearance. Two little girls would be coming home from school, would be seen last by a neighbour just where the road crossed a patch of heath or entered a wood and then—no human eye ever saw them again. Children's cries had startled outlying shepherds in the night, and when they had rushed to the door they could hear nothing but the night wind. The instances of such disappearances were not very common—perhaps once in twenty years—but they were confined to this one tract of country, and came in a sort of fixed progression from the middle of last century, when the record began.

But this was only one side of the history. The latter part was all devoted to a chronicle of crimes which had gone unpunished, seeing that no hand had ever been traced. The list was fuller in last century;[1] in the early years of the present it had dwindled; then came a revival about the 'Fifties; and now again in our own time it had sunk low. At the little cottage of Auchterbrean, on the roadside in Glen Aller, a labourer's wife had been found pierced to the heart. It was thought to be a case of a woman's jealousy, and her neighbour was accused, convicted, and hanged. The woman, to be sure, denied the charge with her last breath; but circumstantial evidence seemed sufficiently strong against her. Yet some people in the glen believed her guiltless. In particular, the carrier who had found the dead woman declared that the way in which her neighbour received the news was a sufficient proof of innocence; and the doctor who was first summoned professed himself unable to tell with what instrument the wound had been given. But this was all before the days of expert evidence, so the woman had been hanged without scruple. Then there had been another story of peculiar horror, telling of the death of an old man at some little lonely shieling called Carrickfey. But at this point I had risen in protest, and made to drive the young idiot from my room.

"It was my grandfather who collected most of them," he said. "He had theories,[2] but people called him mad, so he was wise enough to hold his tongue.

[1] The narrative of Mr. Graves was written in the year 1898.

[2] In the light of subsequent events I have jotted down the materials to which I refer. The last authentic record of the Brownie is in the narrative of the shepherd of Clachlands, taken down towards the close of last century by the Reverend Mr. Gillespie, minister of Allerkirk, and included by him in his *Songs and Legends of Glen*

My father declares the whole thing mania; but I rescued the book, had it bound, and added to the collection. It is a queer hobby; but, as I say, I have theories, and there are more things in heaven and earth——"

But at this he heard a friend's voice in the Quad., and dived out, leaving the banal quotation unfinished.

Strange though it may seem, this madness kept coming back to me as I crossed the last few miles of moor. I was now on a rough tableland, the watershed between two lochs, and beyond and above me rose the stony backs of the hills. The burns fell down in a chaos of granite boulders, and huge slabs of grey stone lay flat and tumbled in the heather. The full waters looked prosperously for my fishing, and I began to forget all fancies in anticipation of sport.

Then suddenly in a hollow of land I came on a ruined cottage. It had been a very small place, but the walls were still half erect, and the little moorland garden was outlined on the turf. A lonely apple tree, twisted and gnarled with winds, stood in the midst.

From higher up on the hill I heard a loud hail, and I knew my excellent friend the shepherd of Farawa, who had come thus far to meet me. He greeted me with the boisterous embarrassment which was his way of prefacing hospitality. A grave reserved man at other times, on such occasions he thought it proper to relapse into hilarity. I fell into step with him, and we set off for his dwelling. But first I had the curiosity to look back to the tumble-down cottage and ask him its name.

A queer look came into his eyes. "They oa' the place Carrickfey," he said. "Naebody has daured to bide there this twenty year sin'—but I see ye ken the story." And, as if glad to leave the subject, he hastened to discourse on fishing.

(cont.): Aller. The authorities on the strange carrying away of children are to be found in a series of articles in a local paper, the *Allerfoot Advertiser*, September and October 1878, and a curious book published anonymously at Edinburgh in 1848, entitled *The Weathergaw*. The records of the unexplained murders in the same neighbourhood are all contained in Mr. Fordoun's *Theory of Expert Evidence*, and an attack on the book in the *Law Review* for June 1881. The Carrickfey case has a pamphlet to itself—now extremely rare—a copy of which was recently obtained in a bookseller's shop in Dumfries by a well-known antiquary, and presented to the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh.

Chapter II

Tells of an Evening's Talk

The shepherd was a masterful man; tall, save for the stoop which belongs to all moorland folk, and active as a wild goat. He was not a new importation, nor did he belong to the place; for his people had lived in the remote Borders, and he had come as a boy to this shieling of Farawa. He was unmarried, but an elderly sister lived with him and cooked his meals. He was reputed to be extraordinarily skilful in his trade; I know for a fact that he was in his way a keen sportsman; and his few neighbours gave him credit for a sincere piety. Doubtless this last report was due in part to his silence, for after his first greeting he was wont to relapse into an extreme taciturnity. As we strode across the heather he gave me a short outline of his year's lambing. "Five pair o' twins yestreen, twae this morn; that makes thirty-five yowes that hae lambed since the Sabbath. I'll dae weel if God's willin'." Then, as I looked towards the hilltops whence the thin mist of morn was trailing, he followed my gaze. "See," he said with uplifted crook—"see that sicht. Is that no what is written of in the Bible when it says, 'The mountains do smoke'?" And with this piece of exegesis he finished his talk, and in a little we were at the cottage.

It was a small enough dwelling in truth, and yet large for a moorland house, for it had a garret below the thatch, which was given up to my sole enjoyment. Below was the wide kitchen with box-beds, and next to it the inevitable second room, also with its cupboard sleeping-places. The interior was very clean, and yet I remember to have been struck with the faint musty smell which is inseparable from moorland dwellings. The kitchen pleased me best, for there the great rafters were black with peat reek, and the uncovered stone floor, on which the fire gleamed dully, gave an air of primeval simplicity. But the walls spoiled all, for tawdry things of to-day had penetrated even there. Some grocers' almanacs—years old—hung in places of honour, and an extraordinary lithograph of the Royal Family in its youth. And this between crooks and fishing-rods and old guns, and horns of sheep and deer.

The life for the first day or two was regular and placid. I was up early, breakfasted on porridge (a dish which I detest), and then off to the lochs and streams. At first my sport prospered mightily. With a drake-wing I killed a salmon of seventeen pounds, and the next day had a fine basket of trout from a hill burn. Then for no earthly reason the weather changed. A bitter wind came out of the north-east, bringing showers of snow and stinging hail, and

lashing the waters into storm. It was now farewell to fly-fishing. For a day or two I tried trolling with the minnow on the lochs, but it was poor sport, for I had no boat, and the edges were soft and mossy. Then in disgust I gave up the attempt, went back to the cottage, lit my biggest pipe, and sat down with a book to await the turn of the weather.

The shepherd was out from morning till night at his work, and when he came in at last, dog-tired, his face would be set and hard, and his eyes heavy with sleep. The strangeness of the man grew upon me. He had a shrewd brain beneath his thatch of hair, for I had tried him once or twice, and found him abundantly intelligent. He had some smattering of an education, like all Scottish peasants, and, as I have said, he was deeply religious. I set him down as a fine type of his class, sober, serious, keenly critical, free from the bondage of superstition. But I rarely saw him, and our talk was chiefly in monosyllables—short interjected accounts of the number of lambs dead or alive on the hill. Then he would produce a pencil and note-book, and be immersed in some calculation; and finally he would be revealed sleeping heavily in his chair, till his sister wakened him, and he stumbled off to bed.

So much for the ordinary course of life; but one day—the second, I think, of the bad weather—the extraordinary happened. The storm had passed in the afternoon into a resolute and blinding snow, and the shepherd, finding it hopeless on the hill, came home about three o'clock. I could make out from his way of entering that he was in a great temper. He kicked his feet savagely against the door-post. Then he swore at his dogs, a thing I had never heard him do before. "Hell!" he cried, "can ye no keep out o' my road, ye bruits?" Then he came sullenly into the kitchen, thawed his numbed hands at the fire, and sat down to his meal.

I made some aimless remark about the weather.

"Death to man and beast," he grunted. "I hae got the sheep doun frae the hill, but the lambs will never thole this. We maun pray that it will no last."

His sister came in with some dish. "Margit," he cried, "three lambs away this morning, and three deid wi' the hole in the throat."

The woman's face visibly paled. "Guid help us, Adam; that hasna happened this three year."

"It has happened noo," he said surlily. "But, by God! if it happens again I'll gang mysel' to the Scarts o' the Muneraw."

"O Adam!" the woman cried shrilly, "haud your tongue. Ye kenna wha hears ye." And with a frightened glance at me she left the room.

I asked no questions, but waited till the shepherd's anger should cool. But the cloud did not pass so lightly. When he had finished his dinner he pulled his chair to the fire and sat staring moodily. He made some sort of apology to me for his conduct. "I'm sore troubled, sir; but I'm vexed ye should see me like this. Maybe things will be better the morn." And then, lighting his short black pipe, he resigned himself to his meditations.

But he could not keep quiet. Some nervous unrest seemed to have possessed the man. He got up with a start and went to the window, where the snow was drifting unsteadily past. As he stared out into the storm I heard him mutter to himself, "Three away, God help me, and three wi' the hole in the throat."

Then he turned round to me abruptly. I was jotting down notes for an article I contemplated in the *Revue Celtique*, so my thoughts were far away from the present. The man recalled me by demanding fiercely, "Do ye believe in God?"

I gave him some sort of answer in the affirmative.

"Then do ye believe in the Devil?" he asked.

The reply must have been less satisfactory, for he came forward and flung himself violently into the chair before me.

"What do ye ken about it?" he cried. "You that bides in a southern toun, what can ye ken o' the God that works in thae hills and the Devil—ay, the manifold devils—that He suffers to bide here? I tell ye, man, that if ye had seen what I have seen ye wad be on your knees at this moment praying to God to pardon your unbelief. There are devils at the back o' every stane and hidin' in every cleuch, and it's by the grace o' God alone that a man is alive upon the earth." His voice had risen high and shrill, and then suddenly he cast a frightened glance towards the window and was silent.

I began to think that the man's wits were unhinged, and the thought did not give me satisfaction. I had no relish for the prospect of being left alone in this

moorland dwelling with the cheerful company of a maniac. But his next movements reassured me. He was clearly only dead-tired, for he fell sound asleep in his chair, and by the time his sister brought tea and wakened him, he seemed to have got the better of his excitement.

When the window was shuttered and the lamp lit, I set myself again to the completion of my notes. The shepherd had got out his Bible, and was solemnly reading with one great finger travelling down the lines. He was smoking, and whenever some text came home to him with power he would make pretence to underline it with the end of the stem. Soon I had finished the work I desired, and, my mind being full of my pet hobby, I fell into an inquisitive mood, and began to question the solemn man opposite on the antiquities of the place.

He stared stupidly at me when I asked him concerning monuments or ancient weapons.

"I kenna," said he. "There's a heap o' queer things in the hills."

"This place should be a centre for such relics. You know that the name of the hill behind the house, as far as I can make it out, means the 'Place of the Little Men.' It is a good Gaelic word, though there is some doubt about its exact interpretation. But clearly the Gaelic peoples did not speak of themselves when they gave the name; they must have referred to some older and stranger population."

The shepherd looked at me dully, as not understanding.

"It is partly this fact—besides the fishing, of course—which interests me in this countryside," said I gaily.

Again he cast the same queer frightened glance towards the window. "If ye'll tak the advice of an aulder man," he said slowly, "ye'll let well alane and no meddle wi' uncanny things."

I laughed pleasantly, for at last I had found out my hard-headed host in a piece of childishness. "Why, I thought that you of all men would be free from superstition."

"What do ye call supersteetion?" he asked.

"A belief in old wives' tales," said I, "a trust in the crude supernatural and the patently impossible."

He looked at me beneath his shaggy brows. "How do ye ken what is impossible? Mind ye, sir, ye're no in the toun just now, but in the thick of the wild hills."

"But, hang it all, man," I cried, "you don't mean to say that you believe in that sort of thing? I am prepared for many things up here, but not for the Brownie—though, to be sure, if one could meet him in the flesh, it would be rather pleasant than otherwise, for he was a companionable sort of fellow."

"When a thing pits the fear o' death on a man he aye speaks well of it."

It was true—the Eumenides and the Good Folk over again; and I awoke with interest to the fact that the conversation was getting into strange channels.

The shepherd moved uneasily in his chair. "I am a man that fears God, and has nae time for daft stories; but I havena traivelled the hills for twenty years wi' my een shut. If I say that I could tell ye stories o' faces seen in the mist, and queer things that have knocked against me in the snaw, wad ye believe me? I wager ye wadna. Ye wad say I had been drunk, and yet I am a God-fearing, temperate man."

He rose and went to a cupboard, unlocked it, and brought out something in his hand, which he held out to me. I took it with some curiosity, and found that it was a flint arrow-head.

Clearly a flint arrow-head, and yet like none that I had ever seen in any collection. For one thing it was larger, and the barb less clumsily thick. More, the chipping was new, or comparatively so; this thing had not stood the wear of fifteen hundred years among the stones of the hillside. Now there are, I regret to say, institutions which manufacture primitive relics; but it is not hard for a practised eye to see the difference. The chipping has either a regularity and a balance which is unknown in the real thing, or the rudeness has been overdone, and the result is an implement incapable of harming a mortal creature. But this was the real thing if it ever existed; and yet—I was prepared to swear on my reputation that it was not half a century old.

"Where did you get this?" I asked with some excitement.

"I hae a story about that," said the shepherd. "Outside the door there ye can see a muckle flat stane aside the buchts. Ae simmer nicht I was sitting there smoking till the dark, and I wager there was naething on the stane then. But that same nicht I awoke wi' a queer thocht, as if there were folk moving around the hoose—folk that didna mak muckle noise. I mind o' lookin' out o' the windy, and I could hae sworn I saw something black movin' amang the heather and intil the buchts. Now I had maybe threescore o' lambs there that nicht, for I had to tak them many miles off in the early morning. Weel, when I gets up about four o'clock and gangs out, as I am passing the muckle stane I finds this bit errow. 'That's come here in the nicht,' says I, and I wunnered a wee and put it in my pouch. But when I came to my faulds what did I see? Five o' my best hoggs were away, and three mair were lying deid wi' a hole in their throat."

"Who in the world—?" I began.

"Dinna ask," said he. "If I aince sterted to speir about thae maitters, I wadna keep my reason."

"Then that was what happened on the hill this morning?"

"Even sae, and it has happened mair than aince sin' that time. It's the most uncanny slaughter, for sheep-stealing I can understand, but no this pricking o' the puir beasts' wizands. I kenna how they daett either, for it's no wi' a knife or ony common tool."

"Have you never tried to follow the thieves?"

"Have I no?" he asked grimly. "If it had been common sheep stealers I wad hae had them by the heels, though I had followed them a hundred miles. But this is no common. I've tracked them, and it's ill they are to track; but I never got beyond ae place, and that was the Scarts o' the Muneraw that ye've heard me speak o'."

"But who in Heaven's name are the people? Tinklers or poachers or what?"

"Ay," said he drily. "Even so. Tinklers and poachers whae wark wi' stane errows and kill sheep by a hole in their throat. Lord, I kenna what they are, unless the Muckle Deil himsel'."

The conversation had passed beyond my comprehension. In this prosaic

hard-headed man I had come on the dead-rock of superstition and blind fear.

"That is only the story of the Brownie over again, and he is an exploded myth," I said, laughing.

"Are ye the man that exploded it?" said the shepherd rudely. "I trow no, neither you nor ony ither. My bonny man, if ye lived a twalmonth in thae hills, ye wad sing safter about exploded myths, as ye call them."

"I tell you what I would do," said I. "If I lost sheep as you lose them, I would go up the Scarts of the Muneraw and never rest till I had settled the question once and for all." I spoke hotly, for I was vexed by the man's childish fear.

"I dare say ye wad," he said slowly. "But then I am no you, and maybe I ken mair o' what is in the Scarts o' the Muneraw. Maybe I ken that whilk, if ye kenned it, wad send ye back to the South Country wi' your hert in your mouth. But, as I say, I am no sae brave as you, for I saw something in the first year o' my herding here which put the terror o' God on me, and makes me a fearfu' man to this day. Ye ken the story o' the gudeman o' Carrickfay?"

I nodded.

"Weel, I was the man that fand him. I had seen the deid afore and I've seen them since. But never have I seen aucht like the look in that man's een. What he saw at his death I may see the morn, so I walk before the Lord in fear."

Then he rose and stretched himself. "It's bedding-time, for I maun be up at three," and with a short good night he left the room.

Chapter III

The Scarts of the Muneraw

The next morning was fine, for the snow had been intermittent, and had soon melted except in the high corries. True, it was deceptive weather, for the wind had gone to the rainy south-west, and the masses of cloud on that horizon boded ill for the afternoon. But some days' inaction had made me keen for a chance of sport, so I rose with the shepherd and set out for the day.

He asked me where I proposed to begin.

I told him the tarn called the Loch o' the Threshes, which lies over the back of the Muneraw on another watershed. It is on the ground of the Rhynns Forest, and I had fished it of old from the Forest House. I knew the merits of the trout, and I knew its virtues in a south-west wind, so I had resolved to go thus far afield.

The shepherd heard the name in silence. "Your best road will be ower that rig, and syne on to the water o' Caulds. Keep abune the moss till ye come to the place they ca' the Nick o' the Threshes. That will take ye to the very lochside, but it's a lang road and a sair."

The morning was breaking over the bleak hills. Little clouds drifted athwart the corries, and wisps of haze fluttered from the peaks. A great rosy flush lay over one side of the glen, which caught the edge of the sluggish bog pools and turned them to fire. Never before had I seen the mountainland so clear, for far back into the east and west I saw mountain tops set as close as flowers in a border, black crags seamed with silver lines which I knew for mighty waterfalls, and below at my feet the lower slopes fresh with the dewy green of spring. A name stuck in my memory from the last night's talk.

"Where are the Scarts of the Muneraw?" I asked.

The shepherd pointed to the great hill which bears the name, and which lies, a huge mass, above the watershed.

"D'ye see yon corrie at the east that runs straucht up the side? It looks a bit scart, but it's sae deep that it's aye derk at the bottom o't. Weel, at the tap o' the rig it meets anither corrie that runs doun the ither side, and that one they ca' the Scarts. There is a sort o' burn in it that flows intil the Dule and sae intil the Aller, and, indeed, if ye were gaun there it wad be from Aller Glen that your best road wad lie. But it's an ill bit, and ye'll be sair guidit if ye try't."

There he left me and went across the glen, while I struck upwards over the ridge. At the top I halted and looked down on the wide glen of the Caulds, which there is little better than a bog, but lower down grows into a green pastoral valley. The great Muneraw still dominated the landscape, and the black scaur on its side seemed blacker than before. The place fascinated me, for in that fresh morning air the shepherd's fears seemed monstrous. "Some

day," said I to myself, "I will go and explore the whole of that mighty hill." Then I descended and struggled over the moss, found the Nick, and in two hours' time was on the loch's edge.

I have little in the way of good to report of the fishing. For perhaps one hour the trout took well; after that they sulked steadily for the day. The promise, too, of fine weather had been deceptive. By midday the rain was falling in that soft soaking fashion which gives no hope of clearing. The mist was down to the edge of the water, and I cast my flies into a blind sea of white. It was hopeless work, and yet from a sort of ill-temper I stuck to it long after my better judgment had warned me of its folly. At last, about three in the afternoon, I struck my camp, and prepared myself for a long and toilsome retreat.

And long and toilsome it was beyond anything I had ever encountered. Had I had a vestige of sense I would have followed the burn from the loch down to the Forest House. The place was shut up, but the keeper would gladly have given me shelter for the night. But foolish pride was too strong in me. I had found my road in mist before, and could do it again.

Before I got to the top of the hill I had repented my decision; when I got there I repented it more. For below me was a dizzy chaos of grey; there was no landmark visible; and before me I knew was the bog through which the Caulds Water twined. I had crossed it with some trouble in the morning, but then I had light to pick my steps. Now I could only stumble on, and in five minutes I might be in a bog hole, and in five more in a better world.

But there was no help to be got from hesitation, so with a rueful courage I set off. The place was if possible worse than I had feared. Wading up to the knees with nothing before you but a blank wall of mist and the cheerful consciousness that your next step may be your last—such was my state for one weary mile. The stream itself was high, and rose to my armpits, and once and again I only saved myself by a violent leap backwards from a pitiless green slough. But at last it was past, and I was once more on the solid ground of the hillside.

Now, in the thick weather I had crossed the glen much lower down than in the morning, and the result was that the hill on which I stood was one of the giants which, with the Muneraw for centre, guard the watershed. Had I taken the proper way, the Nick o' the Threshes would have led me to the Caulds, and then once over the bog a little ridge was all that stood between me and the

glen of Farawa. But instead I had come a wild cross-country road, and was now, though I did not know it, nearly as far from my destination as at the start.

Well for me that I did not know, for I was wet and dispirited, and had I not fancied myself all but home, I should scarcely have had the energy to make this last ascent. But soon I found it was not the little ridge I had expected. I looked at my watch and saw that it was five o'clock. When, after the weariest climb, I lay on a piece of level ground which seemed the top, I was not surprised to find that it was now seven. The darkening must be at hand, and sure enough the mist seemed to be deepening into a greyish black. I began to grow desperate. Here was I on the summit of some infernal mountain, without any certainty where my road lay. I was lost with a vengeance, and at the thought I began to be acutely afraid.

I took what seemed to me the way I had come, and began to descend steeply. Then something made me halt, and the next instant I was lying on my face trying painfully to retrace my steps. For I had found myself slipping, and before I could stop, my feet were dangling over a precipice with Heaven alone knows how many yards of sheer mist between me and the bottom. Then I tried keeping the ridge, and took that to the right, which I thought would bring me nearer home. It was no good trying to think out a direction, for in the fog my brain was running round, and I seemed to stand on a pin-point of space where the laws of the compass had ceased to hold.

It was the roughest sort of walking, now stepping warily over acres of loose stones, now crawling down the face of some battered rock, and now wading in the long dripping heather. The soft rain had begun to fall again, which completed my discomfort. I was now seriously tired, and, like all men who in their day have bent too much over books, I began to feel it in my back. My spine ached, and my breath came in short broken pants. It was a pitiable state of affairs for an honest man who had never encountered much grave discomfort. To ease myself I was compelled to leave my basket behind me, trusting to return and find it, if I should ever reach safety and discover on what pathless hill I had been strayed. My rod I used as a staff, but it was of little use, for my fingers were getting too numb to hold it.

Suddenly from the blankness I heard a sound as of human speech. At first I thought it mere craziness—the cry of a weasel or a hill bird distorted by my ears. But again it came, thick and faint, as through acres of mist, and yet clearly the sound of "articulate-speaking men." In a moment I lost my despair and

cried out in answer. This was some forwandered traveller like myself, and between us we could surely find some road to safety. So I yelled back at the pitch of my voice and waited intently.

But the sound ceased, and there was utter silence again. Still I waited, and then from some place much nearer came the same soft mumbling speech. I could make nothing of it. Heard in that drear place it made the nerves tense and the heart timorous. It was the strangest jumble of vowels and consonants I had ever met.

A dozen solutions flashed through my brain. It was some maniac talking Jabberwock to himself. It was some belated traveller whose wits had given out in fear. Perhaps it was only some shepherd who was amusing himself thus, and whiling the way with nonsense. Once again I cried out and waited.

Then suddenly in the hollow trough of mist before me, where things could still be half discerned, there appeared a figure. It was little and squat and dark; naked, apparently, but so rough with hair that it wore the appearance of a skin-covered being. It crossed my line of vision, not staying for a moment, but in its face and eyes there seemed to lurk an elder world of mystery and barbarism, a troll-like life which was too horrible for words.

The shepherd's fear came back on me like a thunderclap. For one awful instant my legs failed me, and I had almost fallen. The next I had turned and ran shrieking up the hill.

If he who may read this narrative has never felt the force of an overmastering terror, then let him thank his Maker and pray that he never may. I am no weak child, but a strong grown man, accredited in general with sound sense and little suspected of hysterics. And yet I went up that brae face with my heart fluttering like a bird and my throat aching with fear. I screamed in short dry gasps; involuntarily, for my mind was beyond any purpose. I felt that beast-like clutch at my throat; those red eyes seemed to be staring at me from the mist; I heard ever behind and before and on all sides the patter of those inhuman feet.

Before I knew I was down, slipping over a rook and falling some dozen feet into a soft marshy hollow. I was conscious of lying still for a second and whimpering like a child. But as I lay there I awoke to the silence of the place. There was no sound of pursuit; perhaps they had lost my track and given up. My courage began to return, and from this it was an easy step to hope. Perhaps

after all it had been merely an illusion, for folk do not see clearly in the mist, and I was already done with weariness.

But even as I lay in the green moss and began to hope, the faces of my pursuers grew up through the mist. I stumbled madly to my feet; but I was hemmed in, the rock behind and my enemies before. With a cry I rushed forward, and struck wildly with my rod at the first dark body. It was as if I had struck an animal, and the next second the thing was wrenched from my grasp. But still they came no nearer. I stood trembling there in the centre of those malignant devils, my brain a mere weathercock, and my heart crushed shapeless with horror. At last the end came, for with the vigour of madness I flung myself on the nearest, and we rolled on the ground. Then the monstrous things seemed to close over me, and with a choking cry I passed into unconsciousness.

Chapter IV

This Darkness that is Under the Earth

There is an unconsciousness that is not wholly dead, where a man feels numbly and the body lives without the brain. I was beyond speech or thought, and yet I felt the upward or downward motion as the way lay in hill or glen, and I most assuredly knew when the open air was changed for the close underground. I could feel dimly that lights were flared in my face, and that I was laid in some bed on the earth. Then with the stopping of movement the real sleep of weakness seized me, and for long I knew nothing of this mad world.

* * * * * *

Morning came over the moors with bird song and the glory of fine weather. The streams were still rolling in spate, but the hill pastures were alight with dawn, and the little seams of snow were glistening like white fire. A ray from the sunrise cleft its path somehow into the abyss, and danced on the wall above my couch. It caught my eye as I wakened, and for long I lay crazily wondering what it meant. My head was splitting with pain, and in my heart was the same fluttering nameless fear. I did not wake to full consciousness; not till the twinkle of sun from the clean bright out-of-doors caught my face did I realize that I lay in a great dark place with a glow of dull firelight in the middle.

In time things rose and moved around me, a few ragged shapes of men, without clothing, shambling with their huge feet and looking towards me with curved beast-like glances. I tried to marshal my thoughts, and slowly, bit by bit, I built up the present. There was no question to my mind of dreaming; the past hours had scored reality upon my brain. Yet I cannot say that fear was my chief feeling. The first crazy terror had subsided, and now I felt mainly a sickened disgust with just a tinge of curiosity. I found that my knife, watch, flask, and money had gone, but they had left me a map of the countryside. It seemed strange to look at the calico, with the name of a London printer stamped on the back, and lines of railway and highroad running through every shire. Decent and comfortable civilization! And here was I a prisoner in this den of nameless folk, and in the midst of a life which history knew not.

Courage is a virtue which grows with reflection and the absence of the immediate peril. I thought myself into some sort of resolution, and lo! when the Folk approached me and bound my feet I was back at once in the most miserable terror. They tied me, all but my hands, with some strong cord, and carried me to the centre, where the fire was glowing. Their soft touch was the acutest torture to my nerves, but I stifled my cries lest some one should lay his hand on my mouth. Had that happened, I am convinced my reason would have failed me.

So there I lay in the shine of the fire, with the circle of unknown things around me. There seemed but three or four, but I took no note of number. They talked huskily among themselves in a tongue which sounded all gutturals. Slowly my fear became less an emotion than a habit, and I had room for the smallest shade of curiosity. I strained my ear to catch a word, but it was a mere chaos of sound. The thing ran and thundered in my brain as I stared dumbly into the vacant air. Then I thought that unless I spoke I should certainly go crazy, for my head was beginning to swim at the strange cooing noise.

I spoke a word or two in my best Gaelic, and they closed round me inquiringly. Then I was sorry I had spoken, for my words had brought them nearer, and I shrank at the thought. But as the faint echoes of my speech hummed in the rock chamber, I was struck by a curious kinship of sound. Mine was sharper, more distinct, and staccato; theirs was blurred, formless, but still with a certain root resemblance.

Then from the back there came an older being, who seemed to have heard my words. He was like some foul grey badger, his red eyes sightless, and his

hands trembling on a stump of bog oak.

The others made way for him with such deference as they were capable of, and the thing squatted down by me and spoke.

To my amazement his words were familiar. It was some manner of speech akin to the Gaelic, but broadened, lengthened, coarsened. I remembered an old book tongue, commonly supposed to be an impure dialect once used in Brittany, which I had met in the course of my researches. The words recalled it, and as far as I could remember the thing, I asked him who he was and where the place might be.

He answered me in the same speech—still more broadened, lengthened, coarsened. I lay back with sheer amazement. I had found the key to this unearthly life.

For a little an insatiable curiosity, the ardour of the scholar, prevailed. I forgot the horror of the place, and thought only of the fact that here before me was the greatest find that scholarship had ever made. I was precipitated into the heart of the past. Here must be the fountainhead of all legends, the chrysalis of all beliefs. I actually grew light-hearted. This strange folk around me were now no more shapeless things of terror, but objects of research and experiment. I almost came to think them not unfriendly.

For an hour I enjoyed the highest of earthly pleasures. In that strange conversation I heard—in fragments and suggestions—the history of the craziest survival the world has ever seen. I heard of the struggles with invaders, preserved as it were in a sort of shapeless poetry. There were bitter words against the Gaelic oppressor, bitterer words against the Saxon stranger, and for a moment ancient hatreds flared into life. Then there came the tale of the hill refuge, the morbid hideous existence preserved for centuries amid a changing world. I heard fragments of old religions, primeval names of god and goddess, half-understood by the Folk, but to me the key to a hundred puzzles. Tales which survive to us in broken disjointed riddles were intact here in living form. I lay on my elbow and questioned feverishly. At any moment they might become morose and refuse to speak. Clearly it was my duty to make the most of a brief good fortune.

And then the tale they told me grew more hideous. I heard of the circumstances of the life itself and their daily shifts for existence. It was a

murderous chronicle—a history of lust and rapine and unmentionable deeds in the darkness. One thing they had early recognized—that the race could not be maintained within itself; so that ghoulish carrying away of little girls from the lowlands began, which I had heard of but never credited. Shut up in those dismal holes, the girls soon died, and when the new race had grown up the plunder had been repeated. Then there were bestial murders in lonely cottages, done for God knows what purpose. Sometimes the occupant had seen more than was safe, sometimes the deed was the mere exuberance of a lust of slaying. As they gabbled their tales my heart's blood froze, and I lay back in the agonies of fear. If they had used the others thus, what way of escape was open for myself? I had been brought to this place, and not murdered on the spot. Clearly there was torture before death in store for me, and I confess I quailed at the thought.

But none molested me. The elders continued to jabber out their stories, while I lay tense and deaf. Then to my amazement food was brought and placed beside me—almost with respect. Clearly my murder was not a thing of the immediate future. The meal was some form of mutton—perhaps the shepherd's lost ewes—and a little smoking was all the cooking it had got. I strove to eat, but the tasteless morsels choked me. Then they set drink before me in a curious cup, which I seized on eagerly, for my mouth was dry with thirst. The vessel was of gold, rudely formed, but of the pure metal, and a coarse design in circles ran round the middle. This was surprising enough, but a greater wonder awaited me. The liquor was not water, as I had guessed, but a sort of sweet ale, a miracle of flavour. The taste was curious, but somehow familiar; it was like no wine I had ever drunk, and yet I had known that flavour all my life. I sniffed at the brim, and there rose a faint fragrance of thyme and heather honey and the sweet things of the moorland. I almost dropped it in my surprise; for here in this rude place I had stumbled upon that lost delicacy of the North, the heather ale.

For a second I was entranced with my discovery, and then the wonder of the cup claimed my attention. Was it a mere relic of pillage, or had this folk some hidden mine of the precious metal? Gold had once been common in these hills. There were the traces of mines on Cairnsmore; shepherds had found it in the gravel of the Gled Water; and the name of a house at the head of the Clachlands meant the "Home of Gold."

Once more I began my questions, and they answered them willingly. There and then I heard that secret for which many had died in old time, the secret of

the heather ale. They told of the gold in the hills, of corries where the sand gleamed and abysses where the rocks were veined. All this they told me, freely, without a scruple. And then, like a clap, came the awful thought that this, too, spelled death. These were secrets which this race aforetime had guarded with their lives; they told them generously to me because there was no fear of betrayal. I should go no more out from this place.

The thought put me into a new sweat of terror—not of death, mind you, but of the unknown horrors which might precede the final suffering. I lay silent, and after binding my hands they began to leave me and go off to other parts of the cave. I dozed in the horrible half-swoon of fear, conscious only of my shaking limbs, and the great dull glow of the fire in the centre. Then I became calmer. After all, they had treated me with tolerable kindness; I had spoken their language, which few of their victims could have done for many a century; it might be that I had found favour in their eyes. For a little I comforted myself with this delusion, till I caught sight of a wooden box in a corner. It was of modern make, one such as grocers use to pack provisions in. It had some address nailed on it, and an aimless curiosity compelled me to creep thither and read it. A torn and weather-stained scrap of paper, with the nails at the corner rusty with age; but something of the address might still be made out. Amid the stains my feverish eyes read, "To Mr. M—, Carrickfey, by Allerfoot Station."

The ruined cottage in the hollow of the waste with the single gnarled apple tree was before me in a twinkling. I remembered the shepherd's shrinking from the place and the name, and his wild eyes when he told me of the thing that had happened there. I seemed to see the old man in his moorland cottage, thinking no evil; the sudden entry of the nameless things; and then the eyes glazed in unspeakable terror. I felt my lips dry and burning. Above me was the vault of rock; in the distance I saw the fire-glow and the shadows of shapes moving around it. My fright was too great for inaction, so I crept from the couch, and silently, stealthily, with tottering steps and bursting heart, I began to reconnoitre.

But I was still bound, my arms tightly, my legs more loosely, but yet firm enough to hinder flight. I could not get my hands at my leg straps, still less could I undo the manacles. I rolled on the floor, seeking some sharp edge of rock, but all had been worn smooth by the use of centuries. Then suddenly an idea came upon me like an inspiration. The sounds from the fire seemed to have ceased, and I could hear them repeated from another and more distant

part of the cave. The Folk had left their orgy round the blaze, and at the end of the long tunnel I saw its glow fall unimpeded upon the floor. Once there, I might burn off my fetters and be free to turn my thoughts to escape.

I crawled a little way with much labour. Then suddenly I came abreast an opening in the wall, through which a path went. It was a long straight rock-cutting, and at the end I saw a gleam of pale light. It must be the open air; the way of escape was prepared for me; and with a prayer I made what speed I could towards the fire.

I rolled on the verge, but the fuel was peat, and the warm ashes would not burn the cords. In desperation I went farther, and my clothes began to singe, while my face ached beyond endurance. But yet I got no nearer my object. The strips of hide warped and cracked, but did not burn. Then in a last effort I thrust my wrists bodily into the glow and held them there. In an instant I drew them out with a groan of pain, scarred and sore, but to my joy with the band snapped in one place. Weak as I was, it was now easy to free myself, and then came the untying of my legs. My hands trembled, my eyes were dazed with hurry, and I was longer over the job than need have been. But at length I had loosed my cramped knees and stood on my feet, a free man once more.

I kicked off my boots, and fled noiselessly down the passage to the tunnel mouth. Apparently it was close on evening, for the white light had faded to a pale yellow. But it was daylight, and that was all I sought, and I ran for it as eagerly as ever runner ran to a goal. I came out on a rock shelf, beneath which a moraine of boulders fell away in a chasm to a dark loch. It was all but night, but I could see the gnarled and fortressed rocks rise in ramparts above, and below the unknown screes and cliffs which make the side of the Muneraw a place only for foxes and the fowls of the air.

The first taste of liberty is an intoxication, and assuredly I was mad when I leaped down among the boulders. Happily at the top of the gully the stones were large and stable, else the noise would certainly have discovered me. Down I went, slipping, praying, my charred wrists aching, and my stockinged feet wet with blood. Soon I was in the jaws of the cleft, and a pale star rose before me. I have always been timid in the face of great rocks, and now, had not an awful terror been dogging my footsteps, no power on earth could have driven me to that descent.

Soon I left the boulders behind, and came to long spouts of little stones,

which moved with me till the hillside seemed sinking under my feet. Sometimes I was face downwards, once and again I must have fallen for yards. Had there been a cliff at the foot, I should have gone over it without resistance; but by the providence of God the spout ended in a long curve into the heather of the bog.

When I found my feet once more on soft boggy earth, my strength was renewed within me. A hope of escape sprang up in my heart. For a second I looked back. There was a great line of shingle with the cliffs beyond, and above all the unknown blackness of the cleft. There lay my terror, and I set off running across the bog for dear life. My mind was clear enough to know my road. If I held round the loch in front I should come to a burn which fed the Farawa stream, on whose banks stood the shepherd's cottage. The loch could not be far; once at the Farawa I would have the light of the shieling clear before me.

Suddenly I heard behind me, as if coming from the hillside, the patter of feet. It was the sound which white hares make in the winter-time on a noiseless frosty day as they patter over the snow. I have heard the same soft noise from a herd of deer when they changed their pastures. Strange that so kindly a sound should put the very fear of death in my heart. I ran madly, blindly, yet thinking shrewdly. The loch was before me. Somewhere I had read or heard, I do not know where, that the brutish aboriginal races of the North could not swim. I myself swam powerfully; could I but cross the loch I should save two miles of a desperate country.

There was no time to lose, for the patter was coming nearer, and I was almost at the loch's edge. I tore off my coat and rushed in. The bottom was mossy, and I had to struggle far before I found any depth. Something plashed in the water before me, and then something else a little behind. The thought that I was a mark for unknown missiles made me crazy with fright, and I struck fiercely out for the other shore. A gleam of moonlight was on the water at the burn's exit, and thither I guided myself. I found the thing difficult enough in itself, for my hands ached, and I was numb from my bonds. But my fancy raised a thousand phantoms to vex me. Swimming in that black bog water, pursued by those nameless things, I seemed to be in a world of horror far removed from the kindly world of men. My strength seemed inexhaustible from my terror. Monsters at the bottom of the water seemed to bite at my feet, and the pain of my wrists made me believe that the loch was boiling hot, and that I was in some hellish place of torment.

I came out on a spit of gravel above the burn mouth, and set off down the ravine of the burn. It was a strait place, strewn with rocks; but now and then the hill turf came in stretches, and eased my wounded feet. Soon the fall became more abrupt, and I was slipping down a hillside, with the water on my left making great cascades in the granite. And then I was out in the wider vale where the Farawa water flowed among links of moss.

Far in front, a speck in the blue darkness, shone the light of the cottage. I panted forward, my breath coming in gasps and my back shot with fiery pains. Happily the land was easier for the feet as long as I kept on the skirts of the bog. My ears were sharp as a wild beast's with fear, as I listened for the noise of pursuit. Nothing came but the rustle of the gentlest hill wind and the chatter of the falling streams.

Then suddenly the light began to waver and move athwart the window. I knew what it meant. In a minute or two the household at the cottage would retire to rest, and the lamp would be put out. True, I might find the place in the dark, for there was a moon of sorts and the road was not desperate. But somehow in that hour the lamplight gave a promise of safety which I clung to despairingly.

And then the last straw was added to my misery. Behind me came the pad of feet, the pat-patter, soft, eerie, incredibly swift. I choked with fear, and flung myself forward in a last effort. I give my word it was sheer mechanical shrinking that drove me on. God knows I would have lain down to die in the heather, had the things behind me been a common terror of life.

I ran as man never ran before, leaping hags, scrambling through green well-heads, straining towards the fast-dying light. A quarter of a mile and the patter sounded nearer. Soon I was not two hundred yards off, and the noise seemed almost at my elbow. The light went out, and the black mass of the cottage loomed in the dark.

Then, before I knew, I was at the door, battering it wearily and yelling for help. I heard steps within and a hand on the bolt. Something shot past me with lightning force and buried itself in the wood. The dreadful hands were almost at my throat, when the door was opened and I stumbled in, hearing with a gulp of joy the key turn and the bar fall behind me.

Chapter V

The Troubles of a Conscience

My body and senses slept, for I was utterly tired, but my brain all the night was on fire with horrid fancies. Again I was in that accursed cave; I was torturing my hands in the fire; I was slipping barefoot among jagged boulders; and then with bursting heart I was toiling the last mile with the cottage light—now grown to a great fire in the heavens—blazing before me.

It was broad daylight when I awoke, and I thanked God for the comfortable rays of the sun. I had been laid in a box-bed off the inner room, and my first sight was the shepherd sitting with folded arms in a chair regarding me solemnly. I rose and began to dress, feeling my legs and arms still tremble with weariness. The shepherd's sister bound up my scarred wrists and put an ointment on my burns; and, limping like an old man, I went into the kitchen.

I could eat little breakfast, for my throat seemed dry and narrow; but they gave me some whisky-and-milk, which put strength into my body. All the time the brother and sister sat in silence, regarding me with covert glances.

"Ye have been delivered from the jaws o' the Pit," said the man at length. "See that," and he held out to me a thin shaft of flint. "I fand that in the door this morning."

I took it, let it drop, and stared vacantly at the window. My nerves had been too much tried to be roused by any new terror. Out of doors it was fair weather, flying gleams of April sunlight and the soft colours of spring. I felt dazed, isolated, cut off from my easy past and pleasing future, a companion of horrors and the sport of nameless things. Then suddenly my eye fell on my books heaped on the table, and the old distant civilization seemed for the moment inexpressibly dear.

"I must go—at once. And you must come too. You cannot stay here. I tell you it is death. If you knew what I know you would be crying out with fear. How far is it to Allermuir? Eight, fifteen miles; and then ten down Glen Aller to Allerfoot, and then the railway. We must go together while it is daylight, and perhaps we may be untouched. But quick, there is not a moment to lose." And I was on my shaky feet, and bustling among my possessions.

"I'll gang wi' ye to the station," said the shepherd, "for ye're clearly no fit to look after yourself. My sister will bide and keep the house. If naething has touched us this ten year, naething will touch us the day."

"But you cannot stay. You are mad," I began; but he cut me short with the words, "I trust in God."

"In any case let your sister come with us. I dare not think of a woman alone in this place."

"I'll bide," said she. "I'm no feared as lang as I'm indoors and there's steeks on the windies."

So I packed my few belongings as best I could, flung my books into a haversack, and, gripping the shepherd's arm nervously, crossed the threshold. The glen was full of sunlight. There lay the long shining links of the Farawa burn, the rough hills tumbled beyond, and far over all the scarred and distant forehead of the Muneraw. I had always looked on moorland country as the freshest on earth—clean, wholesome, and homely. But now the uplands seemed like a horrible pit. When I looked to the hills my breath choked in my throat, and the feel of soft heather below my feet set my heart trembling.

It was a slow journey to the inn at Allermuir. For one thing, no power on earth would draw me within sight of the shieling of Carrickfey, so we had to cross a shoulder of hill and make our way down a difficult glen, and then over a treacherous moss. The lochs were now gleaming like fretted silver; but to me, in my dreadful knowledge, they seemed more eerie than on that grey day when I came. At last my eyes were cheered by the sight of a meadow and a fence; then we were on a little byroad; and soon the fir-woods and corn-lands of Allercleuch were plain before us.

The shepherd came no farther, but with brief good-bye turned his solemn face hillwards. I hired a trap and a man to drive, and down the ten miles of Glen Aller I struggled to keep my thoughts from the past. I thought of the kindly South Country, of Oxford, of anything comfortable and civilized. My driver pointed out the objects of interest as in duty bound, but his words fell on unheeding ears. At last he said something which roused me indeed to interest—the interest of the man who hears the word he fears most in the world. On the left side of the river there suddenly sprang into view a long gloomy cleft in the hills, with a vista of dark mountains behind, down which a stream of considerable

size poured its waters.

"That is the Water o' Dule," said the man in a reverent voice. "A graund water to fish, but dangerous to life, for it's a' linns. Awa at the heid they say there's a terrible wild place called the Scarts o' Muneraw,—that's a shouther o' the muckle hill itsel' that ye see,—but I've never been there, and I never kent ony man that had either."

At the station, which is a mile from the village of Allerfoot, I found I had some hours to wait on my train for the south. I dared not trust myself for one moment alone, so I hung about the goods shed, talked vacantly to the porters, and when one went to the village for tea I accompanied him, and to his wonder entertained him at the inn. When I returned I found on the platform a stray bagman who was that evening going to London.

If there is one class of men in the world for which I have small inclination it is this; but such was my state that I hailed him as a brother, and besought his company. I paid the difference for a first-class fare, and had him in the carriage with me. He must have thought me an amiable maniac, for I talked in fits and starts, and when he fell asleep I would wake him up and beseech him to speak to me. At wayside stations I would pull down the blinds in case of recognition, for to my unquiet mind the world seemed full of spies sent by that terrible Folk of the Hills. When the train crossed a stretch of moor I would lie down on the seat in case of shafts fired from the heather. And then at last with utter weariness I fell asleep, and woke screaming about midnight to find myself well down in the cheerful English midlands, and red blast furnaces blinking by the railway-side.

In the morning I breakfasted in my rooms at St. Chad's with a dawning sense of safety. I was in a different and calmer world. The lawn-like quadrangles, the great trees, the cawing of rooks, and the homely twitter of sparrows—all seemed decent and settled and pleasing. Indoors the oak-panelled walls, the shelves of books, the pictures, the faint fragrance of tobacco, were very different from the gimcrack adornments and the accursed smell of peat and heather in that deplorable cottage. It was still vacation time, so most of my friends were down, but I spent the day hunting out the few cheerful pedants to whom term and vacation were the same. It delighted me to hear again their precise talk, to hear them make a boast of their work, and narrate the childish little incidents of their life. I yearned for the childish once more; I craved for women's drawing-rooms, and women's chatter, and everything which makes life an

elegant game. God knows I had had enough of the other thing for a lifetime!

That night I shut myself in my rooms, barred my windows, drew my curtains, and made a great destruction. All books or pictures which recalled to me the moorlands were ruthlessly doomed. Novels, poems, treatises I flung into an old box, for sale to the second-hand bookseller. Some prints and water-colour sketches I tore to pieces with my own hands. I ransacked my fishing-book, and condemned all tackle for moorland waters to the flames. I wrote a letter to my solicitors, bidding them go no further in the purchase of a place in Lorn I had long been thinking of. Then, and not till then, did I feel the bondage of the past a little loosed from my shoulders. I made myself a night-cap of rum punch instead of my usual whisky toddy, that all associations with that dismal land might be forgotten, and to complete the renunciation I returned to cigars and flung my pipe into a drawer.

But when I woke in the morning I found that it is hard to get rid of memories. My feet were still sore and wounded, and when I felt my arms cramped and reflected on the causes, there was that black memory always near to vex me.

In a little term began, and my duties—as deputy professor of Northern Antiquities—were once more clamorous. I can well believe that my hearers found my lectures strange, for instead of dealing with my favourite subjects and matters, which I might modestly say I had made my own, I confined myself to recondite and distant themes, treating even these cursorily and dully. For the truth is, my heart was no more in my subject. I hated—or I thought that I hated—all things Northern with the virulence of utter fear. My reading was confined to science of the most recent kind, to abstruse philosophy, and to foreign classics. Anything which savoured of romance or mystery was abhorrent; I pined for sharp outlines and the tangibility of a high civilization.

All that term I threw myself into the most frivolous life of the place. My Harrow schooldays seemed to have come back to me. I had once been a fair cricketer, so I played again for my college, and made decent scores. I coached an indifferent crew on the river. I fell into the slang of the place, which I had hitherto detested. My former friends looked on me askance, as if some freakish changeling had possessed me. Formerly I had been ready for pedantic discussion, I had been absorbed in my work, men had spoken of me as a rising scholar. Now I fled the very mention of things I had once delighted in. The Professor of Northern Antiquities, a scholar of European reputation, meeting me once in the Parks, embarked on an account of certain novel rings recently

found in Scotland, and to his horror found that, when he had got well under way, I had slipped off unnoticed. I heard afterwards that the good old man was found by a friend walking disconsolately with bowed head in the middle of the High Street. Being rescued from among the horses' feet, he could only murmur, "I am thinking of Graves, poor man! And a year ago he was as sane as I am!"

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But a man may not long deceive himself. I kept up the illusion valiantly for the term; but I felt instinctively that the fresh schoolboy life, which seemed to me the extreme opposite to the ghoulish North, and as such the most desirable of things, was eternally cut off from me. No cunning affectation could ever dispel my real nature or efface the memory of a week. I realized miserably that sooner or later I must fight it out with my conscience. I began to call myself a coward. The chief thoughts of my mind began to centre themselves more and more round that unknown life waiting to be explored among the wilds.

One day I met a friend—an official in the British Museum—who was full of some new theory about primitive habitations. To me it seemed inconceivably absurd; but he was strong in his confidence, and without flaw in his evidence. The man irritated me, and I burned to prove him wrong, but I could think of no argument which was final against his. Then it flashed upon me that my own experience held the disproof; and without more words I left him, hot, angry with myself, and tantalized by the unattainable.

I might relate my *bona-fide* experience, but would men believe me? I must bring proofs, I must complete my researches, so as to make them incapable of disbelief. And there in those deserts was waiting the key. There lay the greatest discovery of the century—nay, of the millennium. There, too, lay the road to wealth such as I had never dreamed of. Could I succeed, I should be famous for ever. I would revolutionize history and anthropology; I would systematize folklore; I would show the world of men the pit whence they were digged and the rock whence they were hewn.

And then began a game of battledore between myself and my conscience.

"You are a coward," said my conscience.

"I am sufficiently brave," I would answer. "I have seen things and yet lived.

The terror is more than mortal, and I cannot face it."

"You are a coward," said my conscience.

"I am not bound to go there again. It would be purely for my own aggrandizement if I went, and not for any matter of duty."

"Nevertheless you are a coward," said my conscience.

"In any case the matter can wait."

"You are a coward."

* * * * * *

Then came one awful midsummer night, when I lay sleepless and fought the thing out with myself. I knew that the strife was hopeless, that I should have no peace in this world again unless I made the attempt. The dawn was breaking when I came to the final resolution; and when I rose and looked at my face in a mirror, lo! it was white and lined and drawn like a man of sixty.

Chapter VI

Summer on the Moors

The next morning I packed a bag with some changes of clothing and a collection of notebooks, and went up to town. The first thing I did was to pay a visit to my solicitors. "I am about to travel," said I, "and I wish to have all things settled in case any accident should happen to me." So I arranged for the disposal of my property in case of death, and added a codicil which puzzled the lawyers. If I did not return within six months, communications were to be entered into with the shepherd at the shieling of Farawa—post-town Allerfoot. If he could produce any papers, they were to be put into the hands of certain friends, published, and the cost charged to my estate. From my solicitors I went to a gunmaker's in Regent Street and bought an ordinary six-chambered revolver, feeling much as a man must feel who proposed to cross the Atlantic in a skiff and purchased a small lifebelt as a precaution.

I took the night express to the North, and, for a marvel, I slept. When I awoke about four we were on the verge of Westmoreland, and stony hills blocked the horizon. At first I hailed the mountain-land gladly; sleep for the moment had caused forgetfulness of my terrors. But soon a turn of the line brought me in full view of a heathery moor, running far to a confusion of distant peaks. I remembered my mission and my fate, and if ever condemned criminal felt a more bitter regret I pity his case. Why should I alone among the millions of this happy isle be singled out as the repository of a ghastly secret, and be cursed by a conscience which would not let it rest?

I came to Allerfoot early in the forenoon, and got a trap to drive me up the valley. It was a lowering grey day, hot and yet sunless. A sort of heat haze cloaked the hills, and every now and then a smurr of rain would meet us on the road, and in a minute be over. I felt wretchedly dispirited; and when at last the white-washed kirk of Allermuir came into sight and the broken-backed bridge of Aller, man's eyes seemed to have looked on no drearier scene since time began.

I ate what meal I could get, for, fears or no, I was voraciously hungry. Then I asked the landlord to find me some man who would show me the road to Farawa. I demanded company, not for protection—for what could two men do against such brutish strength?—but to keep my mind from its own thoughts.

The man looked at me anxiously.

"Are ye acquaint wi' the folks, then? " he asked.

I said I was, that I had often stayed in the cottage.

"Ye ken that they've a name for being queer. The man never comes here forbye once or twice a year, and he has few dealings wi' other herds. He's got an ill name, too, for losing sheep. I dinna like the country ava. Up by yon Muneraw—no that I've ever been there, but I've seen it afar off—is enough to put a man daft for the rest o' his days. What's taking ye thereaways? It's no the time for the fishing?"

I told him that I was a botanist going to explore certain hill crevices for rare ferns. He shook his head, and then after some delay found me an ostler who would accompany me to the cottage.

The man was a shock-headed, long-limbed fellow, with fierce red hair and a humorous eye. He talked sociably about his life, answered my hasty questions with deftness, and beguiled me for the moment out of myself. I passed the melancholy lochs, and came in sight of the great stony hills without the trepidation I had expected. Here at my side was one who found some humour even in those uplands. But one thing I noted which brought back the old uneasiness. He took the road which led us farthest from Carrickfey, and when to try him I proposed the other, he vetoed it with emphasis.

After this his good spirits departed, and be grew distrustful.

"What maks ye a freend o' the herd at Farawa?" he demanded a dozen times.

Finally, I asked him if he knew the man, and had seen him lately.

"I dinna ken him, and I hadna seen him for years till a fortnicht syne, when a' Allermuir saw him. He cam doun one afternoon to the public-hoose, and begood to drink. He had aye been kenned for a terrible godly kind o' a man, so ye may believe folk wondered at this. But when he had stuck to the drink for twae days, and filled himsel' blind-fou half a dozen o' times, he took a fit o' repentance, and raved and blethered about siccan a life as he led in the muirs. There was some said he was speakin' serious, but maist thocht it was juist daftness."

"And what did he speak about?" I asked sharply.

"I canna verra weel tell ye. It was about some kind o' bogle that lived in the Muneraw— that's the shouthers o't ye see yonder—and it seems that the bogle killed his sheep and frichted himsel'. He was aye bletherin', too, about something or somebody ca'd Grave; but oh! the man wasna wise." And my companion shook a contemptuous head.

And then below us in the valley we saw the shieling, with a thin shaft of smoke rising into the rainy grey weather. The man left me, sturdily refusing any fee. "I wantit my legs stretched as weel as you. A walk in the hills is neither here nor there to a stoot man. When will ye be back, sir?"

The question was well-timed. "To-morrow fortnight," I said, "and I want somebody from Allermuir to come out here in the morning and carry some baggage. Will you see to that?"

He said “Ay,” and went off, while I scrambled down the hill to the cottage. Nervousness possessed me, and though it was broad daylight and the whole place lay plain before me, I ran pell-mell, and did not stop till I reached the door.

The place was utterly empty. Unmade beds, unwashed dishes, a hearth strewn with the ashes of peat, and dust thick on everything, proclaimed the absence of inmates. I began to be hideously frightened. Had the shepherd, and his sister also, disappeared? Was I left alone, with a dozen lonely miles between me and human dwellings? I could not return alone; better this horrible place than the unknown perils of the out-of-doors. Hastily I barricaded the door, and to the best of my power shuttered the windows; and then with dreary forebodings I sat down to wait on fortune.

In a little I heard a long swinging step outside and the sound of dogs. Joyfully I opened the latch, and there was the shepherd’s grim face waiting stolidly on what might appear.

At the sight of me he stepped back. “What in the Lord’s name are ye daein’ here?” he asked. “Didna ye get eneuch afore?”

“Come in,” I said sharply. “I want to talk.”

In he came with those blessed dogs—what a comfort it was to look on their great honest faces! He sat down on the untidy bed and waited.

“I came because I could not stay away. I saw too much to give me any peace elsewhere. I must go back, even though I risk my life for it. The cause of scholarship demands it as well as the cause of humanity.”

“Is that a’ the news ye hae?” he said. “Weel, I’ve mair to tell ye. Three weeks syne my sister Margit was lost, and I’ve never seen her mair.”

My jaw fell, and I could only stare at him.

“I cam hame from the hill at nightfa’ and she was gone. I lookit for her up hill and doun, but I couldna find her. Syne I think I went daft. I went to the Scarts and huntit them up and doun, but no sign could I see. The Folk can bide quiet enough when they want. Syne I went to Allermuir and drank mysel’ blind—me, that’s a God-fearing man and a saved soul, but the Lord help me, I didna

ken what I was at. That's my news, and day and night I wander thae hills, seekin' for what I canna find."

"But, man, are you mad?" I cried. "Surely there are neighbours to help you. There is a law in the land, and you had only to find the nearest police-office and compel them to assist you."

"What guid can man dae?" he asked. "An army o' sodgers couldna find that hidy-hole. Forby, when I went into Allermuir wi' my story the folk thocht me daft. It was that set me drinking, for—the Lord forgive me!—I wasna my ain maister. I threepit till I was hairse, but the bodies just lauch'd." And he lay back on the bed like a man mortally tired.

Grim though the tidings were, I can only say that my chief feeling was of comfort. Pity for the new tragedy had swallowed up my fear. I had now a purpose, and a purpose, too, not of curiosity but of mercy.

"I go to-morrow morning to the Muneraw. But first I want to give you something to do." And I drew roughly a chart of the place on the back of a letter. "Go into Allermuir to-morrow, and give this paper to the landlord at the inn. The letter will tell him what to do. He is to raise at once all the men he can get, and come to the place on the chart marked with a cross. Tell him life depends on his hurry."

The shepherd nodded. "D'ye ken the Folk are watching for you? They let me pass without trouble, for they've nae use for me, but I see fine they're seeking you. Ye'll no gang half a mile the morn afore they grip ye."

"So much the better," I said. "That will take me quicker to the place I want to be at."

"And I'm to gang to Allermuir the morn," he repeated, with the air of a child conning a lesson. "But what if they'll no believe me?"

"They'll believe the letter."

"Maybe," he said, and relapsed into a doze.

I set myself to put that house in order, to rouse the fire, and prepare some food. It was dismal work; and meantime outside the night darkened and a

great wind rose, which howled round the walls and lashed the rain on the windows.

Chapter VII

"In Tuas Manus, Domine!"

I had not gone twenty yards from the cottage door ere I knew I was watched. I had left the shepherd still dozing, in the half-conscious state of a dazed and broken man. All night the wind had wakened me at intervals, and now in the half-light of morn the weather seemed more vicious than ever. The wind cut my ears, the whole firmament was full of the rendings and thunders of the storm. Rain fell in blinding sheets, the heath was a marsh, and it was the most I could do to struggle against the hurricane which stopped my breath. And all the while I knew I was not alone in the desert.

All men know—in imagination or in experience—the sensation of being spied on. The nerves tingle, the skin grows hot and prickly, and there is a queer sinking of the heart. Intensify this common feeling a hundredfold, and you get a tenth part of what I suffered. I am telling a plain tale, and record bare physical facts. My lips stood out from my teeth as I heard, or felt, a rustle in the heather, a scraping among stones. Some subtle magnetic link seemed established between my body and the mysterious world around. I became sick—acutely sick—with the ceaseless apprehension.

My fright became so complete that when I turned a corner of rock, or stepped in deep heather, I seemed to feel a body rub against mine. This continued all the way up the Farawa water, and then up its feeder to the little lonely loch. It kept me from looking forward; but it likewise kept me in such a sweat of fright that I was ready to faint. Then the notion came upon me to test this fancy of mine. If I was tracked thus closely, clearly the trackers would bar my way if I turned back. So I wheeled round and walked a dozen paces down the glen.

Nothing stopped me. I was about to turn again, when something made me take six more paces. At the fourth something rustled in the heather, and my neck was gripped as in a vice. I had already made up my mind on what I would do. I would be perfectly still, I would conquer my fear, and let them do as they pleased with me so long as they took me to their dwelling. But at the touch of the hands my resolutions fled. I struggled and screamed. Then

something was clapped on my mouth, speech and strength went from me, and once more I was back in the maudlin childhood of terror.

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In the cave it was always a dusky twilight.

I seemed to be lying in the same place, with the same dull glare of firelight far off, and the same close stupefying smell. One of the creatures was standing silently at my side, and I asked him some trivial question. He turned and shambled down the passage, leaving me alone.

Then he returned with another, and they talked their guttural talk to me. I scarcely listened till I remembered that in a sense I was here of my own accord, and on a definite mission. The purport of their speech seemed to be that, now I had returned, I must beware of a second flight. Once I had been spared; a second time I should be killed without mercy.

I assented gladly. The Folk, then, had some use for me. I felt my errand prospering.

Then the old creature which I had seen before crept out of some corner and squatted beside me. He put a claw on my shoulder, a horrible, corrugated, skeleton thing, hairy to the finger-tips and nailless. He grinned, too, with toothless gums, and his hideous old voice was like a file on sandstone.

I asked questions, but he would only grin and jabber, looking now and then furtively over his shoulder towards the fire.

I coaxed and humoured him, till he launched into a narrative of which I could make nothing. It seemed a mere string of names, with certain words repeated at fixed intervals. Then it flashed on me that this might be a religious incantation. I had discovered remnants of a ritual and a mythology among them. It was possible that these were sacred days, and that I had stumbled upon some rude celebration.

I caught a word or two and repeated them. He looked at me curiously. Then I asked him some leading question, and he replied with clearness. My guess was right. The midsummer week was the holy season of the year, when sacrifices were offered to the gods.

The notion of sacrifices disquieted me, and I would fain have asked further. But the creature would speak no more. He hobbled off, and left me alone in the rock chamber to listen to a strange sound which hung ceaselessly about me. It must be the storm without, like a park of artillery rattling among the crags. A storm of storms surely, for the place echoed and hummed, and to my unquiet eye the very rock of the roof seemed to shake.

Apparently my existence was forgotten, for I lay long before any one returned. Then it was merely one who brought food, the same strange meal as before, and left hastily. When I had eaten I rose and stretched myself. My hands and knees still quivered nervously; but I was strong and perfectly well in body. The empty, desolate, tomb-like place was eerie enough to scare any one; but its emptiness was comfort when I thought of its inmates. Then I wandered down the passage towards the fire which was burning in loneliness. Where had the Folk gone? I puzzled over their disappearance.

Suddenly sounds began to break on my ear, coming from some inner chamber at the end of that in which the fire burned. I could scarcely see for the smoke; but I began to make my way towards the noise, feeling along the sides of rock. Then a second gleam of light seemed to rise before me, and I came to an aperture in the wall which gave entrance to another room.

This in turn was full of smoke and glow—a murky orange glow, as if from some strange flame of roots. There were the squat moving figures, running in wild antics round the fire. I crouched in the entrance, terrified and yet curious, till I saw something beyond the blaze which held me dumb. Apart from the others and tied to some stake in the wall was a woman's figure, and the face was the face of the shepherd's sister.

My first impulse was flight. I must get away and think—plan, achieve some desperate way of escape. I sped back to the silent chamber as if the gang were at my heels. It was still empty, and I stood helplessly in the centre, looking at the impassable walls of rock as a wearied beast may look at the walls of its cage. I bethought me of the way I had escaped before and rushed thither, only to find it blocked by a huge contrivance of stone. Yards and yards of solid rock were between me and the upper air, and yet through it all came the crash and whistle of the storm. If I were at my wits' end in this inner darkness, there was also high commotion among the powers of the air in that upper world.

As I stood I heard the soft steps of my tormentors. They seemed to think I

was meditating escape, for they flung themselves on me and bore me to the ground. I did not struggle, and when they saw me quiet, they squatted round and began to speak. They told me of the holy season and its sacrifices. At first I could not follow them; then when I caught familiar words I found some clue, and they became intelligible. They spoke of a woman, and I asked, "What woman?" With all frankness they told me of the custom which prevailed—how every twentieth summer a woman was sacrificed to some devilish god, and by the hand of one of the stranger race. I said nothing, but my whitening face must have told them a tale, though I strove hard to keep my composure. I asked if they had found the victims. "She is in this place," they said; "and as for the man, thou art he." And with this they left me.

I had still some hours, so much I gathered from their talk, for the sacrifice was at sunset. Escape was cut off for ever. I have always been something of a fatalist, and at the prospect of the irrevocable end my cheerfulness returned. I had my pistol, for they had taken nothing from me. I took out the little weapon and fingered it lovingly. Hope of the lost, refuge of the vanquished, ease to the coward,—blessed be he who first conceived it!

The time dragged on, the minutes grew to hours, and still I was left solitary. Only the mad violence of the storm broke the quiet. It had increased in fury, for the stones at the mouth of the exit by which I had formerly escaped seemed to rock with some external pressure, and cutting shafts of wind slipped past and cleft the heat of the passage. What a sight the ravine outside must be, I thought, set in the forehead of a great hill, and swept clean by every blast! Then came a crashing, and the long hollow echo of a fall. The rocks are splitting, thought I; the road down the corrie will be impassable now and for evermore.

I began to grow weak with the nervousness of the waiting, and by-and-by I lay down and fell into a sort of doze. When I next knew consciousness I was being roused by two of the Folk, and bidden get ready. I stumbled to my feet, felt for the pistol in the hollow of my sleeve, and prepared to follow.

When we came out into the wider chamber the noise of the storm was deafening. The roof rang like a shield which has been struck. I noticed, perturbed as I was, that my guards cast anxious eyes around them, alarmed, like myself, at the murderous din. Nor was the world quieter when we entered the last chamber, where the fire burned and the remnant of the Folk waited. Wind had found an entrance from somewhere or other, and the flames blew here and there, and the smoke gyrated in odd circles. At the back, and apart

from the rest, I saw the dazed eyes and the white old drawn face of the woman.

They led me up beside her to a place where there was a rude flat stone, hollowed in the centre, and on it a rusty iron knife, which seemed once to have formed part of a scythe blade. Then I saw the ceremonial which was marked out for me. It was the very rite which I had dimly figured as current among a rude people, and even in that moment of horror I had something of the scholar's satisfaction.

The oldest of the Folk, who seemed to be a sort of priest, came to my side and mumbled a form of words. His fetid breath sickened me; his dull eyes, glassy like a brute's with age, brought my knees together. He put the knife in my hands, dragged the terror-stricken woman forward to the altar, and bade me begin.

I began by sawing her bonds through. When she felt herself free she would have fled back, but stopped when I bade her. At that moment there came a noise of rending and crashing as if the hills were falling, and for one second the eyes of the Folk were averted from the frustrated sacrifice.

Only for a moment. The next they saw what I had done, and with one impulse rushed towards me. Then began the last scene in the play. I sent a bullet through the right eye of the first thing that came on. The second shot went wide; but the third shattered the hand of an elderly ruffian with a club. Never for an instant did they stop, and now they were clutching at me. I pushed the woman behind, and fired three rapid shots in blind panic, and then, clutching the scythe, I struck right and left like a madman.

Suddenly I saw the foreground sink before my eyes. The roof sloped down, and with a sickening hiss a mountain of rock and earth seemed to precipitate itself on the foremost of my assailants. One, nipped in the middle by a rock, caught my eye by his hideous writhings. Two only remained in what was now a little suffocating chamber, with embers from the fire still smoking on the floor.

The woman caught me by the hand and drew me with her, while the two seemed mute with fear. "There's a road at the back," she screamed. "I ken it. I fand it out." And she pulled me up a narrow hole in the rock.

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How long we climbed I do not know. We were both fighting for air, with the tightness of throat and chest and the craziness of limb which mean suffocation. I

cannot tell when we first came to the surface, but I remember the woman, who seemed to have the strength of extreme terror, pulling me from the edge of a crevasse and laying me on a flat rock. It seemed to be the depth of winter, with sheer-falling rain and a wind that shook the hills.

Then I was once more myself and could look about me. From my feet yawned a sheer abyss, where once had been a hill shoulder. Some great mass of rock on the brow of the mountain had been loosened by the storm, and in its fall had caught the lips of the ravine. For a moment I feared that all had been destroyed.

My feeling—Heaven help me!—was not thankfulness for God's mercy and my escape, but a bitter mad regret. I rushed frantically to the edge, and when I saw only the blackness of darkness I wept weak tears. All the time the storm was tearing at my body, and I had to grip hard by hand and foot to keep my place.

Suddenly on the brink of the ravine I saw a third figure. We two were not the only fugitives. One of the Folk had escaped.

I ran to it, and to my surprise the thing as soon as it saw me rushed to meet me. At first I thought it was with some instinct of self-preservation, but when I saw its eyes I knew the purpose of fight. Clearly one or other should go no more from the place.

We were some ten yards from the brink when I grappled with it. Dimly I heard the woman scream with fright, and saw her scramble across the hillside. Then we were tugging in a death-throe, the hideous smell of the thing in my face, its red eyes burning into mine, and its hoarse voice muttering. Its strength seemed incredible; but I, too, am no weakling. We tugged and strained, its nails biting into my flesh, while I choked its throat unsparingly. Every second I dreaded lest we should plunge together over the ledge, for it was thither my adversary tried to draw me. I caught my heel in a nick of rock, and pulled madly against it.

And then, while I was beginning to glory with the pride of conquest, my hope was dashed in pieces. The thing seemed to break from my arms, and, as if in despair, cast itself headlong into the impenetrable darkness. I stumbled blindly after it, saved myself on the brink, and fell back into a merciful swoon.

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Chapter VIII

Note in Conclusion by the Editor

At this point the narrative of my unfortunate friend, Mr. Graves of St. Chad's, breaks off abruptly. He wrote it shortly before his death, and was prevented from completing it by the attack of heart failure which carried him off. In accordance with the instructions in his will I have prepared it for publication, and now in much fear and hesitation give it to the world. First, however, I must supplement it by such facts as fall within my knowledge.

The shepherd seems to have gone to Allermuir and by the help of the letter convinced the inhabitants. A body of men was collected under the landlord, and during the afternoon set out for the hills. But unfortunately the great midsummer storm—the most terrible of recent climatic disturbances—had filled the mosses and streams, and they found themselves unable to proceed by any direct road. Ultimately late in the evening they arrived at the cottage of Farawa, only to find there a raving woman, the shepherd's sister, who seemed crazy with brain fever. She told some rambling story about her escape, but her narrative said nothing of Mr. Graves. So they treated her with what skill they possessed, and sheltered for the night in and around the cottage. Next morning the storm had abated a little, and the woman had recovered something of her wits. From her they learned that Mr. Graves was lying in a ravine on the side of the Muneraw in imminent danger of his life. A body of men set out to find him; but so immense was the landslip, and so dangerous the whole mountain, that it was nearly evening when they recovered him from the ledge of rock. He was alive, but unconscious, and on bringing him back to the cottage it was clear that he was indeed very ill. There he lay for three months, while the best skill that could be got was procured for him. By dint of an uncommon toughness of constitution he survived; but it was an old and feeble man who returned to Oxford in the early winter.

The shepherd and his sister immediately left the countryside, and were never more heard of, unless they are the pair of unfortunates who are at present in a Scottish pauper asylum, incapable of remembering even their names. The people who last spoke with them declared that their minds seemed weakened by a great shock, and that it was hopeless to try to get any connected or rational statement.

The career of my poor friend from that hour was little short of a tragedy. He

awoke from his illness to find the world incredulous; even the country-folk of Allermuir set down the story to the shepherd's craziness and my friend's credulity. In Oxford his argument was received with polite scorn. An account of his experiences which he drew up for the *Times* was refused by the editor; and an article on "Primitive Peoples of the North," embodying what he believed to be the result of his discoveries, was rejected by every responsible journal in Europe. At first he bore the treatment bravely. Reflection convinced him that the colony had not been destroyed. Proofs were still awaiting his hand, and with courage and caution he might yet triumph over his enemies. But unfortunately, though the ardour of the scholar burned more fiercely than ever and all fear seemed to have been purged from his soul, the last adventure had grievously sapped his bodily strength. In the spring following his accident he made an effort to reach the spot—alone, for no one could be persuaded to follow him in what was regarded as a childish madness. He slept at the now deserted cottage of Farawa, but in the morning found himself unable to continue, and with difficulty struggled back to the shepherd's cottage at Allercleuch, where he was confined to bed for a fortnight. Then it became necessary for him to seek health abroad, and it was not till the following autumn that he attempted the journey again.

He fell sick a second time at the inn of Allermuir, and during his convalescence had himself carried to a knoll in the inn garden, whence a glimpse can be obtained of the shoulder of the Muneraw. There he would sit for hours with his eyes fixed on the horizon, and at times he would be found weeping with weakness and vexation. The last attempt was made but two months before his last illness. On this occasion he got no farther than Carlisle, where he was taken ill with what proved to be a premonition of death. After that he shut his lips tightly, as though recognizing the futility of his hopes. Whether he had been soured by the treatment he received, or whether his brain had already been weakened, he had become a morose silent man, and for the two years before his death had few friends and no society. From the obituary notice in the *Times* I take the following paragraph, which shows in what light the world had come to look upon him:—

"At the outset of his career he was regarded as a rising scholar in one department of archæology, and his Taffert lectures were a real contribution to an obscure subject. But in after life he was led into fantastic speculations; and when he found himself unable to convince his colleagues, he gradually retired into himself, and lived practically a hermit's life till his death. His career, thus broken short, is a sad instance of the fascination which the recondite and the

quack can exercise even over men of approved ability."

And now his own narrative is published, and the world can judge as it pleases about the amazing romance. The view which will doubtless find general acceptance is that the whole is a figment of the brain, begotten of some harmless moorland adventure and the company of such religious maniacs as the shepherd and his sister. But some who knew the former sobriety and calmness of my friend's mind may be disposed timorously and with deep hesitation to another verdict. They may accept the narrative, and believe that somewhere in those moorlands he met with a horrible primitive survival, passed through the strangest adventure, and had his fingers on an epoch-making discovery. In this case they will be inclined to sympathize with the loneliness and misunderstanding of his latter days. It is not for me to decide the question. Though a fellow-historian, the Picts are outside my period, and I dare not advance an opinion on a matter with which I am not fully familiar. But I would point out that the means of settling the question are still extant, and I would call upon some young archæologist, with a reputation to make, to seize upon the chance of the century. Most of the expresses for the North stop at Allerfoot; a ten-miles' drive will bring him to Allermuir; and then with a fifteen-miles' walk he is at Farawa and on the threshold of discovery. Let him follow the burn and cross the ridge and ascend the Scarts of the Muneraw, and, if he return at all, it may be with a more charitable judgment of my unfortunate friend.

The Spider of Guyana

Emile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian

The mineral waters of Spinbronn, in Hundsruck, a few leagues from Pirmesans, formerly enjoyed an excellent reputation, for Spinbronn was the rendezvous of all the gouty and rheumatic members of the German aristocracy. The wild nature of the surrounding country did not deter the visitors, for they were lodged in charming villas at the foot of the mountain. They bathed in the cascade that fell in large sheets of foam from the summit of the rocks, and drank two or three pints of the water every day. Dr. Daniel Haselnoss, who prescribed for the sick and those who thought they were, received his patients in a large wig, brown coat, and ruffles, and was rapidly making his fortune.

Today, however, Spinbronn is no longer a favorite watering place. The fashionable visitors have disappeared; Dr. Haselnoss has given up his practice; and the town is only inhabited by a few poor, miserable woodcutters. All this is the result of a succession of strange and unprecedented catastrophes, which Councillor Bremen, of Pirmesans, recounted to me the other evening.

"You know, Mr. Fritz," he said, "that the source of the Spinbronn flows from a sort of cavern about 5 feet high, and from 10 feet to 15 feet across; the water, which has a temperature of 67 degrees centigrade, is salt. The front of the cavern is half hidden by moss, ivy, and low shrubs, and it is impossible to find out the depth of it, because of the thermal exhalations that prevent any entrance.

"In spite of that, it had been remarked for a century that the birds of the locality—hawks, thrushes, and turtledoves—were engulfed in full flight, and no one knew of what mysterious influence it was the result. During the season of 1801, for some unexplained reason, the source became more abundant, and the visitors one evening, taking their constitutional promenade on the lawns at the foot of the rocks, saw a human skeleton descend from the cascade.

"You can imagine the general alarm, Mr. Fritz. It was naturally supposed that a murder had been committed at Spinbronn some years before, and that the victim had been thrown into the source. But the skeleton, which was blanched as white as snow, only weighed twelve pounds; and Dr. Haselnoss concluded that, in all probability, it had been in the sand more than three

centuries to have arrived at that state of desiccation.

"Plausible as his reasoning was, it did not prevent many visitors leaving that same day, horrified to have drunk the waters. The really gouty and rheumatic ones, however, stayed on, and consoled themselves with the doctor's version. But the following days the cavern disgorged all that it contained of detritus; and a veritable ossuary descended the mountain—skeletons of animals of all sorts, quadrupeds, birds, reptiles. In fact, all the most horrible things that could be imagined.

"Then Haselnoss wrote and published a pamphlet to prove that all these bones were relics of the antediluvian world, that they were fossil skeletons, accumulated there in a sort of funnel during the universal Deluge, that is to say, four thousand years before Christ; and, consequently, could only be regarded as stones, and not as anything repulsive.

"But his work had barely reassured the gouty ones, when one fine morning the corpse of a fox, and then of a hawk, with all its plumage fell from the cascade. Impossible to maintain that these had existed before the Deluge, and the exodus became general.

"'How horrible!' cried the ladies. 'That is where the so-called virtue of mineral waters springs from. Better die of rheumatism than continue such a remedy.'

"At the end of a week the only visitor left was a stout Englishman, Commodore Sir Thomas Hawerbrook, who lived on a grand scale, as most Englishmen do. He was tall and very stout, and of a florid complexion. His hands were literally knotted with gout, and he would have drunk no matter what if he thought it would cure him. He laughed loudly at the desertion of the sufferers, installed himself in the best of the villas, and announced his intention of spending the winter at Spinbronn."

Here Councillor Bremen leisurely took a large pinch of snuff to refresh his memory, and with the tips of his fingers shook off the tiny particles, which fell on his delicate lace jabot. Then he went on.

"Five or six years before the revolution of 1789, a young doctor of Pirmesans, called Christian Weber, went to St. Domingo to seek his fortune. He had been very successful, and was about to retire, when the revolt of the negroes occurred.

Happily he escaped the massacre, and was able to save part of his fortune. He traveled for a time in South America, and about the period of which I speak, returned to Pirmesans, bought the house and what remained of the practice of Dr. Haselnoss.

"Dr. Christian Weber brought with him an old negress called Agatha; a very ugly old woman, with a flat nose, and enormous lips. She always enveloped her head in a sort of turban of the most startling colors; and wore rings in her ears that reached to her shoulders. Altogether she was such a singular-looking creature that the mountaineers came from miles around just to look at her.

"The doctor himself was a tall, thin man, invariably dressed in a blue swallow-tailed coat and leather breeches. He talked very little, his laugh was dry and nervous, and his habits most eccentric. During his wanderings he had collected a number of insects of almost every species, and seemed to be much more interested in them than in his patients. In his daily rambles among the mountains he often found butterflies to add to his collection, and these he brought home pinned to the lining of his hat.

"Dr. Weber, Mr. Fritz, was my cousin and my guardian, and directly he returned to Germany he took me from school, and settled me with him at Spinbronn. Agatha was a great friend of mine, though at first she frightened me, but she was a good creature, knew how to make the most delicious sweets, and could sing the most charming songs.

"Sir Thomas and Dr. Weber were on friendly terms, and spent long hours together talking of subjects beyond my comprehension—of transmission of fluids, and mysterious things they had observed in their travels. Another mystery to me was the singular influence that the doctor appeared to have over the negress, for though she was generally particularly lively, ready to be amused at the slightest thing, yet she trembled like a leaf if she encountered her master's eyes fixed upon her.

"I have told you that birds, and even large animals, were engulfed in the cavern. After the disappearance of the visitors, some of the old inhabitants remembered that about fifty years before a young girl, Loisa Muller, who lived with her grandmother in a cottage near the source, had suddenly disappeared. She had gone out one morning to gather herbs, and was never seen or heard of again, but her apron had been found a few days later near the mouth of the cavern. From that it was evident to all that the skeleton about which Dr.

Haselnoss had written so eloquently was that of the poor girl, who had, no doubt, been drawn into the cavern by the mysterious influence that almost daily acted upon more feeble creatures. What that influence was nobody could tell. The superstitious mountaineers believed that the devil inhabited the cavern, and terror spread throughout the district.

"One afternoon, in the month of July, my cousin was occupied in classifying his insects and rearranging them in their cases. He had found some curious ones the night before, at which he was highly delighted. I was helping by making a needle red-hot in the flame of a candle.

"Sir Thomas, lying back in a chair near the window and smoking a big cigar, was regarding us with a dreamy air. The commodore was very fond of me. He often took me driving with him, and used to like to hear me chatter in English. When the doctor had labeled all his butterflies, he opened the box of larger insects.

"'I caught a magnificent horn-beetle yesterday,' he said, 'the *lucanus cervus* of the Hartz oaks. It is a rare kind.'

"As he spoke I gave him the hot needle, which he passed through the insect preparatory to fixing it on the cork. Sir Thomas, who had taken no notice till then, rose and came to the table on which the case of specimens stood. He looked at the spider of Guyana, and an expression of horror passed over his rubicund features.

"'There,' he said, 'is the most hideous work of the Creator. I tremble only to look at it.'

"And, sure enough, a sudden pallor spread over his face.

"'Bah!' said my guardian, 'all that is childish nonsense. You heard your nurse scream at a spider, you were frightened, and the impression has remained. But if you regard the creature with a strong microscope, you would be astonished at the delicacy of its organs, at their admirable arrangement, and even at their beauty.'

"'It disgusts me,' said the commodore, brusquely. 'Pouff!'

"And he walked away.

"'I don't know why,' he continued, 'but a spider always freezes my blood.'

"Dr. Weber burst out laughing, but I felt the same as Sir Thomas, and sympathized with him.

"'Yes, cousin, take away that horrid creature,' I cried. 'It is frightful, and spoils all the others.'

"'Little stupid,' said he, while his eyes flashed, 'nobody compels you to look at them. If you are not pleased you can go.'

"Evidently he was angry, and Sir Thomas, who was standing by the window regarding the mountains, turned suddenly round, and took me by the hand.

"'Your guardian loves his spiders, Frantz,' he said, kindly. 'We prefer the trees and the grass. Come with me for a drive.'

"'Yes, go,' returned the doctor, 'and be back to dinner at six.' Then, raising his voice, 'No offense, Sir Thomas,' he said.

"Sir Thomas turned and laughed, and we went out to the carriage.

"The commodore decided to drive himself, and sent back his servant. He placed me on the seat beside him, and we started for Rothalps. While the carriage slowly mounted the sandy hill, I was quiet and sad. Sir Thomas, too, was grave, but my silence seemed to strike him.

"'You don't like the spiders, Frantz; neither do I. But, thank Heaven! there are no dangerous ones in this country. The spider your cousin has in his box is found in the swampy forests of Guyana, which is always full of hot vapors and burning exhalations, for it needs a high temperature to support its existence. Its immense web, or rather its net, would surround an ordinary thicket, and birds are caught in it, the same as flies in our spiders' webs. But do not think any more about it; let us drink a glass of Burgundy.'

"As he spoke he lifted the cover of the seat, and, taking out a flask of wine, poured me out a full leathern goblet.

"I felt better when I had drunk it, and we continued our way. The carriage was drawn by a little Ardennes pony, which climbed the steep incline as lightly

and actively as a goat. The air was full of the murmur of myriads of insects. At our right was the forest of Rothalps. At our left was the cascade of Spinbronn; and the higher we mounted, the bluer became the silver sheets of water foaming in the distance, and the more musical the sound as the water passed over the rocks.

"Both Sir Thomas and I were captivated by the spectacle, and, lost in a reverie, allowed the pony to go on as he would. Soon we were within a hundred paces of the cavern of Spinbronn. The shrubs around the entrance were remarkably green. The water, as it flowed from the cavern, passed over the top of the rock, which was slightly hollowed, and there formed a small lake, from which it again burst forth and descended into the valley below. This lake was shallow, the bottom of it composed of sand and black pebbles, and, although covered with a slight vapor, the water was clear and limpid as crystal.

"The pony stopped to breathe. Sir Thomas got out and walked about for a few seconds.

"'How calm it is,' he said.

"Then, after a minute's silence, he continued: 'Frantz, if you were not here, I should have a bathe in that lake.'

"'Well, why not?' I answered. 'I will take a walk the while. There are numbers of strawberries to be found a little way up that mountain. I can go and get some, and be back in an hour.'

"'Capital idea, Frantz. Dr. Weber pretends that I drink too much Burgundy; we must counteract that with mineral water. This little lake looks inviting.'

"Then he fastened the pony to the trunk of a tree, and waved his hand in adieu. Sitting down on the moss, he commenced to take off his boots, and, as I walked away, he called after me: 'In an hour, Frantz.'

"They were his last words.

"An hour after I returned. The pony, the carriage, and Sir Thomas's clothes were all that I could see. The sun was going down and the shadows were lengthening. Not a sound of bird or of insect, and a silence as of death filled the solitude. This silence frightened me. I climbed on to the rock above the

cavern, and looked right and left. There was nobody to be seen. I called; no one responded. The sound of my voice repeated by the echoes filled me with terror. Night was coming on. All of a sudden I remembered the disappearance of Loisa Muller, and I hurried down to the front of the cavern. There I stopped in affright, and glancing toward the entrance, I saw two red, motionless points.

"A second later I distinguished some dark, moving object farther back in the cavern, farther perhaps than human eye had ever before penetrated; for fear had sharpened my sight, and given all my senses an acuteness of perception that I had never before experienced.

"During the next minute I distinctly heard the chirp, chirp of a grasshopper, and the bark of a dog in the distant village. Then my heart, which had been frozen with terror, commenced to beat furiously, and I heard nothing more. With a wild cry I fled, leaving pony and carriage. "In less than twenty minutes, bounding over rocks and shrubs, I reached my cousin's door.

"'Run, run,' I cried, in a choking tone, as I burst into the room where Dr. Weber and some invited friends were waiting for us. 'Run, run; Sir Thomas is dead; Sir Thomas is in the cavern,' and I fell fainting on the floor.

"All the village turned out to search for the commodore. At ten o'clock they returned, bringing back Sir Thomas's clothes, the pony, and carriage. They had found nothing, seen nothing, and it was impossible to go ten paces into the cavern.

"During their absence Agatha and I remained in the chimney-corner, I still trembling with fear, she, with wide-open eyes, going from time to time to the window, from which we could see the torches passing to and fro on the mountain, and hear the searchers shout to one another in the still night air.

"At her master's approach Agatha began to tremble. The doctor entered brusquely, pale, with set lips. He was followed by about twenty woodcutters, shaking out the last remnants of their nearly extinguished torches.

"He had barely entered before, with flashing eyes, he glanced round the room, as if in search of something. His eyes fell on the negress, and without a word being exchanged between them the poor woman began to cry.

"'No, no, I will not,' she shrieked.

"'But I will,' returned the doctor, in a hard tone.

"The negress shook from head to foot, as though seized by some invisible power. The doctor pointed to a seat, and she sat down as rigid as a corpse.

"The woodcutters, good, simple people, full of pious sentiments, crossed themselves, and I, who had never yet heard of the hypnotic force, began to tremble, thinking Agatha was dead.

"Dr. Weber approached the negress, and passed his hands over her forehead.

"'Are you ready?' he said.

"'Yes, sir.'

"'Sir Thomas Hawerbrook.'

"At these words she shivered again.

"'Do you see him?'

"'Yes, yes,' she answered, in a gasping voice, 'I see him.'

"'Where is he?'

"'Up there, in the depths of the cavern—dead!'

"'Dead!' said the doctor; 'how?'

"'The spider! oh, the spider!'

"'Calm yourself,' said the doctor, who was very pale. 'Tell us clearly.'

"'The spider holds him by the throat in the depths of the cavern—under the rock—enveloped in its web—Ah!"

"Dr. Weber glanced round on the people, who, bending forward, with eyes starting out of their heads, listened in horror.

"Then he continued: 'You see him?'

"'I see him.'

"'And the spider. Is it a big one?'

"'O Master, never, never, have I seen such a big one. Neither on the banks of the Mocaris, nor in the swamps of Konanama. It is as large as my body.'

"There was a long silence. Everybody waited with livid face and hair on end. Only the doctor kept calm. Passing his hand two or three times over the woman's forehead, he recommenced his questions. Agatha described how Sir Thomas's death happened.

"'He was bathing in the lake of the source. The spider saw his bare back from behind. It had been fasting for a long time, and was hungry. Then it saw Sir Thomas's arm on the water. All of a sudden it rushed out, put its claws round the commodore's neck. He cried out, "Mon Dieu, Mon Dieu." The spider stung him and went back, and Sir Thomas fell into the water and died. Then the spider returned, spun its web round him, and swam slowly, gently back to the extremity of the cavern; drawing Sir Thomas after it by the thread attached to its own body.'

"I was still sitting in the chimney-corner, overwhelmed with fright. The doctor turned to me.

"'Is it true, Frantz, that the commodore was going to bathe?'

"'Yes, cousin.'

"'At what time?'

"'At four o'clock.'

"'At four o'clock? It was very hot then, was it not?'

"'Yes; oh, yes.'

"'That's it. The monster was not afraid to come out then.'

"He spoke a few unintelligible words, and turned to the peasants.

"'My friends,' he cried, 'that is where the mass of debris and those skeletons come from. It is the spider that has frightened away your visitors and ruined you all. It is there hidden in its web, entrapping its prey into the depths of the cavern. Who can say the number of its victims?'

"He rushed impetuously from the house, and all the woodcutters hurried after him.

"'Bring fagots, bring fagots!' he cried.

"Ten minutes later two immense carts, laden with fagots, slowly mounted the hill; a long file of woodcutters followed, with hatchets on their shoulders. My guardian and I walked in front, holding the horses by the bridle; while the moon lent a vague, melancholy light to the funereal procession.

"At the entrance of the cavern the cortege stopped. The torches were lighted and the crowd advanced. The limpid water flowed over the sand, reflecting the blue light of the resinous torches, the rays of which illuminated the tops of the dark, overhanging pines on the rocks above us.

"'It is here you must unload,' said the doctor. 'We must block up the entrance of the cavern.'

"It was not without a feeling of dread that they commenced to execute his order. The fagots fell from the tops of the carts, and the men piled them up before the opening, placing some stakes against them to prevent their being carried away by the water. Toward midnight the opening was literally closed by the fagots. The hissing water below them flowed right and left over the moss, but those on the top were perfectly dry.

"Then Dr. Weber took a lighted torch, and himself set fire to the pile. The flames spread from twig to twig, and rose toward the sky, preceded by dense clouds of smoke. It was a wild, strange sight, and the woods lighted by the crackling flames had a weird effect. Thick volumes of smoke proceeded from the cavern, while the men standing round, gloomy and motionless, waited with their eyes fixed on the opening. As for me, though I trembled from head to foot, I could not withdraw my gaze.

"We waited quite a quarter of an hour, and Dr. Weber began to be impatient, when a black object, with long, crooked claws, suddenly approached in the

shadow, and then threw itself forward toward the opening. One of the men, fearing that it would leap over the fire, threw his hatchet, and aimed at the creature so well that, for an instant, the blood that flowed from its wound half quenched the fire, but soon the flame revived, and the horrible insect was consumed.

"Evidently driven by the heat, the spider had taken refuge in its den. Then, suffocated by the smoke, it had returned to the charge, and rushed into the middle of the flames. The body of the horrible creature was as large as a man's, reddish violet in color, and most repulsive in appearance.

"That, Mr. Fritz, is the strange event that destroyed the reputation of Spinbronn. I can swear to the exactitude of my story, but it would be impossible for me to give you an explanation. Nevertheless, admitting that the high temperature of certain thermal springs furnishes the same conditions of existence as the burning climate of Africa and South America, it is not unreasonable to suppose that insects, subject to its influences, can attain an enormous development.

"Whatever may have been the cause, my guardian decided that it would be useless to attempt to resuscitate the waters of Spinbronn; so he sold his house, and returned to America with his negress and his collection."

The Green Spider

Sax Rohmer

I find from my notes that Professor Brayme-Skepley's great lecture which was to revolutionize modern medicine should have been delivered upon the fifteenth of March, and many of Europe's leading scientists were during the preceding week to be seen daily in the quaint old streets of Barminster—for the entire world of medical science was waiting agog for the revelation of the Brayme-Skepley treatment.

Many people wondered that Brayme-Skepley should deliver a lecture so vastly important in old-world Barminster rather than in London; but he was not a man to be coerced—so the savants, perforce, came to Barminster.

At twelve, midnight, as nearly as can be ascertained, on the fourteenth of March the porter in charge of the North Gate—by which direct admission can be gained to the quadrangle—was aroused by a loud ringing of his bell.

Hurrying to the door of his little lodge, he was surprised to find at the gate the gaunt figure of Professor Brayme-Skepley, enveloped in a huge fur coat. He hastened to unlock the wicket and admit the great scientist.

"I am sorry to trouble you at so late an hour, Jamieson," said the Professor, "but there are some little preparations which I must make for tomorrow's lecture. I shall probably be engaged in the bacteriological laboratory for a couple of hours. You will not mind turning out with the key?"

He slipped a sovereign into the porter's hand as he spoke, and Jamieson only too gladly acquiesced.

The fire in the little sitting-room of the lodge was almost extinct, but the man revived it, and, putting on a shovelful of coal, lighted his pipe, and sat smoking for about an hour. At one o'clock he stepped outside, and glanced across the quadrangle.

The Professor was still working, and, finding the night air chilly, Jamieson was about to turn in again when a light suddenly appeared in the top window of one of those ancient houses in Spindle Lane. The house was the last of the

row, and overlooked the bacteriological laboratory.

"That's old Kragg's house," muttered the porter; "but I didn't know anybody lived there since the old man died."

The light was a vague and flickering one, almost like that of a match; and, as he watched, it disappeared again. There was something uncanny about this solitary light in a house which he believed to be uninhabited, so, with a slight shudder, Jamieson returned to the comforts of his fireside.

Curiously enough, I had been reading upon this particular night in Harborne's rooms; and at something like twenty minutes past two I knocked the ashes from my pipe, and was about to depart—when there came a sudden scuffing on the stairs. We both turned just as the door was flung open, and Jamieson, white-faced and wild-eyed, stumbled, breathless, into the room.

"Thank Heaven I've found somebody up!" he gasped. "Yours was the only window with a light!"

'Where's the brandy?' I said, for the man seemed inclined to faint upon the sofa.

A stiff glass of cognac pulled him together somewhat, and, with a little colour returning to his face, but still wild of eye, he burst out:

"Professor Brayme-Skepley has been murdered!"

"Murdered!" echoed Harborne.

"And no mortal hand has done the thing, sir!" continued the frightened man. "Heaven grant I never see the like again!"

"You're raving!" I said with an assumption of severity, for Jamieson's condition verged closely upon that of hysteria. "Try to talk sense. Where is the Professor?"

"In the bacteriological laboratory, sir."

"How long has he been there?"

"Since twelve o'clock!"

I glanced at Harborne in surprise.

"What was he doing there?" enquired the latter.

"He said he had some preparations to make for his lecture."

"Well, get on! Here, have another pull at the brandy. How do you know he's dead?"

"I went to ask him how much longer he was going to be."

"Well?"

"He didn't answer to my knocking, although there was a light burning. The door was locked from the inside, so I got on to the dust-box, and just managed to reach a window-ledge. I pulled myself up far enough to look inside; and then—I dropped down again!"

"But what did you see, man? What did you see?"

"I saw Professor Brayme-Skepley lying dead on the floor among broken jars by an overturned table. There were only two lamps on—those over the table—and his head came just in the circle of light. His body was in shadow."

"What else?"

"Blood! His hair all matted!"

"Come on, Harborne!" I cried, seizing my hat. "You too, Jamieson!"

"For the love of Heaven, gentlemen," gasped the man, grasping us each by an arm, "I couldn't! You haven't heard all!"

"Then get on with it!" said Harborne. "Every second is of importance."

"I ran for the window ladder, gentlemen; and when I came back with it the electric lamps were out!"

"Out?"

“I ran up the ladder, and looked in at the window; and saw—how can I tell you what I saw?”

“Don’t maunder!” shouted Harborne. “What was it?”

“It was a thing, sir, like a kind of green spider—only with a body twice the size of that football!”

Harborne and I looked at one another significantly.

“You’re a trifle overwrought, Jamieson,” I said, laying my hand upon his shoulder. “Stay here until we come back.”

The man stared at me.

“You don’t believe it,” he said tensely; “and you’ll go into that place unprepared. But I’ll swear on the Book that there was some awful thing not of this earth creeping in the corner of the laboratory!”

Harborne, with his hand on the doorknob, turned undecidedly.

“Which corner, Jamieson?” he enquired.

“The north-west, sir. I just caught one glimpse of it through the opening in the partition.”

“How could you see it, since all the lights were out?” Harborne asked.

The porter looked surprised. “That never occurred to me before, sir,” he said; “but I think it must have shone—something like the bottles of phosphorus, sir!”

“Come on!” said my friend. And without further ado we ran downstairs into the Square.

A cheerful beam of light from the door of the lodge cut the black shadows of the archway as we approached, and served to show that the panic-stricken porter had left the wicket open. As we hurried through and sprinted across the quadrangle we were met by a cold, damp wind from the direction of the river. The night was intensely dark, and the bacteriological laboratory showed against the driving masses of inky cloud merely as a square patch of blackness.

"Here's the ladder," said Harborne suddenly; and we both paused, undecided how to act.

"Try the door," I suggested.

We rattled the handle of the door, but it was evidently locked, so that for a moment we were in a quandary. Harborne mounted the ladder and peered into the impenetrable shadows of the laboratory, but reported that there was nothing to be seen.

"We must burst the door in," I said; "it hasn't a very heavy lock."

We accordingly applied our shoulders to the door, and gave a vigorous push. The lock yielded perceptibly. I then crashed my heel against the woodwork just over the keyhole, and the door flew open. We immediately detected a most peculiar odour.

"It's the broken bottles," muttered Harborne. "The switch is over against the wall by the bookcase; we must go straight for that."

Cautiously we stepped into the darkness, and at the third or fourth step there was a crackling of glass underfoot. My boot slipped where some sticky substance lay, and I gave an involuntary shudder. A moment later I heard an exclamation of disgust.

"The wall is all wet!" said Harborne.

Then he found the electric buttons, and turned on the lights in rapid succession.

Heavens! How can I describe the picture revealed! Never have I witnessed such a scene of chaos, fearsome in its indications of an incredible struggle.

At first glance the place gave an impression of having been wantonly wrecked by a madman. Scarcely a jar or bottle remained upon the shelves, all being strewn in fragments upon the floor, which was simply swimming in the spilled spirits and preservatives. The door of the case that had contained the specimens of bacilli was wide open, and the glass completely smashed. The priceless contents were presumably to be sought among the hundred and one objects lying in the liquid on the floor.

Most of the books from the shelf were distributed about the place as though they had been employed as missiles, and one huge volume was wedged up under the frosted glass of the skylight in the centre of the roof. In the wood of the partition a lancet was stuck, and a horribly suggestive streak linked it with a red pool upon the floor. A table was overturned, and the two lamps immediately above it were broken. Of Professor Brayme-Skepley there was no sign, but his hat and fur coat hung upon a hook where he had evidently placed them on entering.

For some time we surveyed the scene in silence. Then Harborne spoke.

"What are these marks on the wall?" he said. "They are still wet. And where is the Professor?"

The marks alluded to were a series of impressions in the shape of irregular rings passing from the pool on the floor to the four walls and up the walls to where the shadows of the lamp shades rendered it impossible to follow them. I pulled down a lamp, and turned the shade upwards, whereupon was revealed a thing that caused me a sudden nausea.

The marks extended right to the top of the wall, and could furthermore be distinguished upon the ceiling; and on the framework of the skylight was the reddish-brown impression of a human hand!

"Drop it!" said Harborne huskily. "If we stay here much longer we shall have no pluck left for looking behind the partition."

The northern end of the laboratory is partitioned off to form a narrow apartment, which runs from side to side of the building, but is only some six feet in width. It is lined with shelves whereon are stored the greater part of the materials used in experiments, and is lighted by a square window at the Spindle Lane end, beneath which is a sink. The partition does not run flush up to the western wall, but only to within three feet of it, leaving an opening connecting the storeroom with the laboratory proper. There are two electric lamps in the place, one over the sink, and the other in the centre; but they cannot be turned on from the laboratory, the switch being behind the partition. Consequently the storeroom was in darkness, and, ignorant of what awful thing might be lurking there, we yet, in justice to the missing man, had no alternative but to enter.

Harborne, whose pallor can have been no greater than my own, strode quickly up the laboratory, and passed through the opening in the partition. I following closely behind. I heard the click of the electric switch; but only one lamp became lighted. That over the sink was broken.

We were both, I think, anticipating some gruesome sight; but, singular to relate, the only abnormal circumstance that at first came under our notice was that of the broken lamp. A sudden draught of air, damp and cold, that set the other shade swinging drew our attention to the fact that the window had been pulled right away from its fastenings and lay flat down against the wall. Then Harborne detected the gruesome tracks right along the centre of the floor; and under the window we made a further discovery.

The wall all round the casement was smeared with blood, and the marks of a clutching hand showed in all directions.

"Good heavens!" I muttered; "this is horrible! It looks as though he had been dragged."

There was a queer catch in Harborne's voice as he answered: "We must get out a party to scour the marshes."

"Hark!" I said. "Jamieson has been knocking some of them up. Here they come across the quad."

A moment later an excited group was surveying the strange scene in the laboratory.

"Clear out and get lanterns, you fellows!" shouted Harborne. "His body has been dragged through the window!"

"What's this about a green spider?" called several men.

"Don't ask me!" said my friend. "I am inclined to agree with Jamieson that this is not the doing of a man. We must spread out and examine Spindle Lane and the surrounding country until we find the Professor's body."

During the remainder of that never-to-be-forgotten night a party which grew in number as the hours wore on to dawn scoured the entire countryside for miles round. Towards five o'clock the rain suddenly broke over the marshes,

and drenched us all to the skin, so that it was a sorry gathering that returned at daybreak to Barminster. The local police had taken charge of the laboratory, and urgent messages had been sent off to Scotland Yard; but when the London experts arrived on the scene we had nothing more to tell them than has already been recounted. Harborne, Doctor Davidson, and myself had devoted the whole of our attention to Spindle Lane and the immediate vicinity of the mysterious crime; but our exertions were not rewarded by the smallest discovery.

Such, then, were the extraordinary but inadequate data which were placed in the hands of the London investigators, and upon which they very naturally based a wholly erroneous theory.

This was the condition of affairs upon the night of the 16th, when Harborne suddenly marched into my rooms, and unceremoniously deposited a dripping leather case, bearing the initials J. B. S., in my fender.

"Any news?" I cried, springing up.

"Not likely to be!" he answered. "You might almost think these detectives have assumed all along that they are dealing with a case of the supernatural, and have, in consequence, overlooked certain clues which, had the circumstances been less bizarre, they would have instantly followed up."

"You have some theory, then? What is in this bag?"

There was that in Harborne's manner which I could not altogether fathom as he evasively replied:

"Leaving the bag for a moment, let me just place the facts before you as they really are, and not as they appear to be. I must confess that, last night, I was more than half inclined to agree with the detectives; and it is eminently probable that but for one thing I should now be in complete agreement with the other investigators— who believe that some huge and unknown insect entered the laboratory and bore away the Professor! When I left you and Doctor Davidson yesterday morning I immediately went in search of Jamieson, and found him—three-parts intoxicated. As you have probably heard, he has since become wholly so, and the detectives have utterly failed to extract a sane word from him. In this respect, therefore, I was first in the field; and from him I obtained the one additional clue needed. About one a.m.—an hour after Brayme-Skepley had entered the laboratory—Jamieson came to the door of

his lodge, and saw a light in the end house of Spindle Lane."

"But surely the police have questioned all the tenants in Spindle Lane?"

"The end house is empty."

"Have they examined it?"

"Certainly. But they merely did so as a matter of form: they had no particular reason for doing so. As a result they found nothing. What there was to find I had found before their arrival on the scene."

"I am afraid I don't altogether follow."

"Wait a minute. When I extracted from the porter the fact that he had seen a light in this house the entire affair immediately assumed a different aspect. The key to the mystery was in my hands. I went round into Spindle Lane, and surveyed the end house from the front. It was evidently empty, for the ground-floor windows were almost without glass.

"As I did not want to take anyone into my confidence at this stage of the proceedings it was impracticable to apply for the key, but upon passing round to the north I found that there was a back door with three stone steps leading up from the water's edge. I looked about for some means of gaining these steps—for I did not wish to excite attention by getting out a college boat. In the end I jumped for it. I got off badly from the muddy ground, for the rain was coming down in torrents, but, nevertheless, I landed on the bottom step—off which I promptly shot into the river!

"As I was already drenched to the skin this mattered little, and, notwithstanding my condition, a thrill of gratification warmed me on finding the door to be merely latched. Just as a party of six which had been scouring the east valley appeared upon the opposite bank I entered, and shut the door behind me."

"Well—what then?"

"I went up to the room overlooking the laboratory—for, although no one seems to have attached any particular importance to the circumstance, from the window of this room you could, if the laboratory window were bigger, easily spring through."

"And what did you find there?"

"The origin of the mysterious light."

"Which was?"

"A match! Now, you will agree with me that green spiders do not use matches. Inference: That some human being had been in the room on the night of the murder, and had struck a match, which had been observed by Jamieson. There were also certain marks which considerably mystified me at first. On the thick grime of the window ledge—inside—it was evident that a board had rested. That is to say, a board had been, for some reason, placed across the room. The mortar had fallen off the wall in one corner, and here I found on the floor an impression as though a box had stood on end there—evidently to support the other extremity of the board. My next discovery was even more interesting. I found traces of finger marks—which, by the way, I removed before leaving—on the sill and around the inside of the window-frame. Someone had come in by the window!

"But I remembered that, until I opened it to investigate, the window had been closed. Therefore the mysterious visitor had closed it behind him. Since his blood-stained finger marks testified to the state of his hands on entering, how had he opened the window from outside—a somewhat difficult operation—and yet left no traces upon the sash? for there were none. I assumed, by way of argument, that he had opened the window from the inside.

"I had now constructed a hypothetical assassin who had got into the end house in Spindle Lane, entered the bacteriological laboratory, murdered the Professor, returned through the window, and struck a match—for there were traces of blood upon it. Why had he come back to the room, and by what means had he reached the window of the laboratory? It was upon subsequently examining the laboratory (for the local officer in charge, being an acquaintance, raised no objection to my doing so) that two points became clear. First: That the window could never have been opened from outside. Second: The probability that a plank had been placed across—the same plank that had been used for some other mysterious purpose!

"Working, then, upon this theory, it immediately became evident that a plank could only have been placed in position from one of the windows. Here I had an enlightening inspiration. My assassin must have entered the house from the

riverside, as I had done! How had he conveyed the plank into the place? A boat! You will mark that this was all pure supposition. Nevertheless, I determined, for the moment, to assume that a plank had been used.

"It was with this idea before me that I made my examination of the laboratory, and the various facts, viewed in this new light, began to assume their proper places. The horrible marks, suggestive of an incredible assailant, which so horrified us when we first observed them, were less inexplicable when regarded as intentional and not accidental! To consider the handmark upon the ceiling, for example, as incidental to a struggle for life, pointed to an opponent possessing attributes usually associated with insects; but it was the easiest thing in the world for a tall man, standing upon a table, to imprint such a mark! This startling revelation, taken in conjunction with the locked door and the impossibility of anyone entering the place from the quadrangle, brought me face to face with a plausible solution of the mystery.

"The elaborate nature of the affair pointed to premeditation, and the fact that the missing man had locked the door was most significant. Who could have known that he would be there upon this particular night, and why had he failed to unlock the door? For you will remember that the key was in the lock. Then, again, how did it come about that his cries for assistance did not arouse the people living in Spindle Lane?

"These ideas carried me to the second stage of my theory, and I assumed that a plank had been placed in position for the purpose of exit from, and not of entrance to, the laboratory! My final conclusion was as follows:

"Professor Brayme-Skepley entered the end house in Spindle Lane from a boat—which he obtained at Long's boathouse—bearing a plank and some kind of box or case. The plank he placed from window to window, the case upon the floor of the house in the Lane. He then returned to his boat, and landed beside the house. Entering the quadrangle, as we know, he went into the laboratory, and locked the door. His next proceeding was to smash everything breakable, wrench the window from its fastenings, and imprint the weird tracks and marks which proved so misleading. The book beneath the skylight and the lancet in the woodwork were the artistic touches of a man of genius. By this time it was close upon one o'clock, and, desirous of ascertaining whether his apparatus for bringing about the spider illusion was ready for instant use, he crawled from window to window. It was his match that Jamieson saw from the lodge door, and had Jamieson been a man of mettle the whole plot must have failed.

"He then, probably, grew very impatient whilst awaiting the coming of Jamieson, but he heard him ultimately, and lay in the light of the lamps as we have heard. All fell out as he had planned. Jamieson climbed on to the dust-box and looked into the laboratory; then he ran for the window ladder, as a reasoning mind would have easily foreseen he would do. The Professor, during his absence, broke the lamps, climbed along his plank, and pulled it after him."

I had listened with breathless interest so far, but I now broke in: "How about the spider?"

"Perfectly simple!" answered Harborne. "Allow me."

He reached down for the leather case and unstrapped it. From within he took. . . a magic lantern!

"What!" I exclaimed. "A magic lantern?"

"With cinematograph attachment! Here, you see, is the film—not improved by having been in the river. Some kind of South American spider, is it not?—beautifully coloured and on a black ground. The plank, supported upon the window-ledge and the upturned case, did duty for a table, and as Jamieson went up the ladder, and surveyed the place from the south-east, this was directed from the window of the end house across the few intervening yards of Spindle Lane and through the open laboratory window on to the north-west corner of the wall.

"The beam from the lens would be hidden by the partition and only the weird image visible from the porter's point of view—though had he mounted further up the ladder and glanced over the wall he must have observed the ray of light across the lane. The familiar illuminated circle, usually associated with such demonstrations, was ingeniously eliminated by having a transparent photograph on an opaque ground. The Professor then retreated to the back door and hauled up his boat by the painter—which he would, of course, have attached there. He pulled upstream to return his boat and to sink his apparatus. He was probably already disguised—his fur coat would have concealed this from Jamieson."

I stared at Harborne in very considerable amazement.

"You are apparently surprised," he said with a smile; "but there is really

nothing very remarkable in it all. I have not bored you with all the little details that led to the conclusion, nor related how I suffered a second ducking in leaving the end house; but my solution was no more than a plausible hypothesis until a happy inspiration, born of nothing more palpable than my own imaginings, led me to search for and find the cinematograph. You are about to ask where I found it: I answer, in the deep hole above Long's boat-house where Jimmy Baker made his big catch last summer. Brayme-Skepley, being a man of very high reasoning powers, would, I argued, deposit it up and not downstream, knowing that the river would be dragged. He would furthermore put it in the hole, so that the current should not carry it below college.

"There are, however, still one or two points that need clearing up. As to the blood, that offered no insurmountable difficulty to a physiologist; and, by Jove!" ... He suddenly plunged his hand into the case.... "This rubber ring from a soda-water bottle, ingeniously mounted upon a cane handle, accounts for the mysterious tracks. The point to which I particularly allude is the object of the Professor's disappearance."

"I think," I said, "that I can offer a suggestion. He found, too late to withdraw, that his famous theory had a flaw in it, and could devise no less elaborate means of hiding the fact and at the same time of so destroying his apparatus as to leave no trace whereby his great reputation could be marred."

"That is my own idea," agreed Harborne. "For which reason I have carefully covered such very few tracks as he left, and have decided that this handsome case, with its tell-tale inscription—J. B. S.—must be destroyed. My conclusions are not for the world, which is at perfect liberty to believe that Professor Brayme-Skepley was carried off by an unclassified aptera!"

And so, somewhere or other, Professor Brayme-Skepley is pursuing his distinguished career under a new name, while Harborne allows the world to persist in its opinion.

The Biologist's Quest

John M. Oskison

Lake was a collector of small mammal skins for the Smithsonian authorities in Washington and for the British Museum. His work had been done mainly in the mountains of Southern California and on the big stretches of Arizona deserts. In the winter of 1895 there was a good deal of heated discussion between Professor McLean of the Pennsylvania Scientific Society and one of the scientists at Washington, over the question of whether or not a certain species of short tailed rat still existed in the Lower California Peninsula. The Smithsonian authority believed that it did, from reports sent in by Aldrich, who had collected in the Southwest until 1893, when he was killed by a superstitious Mexican. The rat, if it existed, was a curious survival, and the scientist who could secure and classify it would earn an enviable reputation. So Lake, in the early spring, received orders to go down into the Lower California region and make a thorough search, following Aldrich's lead.

The collector had a free hand in the matter of expense, and when the baggage man dumped his outfit onto the platform at the Yuma station it might have been mistaken for that of a prospector bound for the Yaqui mountains. There were two hundred traps, varying in size from the little, flat ones used for catching a very small brown field mouse, to the yawning iron-jawed kind that a boy must not play with. There were jars of formalin, vials of arsenic, cornmeal, cotton, dried raisins for bait, and a case of delicate, keen-edged skinning tools that Lake would have swallowed to protect. There was food enough to keep three men alive for six months.

At Yuma Lake went to the keeper of the Sandbar Hotel and asked for reliable guides, Indian or Mexican, for the Lower Colorado river, for he intended to float down the river to the Gulf of Lower California and there rig sails to take him farther down the coast. The next day he engaged Kitti Quist, a nut-faced, broad-footed old Yuma Indian, and "Joe" Maria, a Mexican desert guide.

The boat which the three set out in was as broad and stable as a giant tub. They rigged for it a stubby mast, put in a kit of repair tools, thumped the bottom for possible imperfections and bolted a water-tight chest to the side in which Lake's precious tools, cotton, arsenic and note books were stored. Then the Mexican, after pushing it out into the big, muddy river, stretched himself in the

bottom with a cigarette, and told the others that they were safe in the grip of the steady currents for three days. After that, he said, they must row and steer for a day to reach the open water of the Gulf, Joe had gone up and down in this way with traders who had ideas about the payment of duties that are countenanced by neither the Mexican nor the United States Governments.

While the Mexican dozed in the shade of a propped square of blanket, Kitti Quist told the collector tales of the glory which had been Yuma's years before. He said he had been the most feared medicine man in the Southwest. He had laughed in those days at the timorous Yaquis who danced their snake dance with serpents that were young. He had done that dance with five big rattlesnakes twined on his arms and around his neck. But the Yumas grew poorer, less energetic, and careless of the fame of their great man. He had been compelled to go up to Yuma and do tricks for the tourists when the railroad came crawling in from the plains. Then he had guided prospectors to the mountains, and looked on with a smile when they came back half starved and cursing the day they were born. After that he had cured an Arizona Governor of the rheumatism by sucking the man's knee-joints and shoulder blades, and he had become a self-important white man's medicine doctor. But he neglected to advertise and business fell off. Now he was going to help the new doctor catch rats—for what he knew not. And next he would be?—well, he didn't know.

By night the boat was tied to the river bank. The Mexican woke and made camp. Lake used the few minutes of daylight in beating the cactus patches for lizards, showing Kitti Quist how to noose them with a horse hair fixed to a slender pole. He tied tags to these lizards with curious markings on them, and soused them into a formalin jar. When Lake told the old Indian that, fixed in this way, the lizards would not decay if kept until the stars came out no more, he was deeply impressed. The collector caught a desert rat once and skinned it. Kitti Quist watched with astonishment the transformation from a limp corpse to a flabby, empty skin, then back again to a cotton-stuffed, perfectly shaped rat, pinned out in a scampering attitude.

"You have showed me strange medicine tricks with the rat and the lizards," said Kitti Quest once, as the two were exploring the river bank. "Now I will show you what I can do as a Yuma medicine man." Immediately the Indian stepped to the side of a loose stone. He knelt at the side, pushed his hand carefully over the top, then made a quick lunge, and, without suspecting what he was about, Lake saw a four-foot, dull-striped rattler writhing in the grasp of the old man. For five minutes the snake writhed and fought, held firmly by the

neck. It hissed the venomous battle note that comes after the warning rattle. Its rattles made an unceasing, deafening whirr. The Indian remained calm, letting the snake draw its body through his free hand as it twisted and contracted. He put out his arm to serve as a support for the dangling body when the whippings grew less violent. He twined the snake, always keeping a tight grip of the neck, around his right arm, and pulled his fingers gently back and forth along the smooth sides. Then he relaxed the grip of the neck, gradually, and slid the fingers of that hand down slowly, imperceptibly. He spread out his hand in three minutes more and extended the snake's head to the finger-tips. Now all motion had ceased; the rattler lay along his hand and arm pliant and quiet as a huge cord; the unwinking eyes were still and the rattling had ceased. Kitti Quist raised the big reptile, shifted a part of its body to his head, then worked it down to the back of the neck, stretching its length along his shoulders until the tail dropped easily over the shoulder blade. The snake's head he transferred to an upraised elbow, then drew it back toward his face. Here it lay, with its nose held close to the big veins of the old man's neck and moved its tail gently from side to side.

Lake stood as helpless and complaisant as the snake. He felt no surprise when he saw the Indian drop slowly to a sitting position and put his left hand to the sand. Soon the snake glided easily down the extended arm to the earth. Suddenly Kitti Quist sprang to his feet and pounced upon the snake again. But he did not touch it this time. He circled it with a swift moving hand while the snake's head followed in rhythmic movement. Soon it fell, quivering and inert. The Indian's eyes lost the stare that had grown into them. He picked up the body of the rattler with no more concern than he would show in handling a whip. Holding the tail, he whirled it about his head and brought it back with a jerk that separated the head and body, and flung the mutilated trunk away. And when he turned to go back to the camp Lake saw that the sweat was thick on the old man's painted forehead.

The voyage down the Colorado river was accomplished in the manner prophesied by the Mexican. The currents were steady and kept clear of dangerous rocks and cliffsides until near the outlet, where they are broken by spits of sand and whirled by tides and cross currents. Then Joe Maria threw away his cigarette and kept awake. He brought the boat out clear on the smooth waters of the Gulf, set the crude sail and began to beat down the Lower California Coast.

Inland stretched a flat expanse of salt marsh, only a few feet above water

level when the tide was in, and back of this a range of low, cactus-topped hills. These hills were about five miles from the shore, and, when the boat had gone down the coast for a day, seemed to give promise of a rich trapping ground behind.

Early in the afternoon Lake decided to leave the boat, go inland to the hills, to look the country over, and come back to the shore a few miles farther down. He told the Mexican and Kitti Quist to land where he expected to meet them and got the camp ready. He took a few traps, a pipe and a small pewter flask of water. He set out for the hill-top, skirting a narrow lagoon of sea water that was ten and twenty feet deep as the tide swung in and out. The salt swamp grass was heavy and thick, and Lake was relieved to get out on the hill, though it was but a great sand bar piled and packed by the wind. He went on over the crest, looking for water courses, near which he was likely to find the mammals he wanted. The land was puzzling—where ordinarily a dip would show the trace of a surface stream, there was only an evenly rounded hollow of sand. Yet small brushwood grew in scattered groups along these depressions. The streams, Lake decided, were underground, and he started back towards the boat, intending to go down for another day before going inland again.

As the collector came back across the hill he saw the boat going down the coast and noticed that the wind had increased perceptibly. He decided to go down to the shore and walk along the beach to the camping place. But when he reached the shore a quarter of a mile farther down, he came on another of the canal-like inlets that he had skirted in going back to the plain. It was impassable, and he began to walk towards its head. This was three miles in-shore and when he had rounded it and reached the shore again the afternoon was almost gone and he was tired.

Less than a quarter of a mile farther down another of the invisible salt water canals met him, and for the first time Lake gave a thought to the formation of the long flat marsh. He reflected that tide streams would block his way as long as the flat country was before him. Then he looked at the boat that was, strangely enough, tacking far out in the Gulf, and seemed to be in considerable difficulty. He knew that must get out again to the sandhills and walk down on them until the boat had been brought to shore. He had not spared the half pint of water in the flask, and now, when it flashed upon him that he might spend the night on shore, he grew uncommonly thirsty. But he saved the little that remained, wondering as it splashed and tinkled in the metal if some of it might not be lost by the continual beating and shattering inside.

He was panting when he reached the sandhills again, for he had made nervous haste to get out of that tangle of long salt grass and treacherous tide ditches. He looked eagerly for the boat. What he saw was a scarcely distinguishable flat hull and a slender rectangle of sail which a fierce wind was bellying. Now Lake remembered that this Gulf was swept by little two-day hurricanes that danced in mad fury when they got away from the cactus and hampering sand-hills. He was in the edge of the storm only, yet the flying sand stung his cheek and his dried throat craved the little water that remained in this flask.

The boat would be driven miles out on the Gulf, the watcher knew, and if it survived the hurricane, would land far south of this point. So Lake set out to walk as far as he could towards the possible landing place. Farther down the coast, where the formation changed from the monotone of salt marsh, with its single low relief of yellow sand-hills, it might be possible to find water. But here it would be risking too much to turn inland to seek it. While he was gone the boat might put in unexpectedly, and the two guides, not finding him, sail still farther south.

Unconsciously Lake began to walk fast, and when the darkness closed down he was fairly running toward an invisible boat that sailed in the tail of his eye to an anchorage on the shore directly at his feet. Then he pulled himself up, and walked slowly. Soon lagoons, gulf and salt marsh were lost in the gloom, and only the jagged cactus clumps stood out like giant, distorted shadows on the horizon. Lake took counsel with himself, and lay determinedly down to sleep through the night. He woke often to feel his jacket where the four spoonfuls of tepid water were. But he would not drink. The screaming wind showered sand on him, forcing him to draw the jacket over his head, giving small promise of an early landing for the boat, and questioning its mere survival. The collector got through to the daylight, sleeping a little and dreaming of the wonderful short-tailed rat, swimming forever from bank to bank of a sluggish salt pool that rose and fell as the tide crept in and out.

As the morning broke, Lake, who had been sitting in the sand for a long time, peering distractedly into the darkness, rose and looked over the Gulf. There was no sign of the boat. The wind, its force spent in the night, scarcely ruffled the water. The sun came out big and glowing, and the desert heat soon penetrated the temporary early morning chill. The marooned man was seized with a bitter morning thirst, and raised the flask half way to his lips before he remembered that the little fresh water must be saved for a more dire necessity.

He drew off the coat that had begun to weigh him down. He was about to fling it aside when he felt the pewter flask strike against him. He drew it from the coat pocket in a genuine panic. He felt the pipe, a heavy briar, in another pocket, and the thought of smoking with a parched throat made him smile. He threw it with all his strength at a clump of cactus, then trembled at the prodigal waste of a failing energy. Jamming the flask into his shirt bosom, he laid the coat aside, and stepped carefully on. For two hours he kept his head, then the swishing and tinkling of the water in the canteen became maddening. There was a too perfect harmony between its music and the rhythm of his steps. He broke this by making longer strides, then stopping suddenly.

Before noon he sat down in the shade of a cactus. He knew that sleep, when the scorching sun and want of water would drive men crazy, had often saved the sanity of desert travelers. But he could not sleep. He rose when the sun was two hours from the western horizon and tramped doggedly on. For an hour after setting out he tramped slowly, holding his hat clear of his head to protect it from the sun, and to let the faint breeze blow in his hair. To hold it in this way, however, tired him, and soon the eternal rhythm recommenced. A lizard that flirted its tail and ran to cover entered the orchestra of his fevered imagination, its tail going up and down like the baton of a conductor. The music grew louder and clearer, and he forgot that the pewter flask held water that might cool the fever. It was the great drum whose beating kept the whole orchestra from turning to a riotous babble of individual performers. So the drum must not quit beating.

Unconsciously Lake increased his speed under the stimulus of the fever. To his mind the orchestra was in breathless chase of a melody that grew faster and faster in time and louder in volume. There would be one final crash, he knew, when the strange new symphony was ended, and he wondered if the drum would be equal to its part. The crash came as the collector, exhausted from a mad scamper down the side of the sandhills, pitched into the rank salt grass near the edge of a tide inlet.

Lake slept through most of the night from sheer exhaustion. He was conscious when he woke of a slap-slap of sound near. At first he thought it was the lapping of the water against the side of the boat, and wondered if the Mexican had yet cooked the breakfast. Then he rose to search the Gulf with his eyes for a sign of his companions.

He thought he was far south of where he had first landed, but in fact he had

come only a few miles. He was sure that he had gone past the point where the boat would put in and turned to tramp back up the coast. He went in, unthinking, to the water's edge, and had to tramp back to the sandhills again. He was at the former symphony rehearsal again by this time. Calling up his straying faculties, Lake deliberately chose a low bit of ground and began to dig with his hands to find water. And he fainted on the edge of an unpromising hole before the sun was in mid-sky. All the while the idea remained fixed in the man's mind that he must not drink the water that he carried.

The shifting of the breeze so that it blew into his face revived Lake early in the afternoon. He sat up and looked at the horizon, where the Gulf met the sky, with an air of calm indifference. He thought only that it would be a novel sight to see a little, full-bodied tub of a boat drop out of the sky and bring a nut-faced old Indian and a Mexican with a cigarette up on the salt marsh. But it was a bore to watch anything so lacking in variety, and Lake, under the impression that he was only to finish an interrupted siesta, stretched himself on his back to die. The flask he placed at his side, determined to take a full drink when the Mexican roused him for supper.

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All through the first night of Lake's absence, Kitti Quist and the Mexican had been driven by the storm out into the Gulf. They realized that it would be impossible to make the land after the hurricane came upon them. They retained a tiny rectangle of sail on the stumpy mast to keep the craft's head square to the waves that drenched the boat from stern to bow, and the gale had driven them far out. And the next day they had sailed back towards the West without sighting the coast line.

In the middle of the second night the boat had jammed its nose into a mud bank, and the two had tied up and waited for the daylight. When the morning broke neither could tell whether this flat marsh, bordered by low sand hills, was the same through which the new doctor had disappeared, or another, fifty miles down the coast. They decided to sail north on the chance of having passed the collector. All day they sailed, firing a heavily loaded rifle at intervals. Once the Indian had gone ashore to search the tall salt marsh. But he met the sullen tide streams and had to get back to the boat. The possibility that Lake might be without water had not occurred to them, and they thought only of relieving his anxiety about themselves and the boat.

Near sundown Kitti Quist pointed out a spit of sand, upon which he said the white man had gone ashore. The Mexican doubted, and the boat was pulled in against the bank. The Indian was right—Lake's tracks led off towards the sand hills. He said that they would tie up the boat and follow the tracks. But Joe Maria was lazy, and suggested that they set off a great blast of gunpowder. Lake, he declared, would hear it if he was within reach and come to them. Kitti Quist agreed; and when Lake was about to pass into the long sleep, which he thought, fretfully, he had been wanting for ages, the roar of the blast brought him to his knees.

What he saw was worth looking at—it provided variety. A big column of smoke was going up, and at one side were a nut-faced old Indian staring at him, and a lazy Mexican waving his sombrero frantically. A little, full-bodied tub of a boat was there, trying to climb ashore. He would go and see if supper was ready. But his strength, nerve, voice, feelings were gone—he tottered headlong into the grass.

The Mexican had seen the collector rise from the grass like a spectre, and yelled to Kitti Quist to look. They found Lake, his tongue swollen and protruding, his face scorched, holding a flask with four spoonsful of tepid water still in it. They wondered at that, but set it down to the new doctor's curious theories. They used the water to revive Lake, and carried him to the boat. The next day they sailed back for the mouth of the Colorado river. The two guides brought Lake's wandering mind back to the rational world, and restored his parched face and swollen tongue to a comparatively normal state by a wise use of broths and careful watchfulness. Two days before the awkward tub was pulled up at the Yuma landing Lake could talk, but with considerable difficulty, of his experiences.

"The doctor will go back for the rats when he is rested?" inquired Kitti Quist as he bustled about the boat. He accidentally kicked Lake's water flask into view.

"Go back!" the collector shouted hoarsely. "Kitti Quist," he went on quietly, "the white Medicine Man can no longer do strange medicine tricks with the rats. Not with the short tailed rats," he added under his breath.

Lake gave his outfit, even the delicate, keen-edged skinning tools, to Kitti Quist, and the Mexican guide. Then he took the train for San Francisco. Cooley, who went down to Yuma the next spring to catch chipmunks for the new zoological park in New York, bought the traps and cotton from the old Medicine Man. Professor McLean, of the Pennsylvania Scientific Society, published a pamphlet in the fall of 1897 to show that the short-tailed rat described by the Smithsonian authority never existed except in the imagination.

The Bamboo Trap

Robert S. Lemmon

"A letter, *patrón*."

One corner of the mosquito bar that made of the tent fly an airy, four-walled room was lifted and a brown hand thrust in the envelope with its array of foreign postmarks and smudgy thumb-prints, all but concealing the familiar American stamp. Outside, the steady roar of the Chanchan River, softened by distance as it charged down the last pitches of the Andes on its way to the Gulf of Guayaquil and the Pacific, blended into a musical background for the messenger's guttural voice.

John Mather laid down the birdskin on which he was working and reached eagerly for the missive. Any word from the outside world was a godsend here in the Jungle—doubly so when it came in the form of a letter whose bulk proclaimed several pages of home news. He ripped open the flap with dexterous, capable fingers and flattened the folded sheets on the camp table before him among the litter of skinning tools, cotton, and specimen labels.

For a space he read absorbedly, sensing behind the cold impersonality of the typewritten words the analytical mind of the man who had dictated them. Not until he came to the last page did his expression change and a half frown pucker the corners of his eyes.

"Hell!" he growled. "Isn't that the way of things? Just when I'm finishing up my collections here, too, and planning to catch the next steamer north. No Christmas at home this year! Let's see—how many of the damn things does he say he wants?" He re-read the final paragraphs of the letter, mumbling them half aloud in the manner of one in whom many years of living alone in the back of the world's beyond have bred the habit of self-conversation:

"The Department of Entomology is extremely desirous of securing several specimens of the Cuabandan spider, to complete their habitat group of insects from the high Andes. It seems that the ones they intended to use proved to be rather poorly prepared and could not be mounted satisfactorily.

"Also, I am in receipt of a letter from the International Museum in Chicago

offering to exchange a valuable collection of humming-bird skins from Guatemala for a complete series of these same spiders. You know how incomplete our Guatemalan material is, and therefore how anxious I am to secure these specimens from Dr. Huston. He asks that we furnish him with at least a dozen Cuabandans of both sexes, and perhaps twice that number of immature ones.

"You will find the spiders inhabiting the slopes of the mountain Chuquipata, probably between the 9,000- and 12,000-foot levels, although reliable data on this point is impossible for me to secure. The species is decidedly rare, and I can give you little information to help you in your search. Beyond their appearance and great size, with which you are perhaps familiar, and the fact that they are carnivorous and often prey upon small birds, nothing is really known of them. I shall depend upon you to remain in the region long enough to gain at least an outline of their life habits.

"I am sorry to have to give you this new assignment, Mather, because I judge from your last letter that you have about finished your field work on the west side of the mountains and are looking forward to your return to New York. But I know that you will appreciate my position and postpone sailing for the few additional weeks which the Chuquipata expedition will entail.

"All good wishes to you from myself and the Staff.

"Sincerely yours,
"Eliot A. Rodgers,
"Curator of Ornithology."

Mather folded the letter thoughtfully and thrust it into the pocket of his flannel shirt. With the buttoning down of the flap he seemed to dismiss his irritation and become again the seasoned museum collector, taking each task as it comes and subjugating all personal desires to the duties of his calling. As he turned again to the half-skinned bird before him he summoned his Indian guide and general assistant in the terse Spanish fashion, "Pedro—*ven aqui*!"

"*Ahora si, patrón*," sing-songed the Quichua from the cooking lean-to near by. "*Yo no màs*!" In a moment he stood before the white man, a squat, stolid figure with the humble eyes of a whipped dog.

Mather snipped the wing bones of the bird close to the body and stripped the skin down the neck and over the skull to the eyes, turning it inside out

skilfully. A few crunching clips with his scissors separated head from neck and exposed the base of the brain. He set the raw body aside and commenced scooping out the clotted, grayish matter from the interior of the skull.

As he worked he spoke pointedly. "You know Chuquipata, Pedro?"

A grunt and nod signified the Indian's assent. In the presence of the American his words were customarily few, a reticence inspired not so much by awe of his employer as by inherited fear of the whites handed down from the days of the first enslaving of his race by the Spanish *conquistadores* four centuries ago.

"Rough country, isn't it? *Muchas quebradas—no*?"

Another affirmative, more vehement this time. Then "You not go there, *patrón*?"

Mather finished cleaning the birdskin, dusted its inner surface with arsenic and alum powder to cure and preserve it, and turned it right side out again.

"Yes, we go to Chuquipata in three days," he answered as he shook the ruffled feathers into place and began filling out the skin with cotton. "You will go to the village to-morrow and get *cargadores* to carry the outfit. Four good men I will need, Pedro. Or, if you can find them, two mules instead; pack animals are better than men, but there are not many to be had. See what you can do."

He dismissed the man with a wave of the hand, and tied an identifying label to the crossed feet of his specimen. As carefully as if it were of the most fragile and costly porcelain he wrapped the tiny green and yellow effigy of the bird in cotton to hold it in shape until feathers and skin should dry, and added it to the rows of similar mummies in the tray of his collector's trunk.

"That makes eight hundred from this region," he commented as he made the entry in a record book. "Not bad for three months' work, considering the weather I've had. It brings the total up to nearly two thousand for the whole trip and several of the species are new to science, too. Well, I suppose I'll have to let it go at that and begin to get ready for this Chuquipata hike. It'll take nearly a day just to pick up my small mammal traps in the jungle around here."

Toward the southward end of that semi-arid plateau which stretches for three hundred rolling miles between the East and West Cordillera of the Ecuadorian Andes lies a land that God forgot. High in the air it is, as men measure such things—a matter of two vertical miles above the slow lift of the Pacific out beyond the sunset. Tumbled and stark too, a dumping ground of the Titans, a scrap heap from the furnaces in which the world was made. For in ages far beyond the memory of man, volcanic peaks whose summits have long been smoothed by the erosion of the centuries belched forth their hot lava and ash and laid a blight upon the land. Ravine, hillock, mountain, wind-swept, gaunt, and all but uninhabited, magnificent in the splendour of their distances—such is the setting of Chuquipata to-day, and such will it remain until Vulcan kindles his forge anew.

Up into this sky-top world John Mather rode on a day as glittering and telescopically clear overhead as it was harsh and dusty underfoot—up out of the green rankness of the coast jungles into a land of illimitable space. To the condor swinging a thousand feet in air, his pack-train seemed like ants crawling in single file across a rugged boulder.

Where a ravine gashed the side of Chuquipata he pitched camp on a little grassy flat protected on three sides by the crumbly walls of the cut, and braced his tent pegs with rocks against the tugging of a wind that pounced down in unexpected gusts. Scrubby brush and the stunted, gnarly trees of the high altitudes straggled here and there, promising firewood in limited and smoky quantities. A score of feet from the tent door a brooklet tinkled under overhanging wire grass, ice-cold and diamond-clear. And above it all, stupendous in miles of waving, yellowish *páramo*, dwarfing men and camp to pigmy size, the mountain swept up and up into a cap of clouds.

When the equipment was unloaded, Mather dismissed his packers and their two mules, for he had no way of telling how long his search for the giant spiders might last, and there was no point in feeding idle mouths week after week. Only Pedro he retained, to do the camp chores and leave him entirely free for his collecting work. Besides, the Indian would be useful when, at the end of the stay, new carriers would have to be secured from one of the villages a day's march away.

It was mid-afternoon before the camp was fully arranged and Mather set out for his first survey of the area he might have to cover as with a fine tooth comb. Hopeless enough it seemed, as he looked up at it from the ravine head,

an appallingly vast and rugged hay stack in which to search for one small needle. Were his quarry a bird that flew or an animal that ran, the task would not have looked so hopeless. But a spider, a crawling creature of the grass and brush, probably never coming into fair view—that was different.

He set to work methodically, covering every type of ground that lay between the points which his aneroid told him were eight and twelve thousand feet above the sea. Bunch grass, scrub, rocks, volcanic ash—he went over them all with keen and patient thoroughness but no success. Inquiries of Pedro and the occasional mountain Quichuas whom he met elicited no information of value; either his attempts to describe the creatures he sought were not understood, or the spiders were so rare that even the natives were unfamiliar with them. Evening after evening he returned wearily to camp, empty-handed save for a brace of mountain partridges or a few wild pigeons which he had shot for food, or the half-dozen smaller birds of which his collection stood in need.

"If I had only had some line on the habits of the beasts it would be easier," he mused as he ate his cornbread lunch one day beside a stream that plunged down the mountain far to the north of where his camp lay. "As a matter of fact, I don't know even whether they're day or night feeders. About the only thing I'm sure of is that they're not to be found on the south slope where I've been working. Pedro and I will have to move the outfit around to this side, I guess; the vegetation is quite different here—thicker and not so dried, as though it got more rain. I'll take a look down this spur and then work back around the base. There may be a .good camp site down that way."

He picked up his gun and started to descend the ridge that dropped sharply toward a valley so far below that its brush and trees blended to a uniform sage-green carpet of marvellous softness. Rocks and beds of loose pumice that broke and slid treacherously as he crossed them covered the slope. He edged his way down cautiously, grasping the rare handholds of bush or tough grass, above him the blue spaces of the sky, the patchwork quilt of the world far-flung below.

A half-hour of this, and then the knife edge fanned out into a broader, easier descent across which trailing bamboo had spread an unbroken mat. As far as Mather could see on either side, and forward to the last steep pitch that dropped to the valley floor, that tangle of interlacing stems and off-shoots extended, three feet or so above the ground and in some places strong enough to support a man's full weight. Had a leafy cloth been woven to cover the mountain's

bareness it could not have more perfectly concealed what lay beneath.

"I'm not very keen to tackle that," Mather muttered, halting at the edge of the tangle. "Too tough to smash through, and not quite tough enough to walk on—I've tried ground cane before."

He looked back at the pitch he had just descended and shook his head.

"About six of one and half a dozen of the other, I guess. Damned if I'll shin up that ridge again. Can't work around the edge of this bamboo, either—those cliffs block me off. Well, here goes for a bad two hours' work."

He took the shells out of his gun, slung the weapon on his back so as to leave both hands free, and started down, choosing what appeared to be the least rugged part of the slope.

It was rough going. On hands and knees he would crawl along for a few yards over the bamboo, then strike a weak spot and smash through to the ground in a smother of leaves and hampering tendrils, scramble out and go on. By the time he was half way to the bottom of the valley he was soaked with perspiration and nearly fagged out. Only his indomitable will and the knowledge that to turn back now would be doubly impossible kept him going.

It was nearly sunset when he reached a comparatively level stretch beyond which the mountain dropped away suddenly as though to make up for lost time. Across this place the cane was unusually thick, and he was getting along quite well, when, a few yards short of the steep slope the supporting mat broke with a ripping, tearing noise and he slithered down sickeningly into hot, pitchy darkness. Then a crunching jar, red lights flickering before his eyes, and unconsciousness.

How long he lay insensible he could not tell. It must have been many hours, for when he came to he was stiff and sore and the blood from a long scratch across his wrist had dried. A thousand tiny hammers seemed beating on his brain, each stroke an ache that quivered through a nerve. Dazedly he tried to sit up, failed, and lay flat on his back, hands clutching at the ground as he fought for control of his twitching eyes.

Gradually things steadied, and he saw that he was in a sort of pear-shaped cave perhaps a dozen yards in diameter and half as high. Daylight filtered

through a ragged hole at its apex, pitifully weak, but enough to disclose the mingled rocks and earth that formed the walls of the enclosure and the whitish, diseased-looking vines that twined up them to the opening.

"That's where I fell through—that hole," Mather croaked. "Yes—that hole—fell through—yes, *fell through*. I've got to—get out—up there."

He wavered to his knees and waited grimly for the whirling in his head to abate.

"Now, let's—see," he whispered hoarsely, creeping toward the wall.

Twice he made the circuit of the cave, groping his way over boulders and loose debris that gave out a dank, nauseous odour. His hands pawed uncertainly at the walls, seeking firm holds, but finding nothing except the mass of vine stems, clammy and breaking at the first hard pull.

"Fool!" he growled at last. "I couldn't get up there anyway. It slopes in. A man can't climb on a ceiling. God!"

He slumped back and tried to think rationally.

"Let's see, now. I was coming down the mountain, headed west. The steepest part was just ahead of me when I fell—forty-five-degree slope, about. Not more than twenty feet or so away. This hole, now—yes, it's close to forty feet wide at the bottom—maybe five feet through to the face of the slant—"

He started up eagerly, the realization that he could burrow his way out clearing his brain and putting new life in his racked body. He reached for the sheath knife at his belt, the only digging tool he had. As he stood there with it in his hand a thought flashed over him that drove all the zest from his face.

"I don't know where to begin," he muttered. "*Which is the west side?*"

He looked about helplessly at the prison that hemmed him in. Somewhere, to right or left, ahead or behind, that mass of earth and rock must be comparatively thin, hardly more than a shell separating him from freedom and the broad reaches of the sky. If he could find that spot, strike that downhill side, he might be able to dig through to the outer world in a few hours. If he missed it, started work on the wrong side, his burrowing would only lead him deeper into the

mountain, wasting his strength and the precious element of time. And between those two extremes, the heart-warming right and the hopelessly wrong, was no faintest clue to guide him to a decision. Yes, there was one—his compass, of course! Stupid not to have thought of that before; the surest possible proof. Everything was all right now.

He fumbled in the side pocket of his coat and drew out the instrument, a watch-like affair in a heavy nickel case. His first glance showed the needle bent crazily beneath the shattered glass, twisted and utterly ruined by the crash of his fall.

Mather's face went hard as he tilted the broken thing in his hand, testing its uselessness with a sort of grim irony. "So-o," he said bitterly. "You're about as much good to me as a piece of cheese, aren't you? Or a chunk of lead—because I could eat the cheese. Well, I guess I'll have to depend on Old Lady Luck to help me out. I may as well pick out a place that looks like easy digging, anyhow."

He stumbled across the cave and began to pick away at the wall where the earth was crumbly and yielded readily to knife and hands. A few inches in he struck rock. Working along it, he came finally to loose rubble, but the mass was too large for him to dislodge without starting a disastrous cave-in from above. He would have to try another place. And an hour had been wasted.

A second location was even less promising, but the third gave him hope. He burrowed on stubbornly, his fingers torn and bleeding from the sharp fragments of rock embedded in the soil like chips of glass, his muscles aching from their exertions in the cramped space which his progress created. Two feet, a yard—at this rate he ought to break through in a few more hours, unless he were working in the wrong direction. At thought of that contingency he redoubled his efforts, determined to end the uncertainty as soon as possible. And a few inches farther on he came squarely up against another boulder that defied every attempt to move it.

Exhausted and reeking with perspiration, he backed out of the hole and stretched full length on the floor of the cave. In a little while, when the cramps had left his back and shoulders, he would start in again. Yes, just a few minutes rest, and then—then he was roused from uneasy half-sleep by a slow, insistent rustling like a snake crawling through grass. He listened tensely, eyes closed in concentration, striving to locate its direction. The sound came closer, louder,

on all sides of him, filling the cave with eerie whispers. Then suddenly it seemed to reach a focus close by, and a creeping hairy body brushed against his neck. With a leap he gained his feet, his eyes wide with horror.

The light in the cave had dimmed, but he could see that the walls were alive with huge spiders, thick-legged and hideous, their bodies as large as a sparrow's and covered with straggly fuzz. Some were blackish in colour, others were a sort of cherry red. They were crawling sluggishly, as though gorged with food, down the vines that reached the opening above his head. A dozen had gained the floor, others were nearly there. Hundreds more were creeping in at the hole and groping for convenient stems down which to clamber.

With a shudder Mather knew—knew that here, in this dark prison, was the night shelter, the universal rendezvous, of the beasts he had come so far to catch. By day they hunted through the cane tangle that covered the mountainside, perfectly concealed and safe from all detection, and as night approached they convened here from all directions to take refuge from the rains which each night spilled across the land. They were gathering now, crawling, crawling with that infernal rustling sound—

"God!" he muttered. "And he said they were rare!" Full darkness came, bringing to John Mather the torture of eternal nightmare. With hands, coat, hat, he beat and crushed the furry hordes that swarmed over him. But for every one killed two more were ready to take its place; there seemed no end to their numbers. Their curved jaws clipped into him wherever his skin was exposed. Though he could see nothing in the pitchy darkness, an odour of decay told him that shreds of flesh from their victims of days before still clung to them, and the dread of blood-poisoning obsessed him. In a quiver of loathing and fear he fought on bitterly hour after hour, dropping into snatches of exhausted sleep only to struggle up again when the writhing burden on his face threatened to choke off his breath.

At last the blackness began to gray. Dawn was coming up over the mountains, and as the light strengthened, the spiders scattered, climbing the vines again to the open air and the sunshine. Singly and in battalions they went rank after rank up the stems of their living ladders. And as the last stragglers disappeared through the opening above him Mather sat with head sunk between his hands, fighting to retain a sanity that hung on the very edge of destruction.

It must have been midday before he pulled himself together enough to eat

some of the emergency rations which were as much a part of his collecting outfit as his gun or butterfly net. The food helped to steady him, and presently he began moving about under the hole at the cave's peak, trying to determine the points of the compass by the appearance of the scraps of sky he could see through the openings in the bamboo. A few minutes' study convinced him of the hopelessness of this, for leaden clouds had blotted out the sun. So uniform was their mass that he could not even detect their own direction of movement, which, if he could have ascertained, would have served as a fairly accurate indication here in this land where the prevailing wind at the higher levels blows from the east.

"I'd better get back to my digging," he told himself finally. "It's the only chance, for Pedro would never find me among all those acres of cane, even if he knew enough to come this way to look. I didn't tell him which way I was going, when I left camp."

He groped his way into the tunnel he had started the day before and renewed his struggle with the rocks that blocked its end. He felt stronger now, and the physical work helped to shove into the background of his mind the horror that he knew the night would bring again. Perhaps he could break his way through before dark—a mere chance, but enough to add incentive to his labour.

By superhuman effort he worked out the largest rock at last, backed into the cave with it, and wriggled in again to the attack. Prying and digging with his knife, he burrowed on through earth that gave way more readily as he progressed. Sweat streamed from him unheeded; with each foot that he advanced the air in the tunnel grew warmer. A nauseating, steamy odour crept into it, so faint at first as to defy analysis, but increasing momentarily.

Presently Mather drew his hand back with an exclamation of surprise. His fingers had touched a rock so hot that it almost burned them.

"What the hell?" he growled, then lay still, thinking, his chest heaving as he gasped for breath:

Crushingly the explanation came to him: The burrow was leading into the mountain, straight forward toward those infernal caverns of molten lava and steam which underlie that whole mighty continental backbone from Cape Horn to Panama. Already he had dug far enough through the mountain's outer shell

to reach the heat that radiated from them.

Mather's heart sank with the realization that all his work had gone for nothing. Then a great wave of hope swept over him as the thought came that out of this very failure sprang success, for since he had been digging toward the mountain's centre, the opposite way must lead to light and life and freedom.

He wormed his way backward, gulping with relief as he reached the cooler air near the tunnel's mouth. A few more wriggles, and his knee struck something that crushed flabbily under the pressure. Across one hand dragged a fat, rough body, paused and sent a tingle of pain up his forearm as he shook it off with a jerk. The spider army had returned.

Through the endless hours of that second night of horror John Mather clung to two things with the desperation of a wave-buffeted man whose arm is crooked across a slippery, floating spar: the knowledge that daylight would bring relief from his tormentors, and the hope that before another evening drove them scurrying back to shelter he would have won his way through the cave wall. Every atom of will power, every drop of that fine essence of determination which some men call upon to carry them against impossible odds he threw into the mental struggle, knowing that to lose sight of his goal would mean gibbering madness.

And in the end he won. Taut and quivering as a plucked string, he sensed rather than saw that the crawling hosts were gone.

"Now!" he rasped, the sound of his own voice grating across his nerves. "Now you dig."

He hurled himself savagely into the work, slashing and tugging at the hard-packed earth and stone opposite the mass of debris he had scooped out the day before. His knife wedged between two rocks and the blade snapped short off as he tried to extricate it. He cursed chokingly and hacked away with the haft, pitifully futile by comparison.

"Got to make it!" he muttered. "Got to make it today! I'll go crazy—*crazy*, I tell you!"

Inch by inch, a foot, two feet, three, he won ahead through the darkness, driving his battered hands without mercy. Out there somewhere beyond that

stubborn, unseen barrier against which he pressed were fresh air and the sane, unhampered sweep of God's world. Behind, unspeakable gloom and torture more horrible than death. He must, he must keep going!

It was nearly noon when he stopped from sheer inability to do more and slithered back into the cave for a few minutes' rest. For a moment he thought night was coming on, so dark was it as he emerged from the tunnel, but as he glanced up at the opening above his head he saw that the shadows came from masses of blue-black clouds that swirled together ominously and dropped lower even as he watched. A dull pulsing shook the air, as of huge drums thudding afar off. Lightning ripped across the clouds, so close that Mather heard its white-hot crackle an instant before the smash of the thunder beat against his brain. He threw an arm across his face to shut out the flash and what it revealed—thousands of noisome, hairy beasts that came scuttling on fat legs through the opening to take refuge from the storm.

Then it rained. The heavens opened and crashed down. A torrent of mud and water poured through the cave roof, ripping the opening to twice its former size. Like a huge bucket the cave caught and held the flood. Momentarily the water rose—to Mather's ankles, his knees, his waist. The spiders struggled in it, dropping from walls and roof by dozens. They swarmed over him horribly as they fought with each other for safety on his body and head. He tried to brush them off, to drown them by sousing himself under the cascade that spilled down from above, but they clung to him like leeches.

The water was up to his chest, now. Presently he was swimming, his head a mass of spiders that thickened by the minute and nearly suffocated him. For an age he struggled, growing weaker and weaker, knowing that in the end he must sink under that chaotic mass. The thought of it nerved him to a few more feeble strokes, a final effort to rid his head of the clammy bodies. Then, miraculously, a clatter and splash of falling rocks and earth, a sucking sound as from a giant sluice pipe suddenly cleared, and his feet touched bottom.

He staggered blindly, trying to gain his balance on the uneven rocks. With arms arched he crushed and rubbed his head free of its loathsome blanket and saw that the water was but waist deep and falling rapidly. Through the lightening darkness he could make out the whirlpool which told where, at the end of the tunnel he had been digging, the wall had given way before the pressure from within. Even as he looked the last of the water swashed out, and stooping down, he caught a glimpse of daylight. On hands and knees he crept through

the opening and emerged to the free sweep of the hills, soft and dripping and peaceful against the background of the retreating storm.

For minutes he lay there, a sodden, shaken figure, looking out across that far-flung view with hollow eyes from which the stare of horror slowly faded. Then he got to his knees, his feet, and drew a great, shuddering breath. His eyes dropped to the slope immediately before him, strewn with scores of drowned spiders.

"Well," he said shakily, "it looks as though there are enough here for all the museums in the world. I'll make a good haul while I'm about it."

With swollen, bruised hands, he began gathering up the draggled bodies and piling them beside a rock.

An Odd Freak

W. W. Jacobs

"Speaking o' money," said the night-watchman, thoughtfully, as he selected an empty soap-box on the wharf for a seat, "the whole world would be different if we all 'ad more of it. It would be a brighter and a 'appier place for everybody.

He broke off to open a small brass tobacco box and place a little quid of tobacco tenderly into a pouch in his left cheek, critically observing at the same time the efforts of a somewhat large steamer to get alongside the next wharf without blocking up more than three parts of the river. He watched it as though the entire operation depended upon his attention, and, the steamer fast, he turned his eyes back again and resumed his theme.

"Of course it's the being short that sharpens people," he admitted, thoughtfully; "the sharpest man I ever knew never 'ad a ha'penny in 'is pocket and the ways 'e had o' getting other chaps to pay for 'is beer would ha' made 'is fortin at the law if 'e'd only 'ad the eddication. Playful little chap 'e was. I've seen men wot didn't know 'im stand 'im a pot o' beer and then foller 'im up the road to see 'im knock down a policeman as 'e'd promised. They'd foller 'im to the fust policeman 'e met, an' then 'e'd point them out and say they were goin' to half kill 'im, an' the policeman 'ud just stroll up an' ask 'em wot they were 'anging about for, but I never 'eard of a chap telling 'im. They used to go away struck all of a 'eap. He died in the accident ward of the London Horsepittle, poor chap."

He shook his head thoughtfully, and ignoring the statement of the watchman at the next wharf that it was a fine evening, shifted his quid and laughed rumblingly.

"The funniest way o' raising the wind I ever 'eard of," he said, in explanation, "was one that 'appened about fifteen years ago. I'd just taken my discharge as A. B. from the *North Star*, trading between here and the Australian ports, and the men wot the thing 'appened to was shipmates o' mine, although on'y firemen.

"I know it's a true story, becos I was in it a little bit myself, and the other part I 'ad from all of 'em, and besides, they didn't see anything funny in it at all, or anything out of the way. It seemed to them quite a easy way o' making money, and I dessay if it 'ad come off all right I should have thought so too.

"In about a week arter we was paid off at the Albert Docks these chaps was all cleaned out, and they was all in despair with a thirst wot wasn't half-quenched, and a spree wot was on'y in a manner o' speaking just begun, and at the end of that time they came round to a room wot I 'ad, to see wot could be done. There was four of 'em in all: old Sam Small, Ginger Dick, Peter Russet, and a orphan nevy of Sam's whose father and mother was dead. The mother 'ad been 'alf [negro] an 'alf Malay when she was living, and Sam was always pertickler careful to point out that his nevy took arter 'er. It was enough to make the pore woman turn in 'er grave to say so, but Sam used to say that 'e owed it to 'is brother to explain.

"'Wot's to be done?' ses Peter Russet, arter they'd all said wot miserable chaps they was, an' 'ow badly sailormen was paid. 'We're all going to sign on in the *Land's End*, but she doesn't sail for a fortnight; wot's to be done in the meantime for to live?'

"'There's your watch, Peter,' ses old Sam, dreamy-like, 'and there's Ginger's ring. It's a good job you kep' that ring, Ginger. We're all in the same boat, mates, an' I only wish as I'd got something for the general good. It's 'aving an orphan nevy wot's kep' me pore.'

"'Stow it,' ses the nevy, short-like.

"'Everything's agin us,' ses old Sam. 'There's them four green parrots I brought from Brazil, all dead.'

"'So are my two monkeys,' ses Peter Russet, shaking 'is 'ead; 'they used to sleep with me, too.'

"They all shook their 'eads then, and Russet took Sam up very sharp for saying that p'r'aps if he 'adn't slep' with the monkeys they wouldn't ha' died. He said if Sam knew more about monkeys than wot 'e did, why didn't 'e put 'is money in them instead of green parrots wot pulled their feathers out and died of cold.

"'Talking about monkeys,' ses Ginger Dick, interrupting old Sam suddenly, 'wot about young Beauty here?'

"'Well, wot about him?' says the nevy, in a nasty sort o' way.

"'W'y, 'e's worth forty monkeys an' millions o' green parrots,' ses Ginger, starting up; 'an' here 'e is a-wasting of 'is opportunities, going about dressed like a Christian. Open your mouth, Beauty, and stick your tongue out and roll your eyes a bit.'

"'W'y not leave well alone, Ginger?' ses Russet, and I thought so too. Young Beauty was quite enough for me without that.

"'Ter 'blige me,' ses Ginger, anxiously, 'just make yourself as ugly as wot you can, Beauty.'

"'Leave 'im alone,' ses old Sam, as his nevy snarled at 'em. 'You ain't everybody's money yourself, Ginger.'

"'I tell you, mates,' ses Ginger, speaking very slow and solemn, 'there's a fortin' in 'im. I was lookin' at 'im just now, trying to think who 'e reminded me of. At fust I thought it was that big stuffed monkey we saw at Melbourne, then I suddenly remembered it was a wild man of Borneo I see when I was a kid up in Sunderland. When I say 'e was a 'andsome, good-'arted looking gentleman alongside o' you, Beauty, do you begin to get my meaning?'

"'Wot's the idea, Ginger?' ses Sam, getting up to lend me and Russet a 'and with his nevy.

"'My idea is this,' ses Ginger: 'take 'is cloes off 'im and dress 'im up in that there winder-blind, or something o' the kind; tie 'im up with a bit o' line, and take 'im round to Ted Reddish in the 'Ighway and sell 'im for a 'undered quid as a wild man o' Borneo.'

"'*Wot*! screams Beauty, in an awful voice. 'Let go, Peter; let go, d'ye hear?'

"'Old your noise, Beauty, while your elders is speaking,' ses 'is uncle, and I could see 'e was struck with the idea.

"'You jest try dressing me up in a winder-blind,' ses his nevy, half crying with rage.

"'Listen to reason, Beauty,' ses Ginger; 'you'll 'ave your share of the tin; it'll only be for a day or two, and then when we've cleared out you can make your escape, and there'll be twenty-five pounds for each of us.'

"'Ow do you make that out, Ginger?' ses Sam, in a cold voice.

"'Fours into a 'undered,' ses Ginger.

"'Ho,' ses Sam. 'Ho, indeed. I wasn't aweer that 'e was your nevy, Ginger.'

"'Share and share alike,' ses Russet. 'It's a very good plan o' yours, Ginger.'

"Ginger holds 'is 'ead up and looks at 'im 'ard.

"'I thought o' the plan,' 'e ses, speaking very slow and deliberate. 'Sam's 'is uncle, and 'e's the wild man. Three's into a 'undered go—'

"'You needn't bother your fat 'ead adding up sums, Ginger,' ses Russet, very polite. 'I'm going to 'ave my share; else I'll split to Ted Reddish.'

"None of 'em said a word about me: two of 'em was sitting on my bed; Ginger was using a 'ankerchief of mine wot 'e found in the fireplace, and Peter Russet 'ad 'ad a drink out o' the jug on my washstand, and yet they never even mentioned me. That's firemen all over, and that's 'ow it is they get themselves so disliked.

"It took 'em best part of an 'our to talk round young Beauty, an' the langwidge they see fit to use made me thankful to think that the parrots didn't live to larn it.

"You never saw anything like Beauty when they 'ad finished with 'im. If 'e was bad in 'is cloes, 'e was a perfeck horror without 'em. Ginger Dick faked 'im up beautiful, but there was no pleasing 'im. Fust he found fault with the winder-blind, which 'e said didn't fit; then 'e grumbled about going bare-foot, then 'e wanted somethink to 'ide 'is legs, which was natural considering the shape of 'em. Ginger Dick nearly lost 'is temper with 'im, and it was all old Sam could do to stop himself from casting 'im off for ever. He was finished at last, and arter Peter Russet 'ad slipped downstairs and found a bit o' broken clothes-prop in the yard, and 'e'd been shown 'ow to lean on it and make a noise, Ginger said as 'ow if Ted Reddish got 'im for a 'undered pounds 'e'd get 'im a bargain.

"'We must 'ave a cab,' ses old Sam.

"'Cab?' ses Ginger. 'What for?'

"'We should 'ave half Wapping following us,' ses Sam. 'Go out and put your ring up, Ginger, and fetch a cab.'

"Ginger started grumbling, but he went, and presently came back with the cab and the money, and they all went downstairs leading the wild man by a bit of line. They only met one party coming up, and 'e seemed to remember somethink 'e'd forgotten wot ought to be fetched at once.

"Ginger went out fust and opened the cab-door, and then stood there waiting becos at the last moment the wild man said the winder-blind was slipping down. They got 'im out at last, but before 'e could get in the cab was going up the road at ten miles an hour, with Ginger 'anging on to the door calling to it to stop.

"It came back at about a mile an' a 'alf an hour, an' the remarks of the cabman was eggstrordinary. Even when he got back 'e wouldn't start till 'e'd got double fare paid in advance; but they got in at last and drove off.

"There was a fine scene at Ted Reddish's door. Ginger said that if there was a bit of a struggle it would be a good advertisement for Ted Reddish, and they might p'r'aps get more than a 'undered, and all the three of 'em could do, they couldn't get the wild man out o' that cab, and the cabman was hopping about 'arf crazy. Even now and then they'd get the wild man 'arf out, and then he'd get in agin and snarl. 'E didn't seem to know when to leave off, and Ginger and the others got almost as sick of it as the cabman. It must ha' taken two years' wear out o' that cab, but they got 'im out at last, and Reddish's door being open to see what the row was about, they went straight in.

"'Wot's all this?' ses Reddish, who was a tall, thin man, with a dark moustache.

"'It's a wild man o' Borneo,' ses Ginger, panting; 'we caught 'im in a forest in Brazil, an' we've come 'ere to give you the fust offer.'

"Ted Reddish was so surprised 'e couldn't speak at fust. The wild man seemed to take 'is breath away, and 'e looked in a 'elpless kind o' way at 'is wife, who'd just come down. She was a nice-lookin' woman, fat, with a lot o' yeller hair, and she smiled at 'em as though she'd known 'em all their lives.

"'Come into the parlour,' she ses, kindly, just as Ted was beginning to get 'is breath.

"They followed 'em in, and the wild man was just going to make hisself comfortable in a easy chair, when Ginger give 'im a look, an 'e curled up on the 'earthrug instead.

"'"'E ain't a very fine specimen,' ses Ted Reddish, at last.

"'"It's the red side-whiskers I don't like,' ses his wife. 'Besides, who ever 'eard of a wild man in a collar an' necktie?'

"'"You've got hold o' the wrong one,' ses Ted Reddish, afore Ginger Dick could speak up for hisself.

"'"Oh, I beg your pardin,' ses Mrs. Reddish to Ginger, very polite. 'I thought it was funny a wild man should be wearing a collar. It's my mistake. That's the wild man, I s'pose, on the 'earthrug?'

"'"That's 'im, mum,' ses old Sam, very short.

"'"He don't look wild enough,' ses Reddish.

"'"No; 'e's much too tame,' ses 'is wife, shaking her yeller curls.

"The chaps all looked at each other then, and the wild man began to think it was time he did somethink; and the nearest thing 'andy being Ginger's leg, 'e put 'is teeth into it. *Anybody* might ha' thought Ginger was the wild man then, the way 'e went on, and Mrs. Reddish said that even if he so far forgot hisself as to use sich langwidge afore 'er, 'e oughtn't to before a poor 'eathen animal.

"'"How much do you want for 'im?' ses Ted Reddish, arter Ginger 'ad got 'is leg away, and taken it to the winder to look at it.

"'"One 'undered pounds,' ses old Sam.

"Ted Reddish looked at 'is wife, and they both larfed as though they'd never leave off.

"'"Why, the market price o' the best wild men is only thirty shillings,' ses Reddish, wiping 'is eyes. 'I'll give you a pound for 'im.'

"Old Sam looked at Russet, and Russet looked at Ginger, and then *they* all larfed.

"'Well, there's no getting over you, I can see that,' ses Reddish, at last. 'Is he strong?'

"'Strong? Strong ain't the word for it,' ses Sam.

"'Bring 'im to the back and let 'im 'ave a wrestle with one o' the brown bears, Ted,' ses 'is wife.

"''E'd kill it,' ses old Sam, hastily.

"'Nevermind,' ses Reddish, getting up; 'brown bears is cheap enough.'

"They all got up then, none of 'em knowing wot to do, except the wild man, that is, and *he* got 'is arms tight round the leg o' the table.

"'Well,' ses Ginger, 'we'll be pleased for 'im to wrestle with the bear, but we must 'ave the 'undered quid fust, in case 'e injures 'isself a little.'

"Ted Reddish looked 'ard at 'im; and then he looked at 'is wife agin.

"'I'll just go outside and talk it over with the missus,' he ses at last, and they both got up and went out.

"'It's all right,' ses old Sam, winking at Ginger.

"'Fair cop,' ses Ginger, who was still rubbing his leg. 'I told you it would be, but there's no need for Beauty to overdo it. He nearly 'ad a bit out o' my leg.'

"'A'right,' ses the wild man, shifting along the 'earth-rug to where Peter was sitting; 'but it don't do for me to be too tame. You 'eard wot she said.'

"'How are you feeling, old man?' ses Peter, in a kind voice, as 'e tucked 'is legs away under 'is chair.

"'Gurr,' ses the wild man, going on all fours to the back of the chair, 'gur—wug—wug—"

"'Don't play the fool, Beauty,' ses Peter, with a uneasy smile, as he twisted 'is 'ead round. 'Call 'im off, Sam.'

"'Gurr,' ses the wild man, sniffing at 'is legs; 'gurr.'

"'Easy on, Beauty, it's no good biting 'im till they come back,' ses old Sam.

"'I won't be bit at all,' ses Russet, very sharp, 'mind that, Sam. It's my belief Beauty's gone mad.'

"'Hush,' ses Ginger, and they 'eard Ted Reddish and 'is wife coming back. They came in, sat down agin, and after Ted 'ad 'ad another good look at the wild man and prodded 'im all over an' looked at 'is teeth, he spoke up and said they'd decided to give a 'undered pun for 'im at the end o' three days if 'e suited.

"'I s'pose,' ses Sam, looking at the others, 'that we could 'ave a bit of it now to go on with?'

"'It's agin our way of doing business,' ses Ted Reddish. 'If it 'ad been a lion or a tiger we could, but wild men we never do.'

"'The thing is,' ses Mrs. Reddish, as the wild man started on Russet's leg and was pulled off by Sam and Ginger, 'where to put 'im.'

"'Why not put 'im in with the black leopard?' ses her 'usband.

"'There's plenty o' room in his cage,' says 'is wife, thoughtfully, 'and it 'ud be company for 'im too.'

"'I don't think the wild man 'ud like that,' ses Ginger.

"'I'm sartain sure 'e wouldn't,' says old Sam, shaking 'is 'ed.

"'Well, we must put 'im in a cage by hisself, I s'pose,' ses Reddish, 'but we can't be put to much expense. I'm sure the money we spent in cat's meat for the last wild man we 'ad was awful.'

"'Don't you spend too much money on cat's meat for 'im,' ses Sam, ''e'd very likely leave it. Bringing 'im 'ome, we used to give 'im the same as we 'ad ourselves, and he got on all right.'

"'It's a wonder you didn't kill 'im,' ses Reddish, severely. 'He'll be fed very

different 'ere, I can tell you. You won't know 'im at the end o' three days.'

"'Don't change 'im too sudden,' ses Ginger, keeping 'is 'ead turned away from the wild man, wot wos trying to catch 'is eye. 'Cook 'is food at fust, 'cos 'e's been used to it.'

"'I know wot to give 'im,' ses Reddish, off-handedly. 'I ain't been in the line twenty-seven years for nothink. Bring 'im out to the back, an' I'll put 'im in 'is new 'ome.'

"'They all got up and, taking no notice of the wild man's whispers, follered Ted Reddish and 'is wife out to the back, where all the wild beasts in the world seemed to 'ave collected to roar out to each other what a beastly place it was.

"'I'm going to put 'im in "'Appy Cottage" for a time,' says Reddish; 'lend a hand 'ere, William,' he says, beckoning to one of 'is men.

"'Is *that* "'Appy Cottage"?' ses old Sam, sniffing, as they got up to a nasty, empty cage with a chain and staple in the wall.

"Ted Reddish said it was.

"'Wot makes you call it that?' ses Sam.

"Reddish didn't seem to 'ear 'im, and it took all Ginger's coaxing to get Beauty to go in.

"'It's on'y for a day or two,' he whispers.

"'But 'ow am I to escape when you've got the brass?' ses the wild man.

"'We'll look arter that,' ses Ginger, who 'adn't got the least idea.

"The wild man 'ad a little show for the last time, jist to impress Ted Reddish, an' it was pretty to see the way William 'andled 'im. The look on the wild man's face showed as 'ow it was a revelashun to 'im. Then 'is three mates took a last look at 'im and went off.

"For the fust day Sam felt uneasy about 'im, and used to tell us tales about 'is dead brother which made us think Beauty was lucky to take arter 'is mother;

but it wore off, and the next night, in the Admiral Cochrane, 'e put 'is 'ead on Ginger's shoulder, and wep' for 'appiness as 'e spoke of 'is nevy's home at ''Appy Cottage.'

"On the third day Sam was for going round in the morning for the money, but Ginger said it wasn't advisable to show any 'aste; so they left it to the evening, and Peter Russet wrote Sam a letter signed 'Barnum,' offering 'im two 'undered for the wild man, in case Ted Reddish should want to beat 'em down. They all 'ad a drink before they went in, and was smiling with good temper to sich an extent that they 'ad to wait a minute to get their faces straight afore going in.

"'Come in,' ses Reddish, and they follered 'im into the parler, where Mrs. Reddish was sitting in a arm-chair shaking 'er 'ed and looking at the carpet very sorrowful.

"'I was afraid you'd come,' she ses, in a low voice.

"'So was I,' ses Reddish.

"'What for?' ses old Sam. It didn't look much like money, and 'e felt cross.

"'We've 'ad a loss,' ses Mrs. Reddish. She touched 'erself, and then they see she was all in black, and that Ted Reddish was wearing a black tie and a bit o' crape round 'is arm.

"'Sorry to 'ear it, mum,' ses old Sam.

"'It was very sudden, too,' ses Mrs. Reddish, wiping 'er eyes.

"'That's better than laying long,' ses Peter Russet, comforting like.

"Ginger Dick gives a cough. 'Twenty-five pounds was wot '*e'd* come for; not to 'ear this sort o' talk.'

"'We've been in the wild-beast line seven-an'-twenty years,' ses Mrs. Reddish, 'and it's the fust time anythink of this sort 'as 'appened.'

"''Ealthy family, I s'pose,' ses Sam, staring.

"'Tell 'im, Ted,' ses Mrs. Reddish, in a 'usky whisper.

"'No, you,' ses Ted.

"'It's your place,' ses Mrs. Reddish.

"'A woman can break it better,' ses 'er 'usband.

"'Tell us wot?' ses Ginger, very snappish.

"Ted Reddish cleared 'is throat.

"'It wasn't our fault,' he ses, slowly, while Mrs. Reddish began to cry agin; 'gin'rally speakin', animals is afraid o' wild men, and night before last, as the wild man wot you left on approval didn't seem to like "'Appy Cottage," we took 'im out an' put 'im in with the tiger.'

"'Put him in with the WOT?' ses the unfortnit man's uncle, jumping off 'is chair.

"'The tiger,' ses Reddish. 'We 'eard something in the night, but we thought they was only 'aving n little bit of a tiff, like. In the morning I went down with a bit o' cold meat for the wild man, and I thought at first he'd escaped; but looking a little bit closer—'

"'Don't, Ted,' ses 'is wife. 'I can't bear it.'

"'Do you mean to tell me that the tiger 'as eat 'im?' screams old Sam.

"'Most of 'im,' ses Ted Reddish; 'but 'e couldn't ha' been much of a wild man to let a tiger get the better of 'im. I must say I was surprised.'

"'We both was,' ses Mrs. Reddish, wiping 'er eyes.

"You might ha' 'eard a pin drop; old Sam's eyes was large and staring, Peter Russet was sucking 'is teeth, an' Ginger was wondering wot the law would say to it—if it 'eard of it.

"'It's an unfortunit thing for all parties,' ses Ted Reddish at last, getting up and standing on the 'earthrug.

"'Orrible,' ses Sam, 'uskily. 'You ought to ha' known better than to put 'im in with a tiger. Wot could you expect? W'y, it was a mad thing to do.'

"'Crool thing,' ses Peter Russet.

"'You don't know the bisness properly,' ses Ginger, 'that's about wot it is. W'y, I shou'd ha' known better than that.'

"'Well it's no good making a fuss about it,' ses Reddish. 'It was only a wild man arter all, and he'd ha' died anyway, cos 'e wouldn't eat the raw meat we gave 'im, and 'is pan o' water was scarcely touched. He'd ha' starved himself anyhow. I'm sorry, as I said before, but I must be off; I've got an appointment down at the docks.'

"He moved towards the door; Ginger Dick gave Russet a nudge and whispered something, and Russet passed it on to Sam.

"'What about the 'undered quid?' ses pore Beauty's uncle, catching 'old o' Reddish as 'e passed 'im.

"'Eh?' ses Reddish, surprised—'Oh, that's off.'

"'Ho!' says Sam. 'Ho! is it? We want a 'undered quid off of you; an wot's more, we mean to 'ave it.'

"'But the tiger's ate 'im,' says Mrs. Reddish, explaining.

"'I know that,' ses Sam, sharply. 'But 'e was our wild man, and we want to be paid for 'im. You should ha' been more careful. We'll give you five minutes; and if the money ain't paid by that time, we'll go straight off to the police-station.'

"'Well, go,' ses Ted Reddish.

"Sam got up, very stern, and looked at Ginger.

"'You'll be ruined if we do,' ses Ginger.

"'All right,' ses Ted Reddish, comfortably.

"'I'm not sure they can't 'ang you,' ses Russet.

"'I ain't sure, either,' says Reddish; 'and I'd like to know 'ow the law stands, in case it 'appens agin.'

"'Come on, Sam,' ses Ginger; 'come straight to the police-station.'

"He got up, and moved towards the door. Ted Reddish didn't move a muscle, but Mrs. Reddish flopped on her knees and caught old Sam round the legs, and 'eld him so's 'e couldn't move.

"'Spare 'im,' she ses, crying.

"'Lea' go o' my legs, mum,' ses Sam.

"'Come on, Sam,' ses Ginger; 'come to the police.'

Sam made a desperit effort, and Mrs. Reddish called 'im a crool monster, and let go and 'id 'er face on 'er husband's shoulder as they all moved out of the parlour, larfing like a mad thing with hysterics.

"They moved off slowly, not knowing wot to do, as, of course, they knew they daren't go to the police about it. Ginger Dick's temper was awful; but Peter Russet said they mustn't give up all 'ope—he'd write to Ted Reddish and tell 'im as a friend wot a danger 'e was in. Old Sam didn't say anything, the loss of his nevy and twenty-five pounds at the same time being almost more than 'is 'art could bear, and in a slow, melancholy fashion they walked back to old Sam's lodgings.

"'Well, what the blazes is up now?' ses Ginger Dick, as they turned the corner.

"There was three or four 'undred people standing in front of the 'ouse, and women's 'eads out of all the winders screaming their 'ardest for the police, and as they got closer they 'eard a incessant knocking. It took 'em nearly five minutes to force their way through the crowd, and then they nearly went crazy as they saw the wild man with 'alf the winder-blind missing, but otherwise well and 'arty, standing on the step and giving rat-a-tat-tats at the door for all 'e was worth.

"They never got to know the rights of it, Beauty getting so excited every time they asked 'im 'ow he got on that they 'ad to give it up. But they began to 'ave a sort of idea at last that Ted Reddish 'ad been 'aving a game with 'em, and that Mrs. Reddish was worse than wot 'e was."

The Golden Tiger

F. Norreys Connell

It is not long since the Rajah of Rhatameh took courage of his passion and murdered Mr. Tinspire, the British Resident, sending his head in a biscuit-box to his wife, yet the occurrence is hardly remembered. I, John Quirke, captain in the Bengal Staff Corps, have not forgotten—cannot forget it. And this is why.

I was in command of the Sepoy company forming Mr. Tinspire's escort when we fell into the trap which Rhatameh had laid. I was cut down, and thought to have been destroyed then and there, but instead was carried not ungently to the Rajah's palace, which was rather fort than mansion. He invited me to drink tea with him, and this I did, half expecting to find it poisoned, but unwilling to let him think that I cared overmuch. No symptom of irritation followed on the first cup, so I drank a second, and Rhatameh and I chatted pleasantly away, for the most part about polo, at which he was an expert and I wished to be.

He made me forget I was his prisoner, not unlikely under sentence of death, as he described to me with all a sportsman's eye to detail how best to hold up a pony's head when making a cross-drive. From ponies we came to horses, and sending for his Wazir battle-steed he called me to admire his points, a thing I had no difficulty in doing, for they were patent. After this he showed me his sporting armoury, containing every species of weapon, from a saloon pistol to an elephant gun. Comparatively ignorant about cattle, here I felt myself quite at home, and soon picked out the choicest items of his collection. With a Mannlicher repeater between us, we discussed grips and balances, cams and tumbling-blocks.

"You have shot tigers?" he queried.

"Five," said I.

"Thirty have fallen to my gun," he boasted, and in my heart I said he was a liar, for there were few great beasts in that country, and the rulers of Rhatameh only went abroad to make war. There was an explanation. "That sport costs too much money; every tiger I kill has to be sent up from Bengal. The dealers ask me 2,000 rupees each, and will do nothing until they are paid... I despise the Bengalese—they are all tradesmen. They dare not face the king of the jungle: they entrap him and send him to me to be slain—and then they ask me

for money, from me who did them this service. I say I despise them: they are afraid of the English. I am not afraid of the English. I have beaten the English at polo and in battle. You, an English officer, are my prisoner. I could spit in your face and you dare not hinder me.... But you, with your strange European mind, would say I was no gentleman, and to that I cannot listen. Therefore, I shall be gracious towards you."

I nearly grinned at the Rajah during this speech, for, hopeless as then would be my chance of ultimate escape, I knew my hand was heavy enough to shatter His Highness's skull if he attempted bodily insult.

Ignoring the side issue, I asked if he had shot lately. "Not tigers," he told me, with a suspicion of malice in his tone.

"You have no tigers now?"

He stared me abruptly in the face. "Yes, one: the Sacred Tiger. Have you not heard of him?"

I cudgelled my brains. "The Golden Tiger of Khandara. Is that the beast?"

"Kohilu, the Sacred Tiger of Khandara, is of ruddy gold," quoth the Rajah.

"Is it a tiger really, your Highness?"

"Think you it to be a mule?" he retorted. "Would you see for yourself?"

"If your Highness would bring me," I replied, and his crafty smile showed that he took my meaning.

"I will bring you," he acquiesced. "Kohilu will not harm his master, but I cannot promise you your safety."

"That I will answer for, if your Highness will permit."

He held up his hand warningly. "You may take no weapon. Whatever shall come to pass, the Sacred Tiger of Khandara must not be injured."

This was a stumbling-block for me, but although he looked me through and through I did not let him see it.

"I quite understand, your Royal Highness," I made answer, very quietly. "Sacred vessels are easy to crack, hard to replace."

"Silence!" ordered the Rajah, imperiously "Keep your irony until you are facing Kohilu. Then say what you will—unless, indeed, something we cannot foresee should stop you."

Catching up his humour, I replied, "Killing or being killed is my business. If I cannot do the one, I am not unprepared to submit to the other."

"Wait," said the Rajah, again. "It is easy to talk."

I bowed and declared myself at his disposal.

The Rajah took from his armoury a large gold instrument, not unlike an elephant goad fitted with a huge corkscrew handle.

He answered my questioning glance with the words, "My magic wand," and looked so unutterably conceited, that I would have given half my chance of escape for the kicking of him.

He was not a very powerful man, and, judging that his wand was heavier than the name implied, I offered to carry it for him, but he waved me back; nor did he trust it to a menial: we were to pay our visit to the Sacred Tiger absolutely without attendants of any kind. This did not astonish me, for it was natural that only few persons of the State should be allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, but it made me imagine that the object of our visit would be so chained up that he could not overpower us by his greeting.

The temple of the sacred beast was outside the precincts of the palace, and, there being no steps, the entrance was approached by a long stone ramp of gentle incline. Up this I walked with a step so eager that I was begged to tarry by the Rajah.

That potentate, marking the few glances I cast around, called upon me to admire the view. "See Khandara and die," said he: whether he chose those words with special intention I am not sure. As I said, we were without escort; looking back, it seems to me that had I here overpowered my companion I could have bid strongly for my liberty, but, oddly enough, my mind was so full of the new adventure that the idea of flight did not occur to me. At that moment I believe that I would have accepted the intervention of British troops quite as unwillingly as the

Rajah himself. What I wanted was the tiger—that seen, there was leisure to think of my personal safety. The fact of the matter was that the Rajah had nettled my self-esteem, and I would have faced a family of cats, naked, in the arena rather than flinch before his eyes. The outer gate of the temple was opened by unseen hands as we approached, and swung to again when we had passed through. Great bars descending from the walls secured it on the inside. We were now in a paved courtyard, guarded by very high, embattled walls. Behind us was the gatehouse, which had no visible door or window, and in front was a large edifice built in a gaudy rococo style, which hurt my eyes so that I do not care to describe it.

"Does the poor beast never try to run away?" I asked, on the spur of the moment.

"No," answered the Rajah, thoughtfully. "He never does": for once he did not take my meaning.

Arrived at the entrance to the temple proper, I noticed that it was closed by heavy swing doors without bolt, lock, or bar of any kind, but so constructed as to open only inwards.

The Rajah paused, and laying down his burden, produced a printed document and a stylographic pen.

"You are sure of yourself?" he asked.

"Sure," I affirmed.

"Then sign this," he returned, and handed me pen and paper.

I read: "This is to certify that I, "—here there was a blank for the name and other particulars—"enter the temple of Kohilu the Sacred Tiger of Khandara, of my own volition, at my own wish and under the protection of my own God. Signed day of 189 ."

"I will sign all but the last phrase," I declared. "I do not expect Providence to interest Himself in my foolhardiness."

The Rajah demurred. "All the others have signed," said he.

The words were dark, and it was with something of an effort that I modulated my reply: "The more reason, your Highness, for an exception."

“I do not make exceptions,” said he.

“Then,” I suggested, nonchalantly, “let us go back.”

“ Never,” he rapped out, abruptly.

“Then,” said I, in as nearly as possible the same tone as before, “let us go forward.”

This irritated him to the serving of my purpose, and crumpling up the paper in his hand, he threw his weight against the doors and opened them wide enough for a man to pass.

“Enter,” he cried, with the voice of a challenge.

“Thank you,” I said. And with a final muster of my pride, in I strode, in my imagination buffeting death.

My nose received the first impression there was no smell. Rather should I say the penetrating effluvia of savage beasts was wanting or had been overcome by the odour of incense. The temple of the Sacred Tiger smelt like the sanctuary of a Catholic church rather than the cage of a wild animal. Yet a cage it undeniably was. Just clear of the doors swung fully back were the bars, iron, coated thickly with gold and of ancient design, but I suspect recent Manufacture, for the gate which was open had very modern bolts and locks. The place was strewn with the litter of an ossuary. Lying in the middle was a long thin, white bone, unmistakably the femur of a woman, and not of a woman indigenous to the soil; but I saw no tiger or animal of any kind. A thought flashed upon me that the tiger of Khandara was Starvation, and that I had been lured here to die like a rat in a trap. I turned to make a frantic effort to battle my way out, and found the Rajah at my elbow quietly enjoying my trepidation.

“I thought,” said he, slowly, “you wished to meet death.”

“Visible, knowable death, willingly,” said I.

“Death sleeps,” answered the Rajah. “He is within.”

Following the motion of his hand, I saw in the farther wall of the den another opening without a door, and leading apparently into darkness.

"I shall lead Kohilu forth," said the Rajah. And I was impressed by his dignity as he stepped into the cage and out at the farther opening as jauntily as I might enter my loose box.

Already marvelling when he passed into the pitchy darkness, I was really startled to see that darkness turn to light as if his presence were effulgent: although my common sense quickly suggested that many men have electric light in their stables. A fantastic shadow was thrown on the wall, as if a child in cap and frock were prodding a prediluvian monster with a corkscrew.

All the time I heard a grunting like the modified rumble of a donkey-engine. The sense of mystification changed from the ludicrous to the unbearable, and I was on the point of following the Rajah, when the noise ceased and the light simultaneously went out.

I drew a long breath. I here was a chink of metal: the Rajah reappeared, leading by a gold chain, not the thickness of a watch-guard, a gigantic tiger, thirteen hands at the shoulder—the height of a polo-pony—and gorgeously marked.

It took no notice of me, stalking round the cage at the end of its lead with the dull precision of a circus-horse. It struck me at once that it moved like no jungle creature I had ever seen, with its sharp angular steps and its tail dropped behind; but it was, none the less, formidable-looking, and my faith in the Rajah's intrepidity increased.

The tour of the arena twice made, the Rajah, following the beast, gently laid his hand on its withers, and the beast instantly stopped, falling into a statuesque attitude.

Said the Rajah, "Behold, Kohilu!"

I smiled in return and, approaching, made bold to stroke the beast. The Rajah motioned me back: "Remember, Kohilu my Familiar is Death." He appealed to the thing. "What art thou, oh, Heaven-sent one?"

"Tod," said a voice from Kohilu's inwards.

"Kohilu," explained the Rajah, rather naively, "thinks you are a German." But the Rajah over estimated my credulity. I preferred to draw my own conclusions, and began to suspect I could deal with both Monarch and "Familiar.''

“Kohilu is a man-eater?” I asked.

“Kohilu eats nothing else.”

“Yet his coat is not mangy.”

“The covering of the immortals cannot decay.”

“He has not fed this morning.” I pointed to the dry bones underfoot.

“The day is yet young,” returned the Rajah, oracularly.

There was a little pause, and passing his hand again over the animal’s withers he caressed him.

“A quiet brute is Kohilu,” I said at last.

“Think you so?” snorted the Rajah, his fingers fumbling under the long hair.

“I do,” said I, and, choosing my spot, carefully dropped my hand on the brute’s muzzle.

The great lower jaw opened and shut with a convulsive snap, but my fingers were well out of reach, and I did not remove my hand.

The Rajah changed colour, and the angry look came again in his eyes.

“Awake, Kohilu,’’ he cried, and, loosing the animal, sprang backwards. The immense fore-paws flew up and caught me a blow in the chest that grounded me, and the beast leaped high in the air, its tail just clearing my head. Realizing my danger, I scrambled to my feet. The tiger was bounding round the place with huge upward leaps, more like the movement of a kangaroo than any other beast I knew of. It would rise 12 ft. or 14 ft. into the air; in falling, smite the ground viciously with its tail, and bounding forward again.

All the while its claws worked incessantly, its eyes shone with fire, and its jaws snapped and snapped. In its flight it scattered the bones and litter in all directions, but it did not approach the Rajah very closely. Seeing this, I knew my chance was to keep at His Highness’ back until these antics ceased. With what ease I could pretend to I lounged over to him and took my place as it

were casually. The animal's bounds grew even higher, and the crash of its concussions with the earth became deafening. "Now is Kohilu a tiger or not?" shouted the Rajah.

"Your Highness knows best," I answered. "But this I will say—Kohilu came not from Bengal.

"Kohilu came from Heaven."

"Then," said I, firmly, "Heaven is in England.''

"In England! Infidel dog!"

"If Kohilu came from Heaven, then Heaven is Sheffield."

"You lie! Kohilu never saw England."

"Nuremberg, then?"

"Kohilu's eyes have never beheld Europe."

"Kohilu's eyes are electric lamps," I answered; and added, point-blank, "the fact is, your Highness, you are a child and Kohilu is your toy."

The words were yet on my lips when he sprang at me and flung me down right in the way the beast was coming, but I caught him to me and dragged him also down, determined I should not die alone. The beast fell short, and again leaped over us, the near hind claw tearing away the Rajah's turbin as it took off.

Struggling, we rolled back to safer ground. The Rajah slipped out his poniard, but ere he could use it I snatched up that same long white bone which had caught my eye on entering the cage, and I knocked him senseless.

I had a mind to experience with his body the fate which he had intended to be mine, but what I can only call over-civilized sentimentality deterred me from doing so; and having removed his weapons, gagged and bound him, I sat down on his chest and reflected that it was high time to consider some means of escape.

Meanwhile the tiger bounded and jumped, sometimes swaying unpleasantly near. One conclusion I came to while watching—that the circular movement

was governed by the action of the tail, and that this was an intermittent control effected by many incalculable trifles.

I must have been sitting so for over an hour before the mechanical force of the toy showed signs of slackening; from first to last the performance must have occupied nearly three hours. If it could hold on so long at high pressure, it seemed pretty clear that it might have sustained its first walking pace for a whole day.

So I argued as, with feebler and feebler bounds, the contrivance worked itself out. What struck my humour was that the last movements were accompanied by a buzzing sound that might have come from the mechanism of a clockwork train. And this mental vision gave me the clue to the nature of the Rajah's "magic wand." It was an exaggerated clock-key, no more.

When the thing had quite run out, I penetrated into the inner chamber in search of this key, and with the aid of a match found the electric light button and switched it on. The place was empty save for a few simple tools in a rack, and the object of my quest leaning against the wall: that it had, however, at one time been the home of a real tiger, I judged from its shape to be probable.

Returning to the toy I subjected it, somewhat gingerly I must confess, to examination. In the centre of the chest I found the winding hole and inserted the key: I had not given it a quarter turn when the great jaw crashed down on my head, half stunning me. Fortunately the other limbs did not move and the mouth shut again after the second snap. Clearly I had to find the method of controlling the engine before I dared give it power. I passed my hand over the withers, and found there seven small circular knobs such as are attached to wash-house pipes. Not without some misgivings I climbed up on the animal's back to look at them. Brushing the hair aside, I read on each respectively: "*Rechtes Vorbein, Linkes Vorbein, Hinterbeine, Kinnenbachen, Schwanz, Augen,* and *Zerstörung*."

The certainty of liberty sprung up within me, for I knew I could manage the machine with these handles. Did not *Rechtes Vorbein* and *Linkes Vorbein* mean off and near fore-legs; *Hinterbeine*, hind-legs; *Kinnenbachen*, jaw; *Schwanz*, tail; and *Augen*, eyes?.... But what did *Zerstörung* mean? My thin German vocabulary did not contain the word. I had seen the animal use its legs, jaw, and tail, and its eyes light up, but could think of nothing else. I felt the handle: unlike the others it was turned off. There was no time for further consideration, so I turned off the others and descended to wind up the monster.

It was a stiff job, and took me nearly twenty minutes. When it was finished I gave the three handles controlling the legs each a very slight twist. With a jerk the beast began to move, and, being uncontrolled by the action of its tail, bounced straight into the wall with a tremendous thud which shook the whole building: there its limbs still kept on working. Fearful of an upset, I jumped up and turned off the machinery.

I was now in a great dilemma to know how to get its head round again, the thing being much too heavy for my mere strength to be of any avail. To set it going again might overturn it, and that would be the ruin of my scheme.

I decided to try the effect of the off forepaw alone, and set it gently in motion. This produced no useful result, merely causing the animal to vibrate so I turned it off and tried the tail, which made the apparatus rock violently, but neither did any good. Not to be beaten without a struggle, I tried both tail and leg together. This was the secret: the beast lumbered round, carrying away great chunks of masonry with its paws.

Determined to thoroughly master the steering-gar before going any further, as soon as the thing was clear I mounted on its back and cautiously set it going. When I thought I had room to turn, I stopped the near fore-leg, with the consequence that the beast swung sharply round, pitching me over his shoulder on to the still prostrate Rajah, but for whose intervention I might have broken my neck. I was on my feet just in time to save the beast from crashing into the wall.

Mounting again, I continued my experiments, with the result that in half an hours time I was able to describe the figure of eight, and perform other exercises of the riding-school. When I thought myself fairly efficient, I again wound the animal up to the full, worked it into position for departure, and turned my attention to the Rajah. He had recovered consciousness, and regarded me with considerable dislike as I removed his outer garments and pulled them on over my uniform, along with his sword and other accoutrements. I also replaced my helmet by his turban.

He strove to work the gag out of his mouth, probably to invite me to kill him, for he was a proud man in his way, but I affected to ignore him, thinking that the most irritating treatment to which I could subject him.

Night was descending, and it behooved me to be off. To steer the beast out

of the cage was a ticklish job, and before I could attempt to do it, it was necessary to force back the ponderous temple doors. By this time I had been nearly forty hours without solid food, and the strain on my weakened muscles made me tremble all over. So little nerve was then left to me after my exertions, that I did not dare to ride the animal out; but, seeing it in motion, took my place in rear. It was as well I did so, for it brushed the bars near enough to have mangled my leg had I been on it. The court-yard reached, I clambered to my perch again, exulting in my success... But only for an instant. Blackly in the gloom stood up the outer gate with its inexorable bars.

In my nervous state I was prostrated by this check: it seemed an end to all my hopes. Stopping the tiger, I stared painfully into the gathering darkness. Was I only a rat after all? Would the Rajah get the better of me? My impulse was to go back, make an end of him, and of myself across his body. But even then the slaying of a man in cold blood was abhorrent to me. Better to make one desperate effort to break out.

Digging my hands into the long hair, I crouched low as possible on the tiger's back, and turned the first four handles as far as they would go.

The golden tiger rose in the air, came heavily to earth, and as it rose again I shut my eyes. There was a crash as of the crack of doom, the whole world staggered round me, and I thought my head was splitting—a great jerk—I opened my eyes and found we were bounding into unfathomable night at the speed of an express train. I dared not attempt to steer the animal at such a pace, which, indeed, threatened to shake myself and it to fragments; so, as uniformly as I could, I reversed all the handles.

When the speed was sufficiently reduced for me to use my eyes, we had left the ramp far behind and were chasing across a sandy plain. Whither I could not judge. From behind arose a great uproar of voices, and the discharge of the Rajah's seven-pounder gun, which none but he could handle, proclaimed that he was again at large.

The moon came up and told me that I was heading due south across the Rhatamevan plateau, which extended for some fifteen miles in front of me till the mountains again arose. At my present reduced pace I ought to traverse this distance in five quarters of an hour. Then if I could strike the mountain road it should not be very difficult to gallop past the guard-house, leap the barrier, and be off up the mountain ere a bullet could stay me.

But the Rajah had not done with me yet, I found. One of his first acts must have been to wire a warning to the outpost, and as I approached the guard-house was ablaze with light, and I saw some score of men armed with rifles thrown forward into the plain. I stopped the tiger, so that the noise might not give them knowledge of my presence before I had settled my plans.

To gain the road was my only chance—but how to do it? To my horror I saw them lead out an elephant and anchor him across the path with the head towards me. At the same moment the galloping of horses came up on the wind behind. Cursing the momentary indecision which had added to my difficulties, I fumbled with my handles but could not turn them on. At last my nerve had broken down.

The sweat broke out on my brow, and thinking I was about to fall from my perch I grabbed at the seventh handle.

I felt a tremendous concussion under me; there was a roar and a wave of fire, followed by smoke stinking of powder. I heard the yells of frightened men, and the frantic trumpeting of the elephant.

As the vapour cleared I saw that the men opposed to me were gone, and that the elephant was lying prone in its chains.

The uproar of pursuit came nearer. Praising the gods, I turned the first three handles full on as before, and Kohilu bounded forward, once, twice, thrice—again: this time we landed right on the elephant, trampling the poor squealing monster into the earth. But Kohilu, though he toppled heavily forward, did not fall. Up again he bounded forward into liberty. And not all Rhatameh could stop us now.

At dawn, after carrying me 120 miles, Kohilu received the contents of a British magazine rifle. It did not matter to Kohilu, and it told me a welcome tale. I had come on the bivouac of a regiment of Punjaubees. A taciturn Scots major was in command.

When he had listened to my story with a weary air, he remarked, “Made in Germany, of course. Everything’s made in Germany nowadays.”

The Lion's Skin

Henry Wallace Phillips

One morning the Little Spirit said to Wanda, "Take your bow, and kill the old Red Lion in the cave."

So Wanda went into the tepee for his bow.

'Ugh! Good!" said his father, when Wanda told him of the chase; but his mother cried, "Ai, ai!"

Wanda ran toward the west, so that his shadow streamed long before him from the rising sun, and at last it fell upon the lion's cave, when Wanda's mouth tasted salt from the running.

The lion came out, snarling horribly, his long tail twisting and curling like an angry snake, his yellow teeth gleaming like gold, and his eyes burning.

"It is said you are to die," called Wanda, "but between you and me is no old quarrel—what good can I do for you?"

"It is said, it is said!" mocked the lion, as he crouched low. "Many things are said!" Then he turned the fire of his eyes on Wanda to melt the warrior's heart. But the heart only beat the stronger and steadier.

"It is a true word," said the lion slowly, as the fire died out of his eves. "Take my skin when I am dead, O brave, and we shall hunt together. Your foe is my foe, your wish my wish. Aargh! I shall never smell the green things on the prairie again." And he sat up, pointing his muzzle to the sky, and howled his death whoop.

"Die!" twanged the bow string. "Yess-s-s!" hissed the arrow.

The lion met death as though it were sleep, and Wanda took his skin.

"Now I wish it were tanned," said the brave, "and I could wear it home."

Then he looked at the skin, and behold, it was tanned, as soft to the fingers

as though the old squaws had worked it with grease and sand stones for a half year.

"Your wish is my wish," repeated Wanda. "Then it is true. To my back!" he called to the skin. At once it sprang from the ground to the warrior's shoulders, resting its head upon his head, and its arms upon his arms.

"Ugh! Good!" said his father, when Wanda returned to the tepee, and there was a light in his old eyes; but, "Ai, ai!" cried the mother very softly.

"Now the people shall hear of this in council," said Wanda's father. "Many have visited the Red Lion, and stayed forever; so, there was—" and he named them, keeping toll on his withered fingers; "but my son comes back carrying the skin."

To the council came Pazhee-to-to, the medicine man. "Green Grass," they called him, because his mind was strong and clear like the first growth of spring, and his soul as pure as the spring breezes.

While his father told the story of the chase, Wanda sat apart gazing quietly into the distance, as became so great a warrior, and Pazhee-to-to fixed a strong glance upon him.

When the story was finished the people cried, "How!" and, "Ohéte ge-as!" but Pazhee-to-to strode up to Wanda, and made a strange sign with his right arm.

As Wanda was wondering at this, he felt the lion's claws tighten upon his arm, and before he knew it, his right arm had waved an answer.

"The Great Spirit is with us!" called Pazhee-to-to. "There is more in this, O people, than your eyes can see!"

Then he turned to them, and said:

"Braves of the Ogallallas! You live in happiness and plenty, brave are your men and dutiful your women. The bison fills your houses with food, and the Great Spirit fills your hearts with truth and courage. It is well with you; but to the south the men and women of your own people under the curse of the Giant Bird. Each day one of them is carried off—man, wife, maiden, or papoose—and friends can only weep for the lost one.

"What can man do against this bird? His jaws are longer than a man's body, his wings darken the sky like a thunder cloud, the grip of his claws makes the bear's grip seem like the grasp of a child. The arrow bounds back from his scales in pieces, and no man dare face him with spear or pogamoggan!

"Ai, a man can do nothing, and the hearts of your own people to the south are turned to ashes. The fire of courage has died in them; they can no longer meet death like men. No, they pant and tremble like the rabbit.

"But," cried Pazhee-to-to, raising his voice, "the Great Spirit ordered a sign to show that the curse was ended, and this day I have seen the sign. O Wanda, pure of heart, strong young man and daring warrior, life spreads before you like a feast! Still, now before your people, I ask you, will you turn your face from it to serve those others in the south?"

The lion's jaws closed tight upon Wanda's head, and before he knew it, he answered, "I will."

Then there came a great silence upon the people.

In the middle of it Wanda left them.

That night each man came and laid the dearest thing he had before the tepee, as a tribute to Wanda.

It was a three days' journey to the haunt of the bird. On the evening of the fourth night his friends left him, and Wanda sat alone to face death in the morning.

That night he smoked his pipe and thought, "How am I to kill this bird?" Not once did he think, "Shall I be killed?" As he sat thinking, he felt the lion's head trying to speak into his head.

"Speak on, O friend. I listen," said he.

Then the lion's head spoke into his head. "With fire is the only way you can slay the bird," it said.

"But how?" asked Wanda.

The lion's head spoke into his head again, and made the matter clear to

him. So Wanda gathered dry wood, and particularly a long pole like a spear, and a block and rod to kindle fire with.

He turned the rod between his hands, pressing it down. "Great Spirit, bless this fire!" he cried, and a little flame sprang up.

In the morning the people heard the voice of Wanda singing on the river mound, so that the woods rang with it. It scattered fear as light scatters darkness, and it beat upon men's hearts with a beat like the war drum. At every beat the hearts of the men tightened.

"If Wanda, the brave one, fails," cried they, "then here is another for the sacrifice!"

Then old Pazhee-to-to smiled. "Nothing that is good is lost," said he. "Yesterday there was but one Wanda, today there are a thousand. Nothing breeds so fast as a brave deed;" and his eye kindled.

But out on the mound Wanda saw the inky shadow of the Giant Bird splashed against the ball of the sun like a totem on a shield, and he turned his face up to have the joy of great pride in himself before he was no more.

He beat himself upon the chest with his clenched hand, while the blood rushed hot to his cheeks.

"Wankahtonka! Great Spirit!" he called. "Look upon me, a man not afraid to die. See my soul, O mighty one! It is white. See my heart—it is strong. Rejoice with me, Great Spirit, rejoice with me!"

Then he thrust the piece of wood like a spear into the fire, and faced the bird, that came faster and faster, so that the grasses of the prairie whispered and bent to the wind of its passage.

"My foe is your foe!" said the head of the lion into Wanda's head, and the hair on the back of the hide stood up bristling and fierce.

The bird came, flying low, its huge jaws open, its wicked, dull eyes fixed on Wanda. So it came, traveling at such speed the heart of man could scarcely bear to see it, making a noise like the fall of much water in its flight.

Wanda stood still, his hand upon the piece of wood like a spear, waiting for the time. There must be no slip, no quiver of the hand. There was but one right instant; that lost, all was lost.

"Strike!" cried the lion's head into Wanda's head, and before he knew it, Wanda had plucked the wood from the fire, and stabbed the bird in through its open jaws, down into the throat, with his burning spear.

The sound of one bitter blow rang over the prairie, then all was still.

When the people came they saw the great bird, monstrous, obscene, sprawled out in death. The sod of the prairie was torn into furrows by its death struggles. As they looked, a great wonder came to their minds that a man should have killed it.

There beyond it lay Wanda, his face all peace, smiling a smile of welcome to the blue sky above, and the lion's skin lay across the cruel wound in his chest, hiding it.

And the people raised their voices in a great song of praise to the warrior, and of thankfulness to Wankahtonka. But far away there came a faint cry, sad to listen to:

"Ai, ai!" wept the mother of Wanda.

The Great Sea-Serpent: A New Wonder Story

Hans Christian Andersen

There was a little fish—a salt-water fish—of good family: I don't recall the name—you will have to get that from the learned people. This little fish had eighteen hundred brothers and sisters all just as old as he; they did not know their father and mother, and were obliged to look out for themselves at the very beginning, and swim round, but that was great sport. They had water enough to drink, the entire ocean; they thought nothing about their food, it came when they wanted it. Each did as it pleased, each was to make out its own story—ay, rather none of them thought at all about that. The sun shone down on the water that was light about them, so clear was it. It was a world with the strangest creatures, and some very horrid and big, with great gaping mouths that could gulp down all the eighteen hundred brothers and sisters, but neither did they think of that, for none of them as yet had been swallowed. The small ones swam side by side close together, as herrings and mackerel swim. But as they were swimming their prettiest in the water and thinking of nothing, there sank with prodigious noise, from above, right down through them, a long heavy thing that looked as if it never would come to an end; it stretched out farther and farther, and every one of the little fishes that scampered off was either crushed or got a crack that it could not stand. All the little fishes, and the great ones with them, from the level of the sea to the bottom, were thrown into a panic. The great horrid thing sank deeper and deeper, and grew longer and longer, miles and miles long. The fishes and snails, everything that swims, or creeps, or is driven by the current, saw this fearful thing, this enormous incomprehensible sea-eel which had come down upon them in this fashion.

What was the thing, anyway? Ah, we know; it was the great interminable telegraph cable that people were laying between Europe and America.

There was a confusion and commotion amongst all the rightful occupants of the sea where the cable was laid. The flying fishes shot up above the surface as high as they could fling themselves; the blow-fish took a leap an entire gunshot in length over the water, for it can do that; the other fish made for the bottom of the sea, and went down with such haste that they reached it long before the telegraph was seen or known about down there; they poured in on the cod and flounders that lived peaceably at the bottom of the sea and ate their neighbors. One or two of the sea-anemones were so agitated that they

threw up their stomachs, but they lived after it just the same, for they can do that. A good many lobsters and crabs got out of their excellent shells, and were obliged to wait for their bones to grow back again.

In all this fright and confusion, the eighteen hundred brethren and sisters became separated, and never again met, or ever knew each other after that; only some ten of them remained still in the same place, and so in a few hours they got over the first fright and began to be curious about the affair. They looked about them, they looked up and they looked down, and down in the depths they fancied they saw the fearful thing that had scared them—yes, had scared all, great and small, lying on the bottom of the sea, as far as their eyes could reach; it was quite thin, but they did not know how thick it might be able to make itself, or how strong it was; it lay very quiet, but then that might be a part of its cunning, they thought.

"Let it lie; it does not come near us!" said the most cautious of the little fishes; but the smallest one of all would not give up trying to find out what the thing could be. It had come down from above, so it was up above that one could best find out about it. So they swam up to the surface. It was perfectly still. They met a dolphin there. The dolphin is a sprightly fellow that can turn somersaults on the water, and it has eyes to see with, so it must have seen this and known all about it. They asked him, but he had only been thinking about himself and his somersaults, he'd seen nothing, had no answer for them, and only looked high and mighty.

Then they turned to the seal, which was just plunging in; it was more civil, for all that it eats small fish; but to-day it had had enough. It knew little more than the dolphin.

"Many a night have I lain upon a wet stone and looked far into the country, miles away from here; there are crafty creatures called in their speech men-folk. They plot against us, but usually we slip away from them; that I know well, and the sea-eel too, that you are asking about, he knows it. He has been under their sway, up there on the earth, time out of mind, and it was from there that they were carrying him off on a ship to a distant land. I saw what a trouble they had, but they could manage him, because he had become weak on the earth. They laid him in coils and circles. I heard how he ringled and rangled when they laid him down and when he slipped away from them out here. They held on to him with all their might—ever so many hands had hold of him, but he kept slipping away from them down to the bottom; there he is lying now—till further notice, I rather think."

“He is quite thin,” said the small fishes.

“They have starved him,” said the seal, “but he will soon come to himself, and get his old size and corpulence again. I suppose he is the great sea-serpent that men are so afraid of and talk so much about. I never saw him before, and never believed in a sea-serpent; now I do. I believe he is the sea-serpent,” and with that down went the seal.

“How much he knew! How he talked!” said the small fishes; “I never was so wise before; if it only isn’t all an untruth.”

“We can, anyway, swim down and see for ourselves,” said the littlest fish; “on the way we can hear what the others think about it.”

“I wouldn’t make a stroke with my fins to get at something to know,” said the others, and turned away.

“But I would!” said the littlest fellow, and put off down into deep water; but it was a good distance from the place where “the long thing that sank” lay. The little fish looked and hunted on all sides down in the deep water. Never before had it imagined the world to be so big. The herrings went in great shoals, shining like a mighty ribbon of silver; the mackerel followed after, and looked even finer. There were fishes there of all fashions and marked with every possible color: jelly-fish, like half-transparent flowers, borne along by the currents. Great plants grew up from the floor of the ocean; grass, fathoms long, and palm-like trees, every leaf tenanted by shining shell-fish.

At last the little fish spied a long dark streak away down, and made his way toward it, but it was neither fish nor cable: it was the gunwale of a sunken vessel, which above and below the deck was broken in two by the force of the sea. The little fish swam into the cabin, where the people who perished when the vessel sank were all washed away, except two: a young woman lay there stretched out, with her little child in her arms. They seemed to be sleeping. The little fish was quite frightened, for it did not know that they never again could waken. Sea-weed hung like a net-work of foliage over the gun-wale above the two beautiful bodies of mother and babe. It was so quiet, so solitary; the little fish scampered away as fast as it could, out where the water was bright and clear, and there were fishes to see. It had not gone far before it met a whale, fearfully big.

“Don’t swallow me!” cried the little fish; “I am not even to be tasted, I am so small. and it is a great comfort to me to live.”

“What are you doing away down here, where your kind never come?” asked the whale.

So then the little fish told about the astonishingly long eel, or whatever the thing was, that had sunk down from above and produced such a panic amongst all the other creatures in the sea.

“Ho, ho!” said the whale, and he drew in such a rush of water that he was ready to make a prodigious spout when he came to the surface for a breath. “Ho, ho! So that was the thing that tickled me on the back when I was turning round. I thought it was a ship’s mast, that I could break up into clothes-pins. But it was not here that it was; no, a good deal farther out lies the thing. I’ll go with you and look for it, for I have nothing else to do;” and so it swam off, and the little fish behind it, not too near, because there was a tearing stream, as it were, in the wake of the whale.

They met a shark and an old saw-fish; they, too, had heard of the famous sea-eel, so long and so thin; they had not seen it, but now they would.

“I’ll go with you,” said the shark, who was on the same road; “if the great sea-serpent is no thicker than a cable, then I can bite through it in one bite,” and he opened his mouth and showed his six rows of teeth—“I can bite dents in a ship’s anchor, and certainly can bite off the shank.”

“There it is!” said the great whale; “I see him.” He thought he saw better than the others. “See how it rises, how it bends and bows and curves!”

But it was not the sea-serpent, but an extraordinarily great eel, ever so many ells long, that drew near.

“Why, I have seen him before!” said the saw-fish. “He never has made a hullabaloo in the sea or frightened any big fish out of his wits.” And so they talked to him of the new eel, and asked him if he would go with them on their voyage of discovery.

“If that eel is longer than I am,” said the sea-eel, “there will be something disagreeable happening.”

"Ay, that there will," said the others; "there are enough of us not to tolerate him!" and so they shot ahead. But then there came right in their way a great monster, bigger than all of them put together; it looked like a floating island, that could not stop itself. It was a venerable whale. Its head was grown over with sea-weed, its back covered with barnacles, and such innumerable oysters and mussels, that its black skin was altogether whitened.

"Come with us, old fellow!" said they. "Here is a new fish come, and we won't stand it."

"I would rather lie where I am lying," said the whale. "Leave me alone; leave me alone. O ah, O ah! I suffer from a dreadful disease! My only relief is to get up toward the surface and get my back up higher; then the great sea-fowl can come and pick at me. That feels so good! Only when they do not drive their beaks in too far; sometimes they go in too deep, quite into my blubber. You can see now how a complete skeleton of a fowl is fixed in my back; she struck her claws in too deep, and could not get them out when I went down to the bottom. And now the little fishes have picked at her. See how she looks, and how I look. I am all diseased!"

"That is all imagination!" said the shark. "I am never sick. No fish is ever sick."

"Pardon me," said the whale. "The eel suffers from headache, the carp has the smallpox, and we all have intestinal worms."

"Nonsense!" said the shark, and refused to hear any further, and the others also would rather not; they had something else to attend to.

At last they came to the place where the telegraph cable lay. It has a pretty long bed on the floor of the sea from Europe to America, over sand-banks and sea-mud, rocky ground and weedy places, entire forests of coral. The currents down there, too, change, whirlpools eddy, and fishes swarm in greater masses than the countless flocks of birds that men see when birds of passage take their flight. There is a stir, a splashing there, a humming and rushing; the rushing still haunts a little the great empty conch-shells when we hold them to our ears.

"There lies the fellow!" cried all the great fishes and the little one with them. They saw the cable, the beginning and end of which vanished beyond the reach of their eyes. Sponges and polyps swayed from the ground, rose and fell over it, so that now it was hidden, now came to view. Sea-porcupines, snails, and

worms moved over it. Gigantic crabs, that had a complete fringe of creeping things, stalked about it. Dark sea-anemones, or whatever the creature is called that eats with its entire body, lay beside it and smelled of the new creature that had stretched itself on the bottom of the sea. Flounders and codfish turned over in the water so as to get an idea about it from all sides. The star-fish, that always bores down into the mud and can keep its eyes outside, lay and stared to see what was to come of all this bustle.

The telegraph cable lay without stirring, but life and thought were in it. Human thought went through it. "The thing is crafty," said the whale; "it is able to strike me in the stomach, and that is my weak point."

"Let us grope along," said the polyps. "I have long arms and limber fingers; I have been moving by the side of it; now I'll go a little faster," and so it stretched its most flexible, longest arms down to the cable and round about it. "It has no scales!" said the polyps; "it has no skin at all. I do believe it never feeds its own young."

The sea-eel laid itself by the side of the telegraph cable and stretched out as far as it could. "The thing is longer than I am," it said; "but it is not length that does anything; one must have skin, stomach, and flexibility."

The whale dove down deeper than it ever had been. "Art thou fish or art thou plant?" it asked, "or art thou only some piece of work made up above that cannot thrive down here amongst us?"

The telegraph cable did not answer; it has no power for that. Yet thoughts go through it, men's thoughts, that rush in one second miles upon miles from land to land.

"Will you answer, or will you take a crack?" asked the fierce shark, and all the other great fishes asked the same thing.

The cable did not stir, but it had its private thought, and such a one it had a right to have when it was full of thoughts. "Let them only give me a crack! Then I shall be hauled up and be myself again; that has happened to others of my race in shallower waters." So it gave no answer; it had something else to attend to; it telegraphed and lay in its lawful place at the bottom of the ocean.

Up above, the sun now went down, as men say. It became like flaming fire,

and all the clouds glowed with fiery color, each more splendid than the other. “Now we shall get the red light,” said the polyps, “and can see the thing better, if need be.”

“At it! At it!” shouted the shark. “At it! At it!” said the sword-fish and the whale and the eel. They rushed forward, the shark foremost. But just as it was about to grip the wire, the sword-fish, out of pure politeness, ran his saw right into the back of the shark. It was a great mistake, and the shark lost all his strength for biting. There was a hubbub down in the mud. Great fishes and small, sea-anemones and snails rushed at one another, ate each other, mashed and squeezed in. The cable lay quietly and attended to its affairs, and that one ought to do.

The dark night brooded over them, but the ocean’s millions upon millions of living creatures lighted it; craw-fish, not so big as a pin-head, gave out light. Some were so small that it took a thousand to make one pin-head, and yet they gave light. It certainly is wonderful, but that’s the way it is.

These sea creatures looked at the telegraph wire. “What is that thing?” they asked, “and what isn’t it?” Ay, that was the question.

Then there came an old sea-cow. Folks on the earth call its kind a mermaid, or else a merman. This was a she, had a tail and two short arms to splash with, hanging breasts, and sea-weed and sponges on her head, and that was what she was proud of.

“Will you have the society of intelligent people?” said she. “I’m the only one down here that can give it. But I ask in return for it perfectly secure pasturage on the bottom of the sea for me and mine. I am a fish, as you see, and I am also an amphibious animal—with practice. I am the wisest cow in the sea. I know about everything that goes on down here, and all that goes on above. That thing you are pondering over is from above, and whatever plumps down from up there is either dead or comes to be dead and powerless; let it lie there for what it is; it’s only some invention of man.”

“Now I think there is something more to it,” said the little fish.

“Hold your tongue, mackerel!“ said the great sea-cow.

“Stickleback!” said the rest, and that was even more insulting.

And the sea-cow explained to them that this terrible thing, which, to be sure, had not given out a single mutter, was only some invention from the dry land. And it delivered a little oration upon the rottenness of men.

"They want to get hold of us," said she. "That's all they live for. They stretch nets for us, and come with bait on a hook to catch us. That thing there is some kind of big string which they think we are going to bite at. They are such stupids! We are not. Only do not touch it, and it will shrivel up and all turn to dust and mud. Everything that comes down from up there is full of cracks and breaks—it's good for nothing."

"Good for nothing!" said all the creatures in the sea, and held fast to the sea-cow's opinion, so as to have an opinion. The little fish had its own thoughts. "That exceedingly long, thin serpent is perhaps the most wonderful fish in the ocean. I have a feeling it is."

"The very most wonderful," say we human folks, and say it with knowledge and assurance. It is the great sea-serpent, long ago the theme of song and story. It was born and nourished and sprang forth from men's cunning and was laid upon the bottom of the sea, stretching from the Eastern to the Western land, bearing messages, quick as light flashes to our earth. It grows in might and in length, grows year by year through all seas, round the world, beneath the stormy waves and the lucid waters, where the skipper looks down as if he sailed through the transparent air, and sees the swarming fish, brilliant fireworks of color. Down, far down, stretches the serpent, Midgard's snake, that bites its own tail as it encircles the earth. Fish and shell beat upon it with their heads—they understand not the thing—it is from above. Men's thoughts in all languages course through it noiselessly.

"The serpent of science for good and evil, Midgard's snake,
the most wonderful of all the ocean's wonders, our—
Great Sea-Serpent!"