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AMBROSE BIERCE, F. A. MITCHELL-HEDGES And The CRYSTAL SKULL

by Sibley S. Morrill

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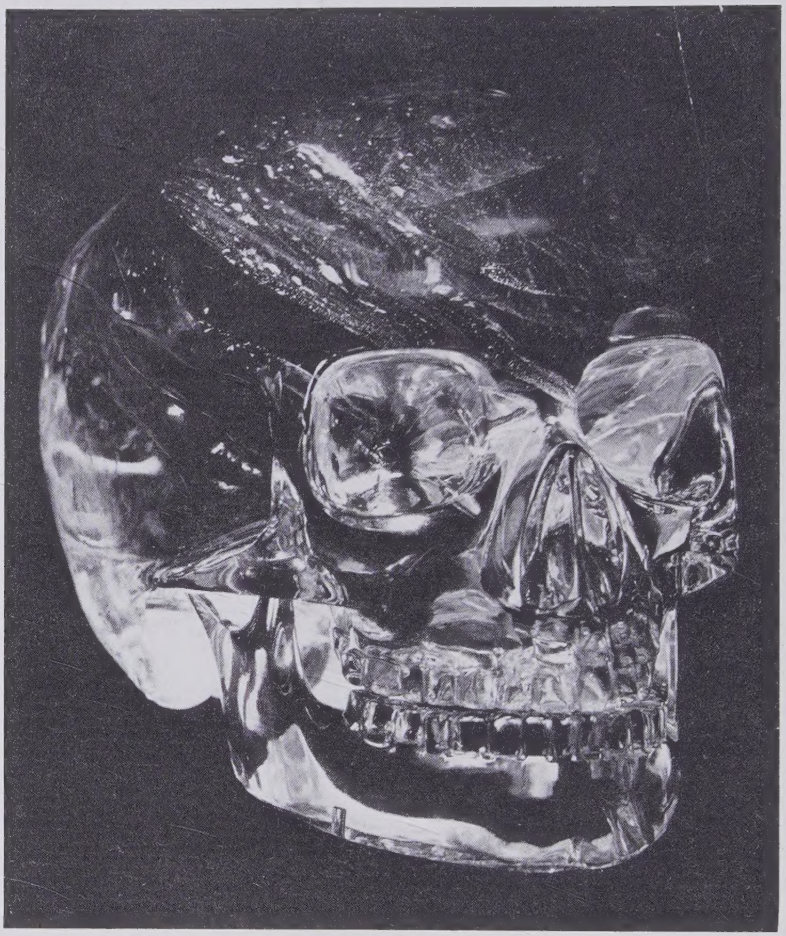

The crystal skull, an 11 pound, 7 ounce jewel, whose owner, the late F. A. Mitchell-Hedges, was with General Pancho Villa at the same time as Major Ambrose Bierce, is certainly one of the world's most mysterious objects. Though it was evidently the archetype for the figure 10 in the Mayan head-variant system of numeration and a most sacred possession of the Maya, Mitchell-Hedges always refused to say where, when or how he acquired it. And, oddly enough, all references to it in the first and English edition of his autobiography were carefully removed from the American edition, published by Little, Brown and Co. —for reasons its editors disclaim knowing.

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FOREWORD

It is the thesis of this book that the mysterious disappearance in Mexico in 1913 of Major Ambrose Bierce, one of the most important and controversial figures in American literature, was vitally involved with the appearance in the 20th Century of the extraordinary crystal skull in some way acquired by the late F. A. Mitchell-Hedges, known primarily as a British explorer of Central America during the Twenties and Thirties; and that both men went into Mexico at the same time—with General Pancho Villa's army, furthermore—as secret agents of their governments.

While the evidence offered does not prove the ultimate fate of Bierce, it does present a more rational explanation than has yet been given of Bierce's actions in the months prior to his going to Mexico and the reasons for his going there. It also indicates that he almost certainly reached British Honduras by the summer or fall of 1914, finally disappearing in that general area and possibly in a section from which other and mysterious disappearances have occurred during this century, three of them being given.

The nature of the evidence includes documentary material most of which has been available for years but which, so far as we can determine, has never before been assembled for publication—a matter which in itself forms something of a mystery and for which the explanation suggested will not be popular in certain official circles.

The first three chapters deal with the skull itself. They show its authenticity as one of the greatest jewels in the world, its importance in the Mayan head-variant system of numeration, and its significance to the religion of the Maya as a sacred object.

Though Bierce is not mentioned in those chapters, their reading is essential to an understanding of why it was that certain persons have suppressed knowledge of the skull, including a glaring example from two major publishing houses, one British

the other American, in the publishing of Mitchell-Hedges' autobiography. Their reading also serves to underline the need for Mitchell-Hedges' consistent refusal to say how, when or where he acquired the skull and his negative testimony on his relationship to Bierce.

The evidence that Bierce and Mitchell-Hedges were secret agents in Mexico for intelligence purposes is given in Chapters IV through VII.

It is our belief that the hypothesis to that effect forms the only sensible explanation for a chain of phenomena that is otherwise not explicable even by using the spavined workhorse of coincidence.

The Mitchell-Hedges skull with detached lower jaw

Chapter I

In July, 1936, MAN, a monthly record of anthropological science published under the direction of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, devoted five pages to a comparison study of two life-size crystal skulls which manifestly are among the most remarkable jewels in the world, as well as the only two such "known to be in existence."

One was described as the "Burney skull" through its having been lent by Sydney Burney, a London art dealer with whom the owner, the late F. A. Mitchell-Hedges, had left it as security for a loan. The other was the so-called "Aztec skull" which the British Museum reportedly had acquired in 1898 from a French officer who had served under Maximillian in Mexico.

What prompted the editors of MAN to devote so much space to the study was that up to a short time before, the British Museum skull had been the only one known of such size and excellence of workmanship. But now there was another, not only of almost the identical size and shape, but much more beautifully fashioned. Furthermore, since the origin of the second was far more obscure than that of the first—except for the seeming certainty that it also came from Mexico in whose culture the skull has long been a dominant symbol—and since each of them represented a fantastic amount of work on the part of the ancient artists who made them, the editors were naturally interested in learning what an intensive, expert study of the two skulls would reveal.

The participating scholars were among the best in the field. They were Dr. G. M. Morant, one of the most eminent

anthropologists; Adrian Digby, who became the Keeper of the British Museum's Department of Ethnology; and H. J. Braunholtz, a member of the British Museum staff.

Inevitably, one of the first things to engage the attention of the trio was the matter of whether either of the skulls could be of modern workmanship. Their findings on that score were negative. As Digby wrote, "in neither case is there any trace of identifiable tool marks, and it is certain that neither specimen was made with steel tools. On the teeth there is no trace of a lapidary's wheel which would betray one or both specimens as being of comparatively recent origin."

With the question of a modern forgery out of the way, the matter that then drew the attention of the scholars was how to account for the similarities and the differences.

Morant, noting that the absence of suture marks on the skulls meant that "few of the usual measurements can be taken at all accurately," nonetheless found that the two skulls were so alike that it became "impossible to avoid the conclusion that [they] are not of independent origin. It is almost inconceivable that two artificers, having no connection with one another, and using different human skulls as models, should have produced specimens so closely similar in form as these two are."

As for the fact that the lower jaw in the Mitchell-Hedges, "Burney," skull was detachable while that of the other was not, and that its teeth and eye sockets were more natural in shaping than those of the British Museum skull—those points meant merely that greater realism had been given to the one than to the other. In his opinion, it was "safe to conclude that they are representations of the same human skull, though one may have been copied from the other."

Also, he observed, there were certain points which suggested that the original was quite possibly the skull of a female, and maybe a European, although the question of what race remained "one which cannot be answered decisively."

The findings of Morant did not agree with those of Digby. While admitting that "Dr. Morant's comparison is very impressive," Digby felt it "probable from the stylistic differences that the [two skulls] are not contemporary" with one another. Also, he maintained that if the two were made after the same

original, the original would have had to be "a particularly important skull, probably belonging to a culture hero or warrior"—a difficult concept in view of the findings of feminine characteristics in both skulls and one which would involve "pure coincidence." Hence, he concluded, "in spite of the remarkable similarity of outline which Dr. Morant has demonstrated, it still appears unwise to assume that the two skulls are based on the same original."

H. J. Braunholz was of approximately the same opinion as Digby. He felt that the British Museum skull had peculiarities of stylization that "are in accordance with the general character of ancient Mexican art." The Mitchell-Hedges skull, on the other hand, showed so much "attention to the correct rendering of detail" that "such realism seems beyond the ordinary range of Aztec art, and gives the skull the character almost of an anatomical study in a scientific age."

Taken as a whole, the study is an impressive one. Indeed, it is safe to say that the two skulls could not have been given a more searching examination in most respects than the participants gave it. Its net results are that both skulls are not of modern workmanship inasmuch as no traces of it can be found on either; that the skulls have remarkable similarities in shape; that they have sufficient female characteristics to suggest that the original on which they were modelled was a female skull that may have been the direct model for both; but that one may have been copied from the other; and that the Mitchell-Hedges skull is more nearly anatomically perfect than the British Museum skull.

But the study is also impressive for some points it did not emphasize. One is that while both skulls represent a high degree of workmanship and anatomical knowledge—although much the more so in the case of the Mitchell-Hedges skull—neither has a feature which each should have and could easily have had if the artists had been seeking merely to fashion replicas of the skull of some famous person, whether male or female.

The missing feature is the suture marks on the pates. To have put them on would have been no trick at all for the artists. And since suture marks on any skull are one of the most impressive things about it, it seems strange that the reason for

their absence should not have been questioned in the study. As to what that reason had to be, a separate chapter is needed to discuss it.

Another point, which the scientists noted along with the absence of the suture marks but did not question, is that the lower jaw on the Mitchell-Hedges skull is detachable, whereas that on the British Museum skull is not. To ascribe the reason for this difference merely to the whim of the artist, to his desire to be more realistic in the one case as against the other is not enough. For if that were the reason, then it would have to be one of the most costly any artist ever had for providing his work with a mere refinement.

Why that is true is that the making of the lower jaw so it is easily detachable called for hundreds if not thousands of hours of extra work, and of the most demanding kind.

In fact, it is probable that no other task in the history of jewelry, including the cleaving of a great diamond, involved more careful thinking and greater skill—to say nothing of what it meant to the future of the artist in life expectancy.

For in the cutting and the shaping of the crystal in its natural state, and in making the lower jaw detachable, the artist was confronted with an extra demand that made his otherwise difficult task abnormally more so. He had to so work the stone that two natural prisms in the back of the skull's mouth would channel light upwards into the eye sockets.

The shaping of the crystal to fulfill that purpose called for not only a remarkable knowledge of optics, but for an extraordinary degree of precision in workmanship. Also, since crystal is easily shattered, no such task as making the lower jaw detachable and providing for the most effective use of the prisms would ever have been undertaken merely to give greater realism to the skull.

On the contrary, the only reason that could justify the countless hours of work this added refinement necessitated would have had to be one of the greatest significance, one far beyond just the desire for artistic perfection.

What that reason was, though it—like the prisms themselves—evidently escaped the notice of the British scholars, there can be no doubt. It was a matter involving the central

points of both the mathematics and the religion of the Maya, a people from whose culture the Aztec and other ancient Mexican nations were to draw heavily.

Chapter II

Probably no other people present more and greater mysteries than do the Maya whose descendants, today numbering over two million, are found mainly in Yucatan and the area around the Bay of Honduras.

One of the things to make them so mysterious is not that they built over a hundred great cities whose ruins have been found in the jungles from southern Mexico to Honduras, but rather that having built them, they suddenly chose, around 1,000 A.D., to abandon them.

Why they elected to do such a thing is a matter still not decided to general satisfaction. Some of the cities they quitted had been inhabited for so long as ten centuries or more. Others were comparatively new. In any case and whatever the reason, they were all deserted at about the same time, as if the inhabitants had been moved by an impulse similar to that which periodically sends hordes of lemmings marching from their homelands on a seeming migration to the sea.

There are, of course, other examples of cities being abandoned by their inhabitants for unknown reasons. The desertion of the great city of Angkor in Cambodia is a case in point. But its people, whoever they were, did not quit a great array of cities such as the Maya left. Nor did the Maya vanish from history as the ancient Cambodians apparently did. On the contrary, they moved elsewhere, mainly into areas of Yucatan where they built other cities and continued to evidence yet other mysteries—a characteristic, by the way, that they still seem to have.

But the mystery involved in the desertion of the Mayan cities, fascinating as it is, is relatively minor when compared to another posed by this extraordinary people—namely, their amazing development of a mathematics that was not only fully as good as that of the Europeans at the time of the Conquest but probably superior to the mathematics of the Europeans, Asians or Africans in classic times.

According to the late Professor Sylvanus G. Morley, in his THE ANCIENT MAYA (Stanford University Press, 1946), "Some time during the fourth or third centuries before Christ, the Maya priests *for the first time in the history of the human race devised a system of numeration by position, involving the conception and use of the mathematical quantity of zero* (italics Morley's), a tremendous abstract intellectual accomplishment."

This product of Mayan philosophic thought—for that is what it had to be, barring the very real possibility of their having got it from a presently unknown civilization—took place around a thousand years before the Hindus, usually credited with originating the zero concept, are supposed to have invented it. And, strangely enough, this amazing Mayan discovery is inextricably involved with the history of the Mitchell-Hedges and the British Museum crystal skulls.

To appreciate this involvement it is essential to have a clear picture of the Mayan system of numeration. It was vigesimal rather than decimal, going by twenties rather than tens—a matter that suggests the Maya apparently felt early in their history that they needed to count on their toes as well as their fingers, in contrast to other peoples who counted on their fingers alone.

Just as we have two sets of symbols for writing numbers —the Roman and the Arabic—the Maya had two. One is the bar and dot system, employing an eliptically shaped shell for zero. The other is the head-variant system consisting of fourteen symbols, each represented by a different head, for the numbers 0 to 13 inclusive. Of these two methods of notation, Morley says the head-variant was closer to that of our Arabic numerals.

But since the Mayan system was vigesimal, how did the

Maya, using the head-variants, form the higher numbers from 14 to 19 inclusive?

They did it by transferring the value of 10 to the appropriate lower number to form the desired higher one. The instrument used was the fleshless lower jaw of the head glyph for 10, which happened to be unique among the fourteen head-variant symbols in being a fleshless human skull, the emblem of the Death God Ah Puch.

As Morley described it, "The head-variant for 10 is the death's head, or skull, and in forming the head-variants for the numbers from 14 to 19 inclusive, the fleshless lower jaw of the death's head was the part used to represent the value of 10 in these composite heads for the six higher numbers. Thus if the fleshless lower jaw is applied to the lower part of the head for 6 . . . the resulting head will be that for 16, that is, 10 plus 6."

(At this point, it is well to note that Morley must have been aware of the comparison study in MAN, but he made no mention in his THE ANCIENT MAYA of the Mitchell-Hedges skull with its detachable lower jaw. The omission is a strange one, in view of the battery of experts authenticating it. Nonetheless, a logical reason for it will be shown later.)

Curiously enough, though Morley was as well informed on the Maya as any other scholar, and though he saw that the head-variants employed were quite possibly those of the Thirteen Gods of the Upper World in the Mayan pantheon, it did not apparently occur to him to wonder why the skull with the detachable lower jaw should have been chosen as the crucially important symbol for the figure 10. Possibly he thought it unimportant, or not of sufficient importance to warrant immediate inquiry.

In any event, choice of the death's head with the detachable lower jaw for the pivotal figure 10 could not have been accidental. On the contrary, it had to be deliberate.

That would be the case whether or not the Maya had the crystal skull at the time. But if they did have the crystal skull when they got their mathematics, it would have been most natural for them to have thought of using the detachable lower jaw as the means for transferring the value of 10 to create the higher numbers. What would more readily suggest such a

thought than possession of such an object, which would then serve as the archetype for 10? On the other hand, if they did not have the crystal skull at the time they got their mathematical concepts, they still might have thought of using the detachable lower jaw for that purpose, but the thought would have been a most improbable one since they would have lacked the object to suggest it to them.

That the decision to so use the lower jaw of the death's head was deliberate in either case is quite evident. For if the Mayan priesthood had the ingenuity and philosophic skill to employ their remarkable mathematical concepts, they had to have the insight to perceive how such a symbol as the death's head with its detachable lower jaw could be put to use for the benefit of their people and their ecclesiastical organization. Indeed, they would have had to use it so, if they already had the skull, since it is an inherent characteristic of priesthoods everywhere to make the maximum use of symbolism, both to teach the truths they advocate and to perpetuate their power.

What the symbolism was in the choice of the death's head for the figure 10 is not an esoteric matter. The figure 10 stands precisely at the mid-point in the twenty-one numbers ranging from 0 to 20 inclusive. The use of the fleshless lower jaw to transfer the value of 10 to a lower number in the series in order to convert it to a higher number in the second half is about as dramatic a lesson as one could ask for.

It says as plainly as can be that if a person makes the proper use of life—and death itself as the culmination of life—if, in other words, he follows the teachings of the priesthood as instructed, he is assured of making the higher number, of attaining Paradise.

The lesson has all the ring of elemental truth, of an importance that cannot be surpassed. It indicates an idealism of a high degree. It puts the matter of advancement squarely up to the individual, where it ought to be. A matter that would have great appeal to the priests.

Furthermore, the fact that use of these head-variant symbols was spread throughout the country of the Maya, being displayed on the stelae and other monuments they erected so abundantly that no one could miss them, indicates that the

lesson was meant to have the maximum significance to this symbol-conscious people.

As to the effect of the lesson, there can be little doubt. The Maya did, as much as any people and more so than many, strictly adhere to the precepts of their religious leaders. And under the leadership of their mathematically-minded priesthood they built one of the most remarkable civilizations of which there is record.

In addition to temples, palaces, observatories and other public buildings, they constructed a highway system that is one of the most extraordinary known. Their highways—the longest runs for 62.3 miles from Coba to Yaxuna in Yucatan, straight as a die for the most part—were elevated above the surrounding terrain at a height of from two to eight feet. The sides were of roughly dressed stone, and their surfaces, usually of about fifteen feet in width, were covered with a cement that makes them today, after the passage of as much as ten centuries for some sections, fully as effective as they ever were. In fact, the Maya were such excellent road builders that the Romans were inferior, according to Dr. Thomas Gann, a noted archeologist who, while en route one day to Coba, from which radiate sixteen Mayan highways, discovered another that was thirty-two feet wide.

But while these Mayan achievements and others that could be mentioned may justly be attributed in good part to the use of the skull symbol as the figure 10—just as many achievements of the Europeans may be attributed to the effect the crucifix has had upon them—one should not assume that the crystal skull did not have yet other tremendously important uses. Indeed, its other uses were every bit as important as those in its capacity as the archetype of the symbol for 10.

In fact, there is reason to feel, as will be shown, that the effect of its other uses was so profound that it may have been actually devastating to the Maya—so devastating that in these other uses may lie the cause of the wholesale abandonment of the Mayan cities at about the end of the first millenium of the Christian Era, as well as the onset of the period of civil war and foreign aggression that disrupted the so-called

New Empire of the Maya, finally brought to ruin by the Europeans.

What these other uses consisted of was the employment of the crystal skull for the purposes of oracular utterances, foreseeing the future and affecting future events—three tasks that traditionally have always been, and so they are today, those of any priesthood, regardless of the means employed to carry them out.

That the Maya so used the crystal skull does not depend on the wholly reasonable assumption that any priesthood possessing such an object would inevitably employ it for those purposes. While such an act would be instinctive, there are other and more tangible evidences.

One of the more obvious lies in the evidence in the skull itself of how the Maya used it for uttering oracles. As noted earlier, a most significant feature of the skull—one that must have been taken into consideration when the skull was shaped from its original piece of crystal—is the presence of two prisms within it, a discovery by Frank Dorland, one of the country's most gifted art conservators and who has studied the skull for years.

That the artist, in forming the skull, shaped the crystal so as to take full advantage of these prisms is made evident by how perfectly the skull is suited to the business of uttering oracles.

Since the business of oracular utterances has always been one of the most important means available to any priesthood for strengthening its ecclesiastical organization, it has always been attended by a certain amount of staging, carefully calculated to convince the person seeking the oracle that he is getting his money's worth.

In the case of the crystal skull, the most effective way in which that purpose could be served would be to have the skull in some darkened fane, placed on an altar before which the oracle seeker would be introduced.

If that were done, and after appropriate rites and ceremonies had been observed, the seeker were to see the skull suddenly illuminated, and if he were at the same time to hear the skull speak and see it move, the probabilities would be

completely in favor of his being convinced that he had got what he sought.

The means by which this bit of stagecraft could be effected is simplicity itself. For the illumination of the skull all that is required is its being properly placed on an altar over a small hole through which, at the appropriate moment, light from a flame beneath the altar is admitted. The light, thanks to its passage through the prisms, is channeled into the eye sockets and other facial areas of the skull to give the desired effect.

How the skull would be moved in order to give the illusion of speaking is a matter that would be handled by two holes in its base. A rod, thrust up through another hole in the altar and into the larger hole in the base of the skull would provide the means whereby motion could be given to the crystal. The smaller hole in the skull's base would serve as the receiver for a pivot point on which the skull would move—matters demonstrated by Dorland in experiments.

Thus it is quite evident that if a person saw the skull's face illuminated, saw the skull move and heard a voice speak—a matter easily handled by means of a tube—he would be strongly inclined to believe what he was told. For few men, even today under such circumstances, would be prone to consider how such simple devices would be used.

But evident as it is from the skull itself how it was used for oracular utterances, there are yet other characteristics of the skull to make equally plain how it was used for foreseeing the future.

The most obvious evidence lies in the fact which, though noted by the participants in the comparison study reported in MAN, apparently did not stir their curiosity—the absence of the suture marks on the pate.

Since, as has already been pointed out, the suture marks would not only have been among the easiest things to form but would also have given greater realism to the skull, and, in point of fact, would have been delineated if the skull was to have served merely as a memorial, it is mandatory to ask why they were left out. In short, just what purpose could there be, what justification, for such an omission?

Manifestly, the only reason why the artist did not put them on was that he was forbidden to do so, that he knew that such an easily carved feature would be completely unacceptable.

Why that would be so is that to have the suture marks there would interfere with prime functions of the skull—those of foreseeing the future and affecting the outcome of events. In brief, suture marks on the pate would be as out of place as engravings on the surface of a crystal ball to be used by a crystal gazer.

The foreseeing of the future would be handled by basically the same technique as that used by some crystal gazers today. The priest, after preliminaries that might include fasting, the use of drugs, or both, and after other prescribed rites, would peer down into the crystal in an effort to see in its depths and striations the picture he sought of what the future held.

How effective an aid the crystal skull was in foretelling the future is unknowable. All that can be said with certainty on that point is that it was probably the most effective crystal ball ever devised, and since there are cases of precognition on record, of an induced as well as an accidental kind, it is highly probable that in some cases over the centuries the skull served that purpose well. In fact, when one considers what may be evidence of its use for affecting the outcome of events, of controlling and shaping the future, it is likely that it had a fairly good incidence of success.

As a preliminary to how the crystal skull was so used, it should be noted that there is a strong body of literature on the subject of psychokinetic energy moving visible objects. Naturally, if psychokinetic energy can move visible objects, it can move invisible ones as well.

If that is admitted, then it should be possible that psychokinetic energy can move molecules, and in such a way that patterns can be formed.

In rock crystal there is a marked elasticity and cohesion in the crystalline substance, as there has to be, to one degree or another, in just about everything.

If then, psychokinetic energy were applied to an area of rock crystal with sufficient intensity, it should be theoretically

possible for it to alter the molecular structure in such a way as to form a marked, preconceived pattern. If the psychokinetic energy were applied often enough in a given area, the elasticity should finally weaken sufficiently so that at some point, the limit would be passed and the pattern remain set in the crystal—thus becoming permanently visible to the naked eye.

At any rate, that possibility is worth exploring in view of certain fascinating things about the crystal skull and the way in which the Mayan priests probably used it to affect events.

That they did use the skull for that purpose is scarcely questionable. People today, as throughout history, feel that to one degree or another, "wishing makes it so." When it doesn't, the disappointed ones seem to feel that the trouble was they didn't wish hard enough, didn't sufficiently focus the power of their wish on the objective.

In the case of the crystal skull, the obvious technique for this purpose would be for the priest to peer down into the skull from behind and above in the attempt to channel his psychic powers, those of whatever god he invoked (probably Ah Puch, the death god, since any look into the future is past the deaths of whoever or whatever dies in the span of the future covered), and the psychic power of the crystal skull itself, toward whatever object or person he wished to influence.

Since the skull would have been personalized in the belief of the user, he would probably turn it to face in the direction of the objective. And since the majority of people are right-handed, thus tending to use the right foot and right eye somewhat more than the left, it is likely that most priests tended to focus the various powers through the right eye socket of the skull.

If that was the case, and if the theory is correct that psychokinetic energy can alter the molecules of the crystal in such a way as to make them form definite patterns, one of which may become set, then the logical place for corroborating evidence would be in the right eye socket of the skull. Whether that is the explanation for the phenomena found in the right eye socket, or whether they are due to sheer coinci-

dence, it is a fact that from certain angles some extraordinary forms appear there, so distinct they can be photographed.

One is that of a truncated pyramid which looks exactly like so many of the truncated pyramids the Maya erected in their cities and centers of worship.

Another form, seen when the right eye socket is viewed from a slightly different angle, looks like a state capitol building. At first thought, it seems absurd to attribute such an architectural form to the Maya. State capitol buildings were certainly unknown to them, regardless of how far into the future they may occasionally have looked. As it so happens, however, the Maya did erect a structure very like it in shape. The building is known today as the Caracol, an astronomical observatory at Chichen Itza. Enough of its round tower is still standing so that one can plainly see the entire structure originally had a general appearance in outline very like that of one of our state capitol buildings.

But the construction of truncated pyramids and astronomical observatories would not have been the only events the outcome of which the Mayan priests would choose to affect by using the powers of the skull. Inevitably there would have been others, and of these one of the most important would have been that calling for the elimination of certain powerful enemies. Hence there ought to be evidence of that use, too, in the right eye socket.

And there is, or at least there is what may be reasonably interpreted as such. It consists of little skull shapes which are also photographable and which presumably represent the condition the Mayan priests wished the heads of certain enemies to permanently assume.

It is perfectly true, of course, we repeat, that all these images in the right eye socket of the skull may be due to nothing but coincidence. But if so, it is decidedly on the remarkable side, especially since, look as one will in the left eye socket and in the other areas of the skull, one does not find anything resembling such a collection of shapes with so marked a relationship to the Mayan culture. They just aren't there.

In view of that, a positive statement that coincidence is the cause of these phenomena would be a statement every bit

as silly as would be the negative statement that they were not due to the use of psychokinetic energy in the manner attributed to the Mayan priests above.

That the Mayan priests did so use the skull there can be no reasonable doubt. That there should be a collection of phenomena in the right eye socket is certainly remarkable. So much so that the likelihood they are due to coincidence is probably less than the likelihood they are due to the use of certain psychic forces about which modern man is only beginning to learn.

In any case, that the Maya used the skull as the archetype of the figure 10, and that it was deeply involved with the intellectual growth of the Maya and the growth of their religion and civilization, are matters that seem evident. So much so that the question immediately arises as to whether the skull was equally involved with their decline.

Chapter III

Folke Henschen, an eminent Swedish pathologist, in his THE HUMAN SKULL (Frederic A. Praeger, Inc., 1966) and which contains a photo of the British Museum skull, remarks that "the part played by the cranium in Mexican culture is almost without parallel elsewhere, and this applies equally to pre-Hispanic and modern times." He also notes there is a "striking paucity" of the skull motif in the art of South American Indian civilizations, a condition that he might have noted is also characteristic of the Indian cultures north of Mexico.

The reason for this state of affairs is a matter, he says, that has long bothered other students of the subject, resulting in a variety of explanations ranging from "atavistic influences" to the "absence of personal security" in the Republic of Mexico. Henschen himself feels that the reason for the skull motif's dominance in the modern culture is more due to the fact that so many representations of skulls survived the Spanish Conquest through having been buried in graves from which they have been dug up only in comparatively recent times; that the Spaniards failed to destroy them because they didn't know about them, and that the "Mexican's sensitivity to macabre symbolism" has become dulled through over-exposure.

Each of these reasons may be a contributing factor. But since the skull symbol in Mexico today, and in the neighboring countries to the south only to a somewhat less extent, is so common it is used in a multitude of things from pastry to newsprint, there must be some other reason to explain this.

The answer, we believe, is closely linked to the history of the Mitchell-Hedges skull under the Maya, and to the impact

of the Mayan civilization on that of the Aztecs and other nations of ancient Mexico.

Thanks in large part to the destruction of the written records of the Maya on the order of the Spanish priests, the only sources available today regarding the Mayan civilization of the Old Empire, ending about 1,000 A.D., are those of an archeological nature—ceramics, painting, sculpture and architecture.

But these are sufficient to show certain things that had to happen in the development of the civilization that underwent such an abrupt change at the end of our first millenium.

One thing inherently apparent is that for some centuries prior to around 300 B.C., when the Mayan priesthood is believed to have first begun to use its remarkable mathematical concepts, the civilization of the Maya had to have been undergoing a steady advance. If the Maya evolved their mathematics, then the people had to have evolved a culture sufficiently strong to provide its priesthood with the leisure essential to such a discovery. In brief, the Mayan agricultural development —with corn as the mainstay—probably had been perfected a substantial number of years earlier.

Up to the beginning of the period when food supply problems were largely solved, it is likely that their religion was a comparatively simple one. For only through freedom from basic demands on a people's time can the elaboration of a religion come about.

But once this added leisure on the part of the general population was assured, the priesthood would inevitably proceed to an elaboration of their religion in such a way as to provide plenty for the population to do with their extra time.

Also, and fairly early in this period of elaboration of religious practices, one thing that would have become quickly obvious to the Mayan priesthood was that everything possible to assure the preservation and safety of the archetypal skull as their most sacred object should be done without delay. In line with that thinking, it would certainly have occurred to the Mayan priests to have a copy made of it. There would have been at least two impelling reasons for doing so.

One would have been that the Maya, familiar with the

fact that crystal is easily shattered, would prefer not to risk having the archetype meet with an accident when publicly displayed on great occasions, on which such a jewel most probably would have been displayed.

The other would consist of the realization that such a jewel as the archetype of 10 would, if it fell into the wrong hands, carry much of its power with it.

If that was their reasoning, then it would be quite understandable that the British Museum skull would have been made so similar in shape but not so finished in its workmanship. It is so much like the original that it could easily pass for it if it were being displayed at a public ceremony. But at the same time, it is sufficiently unlike it so that if it became necessary to secrete the original, in event of a sudden attack, there would be small possibility of the person in charge rescuing the copy by mistake. And by the same token, it would be easy for the looter to mistake the copy for the original.

In any event and regardless of how early the copy was made, one of the most noticeable effects of the agricultural development would be the proliferation of temples and other religious edifices, plus a marked and mounting increase in the number and complexity of ceremonies and rituals. In turn, that would mean a tremendous growth in knowledge and skills in architecture, construction techniques and the various arts themselves.

That this is what happened there can be little doubt. On the basis of present knowledge, the construction of Mayan cities in stone was well under way in what is known as the Early Period of the Old Empire, from 317 A.D. to 633. From 633 to 731—the Middle Period, according to Morley—the Maya "were consolidating the extensive territorial and cultural gains they had made during the early period and were preparing for the tremendous florescence which was to follow during the Great Period." In the Great Period, from 731 to 987, the Maya reached the highest level their civilization is known to have attained. Then, in the period's concluding years, the wholesale abandonment of the Mayan cities set in, to be swiftly followed by the erection of new cities in Yucatan most of which theretofore had not been populated and whose inhabitants were to

be known as the people of the New Empire.

The causes given for this abrupt abandonment are almost as numerous as the writers. Earthquakes, invasion, civil war, pestilence and famine have each their advocates. Morley felt it was due to a failure of the Mayan agricultural system, to a wearing out of the land. He adopted that theory because "it far better explains the observed archeological facts than any of the others suggested." Also, he maintained that the Maya "had no implements for turning the soil--no hoes, picks, harrows, spades, shovels or plows" and consequently could not use the grasslands that had resulted from their burning off the forests as a means of converting them into cornland.

But that theory, which Morley admitted "is by no means proved," is not really adequate. For any people so advanced as the Maya, and with the enormous capital investment their cities represented, clearly had the ability, as well as the need and the means, for fashioning tools adequate for planting corn in grasslands. After all, if the far less advanced Indians of North America could raise corn without converting the forests into savannahs, and they did, it is only reasonable to suppose that the Maya could have done so, too. In fact, since the Maya invented a roadroller—Morley found and photographed one which appears in his book—it seems nothing less than absurd to suppose they did not come up with at least a hoe.

Consequently, there must have been some other compelling matter that forced them to this extraordinary abandonment, and very possibly the decisive factor in it was psychological in nature, its effect being heightened by the fact that there were two crystal skulls in existence at the time.

In evaluating this possibility it is essential to know that while there is no evidence whatever that the Maya of the Old Empire ever had a central government, there is also no evidence at all to show that they did not have one. So far as we can know at present, the Old Empire may have consisted of a collection of city-states. As Morley put it, "the Old Maya Empire *would seem* [italics ours] to have been composed of a number of city-states."

Very possibly there was not a central government in the sense that we employ the term. But it would be most rash to

suggest that there was not a central religious authority, one which might very well have exercised much the same power over the Mayan cities and their inhabitants that the Papacy exercised over European governments from the time of Charlemagne to the Reformation.

Indeed, if the Mitchell-Hedges skull was the archetype of the figure 10, and if it was used in the ways indicated, then whoever it was who controlled the crystal skull—either an individual or a group—must have held a power over the people that would have been the envy of many a temporal ruler.

However, the holding of such power would mean that it would be challenged—as such power always is. And it would also mean, in line with Lord Acton's famous dictum that all power corrupts, that some of the members of the priesthood would become corrupt, too. How that would come about would be in part through the divisions of opinion on religious matters and the rivalries between cities, and also through the corrupting effect from the increased use of the skull for oracles, foreseeing the future and shaping the course of future events.

In the religious field there appears strong evidence for the corruption. It centers about the rite of human sacrifice. Undoubtedly the Maya had been sacrificing human beings from the dawn of history. Most peoples have done so. In the early history of the Maya, as with any other people, such sacrifices would involve few persons and a comparatively simple ritual, if only for the reason that the population could not stand anything more.

But as the civilization flowered and became rich and powerful, there would be an inevitable tendency for the rite of human sacrifice to expand and become elaborate, as did other rites and ceremonies.

The expansion of this rite would be more at the demand of the ruling and priestly class than at that of the other classes, and for the obvious reason that the latter would be the major source of the victims. Further, it is reasonable to feel that the expansion of the rite would be more at the insistence of a part of the ruling class rather than the whole of it. In other words, those of the Maya with the intellectual power that showed itself so brilliantly in their mathematics would presumably

have been less favorable to human sacrifice than the others, and the same would be true of their successors.

Moreover, it is also likely that those of the Maya who favored the comparative simplicity of their earlier religion and society would have looked with disgust at the evolution of the bloody rite that involved tearing out the heart of the living victim.

How early that practice began is impossible to say. But it is worthy of note that in the flowering of the Mayan civilization at the city of Piedras Negras, precisely in the period and the place when and where the Maya are held to have reached the highest level of their artistic skill, there are two representations of this act. Each of them is more symbolical than repertorial. Neither shows the gruesome detail to be evidenced at a later date.

Therefore, since these representations were made in the middle 700's and since the Maya of the Old Empire were, so far as we know, a comparatively peaceful people, it is distinctly possible the development of this bloody rite marked a cleavage that had taken place in their society.

If such a cleavage did occur, it would certainly have affected the priestly class from which the increased use of this rite had to come, as well as all others. And if the cleavage developed along what might be termed normal lines, it is distinctly likely it resulted in a time of troubles so intense as to bring about the abandonment of cities and the removal of a substantial part of the population to Yucatan, up to then only sparsely populated by the Maya.

In that event, the crystal skull would have been a fantastically powerful instrument for affecting the turbulent course of events. Very likely it was used at first for laying an interdict upon certain cities, on the order of that used by the Papacy, and then, finally, permanently anathematizing them.

Indeed, if a rebellious group had managed to acquire the copy, the British Museum skull, it is plain enough how each party to the conflict would have anathematized the other, thus bringing about an intolerable situation which would result in first one group and then the other quitting the cities of the Old Empire and moving to Yucatan.

Such an explanation is at least as reasonable as any other yet offered for this strange migration, far better than earthquakes that managed to leave so many deserted cities relatively intact, the failure of the Maya to invent the hoe, or some strange pestilence. And it also accounts for some other things that we know happened later, both in the New Empire and Mexico itself.

It would account, for example, for the period of peace during the beginning of the New Empire and its cultural renaissance—if only because the survivors of such a struggle and migration would need a time of truce. And it would also account for the ensuing period of civil war, so bitter and extensive that cities such as Mayapan were sacked and destroyed. Written records, lacking for the Old Empire, attest it.

Furthermore, under the New Empire, the rite of human sacrifice by tearing out the heart expanded. The representations of it found on the walls of the temples at Chichen Itza are almost repertorial in their realism. Instead of the single figure of the victim being shown, as on the stelae at Piedras Negras of the mid-700's, the victim is now seen being held down over the convex sacrificial stone by the *chacs,* as the assistants were called, while the officiant, the *nacom,* cuts open the breast to tear out the heart and smear the bloody organ on the idol.

So graphic are these pictures that whoever looks at them cannot fail to be impressed with what they indicate regarding the difference between the Maya of that period and those of the Old Empire.

As to the effect on Mexico, some of the Maya during the period of civil war are known to have called in Mexican mercenaries to aid them. When the great city of Mayapan was sacked by a powerful force of the Maya in 1441 A.D., a strong force of Mexican mercenaries, who either were Aztec or were strongly influenced by Aztecs, were among the Mayan defenders. The taking of the city marked the end of any central Mayan authority in Yucatan. That, in turn, meant that the entire area was open to invasion by the expanding Aztec power.

The Aztec civilization was young at the time. It had probably come into extensive contact with the Maya in the early 1400's, well before the fall of Mayapan. As a people just emerg-

ing from barbarism, the Aztecs could not help but be impressed by the superior culture of the Maya, regardless of the latter being in a period of decadence, just as the Goths and other barbarians were impressed by Roman civilization. And as the Goths did with the Romans, the Aztecs looked upon the Maya as a source of knowledge, loot and victims.

We know about the knowledge from the fact that Mayan mathematical and calendrical practices had a powerful impact on the Aztecs. We know also that it is most probable that the rite of tearing out the heart of a sacrificial victim was either a custom which the Aztecs got from the Maya or one to which they came to give great emphasis under the stimulus of the Mayan example. For in common with other emerging peoples when in contact with a more developed but declining civilization, it would be quite natural for the Aztecs both to copy and to over-emphasize the most impressive of the Mayan rites. That, at least is a better explanation than any other for how the Aztecs came to place more emphasis on this bloody rite than any other civilization is known to have done.

As for the loot they took, it is highly probable that one reason why so little gold has been found in Mayan cities is that the Aztecs valued it greatly and seized all they could get. But whether there was much or little gold, it is quite likely that among the objects taken was the crystal skull that now reposes in the British Museum, and possibly the other as well.

If so, that would go far towards accounting for why it is that the British Museum skull is spoken of as being Aztec in origin. And the Mayan contact would also help explain why the Aztecs developed a skull cult fully as impressive as their rites of human sacrifice by tearing out the hearts of the victims who, on one occasion, numbered 20,000.

The evidence is indisputable. It is recorded in what the Spaniards found as they marched inland to take over the empire of Montezuma. As Bernal Diaz del Castillo, the great lieutenant of Cortes, wrote regarding the entry of the Spaniards to the town of Xocotlan: "I remember that in the plaza where some of their oratories stood, there were piles of human skulls so regularly arranged that one could count them, and I estimated them at more than one hundred thousand. I repeat again that

there were more than one hundred thousand of them."

The significance of that report lies in the fact that Xocotland was only one of the substantial cities through which the Spaniards passed on their march through the Aztec empire.

As for what happened to the archetypal skull during this period, there is no knowing. But it seems likely it did not fall into the hands of Spanish officials. If it had, such a jewel would presumably—though not necessarily—have become crown property and eventually been removed to Spain. It may have become the property of some minor conquistador who kept it as a family treasure, or it may have been secreted by either the Maya or the Aztecs, as so many other Indian treasures were, until the time when someone got possession of it and Mitchell-Hedges managed to acquire it—a matter that will be discussed farther on.

In any event, and despite what happened to it in the years between the time when it was the most sacred object of the Old Mayan Empire and the arrival of the Spaniards, there can be little question that the archetypal skull and the uses made of it by the Mayan priests form the root cause of why it is that the skull motif is so dominant in Mexico today.

For actually it influenced the Spaniards themselves, compelling them to assist in the continuance of the skull motif. The Spanish priests were quite aware that the change from paganism to Christianity would have to be a gradual one. Hence it would be necessary to assist the transition in the native mind by retaining familiar symbols while at the same time they sought to change the native interpretation of them. And so it is that in some old Mexican churches today are seen statues of nuns or monks holding a human skull.

Chapter IV

The way an ancient artifact arrives in the modern world is often open to doubt and usually brings controversy in its wake. But almost invariably, if the piece is considered to be of consequence, its arrival is accompanied by a measure of éclat, by a story that makes sense—at least, upon the surface.

In the case of the Mitchell-Hedges skull and how it arrived in the modern world, the best that can be said is that it was sneaked in. This aspect is so pronounced that many persons have felt the skull was a hoax—something turned out by an obscure jeweler in Hoboken, say, on the order of an eccentric millionaire under the influence of the novels of P. G. Wodehouse

However, thanks to the MAN symposium of experts and the investigations of other qualified persons, there has long been no question in informed circles of its being an authentic survival of another and long gone age. The major questions it now poses are: how it made its appearance in the 20th Century, where, and why its arrival was carefully wrapped in such obscurity and silence as to suggest it had been vitally involved in one of the more sensational or scandalous affairs of state.

There are, of course, several stories as to how the crystal skull was found. None of them, however, are of any consequence wholly aside from the fact that Mitchell-Hedges himself always refused to reveal the answer. Some stories are that he found it in a Mayan temple on an island off the cost of Honduras. Others have it that the temple was on the Honduran mainland or in Mexico or British Honduras. And there are yet others that sound as if they originated in the mind of Edgar

Rice Burroughs and have about as much fact to support them as the story of Tarzan of the Apes.

His adopted daughter Anna Le Guillon Mitchell-Hedges, present owner of the skull, has several times been reported as saying that she found it herself. According to one of these accounts, she discovered it on the site of the great Mayan city of Lubaantun when her father, Dr. Thomas Gann and others were clearing it in 1927* (they discovered the ancient city in 1924), and the story may well be correct—so far as it goes.

The circumstances were these. She was 17 at the time. She was recovering from a severe attack of malaria, an illness that has a depressing effect. The jungle growth covering the site had just been burned off. As she walked about, accompanied by other members of the party, she suddenly spotted the skull, clean of ash and dirt, sitting on some bare ground, about as inconspicuous as an 11-pound, 7-ounce diamond would be if seen lying on an otherwise barren mahogany table.

The find naturally did much to raise her spirits, especially since it was her birthday. But what the report of it does to throw any light on the way in which Mitchell-Hedges acquired it is absolutely nothing.

From the story one might deduce that Mitchell-Hedges had found it earlier at the site and set it up on the ground for his daughter to find as a means of taking her mind off her troubles. But that doesn't make sense, either, so far as where or when he found it are concerned. For if he had found it at the site, why would it be that neither Dr. Thomas Gann, nor Lady Richmond Brown, a close friend of the explorer, nor Captain T. A. Joyce of the British Museum, all of whom were supposedly there, mention such a discovery? And, of course, why also would Mitchell-Hedges himself, who had at least a gifted amateur's knowledge of publicity and how to get it, not have given the story of the discovery of such an object to the press at the earliest possible moment?

Dr. Gann wrote extensively on the Lubaantun expeditions, and so likewise did Lady Richmond Brown. Captain Joyce, who later became President of the Royal Anthropological Institute, also had plenty to say about the expeditions. But none of the three mentioned a word about discovery of the skull or the

*Mitchell-Hedges wrote that he was last at Lubaantun in 1926.

skull itself—a silence clearly demonstrating that Mitchell-Hedges would have had to bring the skull to the site with him and somehow persuade the others to keep quiet about it, if the account of his daughter's finding it were true.

However, that they knew the real story seems evident. Anna Mitchell-Hedges has said that Captain Joyce knew the entire story about the skull, but refused to tell anyone. And quite likely she was right. For Adrian Digby, one of the three participants in the MAN article and a colleague of Joyce, was quite unable to supply any information on the skull's history prior to January, 1934.

At that time, according to Digby, the skull was in the possession of Sydney Burney, the London art dealer who died on January 3, 1951, nine years to the day after the death of Captain Joyce. How Burney got possession of the skull, Digby said he didn't know. But Anna Mitchell-Hedges vividly recalled that her father had left it with Burney as security for a loan to finance one of his expeditions. Burney kept the skull until sometime in 1944 when Mitchell-Hedges got it back on payment of £400. In the meantime, on October 15, 1943, Burney had put the skull up for auction at Sotheby's, but "bought it in" when he found the other bids were too small to cover his debt. After Mitchell-Hedges got the skull back, he kept it until he gave it to his daughter a few years before his death in 1959 at the age of 78, then as always refusing to say how or where he got the skull.

Those are the points known for fact about the skull and how it appeared in the Twentieth Century through the hands of Mitchell-Hedges, and so far as we have been able to discover, there is nothing else yet known that refers specifically to the skull and how or when it came into his possession that can be considered authentic.

However, there are certain important facts about the explorer's life which, when related to what is known of the lives of others and the facts of the times in which they lived, have considerable bearing on the subject.

In this connection it is important to know that some high officials of the Mexican Government are of the unofficial opinion that the skull was acquired by Mitchell-Hedges in Mexico,

and that it, like countless thousands of other artifacts—including an untold number in the 1960's—was illegally removed from the country.

There is justification for their belief, quite aside from the indisputable point that the skull may have got into Aztec hands through the dissolution of the New Mayan Empire and the presence of Aztec and other Mexican forces in Yucatan at the time.

Though that justification concerns some seemingly fantastic things, there is evidence to support it. The evidence involves one of the most unlikely combinations of people imaginable. They are: J. W. "Bet-A-Million" Gates, James "Silver Fox" Keene, Jules Bache, and J. Pierpont Morgan among the Wall Street barons; Lord Duveen of Millbank, whose position in the art world must be described as unique; General Pancho Villa, the Mexican revolutionary; Major Ambrose Bierce, the famous writer, and various others, one of whom was Lieb Bronstein, later known as Leon Trotzky.

How Gates, Keene, Bache and Morgan got into the story was that when Mitchell-Hedges first came to the United States in 1900, he had the right introduction and the ability to capitalize upon it. The ability lay in a certain savoir faire, plus a marked flair for poker. The details are given in his autobiography DANGER MY ALLY (Little, Brown & Co., 1955),* and they make sense as well as interesting reading. Suffice it to say, for this purpose, that on the first occasion he met members of the group, he vividly impressed them by winning $26,000 of their money.

That was enough for them to keep their doors open for him. Subsequently, he did quite well in other respects than poker for a youth in his very early twenties. Because, as he wrote, "I became a frequent visitor to J. P.'s magnificent house on Madison Avenue," as well as because of his other famous associates, he managed to make enough money on the stock market to live a life of comparative leisure. The leisure, plus his acquaintance with Duveen, to whom he was introduced by another friend—Bella da Costa Green, director of the Morgan Library—combined with an assertedly long-established interest in ancient things, eventually led to his doing a tremendous amount of reading of a kind to make him increasingly dissatisfied with the course his life was taking.

*or Elek Books, Ltd., 1954.

Hence, one day in 1905, when his capital totalled about $20,000, he decided to go to Honduras to see what he might find out for himself about the long-gone Indian civilizations of Central America. But before he got started, fate intervened in the form of his mother's illness and he returned to England.

For reasons unnecessary to go into here, he presently went into an unnamed business in London. The business prospered so that he could afford a country house, butler, etc. He married and settled down. Then, in 1912, he learned—so his story goes—that some associates were trying to ruin him. So he promptly proceeded to ruin them, even though it meant ruining himself. He emerged from the dissolution of his firm with $2000. Leaving his wife Dolly with $1500 and a cottage in the country, he took off for New York with the remaining $500—this time with the intention of getting a job with some American firm in Mexico so that he might eventually begin his investigation of ancient American civilizations.

In that part of his autobiography dealing with his return to New York, it is noteworthy that he says nothing to indicate he had any idea Mexico was already in the throes of its greatest revolution. "I had no luck [in getting a job with an American branch office in Mexico]," he wrote. "I answered scores of advertisements and pestered oil and shipping companies almost daily but in vain." The observation is an interesting one if only for the reason that the advertisements he answered could not—very many of them—have had to do with jobs in Mexico, things being as they were there.

Presently, since he was running out of cash, the idea occurred to him of looking up some of his "old and powerful contacts." But he rejected it, he said, as likely to result in an almost certain rebuff. Finally, on the street one day, he met Duveen, who suggested that he get a job with Mike Meyerowitz, a diamond merchant. He got the job immediately, even though he had no experience in that line. Meyerowitz, apparently, was just waiting for him to come along. And he kept the job until that summer of 1913 when he suddenly told Meyerowitz he was going to Mexico (there was still no reference in his work to the Mexican revolution), and he quit.

The day on which Mitchell-Hedges left New York is not

known, but it definitely was well into the summer. As he describes it, "Summer came and the air was fiery in Manhattan's concrete canyons . . . One day I awoke and knew I could wait no longer. It was time to go."

The diamond merchant drove him to the station where "he gave me a sheaf of dollars I wasn't entitled to—enough to take me as far as Florida or Louisiana. Not far enough, but yet I had to go. I had to get as near as I could to the land that was calling me, insistently calling me."

And it was also very nearly time for another visitor in New York that summer to leave for Mexico. That other visitor was the famous Major Ambrose Bierce who for years had been one of the most feared and brilliant writers in the journalistic empire of William Randolph Hearst, and who also, aside from that, had won a unique and permanent place for himself in American letters. Bierce was intent on visiting Mexico and other parts of Latin American with England as his final destination. He had been writing about his forthcoming journey for months to various people, including his New York publisher, and later biographer, Walter Neale. As Carey McWilliams tells in his biography AMBROSE BIERCE (Albert and Charles Boni, 1929), "His letters from May, 1913, throughout the summer, reveal a definite determination to go into Mexico."

Bierce left New York in September and proceeded south in a leisurely manner, visiting some of the battlefields on which he had fought in the Civil War—so the biographers generally say.

On October 24, he was in New Orleans where he spent a day or so seeing the city he had known so well in Reconstruction days. Though he was 71 and suffered an attack of asthma there, his health was basically good. So much so, according to biographers, that by October 27, he was dining in San Antonio, Texas, with old army friends.

And by a curious coincidence, at about the same time Bierce was in New Orleans, Mitchell-Hedges was there, too—serving as a waiter. "I had become a ham-fisted waiter in a swank New Orleans hotel," he wrote. "I had chosen New Orleans because it was a port," and "I might manage to get a job on a vessel bound for one of the countries on which I had set my heart."

But in early November, he decided he had had enough of the city. Mexico, and not some other Latin American country, was again his heart's desire. And so, shortly after Bierce left, he left, too—via a "rag-bag of a car that was almost my sole posession." According to his story, he had already been "a clumsy cowhand in Texas and a losing poker player in San Antonio" during the weeks before he got his waiter's job in New Orleans. Nonetheless, this time, he would go right through the state on his way to some spot south of the Rio Grande.

Thanks to some lucky plays at roulette in a Louisiana gambling hall, he was, at that point, in a better financial condition which he proceeded to improve by selling his car for $25. That done, by means of rail and hitchhiking, he presently found himself "in a tiny village a few miles inside the Mexican border."

It was still November, and he hadn't been in the town three hours before he was taken captive by some of Villa's men who, suspecting him of being a spy, took him to the General himself.

Since he was a British subject, he expected Villa would let him go. But Villa was of a different frame of mind. He had been drinking tequila. As the famous Mexican became convinced Mitchell-Hedges was indeed an Englishman and not a spy, he decided that he should become a member of his army. He insisted on it, to the point of letting the prospective recuit know that otherwise he would be shot—just as he was to have another Englishman, one William H. Benton, shot some three months later, except that the reason in the latter case made plenty of sense inasmuch as Benton had insulted and threatened him.

But Mitchell-Hedges needed no example. He decided on the spot to fight for Villa and proceeded to do just that—so he wrote—for the following ten months.

However, Mitchell-Hedges was not the only volunteer Villa was to get that month from north of the border. Along in the latter part of November, Villa had the honor of having Bierce, the famous fighter in both words and bullets, join his command as an "observer." The evidence is practically indisputable. It was provided by Bierce himself.

From the second week in November, much of which Bierce spent in Laredo, he proceeded westward towards El Paso. As he went, he made an occasional trip across the Rio Grande, with unidentified associates, strangely enough—a matter indicating the strong probability that he was already simpatico with the Villistas, and that he did indeed have a most definite interest in going south where the war lay. When he got to El Paso, he crossed over into Juarez and received the necessary papers to go with Villa's army.

By December 16, one of his last letters shows, he had already participated in some fighting. Though he was accredited as an observer, he had managed to give a demonstration of his worth as a soldier, of where his heart really stood, by shooting one of the enemy. George Sterling, the noted California poet, in an article in the *American Mercury* for September, 1925, wrote that Bierce "took a rifle on one occasion, and being an excellent marksman, picked off in succession twelve of the Carranza soldiers." But that figure was doubtless due to poetic license, and Villa wasn't fighting Carranza's forces at the time. In any case, there are no reasonable grounds to doubt that Bierce did intervene by shooting one of Villa's enemies. He told of it himself. "Poor devil! I wonder who he was," he wrote in the letter reporting it.

After the December 16 letter, there were two or three others—the last being dated the day after Christmas, from Chihuahua. But from then on, the disappearance of Bierce must be likened to that of a stone tossed into a pool. The reports of what happened surged outward in all directions, rebounded from the marge and rebounded again, in an endless ripple towards infinity. The reports are about like ripples, too, but they have a genuine significance for all that. For a proper attempt to determine it, there are several things that must be correctly evaluated.

One is that the army of General Villa in 1913-14 was nothing remotely approaching the rabble or collection of bandits it is so often described as being. It was, in simple fact, a highly disciplined body of men, well armed with batteries of artillery, scores of machineguns, even an air force—Mexican pilots in 1913 were the first in history to bomb warships, so

one report has it—and very well financed. Nor was the army wholly Mexican. There were some dozens of Americans, including airmen, and during much of the time from 1912 through 1915, there was a fair sprinkling of Europeans, including such diverse characters as a Boer general and a grandson of the great Garibaldi, whom Villa once had occasion to discipline.

In addition, there was a fairly steady coming and going of Americans engaged in the business of supplying Villa with the necessary material required for his campaigns, for while he utilized captured equipment as effectively as any commander, he got vast quantities of material from the United States. And that is a most significant matter, since it should be obvious to anyone that the rise of General Villa was a subject of acute interest in Wall Street whose rail, oil, steel and munitions barons had to have good relations with General Villa in case he might emerge from the revolution as President—a very real possibility at the time.

In other words, there was at any one time a substantial number of non-Mexicans with his army—a number sufficient to make it a near certainty that if one of their group were killed in battle, executed, or distinguished himself in some other way, the fact, if not the details, would be very likely to become rapidly known. That would be especially true for any of the Americans or Britons. In the case of a man of Bierce's international reputation, it is as nearly certain as anything can be. For if the news of the execution of an obscure Englishman like Benton would quickly get out, it is improbable, to say the least, that the story of violent death for Bierce would have to wait for months or years, as such stories did wait.

Yet another thing to be aware of regarding Villa's army is that the discipline under which it existed involved a certain amount of what Americans term looting when done by others, but "living off the country" when done by themselves. The loot sought consisted mainly of gold or its equivalent, arms, food and horses—the order varying as the needs of the moment. But the loot belonged to the army—more particularly to its head—and while General Villa was quick to reward successful looters by giving them a part of it, he or his commanders—and usually it was he—were the ones to make the division. It had to

be that way, for all Villa's experience pointed to no other possibility. And it also had to be, as it always must with a commander in comparable circumstances, that a certain amount of the loot goes to himself. For otherwise, he could not assure himself of being able, in case of defeat, to carry out, as Villa repeatedly did, the famous promise Sir Andrew Barton made, ". . . though wounded, I am not slain. I'll lay me down and bleed a while and then arise and fight again."

And then there is another point to be evaluated—that regarding the condition of Mexico in 1913-14. The country was in its fourth year of civil war after a long period of peace and great prosperity for the upper and developing middle classes, even though it had meant grinding poverty for the peons. During those years, there had taken place a tremendous amount of fighting and plundering, much of which was done by bodies of men not like Villa's and whose chief relationship to Villa's was that they operated in the same period and country.

Bandit groups that chose to operate independently until they became convinced it would be safer for them to join the Federalists, or any other of the various armies that appeared and disappeared, were a common phenomenon. Some of them joined Villa, but those that did so usually underwent something of a change. For Villa was a man of intense loyalties. He despised traitors. His only way of dealing with them, even in batches of 300, was the final one of death—usually by a bullet.

Naturally, conditions such as these inevitably resulted in many of the great estates of the country being looted. That, in turn, meant that in many cases there were items of value taken besides gold, arms, food and horses. Objects of all kinds, including paintings, books, tapestries, china and innumerable other things, disappeared—some only to be destroyed or abandoned, others to find their way by devious routes into the hands of those willing to pay for them.

These were matters very well known to many people and certainly to both Mitchell-Hedges and Bierce. Hence it is against that kind of background that one should try to evaluate the activities of Bierce and Mitchell-Hedges in Mexico.

The first consequential thing known for fact about Bierce

after his last letter of December 26, 1913 is given in a story by Vincent Starrett in the Chicago *Daily News* in 1914. It revealed the disappearance of Bierce and the fact that American agents in Mexico had been searching for him. Starrett got the story from Miss Carrie Christiansen, Bierce's former secretary, whom he met in Washington. The story was given him in confidence, but "suddenly she relented and permitted me to make the story public." Curiously enough, Starrett, who felt Bierce's fate "never will be known, and possibly it is better that way," thought it necessary to comment on Miss Christiansen's revelation in his autobiographical BORN IN A BOOKSHOP (University of Oklahoma Press, 1965). The comment is that though he corresponded with her until shortly before her death, he had "no reason to believe she knew any more about the writer's disappearance than she told me at our first meeting"—as plain an indication as one could wish that he had doubted her considerably.

The next important story about Bierce is one that appeared in the Oakland, California *Tribune* of March 9, 1915. It said that Bierce "about whose mysterious disappearance and present whereabouts there has been much speculation, is in England and is assisting drilling a section of Lord Kitchener's new army, according to word received here by Dr. B. F. Mason, from a relative in London." Beyond that, the story merely identified Dr. Mason as a personal friend of Bierce and said that the writer had been missing for about a year after leaving Washington for Mexico.

The three-paragraph story appeared on the front page of the *Tribune* where it was instantly read by the editors of other metropolitan papers in the area and the wire services, but the storm it kicked up was nearly a month in coming. Further, when it did arrive, it was not over the letter from Dr. Mason's relative, but over another—one reportedly from Bierce himself to his daughter Mrs. Helen Cowden, of Bloomington, Illinois, and which she received in early April.

The nature of the storm is best indicated by the way the biographers treat it.

McWilliams said of the March 9 *Tribune* story, but without giving its date, "It was promptly reprinted throughout the

country, but with the statement that Bierce's daughter had confirmed the story at Bloomington, Illinois. She did nothing of the sort. All that she said, when interviewed, was that she had read the newspaper stories about her father. This casual statement was converted into the definite assertion that she had 'received a letter from her father,' and that he was with Kitchener's army. As a matter of fact, there was no basis for the story whatever, aside from this circumstantial confirmation: Bierce had corresponded with Lord Kitchener, after the Boer War, and England was the ultimate destination of his trip. But this version of the disappearance, if true, would fix the date at 1915, and it thus becomes immediately subject to the opinion that Bierce would certainly have written to his daughter in that period of time. His daughter is convinced that he would have communicated with her, if alive, knowing her terrible anxiety and apprehension. This belief finds the strongest substantiation in his last letters, in which he had promised to write from time to time, as he journeyed south."

But Walter Neale, Bierce's friend and publisher, in his LIFE OF AMBROSE BIERCE (Walter Neale, Publisher, 1929) had a somewhat different attitude. Of Bierce's daughter he wrote, "few were the letters that she ever received from him, and in his latter years, their intercourse was infrequent indeed, either by personal contact or by mail. That he should have written to her after he left Washington seems doubtful. If she had received such a letter, I can imagine no good reason why she should not have shown it—any letter that Bierce, under the circumstances, might have written to her."

Neale then went on to cite news stories, published April 3, 1915, in the New York *Evening Sun* and the New York *World,* both under a Bloomington, Illinois dateline. Each said that the mystery of the Bierce disappearance had been cleared up through Mrs. Cowden receiving a letter from her father reporting that he had left Mexico in the fall of 1914 and was with Kitchener's army.

On the following day, the Washington *Post* was cited as having published an interview with Miss Carrie Christiansen. She was quoted as saying that "I received clippings from the California papers several days ago and mailed them to Mrs.

Cowden. I am sure that is the way the report gained circulation in its present form, and that the story had been garbled. I feel sure, as do Maj. Bierce's relatives, that he would have communicated with us had he been still alive. We believe that he is dead in Mexico."

But along with that dispatch, according to Neale, the *Post* published another which said, "Mrs. Helen Cowden, daughter of Major Ambrose Bierce, declined today to give out the letter received from her father yesterday and which it is understood detailed his movements since he disappeared in Mexico. She said, however, that her father was attached to Kitchener's army in France."

As one can see, there are all kinds of possibilities inherent in a situation such as this. When McWilliams states baldly in his biography of Bierce, anent the reported confirmation by Bierce's daughter of the story that she had received a letter from her father, that, "She did nothing of the sort. All that she said, when interviewed, was that she had read the newspaper stories about her father," and that, "this casual statement was converted into the definite assertion that she had 'received a letter from her father,' " it is open to question. The *Post* interview with Mrs. Cowden, quoted above, is of such unequivocal nature that the conversion McWilliams mentions would have had to be an outright lie, and while reporters and editors have been known to do some strange things with facts, clumsy lying in important stories where disclosure is certain is not one of their characteristics. Quite the contrary, barring one major exception—intervention by government authority, the possibility of which in this case will be developed later.

But aside from that, what is the explanation, then, of Mrs. Cowden and the news stories? First of all, it must be borne in mind that the first report of Bierce in England was published by the Oakland *Tribune* on March 9. McWilliams did not give that date, nor have we seen it in any other biography. But if it "was promptly reprinted throughout the country," it was promptly put on the wires to England, too. Hence there was time for Bierce to learn of it in England—if there he was—and so write a letter to his daughter, if he had not already sent one, that would arrive in Bloomington, Illinois by early April.

Despite that, however, one must admit the possibility that Mrs. Cowden did not receive a letter from her father, but that she was reluctant to admit it for plenty of reasons which one can imagine, and so chose to avoid the issue by refusing to show it.

However, any fair assessment of the problem requires that one consider the at least equally great possibility that she did receive such a letter and refused to show it for yet other reasons that are equally easy to imagine. If her contacts with her father had been as infrequent as Neale says, then it is easily conceivable that the letter may have been of a nature she would not care to disclose—something on the order, say, of the "withering missive" he sent his affectionate brother Albert from Laredo, as described in Paul Fatout's AMBROSE BIERCE: The Devil's Lexicographer (University of Oklahoma Press, 1951). Since Bierce was a consistent drinker and Chrstian Science was a factor in his daughter's household, it is evident the sympathy between them could have been rather on the cool side. And whether or not that was the case, it is also easy enough to see yet other reasons she may have had for not revealing the letter's contents—reasons, even, for wishing the entire story might in some graceful way be shoved deep into the background.

In any event, though Neale doubted the letter's existence, he wrote that he had "never seen a published denial . . . by Mrs. Cowden . . . of the Bloomington dispatches, nor a denial by her of their accuracy; nor have I heard that she denied receiving the letter mentioned in the dispatches that she professed her father had written to her."

However, Neale did mention a letter of hers to him on December 2, 1916, which, he felt, seemed to imply that she never received such a letter. He quoted a single sentence from it: "How my father would have enjoyed this European War!!" adding, "according to the Bloomington dispatches and interviews, he had been in that war, whether or not he enjoyed it." That done, Neale dove into the business of attempting to prove that Bierce returned from Mexico and committed suicide in the Grand Canyon, doing himself in with a revolver he had been carrying for that purpose.

So much for the first consequential things concerning

Bierce after his last known letter from Mexico. The next was a story published in 1919 by George F. Weeks, a newsman who said he had it at second hand from a Mexican officer that Bierce had been shot in 1915 on the order of General Urbina, one of Villa's staff. There was nothing whatever to indicate its truth. That was followed by another published in the San Francisco *Bulletin* of March 24, 1920. It was by James H. Wilkins (identified as U. H. Wilkins by Paul Fatout in his biography) whom Fremont Older sent into Mexico to clear up the Bierce mystery. It, too, said he had been shot by a firing squad of Villa's men in 1915. He had been captured serving as a soldier on an ammunition train destined for Carranza's forces and consequently was a traitor. The source was a mysterious unnamed man, and hence the story is almost certainly without merit.

The comment on that sory by Vincent Starrett in his AMBROSE BIERCE (Chicago, Walter M. Hill, 1920), anent a remark from a friend that "Wilkins is an old and reliable journalist," is of interest. Starrett wrote, "I shall not attempt to deny either his age or reliability, but I will casually suggest that *if* he is reliable he is extraordinarily gullible, whatever his age."

Starrett then went on to cite a story which is worth giving since it may be termed typical of the mass in its confusion. It goes: "One remarkable story came privately to me, and was to the positive effect that Ambrose Bierce had been alive and well in San Luis Potosi, as late as December, 1918, five years after his disappearance and after his last letter to his friends. The narrator of that tale believed him to be still living (May, 1920), and ready to come back and astound the world when his 'death' had been sufficiently advertised. There were many details to the story and another Mexican figured. This Mexican had seen a portrait of Bierce in the story-teller's office, had exclaimed at the sight of it, and had told of knowing the original; Bierce and this Indian, it developed, had parted company in San Luis Potosi in December of 1918! The Major was known to the Mexican as 'Don Ambrosio.' But this Mexican was murdered in Los Angeles, in a triangular love scrape, as was attested surely enough by a newspaper account of his murder, so the narrator's chief witness had vanished. This investigator, too, was at least, too credible; although he was shrewd enough to see through the

Weeks and Wilkins stories, and to tear them to pieces. Certainly he knew better than to accuse Bierce of seeking morbid publicity."

After that, the stories about Bierce's disappearance seem to have developed a certain pace on their way into print, as if newsmen and free-lancers had hit upon a subject for which there was an expanding market—as there was—and in which they could safely give rein to their imaginations—which they did. Finally, in 1929, the wave of interest in the Bierce mystery smashed to the high water mark on the literary shore when four biographers of Bierce published the conclusions of their investigations.

Neale's has already been given.

McWilliams' was very different. He wrote, "It is far more likely that Bierce was shot during the fighting that occurred at Torreon about the time he was last heard from." The point is an interesting one since the only battle we have found fought at Torreon within three months of Bierce's last letter, December 26, was given as having been fought on December 9, not quite three weeks earlier.

Adolphe Danziger de Castro's PORTRAIT OF AMBROSE BIERCE (Century Co., 1929), the third of the 1929 crop, offers something radically different from McWilliams and is quite the antithesis of Neale's prose. He devotes an entire chapter to telling how, at great risk to his life, he wormed his way into the confidence of Villa shortly before the famous General was assassinated in 1923, persuading him to confess Bierce "had passed," more particularly that he had been killed because he had "wanted to join Carranza." Castro had conned Villa into the admission by making the General think that Bierce had seduced Castro's sweetheart or wife.

The observations in the fourth biography of Bierce—C. Hartley Grattan's BITTER BIERCE: A Mystery of American Letters (Doubleday, Doran, 1929) — differ just about as much from the others as they differ among themselves. Grattan said of Bierce's visit to Mexico, "That he planned it as a melodramatic disappearance and suicide there is every doubt in the world." He supports that stand by a brilliant analysis of Bierce's character and temper, and he backs

it up in some interesting ways. One is by an extensive quotation from the interview Bierce gave in New Orleans—an interview that very likely the New Orleans waiter Mitchell-Hedges read at the time. The pertinent part goes thus, "I'm on my way to Mexico because I like the game. I like fighting; I want to see it. And I don't think Americans are oppressed there as they say they are, and I want to get at the true facts of the case. Of course, I'm not going inside the country if I find it unsafe for Americans to be there, but I want to take a trip diagonally across from northeast to southwest by horseback, and then take ship for South America."

A still more important quotation Grattan cites—and so do some others—is from a letter Bierce wrote on September 13, 1913 to Mrs. J. C. McCrackin, a long-time friend. Two sentences from it are pertinent: "But sometime, somewhere, I hope to hear from you again. Yes, I shall go into Mexico with a pretty definite purpose, which, however, is not at present disclosable."

As to what Grattan's opinion was regarding the various stories of what finally happened to Bierce in Mexico, he commented, "It is unlikely the matter will ever be finally solved."

Paul Fatout, in his biography of Bierce, considered it likely that Bierce was killed at the siege of Ojinaga, the border city that fell to Villa's forces on January 11, 1914.

"Since his last letter was dated December 26, 1913," Fatout wrote, "that theory appears most probable, as otherwise he would surely have found a way to send word to Helen (his daughter Mrs. Cowden) or to Carrie Christiansen. Although he seemed eager to sever relations with his country, he related the story of his movements in considerable detail up to the time of disappearance. It is hardly likely, then, that letters should abruptly cease without positive reason. That is probability merely, for after three decades and more, the still unsolved mystery is no doubt unsolvable."

On the matter of the letter to Mrs. Cowden reporting that her father was with Lord Kitchener, Fatout had only this to say, "After the outbreak of World War I, another report said that he was on the staff of Lord Kitchener."

Richard O'Connor, in his AMBROSE BIERCE: A Biography (Little, Brown and Co., 1967), says of the December 26

letter to Carrie Christiansen in Washington: "Before destroying it, she noted its essence: 'Trainloads of troops leaving Chihuahua every day. Expect next day to go to Ojinaga, partly by rail.' "

On the basis of that letter, as edited and condensed by Miss Christiansen, O'Connor wrote: "The sensible supposition would be that he did start for Ojinaga as he intended. Ojinaga is about one hundred twenty-five miles northeast of Chihuahua across the Rio Grande from Presidio, Texas. It is possible he caught a troop train and rode it as far as the gap in the rail sixty miles southeast of Ojinaga, from which he would have to ride or walk . . . to join the Villa forces besieging the Huerta garrison. He could have arrived by the time the battle started on January 1, 1914 . . . And that may well have been the soundest lead to Bierce's fate. An old man dying in the confusion of battle, then being dumped into an unmarked grave, would not have attracted much attention. Particularly if the person or persons who buried him found that money belt crammed with fifteen hundred dollars in American currency."

In support of that possibility, O'Connor cites an officer who, on the basis of a photograph, identified Bierce, over a year later, as having been present at the start of the siege, but who had no knowledge of what became of him later.

That possibility for Bierce's death does not seem very sensible to us. It is most unlikely that he would have done much walking, since he could well afford to buy a horse. It is also unlikely that he would have done much associating with the common foot soldiers, since his interests all lay with the officers. Nor does it seem likely that this last letter to his secretary, who never worked for him for pay and whom one biographer believed to be his wife, would have been written as the final letter of a man expecting to die in a matter of days. What seems more likely is that if it did, in fact, mention that he was going to Ojinaga, the letter was designed to throw anyone off the scent of where he did go. Though Bierce had told Miss Christiansen to destroy the letters he wrote her, there is little reason, in view of his general opinion of females, to believe that he really expected her to obey his order. If he had quarreled with her in the summer of 1913, as related by Neale, it is the more likely that such was his expectation—and not withstanding that he had provided for her financial support.

As for what O'Connor had to say on the matter of Bierce having appeared in England in 1915, he dismissed it in a single paragraph, concluding "only the most diligent effort killed that rumor."

Anyway, since the general structure of biographical conjecture on Bierce's ultimate fate includes even a story that he actually died in an insane asylum at Napa, California, near which Miss Christiansen finally settled down, it is probably the most remarkable in literary history to be erected on so scanty a foundation. For the only facts so far available about Bierce—in a physically provable sense—after December 26, 1913, are that he was in Mexico with Villa and that there may be some evidence, in the form of Mrs. Cowden's letter from him, which is not known not to exist, that he may have got to England in late 1914. That second "may" is used advisedly. For if Mrs. Cowden's letter were to be revealed and proved genuine, together with the envelope and its British postmark, it would not necessarily follow that it was mailed in Britain by her father.

However, little as that amounts to, it takes on a considerable importance when one examines Mitchell-Hedges' account of his experiences under General Villa at the same time Bierce was with the same army.

Regarding Mitchell-Hedges' account of his ten months with Villa, one thing that can be safely said is that he wrote it with the obvious intent of hiding something while at the same time signalling that fact—a matter that will be examined in greater detail later. For a person who knew how to tell a story, which he did, that part of his autobiography is highly notable for what he did not say but could have said—and would have said—under reasonably normal conditions of autobiographical composition. And it is equally notable for what he did say, on certain matters, that he should not have said under any other condition than the remarkable one we hypothesize. In short, the impression an informed reader is likely to get from this part of the work in a casual reading is that the writer was with Villa's forces very little, about as long as Bierce was.

From November 2, 1913 to June 23, 1914, there were fifteen battles and campaigns fought by Villa's forces, according to William Douglas Lansford's PANCHO VILLA (Sherbourne

Press, 1965), but look as one will in DANGER MY ALLY, not one of them is mentioned. If Mitchell-Hedges did spend ten months fighting with Villa's forces, as he said, this is nothing short of amazing. If he didn't spend the ten months that way, but wished to give the impression that he did so, it is even more amazing. For in that case, the writer could easily have mentioned a battle or two, describing his part in it, and thus give a greater appearance of authenticity to his work. Furthermore, since he didn't write his autobiography until nearly forty years later, he would have had little to fear from exposure.

That he didn't do so makes him immediately suspect on a casual reading. But when one looks at the work more closely and considers the writer's impressions of Villa and the way he presents him, there can be little question that he knew Villa personally and long enough to gain a knowledge that could probably not have been acquired otherwise.

His concluding remarks about Villa are enough to illustrate:

"According to some hysterical, book-burning politicians, Villa is labelled Communist. This is not true . . . . He was a Mexican Robin Hood, though bloodier and with a dual personality. But that does not make him a Marxist. He was at the height of his power three years before the October Revolution that established the Soviet Government and I am certain that he had never heard the word 'communism.' . . . I remember him with mixed feelings of dread and, at the same time, admiration and even, of a sort, affection. He was incredibly brave, fiercely determined and, after his own fashion, rigidly honest."

Those words have internal evidence of truth. They do not seem to spring from what a man would have learned by reading about Villa.

But if Mitchell-Hedges knew Villa, in what capacity did he know him?

One thing is certain. It could not have been in the capacity of an amateur archeologist, a sort of gentleman grave-robber on a quest for artifacts to satisfy his yearning for knowledge of lost civilizations. That would make only slightly less sense than Mitchell-Hedges' carefully worded account, studded with glaring omissions of essential reference to the political climate and

other things, of why it was that he chose the summer of 1913 to go to Mexico.

What does make sense, however, is that he went to Mexico for much the same—if not the same—reason that makes the most sense for Bierce to have gone there—a secret mission for intelligence purposes.

The reasons for that having been Bierce's purpose are abundant. They so far outweigh the reasons advanced for any other purpose, such as just a desire for death, a yen for travel, etc., etc., that it is difficult to see how so much print could have been wasted on them.

From the collapse of the Diaz regime in 1911, there had been a mounting awareness in Washington and London that the Mexican situation might well develop into the kind of revolution the establishments of Europe and America had been suffering nightmares about since the trying times of the 1840's. The recollection of The Commune in Paris at the close of the War of 1870 was at least as vivid in the minds of men at that time as the recollection of the Russian Revolution of 1917-18 is in ours today. It was made so by a social and industrial upheaval taking place in society that made those times far more insecure for the individual—so far as internal troubles went—than ours today.

Furthermore, by the time 1912 was out, it was fully apparent to Washington and London that the Mexican Revolution was utterly unlike anything that had taken place before in Latin America. It was not a struggle for power between members of the same class, as Latin American revolutions generally had been up to that point. Instead, it was a genuine and massive convulsion which, if it got out of hand, would result in changes that would have—already were having—most unfortunate repercussions in Wall Street and The City. Also, it might have a most drastic effect on society itself in the United States and Great Britain, for, as everyone knew, the anarchists, socialists, and followers of other isms, would all be quick to preach the virtues of any radical society that got control of a country numbering some 18,000,000 people, even if the majority of them were Indians.

Therefore, on that score alone, it was imperative for

British and American governments and businesses to see to it that information from official sources be supplemented by information from unofficial sources for the best protection of their interests. Further, that need was heightened by yet other matters of at least equally great consequence.

For Britain, a point of absolutely vital importance lay in the little known fact that Mexican oil fields in 1913 were the chief source of oil for the British Fleet, then in the process of converting from coal to oil—a matter of the gravest interest to Imperial Germany which for years had been building up its fleet to challenge Britain's.

For the United States, there were also matters of the utmost consequence regarding defense. For years, Washington had been getting reports about Japanese infiltration of Mexico. As far back as 1908, the Kaiser had called in American Ambassador Charlemagne Tower to warn him that a force of 10,000 Japanese soldiers had been distributed in Mexico, disguised as peons, who were training Mexicans for the day when they would march against the United States.

In 1911, the Grand Admiral of the Japanese Fleet had paid a formal visit to Mexico and been received with honors at Chapultepec. The visit gave high color to stories of immense caches of Japanese arms distributed at strategic spots along the West Coast of Mexico and compelled belief in persistent rumors of a secret treaty having been signed between Japan and Mexico by which Japan would receive several coaling stations.

In early 1913, rumors reached Washington of Japanese arms deals to supply General Huerta who had become the de facto President through the murder of President Madero on February 23, 1913. The effect of those rumors was exacerbated that spring by the racist California Legislature's passage of alien land laws directed against the Japanese. And when the rumors of Japanese arms shipments to Huerta were confirmed that summer by arrival of the arms in Mexico, concern in Washington was at a near fever pitch. It was two-fold: on the one hand, over the possibility of an invasion by Mexican-Japanese forces from across the border; on the other, over the possibility of a naval attack on the Panama Canal, then nearing completion.

But that was not all. Washington was also greatly concerned

over German interests in Mexico. Since the Spanish-American War, when only the interposition of British naval units between the Germans and Americans had saved Dewey's fleet at Manila Bay, the Germans had been giving the United States nothing but trouble. At Venezuela in 1903, President Roosevelt had had to threaten Germany with force to end her "peaceful blockade" of Venezuelan ports. Later still, the Kaiser had made an abortive attempt to buy from a Mexican land company "two large ports in Lower California 'for his personal use' " in a thinly disguised attempt to imperil the Panama Canal. And despite the Kaiser's warnings on Japanese infiltration of Mexico, Imperial Germany, throughout the first thirteen years of the century, continued "its diabolical propaganda, aimed not only at undermining the United States . . . but at polluting the Mexicans and several of the South American States," as recounted by William Roscoe Thayer in his biography of Theodore Roosevelt. A charge that was to be borne out when "on April 20, 1914, Admiral Fletcher (USN) was ordered to occupy Vera Cruz to prevent a German ship from landing arms and ammunition for Huerta's army"—he did so next day—as recounted by Frank Tannenbaum in his MEXICO The Struggle for Peace and Bread (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1950).

Under such circumstances, it is quite evident that both London and Washington had great need in 1913 for additional sources of information from the chaotic Mexican scene. And it is also evident that the only way to get it would be by sending trusted agents into Mexico.

But to recognize the need for spies, for special agents, is one thing. To fill it is quite another. All kinds of factors have to be considered. The qualifications in the job description are many and varied, but three are of fundamental importance. They are, and not in the order of their importance—courage, intelligence, and the power of deception.

And there is also another factor of fundamental importance, even though it may have nothing whatever to do with an agent's performance as an agent. It consists of his being able to convince his employers that he is the man for the job.

In the case of Mitchell-Hedges, there can be no doubt of his courage and intelligence. His career shows him to have had

those characteristics in abundance. His power of deception was not so evident. However, for him to have been the poker player he was, it must have been well above average. As for his being able to convince the right people he would be the man for the job, there is no ground for doubt at all. With men like J. Pierpont Morgan, Jules Bache, J. W. Gates and James Keene among his intimate acquaintances over a period of years—to say nothing of his friends in Britain—in which they had plenty of chances to assess his coolness at poker, and with the weight a word from any of them would carry in either London or Washington, it is easy to see how he would get such a job.

Further, if he received such a mission from the British Government, that would make understandable the unlikely story told in his book about his ruining his unnamed firm, his not having disclosed the nature of its business, his peculiar act in taking off for Central America with only $500 and via the United States, and a host of other things besides.

In brief, there can be no doubt that Mitchell-Hedges was a man for just such a job as needed to be done, and that he was given it to do. And since a cardinal rule regarding such missions is that they never be revealed—permission being rarely given and the penalties very severe—the omissions, the hiatuses, the glaring lack of anecdote checkable against events, become not only understandable, but even, in a way, mandatory. As to why he should have come to the United States first on such a mission, one good reason would be to collaborate with American agents. If so, it would be neither the first nor the last time for such a thing to happen.

Regarding Bierce, we shall begin by pointing out that he had the entree to those political and military circles in Washington from which such an assignment would come.

In 1896, Hearst had sent him to Washington in charge of a crew of newsmen to kill The Funding Bill designed to give a magnificent gift of public funds to the Southern Pacific and Central Pacific. The mission was announced and accompanied by all the blatancy at Hearst's command. And the bill, contrary to public expectation, died as surely as St. George's dragon, Bierce becoming known to every person of consequence in the capital, though few, if any, regarding him as a saint.

Late in 1899, Bierce was again sent to Washington for the Hearst papers, and there he remained for the greater part of the next ten years, during which the Army and Navy Club bar formed his favorite watering place. And, if for no other reason, since Bierce, through his articles on the Boer War, was drawn into a long correspondence with General H. H. Kitchener, the British Commander in the conflict, it is evident that his drinking buddies would include those in the higher echelons of military intelligence and not be limited to his close friend General Fred C. Ainsworth. In brief, there is an abundance of evidence to show that Major Ambrose Bierce knew the right persons in Washington of 1913 to give him such an assignment if he asked for it. And while there is today a marked tendency to deprecate the military mind, it is even possible that one of them, in an inspired moment and with no prompting from Bierce, conceived of such a proposal on his own.

Regardless of where the idea originated, the appropriate intelligence officials would have found Bierce just the man for the job. His courage and intelligence had been a matter of public record for better than forty years. His ability at deception was inherent in his age. Time itself had tailored him for the job in that respect. For what government would dream of sending a man well into his seventies to act as an intelligence agent in a country torn by revolution? Especially a man so famous and who had so widely advertised his coming by writing swarms of letters and giving interviews to the press about where he intended to go?

As for how he would be able to funnel news back to Washington on anything he might conceivably learn—why, he would have to carry crates of carrier pigeons with him, since wireless was still in its infancy. No, no! This old one with his talk of death, his well-known love of the macabre, was nothing but a genuine military antique. That he was ambulatory meant less than nothing. Even if he did manage to carry out his quaint desire to ride diagonally down across Mexico and then take ship to South America, whatever he might learn would arrive in Washington in time to be of interest only to historians.

Manifestly, if one accepts this obvious line of thinking—and also remembers that use of the obvious is one of the most

trusted weapons in the arsenal of deception—the actions of Bierce acquire a reason and a cause in complete agreement with his character and desires, especially at that time of his life.

What project could possibly have appealed to a man such as he so much as this? It would have tickled him no end. It suited him in every way. It gave him the things he loved—danger, the opportunity to pit his brain against new men and circumstances in a new field, to rid himself of the tiresome confines and people of what he called "his parish and his time," the likelihood that if he did carry out his project, he would then have occasion to write again—if so he still desired—but this time on something of international significance and with an international audience. And it also gave him yet other assurances of substantial value.

One was the possibility of an exit from life of such a kind as to leave it shrouded in mystery or drama, a matter that would inevitably have strong appeal to him. Another was that when he got to Latin America, he might well find in its mysterious countries something that would give him a new zest for life—a thought that is always in the mind of an intelligent man venturing into new lands.

Any fair appraisal of Bierce will show that such is the way he would have thought if, early in 1913, he had agreed to such a mission. And in that case, any sensible appraisal of the situation will show that his subsequent actions in that year would have taken the course they are known to have taken.

In that event, what more natural than to write to everyone about his proposed journey? And what more natural than to stud his letters—and his conversations—with references to his attitude towards death, to his desire to take a chance on a violent end as far better than "dying in bed," or "falling down the cellar stairs"?

It would also account for his visits to Washington in the summer and early fall of 1913, on his way to New York to see his publisher and other persons, and on his way back—this time to Texas.

It would account further for the fact that there is doubt as to whether on his way to Texas he did in fact visit the Civil War battlefields, as so many of his biographers say he did. For

Walter Neale describes that visit as "his lonely tour of the Western battlefields—if such a tour he took . . . " A suggestion that promptly raises the question that if he didn't visit them, or visited them less extensively than the record kept by Carrie Christiansen indicates, what was he doing? Was he busy conferring with highly placed government officials—he set out on that tour from Washington—or possibly with other agents with whom he was to operate—men such as Mitchell-Hedges, say?

And, of course, it accounts for why it was that he stayed a few days in New Orleans, where Mitchell-Hedges said he was then working as a "ham-fisted waiter in a swank hotel," and who, strangely enough, had returned to New Orleans from near the Mexican border almost as if to meet him. For manifestly a project of this scope required careful planning, particularly since the relaying of information would present certain difficulties. What they would have to do would be to acquaint themselves with the details of whatever intelligence network then existed in Mexico and in British Honduras and Guatemala. They would have to know that network better than the palms of their hands. And they would also have to meet—and New Orleans and its environs would be the ideal place—certain individuals they would have to know.

And it likewide accounts for the fact that, as McWilliams reports, Bierce carried some $2000 in gold—a sizeable sum for a man to take if seeking an unmarked grave by suicide, a date with a firing squad, or a possible death in battle. Especially with a daughter to leave it to and who could make good use of it.

And, to cap it all, this project of a mission is the only logical explanation yet offered for Bierce's remark in the letter to Mrs. McCrackin quoted above—"Yes, I shall go into Mexico with a pretty definite purpose, which, however, is not at present disclosable."

Indeed, when one analyzes Bierce's actions during 1913 on the basis of our hypothesis, they offer stronger evidence that he went into Mexico as a secret agent than in any other capacity. The chances of his meeting death before a firing squad as an agent were certainly good enough to warrant his doing everything he did that is generally ascribed to his desire for a

violent end. Also, being a secret agent would have the added advantage of a certain novelty, when compared to his Civil War experiences, that would have a strong appeal to Bierce. In addition, it would not have the certainty of calling for excessive physical exertion that service with troops would inevitably entail. Further, the hypothesis provides a more reasonable explanation for certain of his acts than any other.

For example, the matter of his tour of the battlefields. When viewed as an act of deception, for the purpose of portraying himself as "an old soldier fading away," it is a superb piece of stagecraft, brilliantly designed to keep anyone from suspecting that he was a secret agent. That it was a "lonely tour" gives it a touch of sentiment that would appeal to many and cause few to consider that there were no witnesses of record. The fact that he wrote various letters to Miss Christiansen, which she destroyed (McWilliams wrote, "She destroyed all the correspondence . . . but that the record she made is authentic, admits of little doubt"), and even that his name can be found on a hotel register or two, does not militate against this assumption. Surely, if one is to credit the intelligence officials of the time with sense enough to make him a secret agent, they would have been smart enough to see that just such evidence should be provided. It would come in very handy if Bierce were to disappear, either without a trace or through a verified execution. For in either case, there would be plenty of questions, some of which might center upon the possibility of an intelligence mission, and in that case, this "lonely tour" would serve to buttress the denials that Bierce's journey was anything other than what it is supposed to have been up to now.

And as for the matter of Bierce and Mitchell-Hedges entering Mexico in the ways they did and what we suggest their actions were after they got there, the hypothesis accounts perfectly well for that also.

Chapter V

When the Mitchell-Hedges account of his days with Villa is considered in the light of this special agent hypothesis involving an association with Bierce, it swiftly becomes apparent that it provides the only rational explanation of some of the most amazing fiction ever offered as fact in a presumably serious autobiography. We say most amazing not merely because it obviously got by the editors in two eminent British and American publishing houses, but also because it has apparently until now gone unchallenged.

The most glaring example is Mitchell-Hedges' major incident in his Villa interlude. It concerns the business of a dawn attack and a bloody one in which not only did some 400 Villistas under the personal leadership of Villa himself come near to disaster at Laredo, Texas, but were fortunate enough to be saved by none other than Mitchell-Hedges.

The incident is a good one, of the typical horse opera genre. The highlights of the raid, purpose of which was to sack the town and capture or kill a personal enemy of Villa's, went thus:

"We were opposite the general store when the silence exploded into furious noise. Flame spurted from the store at pointblank range. Behind me men fell as bullets went home. Our mounts struggled and bucked in panic . . . We were apparently trapped.

"I felt a wonderful exaltation. The blood-lust thundered through my veins. The primitive gripped me. There is no neutrality under fire and at this moment I was with Villa, thinking, planning, scheming.

"I screamed to him and when he turned his head I gesticulated. I tried to make him understand that we must get clear of this murderous cross-fire, that our best chance lay in diving down one of the tiny side streets and attacking the hotel from the rear. He understood, and in a few moments, yelling and signaling, we had managed to gather the larger portion of the band behind us . . . . "

There is more to describe how they got out of town, but as if that might not be enough to let the reader know how he had personally saved Villa, Mitchell-Hedges began the next section of the chapter as follows:

"After Laredo, Villa considered that I had saved him and his band from annihilation in the enfilade, he said. True, the raid had been a fiasco. He had failed to find his rancher enemy and there had been little loot; but they had taught the gringos a grim lesson. From now onwards I would help him plan his raids. When necessary I would command a section of the 'army.' In short, I would become an unofficial aide-de-camp."

There are many things to be said about this Laredo incident. To begin with, it never took place. The only Laredo we were able to find on the Texas maps of the time was the rail center on the lower Rio Grande with a population of considerably better than 14,000. If such an attack had occurred, it certainly would have been listed in the American annals of the period, fully as much so as the raid on Columbus, New Mexico of March 9, 1916, led by Villa's sub-chiefs. But it isn't, and Luciano Juajardo, Librarian of the Laredo Public Library, assured us that the attack was not known locally. Nor is it listed in the Mexican accounts of Villa's life and campaigns.

But why, then, did Mitchell-Hedges put it in? Why would he make such a fantastic and palpably false claim? Why would he go so far as to say that he had been rewarded for having saved Villa and his men by being given the job of planning raids and even commanding a section of the army—matters so easily verifiable? And why, having made these claims, would he follow the paragraph last quoted above by another, two paragraphs on, in which he describes how he made up his mind to leave Villa's army? The paragraph reads thus:

"So willynilly, I had no choice; but as the weeks slipped

by my position grew more desperate. The United States government at last took decisive action and General Pershing marched to the frontier of Mexico with 12,000 troops. I knew I could never take part in any direct military action against the Americans; yet to try and desert would be to court instant and ignominious death as a traitor."

The business about General Pershing marching to the border in 1914 is ridiculous. He was not to do that until 1916, after the United States had become concerned over the raid on Columbus, New Mexico. That is a fact Mitchell-Hedges knew fully as well as anyone else. Consequently, the only reason he put it in was to erect another stop-sign for any reader who might have missed the significance of the Laredo incident.

As to why Mitchell-Hedges did all this, told these patently absurd things, there can be only one logical explanation. They are there, basically, for the same reason that Mitchell-Hedges makes no mention whatsoever of Bierce at any time in his autobiography, nor, so far as we can find, in anything else he wrote or publicly said. And during the late 1920's and 1930's, he had plenty to say as a writer of many articles in the Hearst papers and various others, and as a speaker on numerous radio broadcasts, both in the United States and England.

This is in marked contrast to the fact that practically everyone else who has written about any association with Villa, of such a nature as Mitchell-Hedges' purports to be, has been sure to toss in something about Bierce. And the number who have written about Villa then, and without a personal association of any kind, have generally included some Biercean references. It was expected by editors and public alike. And quite aside from that—any reference to Bierce such as Mitchell-Hedges could, and probably would, have included under such circumstances, would have served to enhance reviews and sales. At the same time, it would have been safe to make since its lack of validity could not easily be proved and probably could never be proved.

On that score, O'Connor in his biography comments on "the stories peddled in the Twenties and Thirties by various 'soldiers of furtune' who claimed to have served with or against Villa and had their own version, translated into salable prose

by a ghost writer," on this matter of Bierce and his end.

These facts were well known to Mitchell-Hedges, and since he was singularly appreciative of book sales—as are most authors, to say nothing of publishers—it follows that he must have had a very sound reason for completely excluding Bierce, so sound that while he might fabricate incidents such as saving Villa at Laredo, he must not even allude to the famous American.

Why Mitchell-Hedges was so silent about Bierce, we contend, is that he did not dare be otherwise. There was far too much at stake. If he were to mention Bierce, in any way to suggest that he knew him, or had seen him, it would promptly evoke questions. The questions almost surely would cause speculation as to the true nature of Mitchell-Hedges' mission in Mexico, and would give rise to the possibility in the public mind that he had been a secret agent. In turn, that would result in speculation on Bierce's real purpose in going there. And because, as we have seen, there is a preponderance of evidence that Bierce was a secret agent, such a mention by Mitchell-Hedges might easily lead to disclosure of enough to reveal what some of the real facts were. That would mean for him a violation of the Official Secrets Act of Great Britain, to which he was subject, and would also make him persona non grata in the United States.

Why that would be the American reaction goes as follows: A host of American authorities were on record as having searched for Bierce in Mexico and found no clues. They began with Marion Letcher, U.S. Consul in Chihuahua City in 1914. They included other and high State Department officials, high army officers like Major General Frederick Funston who commanded along the border, and many more. But to deduce from their statements, all offering no evidence of what actually happened, that some government officials did not know more than was revealed would be naif.

A strong indication this is so is that there is scant reason to believe their search was more than perfunctory, that its purpose was other than to quiet the public. There is evidence of that intent. One of the top searchers was Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane. That the Secretary of the Interior was

chosen for such a task must be considered as one of the rare examples of sardonic humor found in high government circles. Lane, who had been a newsman and attorney in San Francisco when Bierce was holding forth there, had strong feelings about Bierce. He had described him in print as "a hideous monster, so like the mixture of dragon, lizard, bat and snake as to be unnameable." But this aspect of the search is not usually dwelt upon by biographers. Starrett, for example, said only, "The United States government's investigation has come to nothing, and indeed it has been lax."

Hence, if a statement or an indiscreet suggestion from Mitchell-Hedges were to open a new line of inquiry, it could easily result in certain American officials being made to appear as liars, deceivers of the public, a matter most repugnant to them or to their heirs. Also, for an Englishman to be the cause of such a contretemps, more particularly one who had evidently been a secret agent himself and operating in America, it would naturally be most embarrassing to British as well as to American officials—a situation that would certainly have grave repercussions for Mitchell-Hedges himself, as mentioned above.

Therefore, the best thing for him to do, so far as removing himself from possible suspicision was concerned, would be to make no mention at all of Bierce in his writings and radio broadcasts.

Even so late as the publication of his autobiography in 1954, publication of anything to suggest that he and Bierce had been special agents for either of their governments or both, or that might lead to that suggestion, would be quite ill advised. For governments, as the Vietnam War has lately shown, feel they simply cannot afford to have their secrets known—not even after all the principals are dead, a matter abundantly proved by the fact that many of the American documents regarding the Civil, Indian and Spanish Wars are still in top secret classification.

What all this has to do with his careful creation of the Laredo incident should be plain enough to any gossip—male or female—who has got hold of a juicy scandal but finds that he simply dare not relate it. Either he becomes an insufferable person to live with, or he lets out hints that finally lead others

to suspect what the real story is, the while he remains innocent of violating any confidence.

For newspapermen and writers generally, the business of having a tremendous story and being quite unable to get it into print means a frustration that becomes sheer agony. Many are unable to deal with it, except for drink, drugs, or leaving the business for the quieter fields of public relations or real estate. But Mitchell-Hedges was made of sterner stuff. He managed to avoid such pitfalls and succeeded in publishing enough suggestions of his hidden story—stop-signs, so to speak, and there is another and bigger one to come—so that it is likely to remain a subject of discussion and investigation for years.

Chapter VI

In his autobiography, Mitchell-Hedges says that when he left Villa, he rode northward into the United States under an assumed name and returned to England in the fall of 1914. That he did so is just about as likely as Bierce having done so, too.

What makes infinitely more sense is that they both did very differently.

Since, as has been shown, the Japanese and German threat were of the greatest concern to the United States and Great Britain, and since the Japanese threat especially would tend to come from the western part of Mexico, Bierce would have been likely to do somewhat as he said he would—ride in a northeasterly to southwesterly direction down across the country to the West Coast.

But only somewhat. The West Coast would actually be of no concern to him, since its ports would have been adequately covered by American agents. However, the western part of the country, well back from the coastal areas, would be another matter. Here and there, all the way down to the Guatemala border would be sections about which intelligence would be lacking and which well might be the sources of the trouble feared. If a report on them could be made, it would be of infinitely greater value than anything Bierce might get by staying with Villa's forces. And Bierce was manifestly as well prepared as could be for doing exactly that. Carey McWilliams states it was known "that he carried credentials permitting him to pass through the Constitutionalists' territory, and that he was accredited to the Villa forces." Also, according to McWilliams, "He corresponded with Carranza and announced to friends that he 'liked the fellow.' "

But credentials gain in importance if the bearer can back them up with deeds, a point of which Bierce was quite aware. And that is exactly what Bierce proceeded to do, as noted above, in a most convincing manner by killing the Huertista he told about in his letter. The act has bothered some writers as being rather on the coldblooded side. And so it was. However, only a simpleton would feel that Bierce could have done it merely to test his marksmanship. Oddly enough, Sterling, in his *American Mercury* article mentioned earlier, says that Bierce did it "to remove any impression among the Villistas that he was a spy." But Bierce's concern for his impression on the Villistas would have been decidedly secondary for the reason Sterling gave. The prime reason he killed the man is that he knew word of it would travel south ahead of him to other Constitutionalist leaders such as Carranza, Obregon and Zapata, or members of their staffs, thus making his task easier.

For actually, Bierce could not have been greatly interested in what Villa was doing. Information on Villa in 1913-14 the United States had in abundance. Where Villa's sympathies lay was already known. An attempt by a Japanese naval officer to sound out Villa on what he would do in event of a Japanese-American War had been answered by the statement that Villa would support the United States. But what other Constitutionalist generals might be doing, and where, in those certain unknown areas to the south was something else. Indeed, just to know there was no such activity in those areas was of great importance.

The same basic reasoning applies to Mitchell-Hedges. His course would definitely lie southward, but not in the eastern part of the country where the oil fields lay that supplied the British fleet. That area would have long since been under adequate supervision. Instead, the British were as interested as the Americans in any new threat to the United States from a possible Japanese-Mexican alliance, whether or not accompanied by German support. For the safety of their oil source depended primarily on the preservation of the status quo—on a Mexico run by Mexicans and on a United States not threatened by a Mexico strengthened by foreign allies. Whether in revolution or not, such a Mexico the British could handle quite effectively.

For example, after Victoriano Huerta caused the murder of President Madero in February 1913 and seized the presidency, British oil interests quickly granted him a loan. Though Huerta, whom Villa hated and whose forces he had besieged, at Ojinaga, was forced to resign in July 1914, the loan was a sound investment, assuring the oil fields protection during Huerta's brief period of power.

Therefore, the area in which Mitchell-Hedges would be seeking information would be substantially the same as that in which Bierce would be interested. And since, under this hypothesis, they had a community of interests, it is most likely that they worked their way southward with substantial intervals together.

Furthermore, the task should not have been particularly hazardous nor should it have involved any excessive amount of hardship. In fact, they should have been able to do a considerable amount of travelling by rail.

One thing to make this likely is the strong possibility that Villa himself made things easy for them. From 1912 through at least 1915, Villa had emissaries not only in New York and Washington, but in Chicago, St. Louis and New Orleans as well. His own brother Hipolito was one of them. What more natural, then, in view of Villa's need to sustain contacts in the United States, than for him to make things easy for men such as Bierce and Mitchell-Hedges? And also, in such a case, what more natural than for there to be no reference to either man in the records of Villa's battles and campaigns?

How Villa could make it easy for them in their journey south during the first half of 1914 is not difficult to see. He had an excellent intelligence network of his own, including friends even on Carranza's staff.

Up to Huerta's resignation in mid-July 1914, he had been opposed not only by Villa, but Carranza who was later to become President, by Zapata, the famous leader who controlled so much of the southern part of Mexico, and by others. Though the common cause in which the Constitutionalists were allied broke up shortly after Carranza's forces, under Obregon, ousted Huerta from Mexico City in mid-August, the Constitutionalists were in enough of an alliance up to that time for Bierce and

Mitchell-Hedges to have accomplished their task and arrived in Guatemala, where Bierce could have made his report to American officials and from which the two could easily get to British Honduras. And once there, they may both have gone to England on the same ship—Mitchell-Hedges to get a new assignment, Bierce to stay there long enough to give rise to the *Tribune* story of March 9—visiting, perhaps, the places he had loved so much during his visit of 1872-75—and then return to British Honduras.

In any case, it is essential to our general hypothesis to suppose that both Bierce and Mitchell-Hedges were in British Honduras in the fall of 1914 and that by then they already had the crystal skull.

We know that Bierce had $2000 in gold with him when he went into Mexico. Mitchell-Hedges would have had adequate funds available to him while there as a secret agent. So, quite possibly, one, or the other, or both, bought the skull for a few gold pieces from someone who got it as loot from a sacked hacienda—to suggest one of the less romantic ways in which it may have been acquired. For if the best offer at Sotheby's decades later was under £400, some Mexican may well have parted with it for a pair of double eagles.

Regardless of whether one, or the other, or both acquired it in 1914, nothing would have been said publicly about it at the time for obvious reasons. Nor would the skull have been taken to England in the fall, whether Mitchell-Hedges returned alone or Bierce went with him. If the ship on which they sailed were torpedoed—a very real possibility—they would have problems enough in saving themselves, let alone such a piece of crystal. And if it were not torpedoed, either or both would look very peculiar to officials returning from such a mission carrying a crystal skull.

In these circumstances, it seems most likely that they made an agreement to leave the skull in the vault of a Belize bank or business house until such a time as they could both reclaim it, or, after an appropriate interval, the survivor—presumably Mitchell-Hedges—could do so.

That agreement, furthermore, would probably have been made with the understanding that Bierce himself would

immediately begin, either at that time or after returning from England if he did go there, a search for those descendants of the Maya who might be presumed to know much more about the jewel. For if the crystal had been taken as loot from some old family, it is very possible there were papers with it that would give a clue as to where it had been used by the Maya. And if there were such, it would be wholly in keeping with Bierce's character to undertake such a task. Indeed, if his completed secret mission into Mexico was the only assignment given him by the government, which seems quite probable, he would have been completely free to do so.

And in that case, he would surely have done just that, but probably without bothering to communicate with anyone except his daughter. Why he would not have communicated with anyone else is that a letter to his daughter would, presumably, appear more natural and form an excellent means of keeping it from being known that he was in British Honduras. For if that were known, people would wonder why he was there—a situation that would be decidedly hampering to his task of finding out more about the skull and might even give rise to a premature disclosure of its existence. In fact, if he could cause people to think he was half a world away from British Honduras, the chances of his being able to conduct his search in complete anonymity would be greatly enhanced. A matter that could have been easily accomplished through the device of writing to his daughter and having Mitchell-Hedges mail in England the letter that is not known not to exist. On that score, it is conceivable that Mitchell-Hedges, on Bierce's suggestion, was also responsible for the letter to Dr. B. F. Mason of San Leandro that resulted in the Oakland *Tribune* story of March 9.

If that is what happened, then it becomes apparent why the skull was sneaked into the modern world, possibly making its first appearance at Lubaantun in 1927, under conditions that occasioned no publicity, and which would have been both inevitable and great under practically any other comprehensive hypothesis not involving an association with Bierce. For if those present on that occasion—such as Captain Joyce, Lady Richmond Brown and Dr. Gann, all British subjects—were told the story by Mitchell-Hedges of how he actually got the skull, they

could not reveal it without grave danger of a violation of the Official Secrets Act, the penalties of which none of them would care to experience and to which, directly or indirectly, all would be exposed.

Also, if one assumes that Dr. Gann knew the whole story of how Mitchell-Hedges acquired the skull, including the association with Bierce, there then appears a logical and even likely reason for Professor Morley's making no reference to the crystal skull in his THE ANCIENT MAYA. On that assumption, Dr. Gann, who knew Morley, would have told him of the crystal skull in confidence, warning him that Mitchell-Hedges, and possibly others, might be prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act if anything were published that would lead to a disclosure of Bierce's and Mitchell-Hedges' mission, and that Morley honored that confidence by making no reference to the crystal skull. At any rate, that is the only plausible reason we can find for Morley's having made no mention of the crystal skull with its detachable lower jaw, which otherwise he would have surely learned about through the comparison study in MAN, and which, if that were his only source of information, he would certainly have mentioned.

For an idea of the significance of the Official Secrets Act, the Encyclopedia Britannica (1949 edition) describes the act, as in force during the relevant period since 1920, as "a statute for the better protection of the bureaucracy against well informed criticism. Entirely new sections were introduced (in 1911 and 1920) making it an offense punishable with two years' hard labour, for anyone who has served the Crown to communicate to 'any person' any 'information' whether prejudicial to the State or not which he has acquired in his official capacity. It is sufficient that the 'information' was acquired when the person communicating served the Crown, and the accused is not allowed to plead or prove that publication was 'in the public interest.' Truth is also no defense; it is, in fact, essential to a conviction. If the accused can prove the 'information' he communicated was false, he will be acquitted. Any person connected with a newspaper, director, editor, leader-writer, receiving the information is also liable to conviction. It is unnecessary for the prosecution to prove guilty intent,

on the part of such recipient. Search warrants may be issued, for the purpose of such prosecution, by any superior police officer without the usual authorization of a magistrate; any newspaper office may be raided and any member of the staff who refuses, or omits, to give information to the police is guilty of a statutory offense."

The penalties for violation of this act also offer the only reasonable explanation we can find of what must rank as a major mystery in the history of trans-Atlantic publishing activities. That mystery lies in the reasons for the remarkable differences that exist between the first edition of Mitchell-Hedges' autobiography, published by Elek Books Ltd., London, 1954, and the second, or first American edition, published by Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1955.

The first edition contains a chapter titled "The Skull of Doom and a Bomb." It leads off with a full page picture of the skull, but except for the picture caption, it contains only thirteen lines of type regarding the skull itself. They go as follows:

"We took with us (to Africa in 1948) also the sinister Skull of Doom of which much has been written. How it came into my possession I have reason for not revealing.

"The Skull of Doom is made of pure rock crystal and according to scientists it must have taken 150 years, generation after generation working all the days of their lives, patiently rubbing down with sand an immense block of rock crystal until the perfect skull emerged.

"It is at least 3600 years old and according to legend was used by the High Priests of the Maya when performing esoteric rites. It is said that when he willed death with the help of the skull, death invariably followed. It has been described as the embodiment of all evil. I do not wish to try and explain this phenomena."

This is an astonishingly small amount of space to devote to such an object. But little as it is, it is better than nothing.

However, in the American edition of the work, the chapter has been rewritten so that there is no reference whatever to the skull, and the picture, too, of course, is gone.

Why would such a thing be?

Editors of Elek Books Ltd. disclaim all knowledge of why

so little space was given to the skull in the first edition, or why it was dropped from the second. Editors of Little, Brown and Co. do likewise.

These are matters that do not make much sense. One would assume that the alert editors of Elek Books Ltd., being concerned with sales, would have urged Mitchell-Hedges to supply more material than just 13 lines on such an extraordinary object—especially since it had often been the subject of sensational newspaper stories in the British press. And one would also assume that the equally alert editors of Little, Brown and Co. would not only feel the same way but would also not want to have all reference to such an interesting matter carefully removed from the book.

Indeed, since the editors in both these top publishing houses may be presumed to have known about Professor Morley's astounding discovery regarding the place of the death's head with the detachable lower jaw in Mayan numeration, or —if not that—to have been curious enough to consult his famous work, which had been published in 1946, and by the Oxford University Press as well as by Stanford, it becomes all the more strange that only the thirteen lines, the picture and its caption appeared in the one book and were excised from the other. And stranger still is it that no reference was made in the Elek Books Ltd. edition to the detachable lower jaw, while the picture used was taken in such a way as not to suggest this essential feature.

It is most unlikely, of course, that Mitchell-Hedges was not acquainted with Morley's discovery. As already noted, Morley and Dr. Gann were well known to each other, sharing the same field of interest. And Dr. Gann, as we have already seen, knew Mitchell-Hedges. Consequently it is quite unreasonable to suppose that Mitchell-Hedges and his editors did not discuss Morley's discovery and its significance to the crystal skull.

What logical explanation, then, is there for these two strange pieces of editorial work on either side of the Atlantic?

There are two possible explanations that make a great deal of sense, and each depends on the general hypothesis involving the skull and Mitchell-Hedges and Bierce as secret agents.

One is that the British Government, in order to prevent any arousal of public interest that might result in a disclosure of the Bierce and Mitchell-Hedges secret mission relationship, intervened in the case of Elek Books Ltd. and compelled the editors, by one means or another, to remove anything more than the little that appeared. And that in the case of the editors of Little, Brown and Co., either the FBI or some other U.S. governmental agency, for the same purpose, managed to persuade them to leave out all reference to the skull as a favor that would be more suitable to the welfare of the country.

The other is that Mitchell-Hedges himself, knowing that he could not reveal the truth, ordered the material to appear precisely as it did in both cases, on the assumption that if the signals he erected in the Laredo incident and others concerning his Villa interlude went unnoticed, the conspicuous difference between the British and American editions would provide the very stop-sign needed to start an investigation into the matter of both his relations to Bierce and the acquisition of the crystal skull.

Chapter VII

There is still more to support the thesis that Mitchell-Hedges was a British agent.

When he reached England late in 1914, he promptly volunteered for service, so he states, but was rejected by several doctors, "including the distinguished surgeon, Sir Alfred Downham Fripp, of Portland Place, because the leg wounded in the (a Mexican) ambush still gave me trouble."

After that, despite months of waiting for a job as an ambulance driver, he decided that since "nobody wanted me to help in the war, I would go west once more."

That, of course, is nonsense. He may have had trouble with his leg, but it is safe to say that the only reason he was allowed to go back to the United States was that his government sent him there.

It was well into 1915 when he took ship for New York. And on shipboard, the first night out from Liverpool, as the liner made its way through U-boat infested seas, whom should he see at dinner but his former employer Mike Meyerowitz, the diamond merchant.

Naturally, Mitchell-Hedges told his old friend about his unhappy predicament and how he was going again to Central America. But "Mike promptly poured cold water on my schemes for exploration," so he tells it in his autobiography, and by the time they had reached the second course, the diamond merchant had managed to persuade Mitchell-Hedges to stay in New York as his employe.

Both the offer and acceptance of the job were rather on the singular side in view of what followed. One night a few

weeks later, as the two were having a quiet dinner in New York after a hard day's work, Meyerowitz casually introduced Mitchell-Hedges to his old friend Lieb Bronstein.

The Englishman and Bronstein hit it off so well that Mitchell-Hedges was delighted to have Bronstein move in with him for several weeks when Bronstein struck a financial rough spot. A most interesting anecdote in view of Mitchell-Hedges' careful analysis of Villa's character quoted earlier.

Anyway, the sequel to this act of chumminess between the two is every bit as odd as Mitchell-Hedges said it was.

"One day towards the end of 1919"—the author characteristically accounts only in the most sketchy way for what happened in the interim—"while I was on a short holiday in England, I received a mysterious letter on government notepaper, marked 'Very Secret,' asking me to call on Sir Basil Thompson, Chief of the Intelligence Service, at my earliest convenience."

Mitchell-Hedges did so. What Sir Basil wanted was to have Mitchell-Hedges go to Russia, since he was such a good friend of Lieb Bronstein, then known as Leon Trotzky.

Mitchell-Hedges said that he refused, and maybe he did. His autobiography is so hazy on what he did for some time afterwards, it is impossible to be sure.

As for Bierce's end, Anna Mitchell-Hedges recalls hearing her father say that he believed Bierce died in Panama. About the truth of it, there is nothing more than her remark to substantiate it.

However, there is reason to feel that Bierce never attempted to get to Panama nor to South America—despite various reports linking him to the missing Colonel Fawcett and the jungles of the Amazon—that, on the contrary, he remained in Central America and more particularly in the British Honduras-Guatemala sector, since mystery delighted him so.

Even in Bierce's time, certain sections of that area, and especially one, had a reputation for mysterious disappearances —of a kind, furthermore, that could not be better calculated to arouse the interest of a man with Bierce's great fascination in the so-called supernatural, particularly since that area was in the heartland of the Maya.

Some of the documentary evidence for this comes from a source that must be considered proof against any objections that the author merely desired to capitalize on the occult. The source is Dr. Thomas Gann's MYSTERY CITIES Exploration and Adventure in Lubaantun (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925).

In that work, which gives an account of the experiences Gann and Mitchell-Hedges had in clearing the site of Lubaantun, which they had discovered the year before in a desolate section of British Honduras, the author tells of his visit to the villages of Chorro and Yalbac as "some of the remoter Indian settlements in the bush where a white man was seldom or never seen." His reason for wanting to visit such places was that "The Indians, especially in the Spanish-American republics, take every possible precaution to hide their villages, concealing them in the depths of the bush, where they are impossible to find," and he wanted to see what they were like. He attributes the concealment to a "survival . . . of terror, a heritage from Spanish colonial days," and finds that though "the Indians of British Honduras have received nothing but encouragement and kind treatment at the hands of the local Government, old instincts die hard."

Gann, however, as the principal medical officer of the colony, did not find it too difficult to meet the Indians of Chorro, nor did he those of Yalbac about 12 miles farther on and which he reached without incident, despite having to pass through a section of bush with "a somewhat sinister reputation." The triangular section, bounded on one side by a river and on the other two "by fairly well-beaten trails" was of such nature that "anyone finding their way into it would not have the slightest difficulty in getting out; and yet within a few years no less than three persons have unaccountably and mysteriously disappeared here, and never been heard of again."

Dr. Gann, who offered no hypothesis to explain the disappearances, described them as follows:

The first was that of a Bernardino Coh, 17, who set out one morning on a visit to Yalbac with the intention of shooting some game on the way. He had breakfast with a friend in the village of San Pedro, through which he had to pass and when he left, that was the last seen of him. Three days later, his

family and friends, alarmed over his disappearance, started to search for him. Along the trail from San Pedro to Yalbac, "a quick eye of one of the Indians discovered a place where someone had recently forced a passage from the trail into the bush. Following this up for about a mile, they found the boy's shot-bag lying on the ground, still containing his caps, powder-horn, matches and a pack of corn husk cigarettes. Beyond this the trail was easily followed, as the boy seemed to have lurched drunkenly forward from side to side, trampling down the low brush and breaking many small branches. Suddenly it debouched into a little open glade such as one often finds in the forest . . . . The trail, till it entered the glade, was plain and unmistakable, but there was no trace of anyone having walked through the sour grass, where a perfectly unmistakable track is always left . . . there was no indication of anyone having left the little glade, no mark of a struggle, and—no sign of the boy."

The next disappearance was that of a Sergeant Bascombe of the Constabulary at Cayo, "a man of Herculean proportions, and a match for three ordinary men." Bascombe went to Yalbac with an interpreter to arrest a criminal. The criminal got wind of it and left before Bascombe arrived.

The next day, the interpreter returned from Yalbac early in the morning, but Bascombe decided to postpone his return until nearly noon on the chance that his quarry might appear. At noon, Bascombe left Yalbac, well in time to arrive at Cayo before dark.

When Bascombe failed to show up by the following night, the constabulary started searching for him, aided in the search by a large group of Indians. Less than a mile along the road out of Yalbac "a broad trail was found where someone riding mule-back had left the path and forced a passage through the bush. This track was easily followed, and a few hundred yards down it Bascombe's mule was found picketed and quietly grazing on the underbrush." Bascombe's trail was then followed from the point where he had dismounted, and "his machete and leather belt were seen lying on the ground. A little farther on, his revolver in its leather case, was picked up, and lastly the broad felt uniform hat which he had been wearing when last seen.

The trail extended a little farther, then, as in the case of Bernardino, it ended in a small open glade, which showed no signs of a struggle, or of the missing man, and out of which no other trail could be traced into the bush. Large rewards were offered," and the surrounding country was literally combed by scores of men, but nothing further was ever found.

The third case involved a Civil Commissioner Rhys who accompanied a troop into the area on a hunt for a band of Icaiche Indians that had been raiding mahogany camps from across the border. The troop was attacked by the Icaiche while it was "halted in a broad pass cut through the bush for trucking out mahogany to the river." The Icaiche put the troop to rout, killing five and wounding 16. But "curiously enough, the Indians took no advantage of the opportunity thus offered them, for instead of following up their defeated adversaries, whom they might practically have wiped out, they calmly took themselves off into the bush in the opposite direction"

As for Commissioner Rhys, he was never seen again. The dead and wounded were easily found after the troop reformed and returned to the scene. But they were unable to learn anything to show the fate of the Commissioner other than the fact there was nothing to indicate he had been taken captive by the Icaiche.

Though Dr. Gann found nothing at Yalbac when he arrived there that falls in the same category of the mysterious, he came across something that might have done so had his mind been more open to certain possibilities. On the afternoon of his arrival, he was informed by an Indian of a cave the latter had found that contained some old pottery vessels. On the following day—and against the wishes of the chief, the jefe of the community—the physician set off before dawn to investigate it. After traversing six miles of heavy bush, he and the Indian encountered "bare, rugged limestone cliffs, some fifty to a hundred feet high." In the face of one of them they saw an opening about 20 feet above ground. They climbed up and entered it.

"The floor of the cave was at first quite flat, and covered with a hard calcareous deposit which had dripped from the roof . . . . Whilst chipping idly in the deposit on the floor with my machete, I brought to light three small polished beads of green

jade." Near a large boulder they found two bundles of pitch-pine sticks. Gann decided they had been left there centuries before, but since they were as good as ever, he lighted one and proceeded to explore.

"For a considerable distance the passage was straight and flat, but suddenly the floor took a dip downwards, and we found our way blocked by a small lagoon of perfectly clear water. Skirting around the margin of this on an elevated ridge, we came to a rocky wall four or five feet high, beyond which we entered another passage." In that they found plenty of pottery, and it led them into a "great rocky chamber, the exact size and shape of which we were not able to make out, as the light of the torch was not sufficient."

There were other passages leading into that cavern, and before the last torch went out, Gann noted that "the top of one of the stalagmites in the great chamber had been rudely carved to represent a human head, and that in front of it was placed a more or less cubical block of stone which may have served as an altar."

Shortly after Gann left the cave, an Indian met him with news that he was needed immediately in Yalbac where a severe accident had occurred. "How he had followed us across six miles of open bush and stony ground, where to my inexperienced eyes we had not left a trace, was to me inexplicable, yet he had done it, and moreover, done it quickly."

Gann eventually returned, of course, for another look at the cave, but he gave no indication of exploring the passages that led away from the great chamber. Nor did he say whether he ever got to another cave whose mouth he had seen in the distance on the limestone cliff face during his first visit, the indication being that the natives were not cooperative.

All of which suggests that the natives had had him under close surveillance, and, finally deciding that his chief interests really were at Lubaantun, felt it better to let him do his harmless looking and then go away. In short, they took pains to see to it that he did not come upon anything on the order of what Coh and Bascombe had seen, and so there was no reason to have him disappear from civilization.

For the only sensible explanation as to why it was that

Bernardino Coh, Sergeant Bascombe and Commissioner Rhys disappeared is that they saw something they were not supposed to have seen.

The something Coh and Bascombe saw was of such a nature that it compelled them to leave the trail to investigate, and quite possibly the same was true of Rhys. As to what it was they saw, there is simply no knowing at this point.

However, it seems likely that whatever it was that drew the missing men off the trail and through the brush to a glade from which they vanished, it was in some way linked to the hundred thousand skulls that so impressed Bernal Diaz del Castillo that day in Zocotlan, to the crystal skull itself, and hence to Bierce on the basis of our hypothesis.

But before going further along that line, we wish to bring up another matter that is pertinent for reasons other than its involving strange appearances and disappearances. It concerns an episode in a period of the life of Father Junipero Serra—currently a candidate for sainthood—that is quite unknown to the great majority of Roman Catholics but probably was known to Bierce, both because of his extreme interest in ecclesiastical matters as well as the supernatural and the horrible.

As a preliminary we wish to state that while the Holy Inquisition was an instrument whereby the grossest perversions of the Christian ethic were carried out, any fairminded student must admit that the majority of the Inquisitors—how great a majority is another matter—was probably composed of dedicated men whose lives were devoted to the high task of saving the souls of others, even though it might be at the cost of the latters' bodies and lives. In other words, we are quick to aver that Father Serra, in ordering the application of thumbscrew, rack or stake, did so with the utmost reluctance and only because he knew it was in the best interest of the subject as well as the general brotherhood of Christendom. Furthermore, we wish to state our belief that Father Serra was not a man given to imagining things, and especially so in the case of some poor heretic.

The case we cite is one given by Father Serra himself in the form of a report to the Inquisition in Mexico City as of September 1, 1752, long after the last Salem witch had been

cut down from her gibbet, but thirty-six years before the last Mexican heretic to be burned at the stake would die in the famous Zocalo at Mexico City. The report said, in part, anent the activities in the Sierra Gorda Mission, then under the direct care of Father Serra:

"I am in possession of several grave indications that in the district of this mission of mine and its neighborhood there are several persons of the class known as 'gente de razon,' that is to say they are not Indians, who are addicted to the most detestable and horrible crimes of sorcery, witchcraft and devil worship and who are in league with them (the devils) and others, the inquiry into which appertains to your Venerable Tribunal of the Inquisition. And if it is necessary to specify one of the persons guilty of such crimes, I accuse by name a certain Melchora de los Reyes Acesta, an inhabitant of said mission, against whom we, the ministers, have accusations . . . In this regard, in these last few days, a certain Cayetana, a very clever Mexican woman . . . has confessed—she being observed and accused of similar crimes, having been held under arrest by us for some days past—that in the mission there is a large congregation of the said 'personas de razon,' who therefore are not Indians, although some Indians also join them, and that these persons, not Indians, flying through the air by night are in the habit of meeting in a cave on a hill near a ranch called El Saucillo, in the center of the said missions, where they worship and make sacrifice to the demons who appear visibly there in the guise of young goats and various other things of that nature."

What happened to Melchora, Cayetana and the others is not presently known. The answer lies somewhere in the 1500 volumes of manuscript material on the activities of the Inquisition in Mexico.

However, it is quite evident that Father Serra's information regarding the matter was well received by the Inquisition and that they acted on it promptly and effectively. For on September 4, they appointed Father Serra as the Inquisitor for the Sierra Gorda region where his inquisitorial duties were so ably performed that he was soon given the rank of Commissary of the Holy Office with "jurisdiction throughout New Spain

and its adjacent islands," a post he held for better than a decade prior to his setting out for California and the culmination of his career.

On this point, we wish to observe that for some strange reason, and one that may very well be linked to the Powers of Darkness, almost nothing is to be found on this aspect of the life of the great founder of the California missions. In fact, historians are so silent regarding it that one can scarcely help feeling the silence results from a deliberate attempt to deprive Father Serra of the credit that in common fairness ought to be his—that of equal rank with another divine, albeit of a different brand of the Christian faith, the Rev. Cotton Mather who heretofore has stood alone in reputation for his persecution of witches.

So far, we have been able to find the record of only one other case in which Father Serra was active, although it is known that there were others in which he played a dominant part. It concerns a certain Maria Pasquala de Nava whose crimes of witchcraft were such as to require 196 pages for their report. She was tried in 1766 during a period of several months. Though she was a true *malefica* or witch, as the findings showed, she obviously was finally persuaded to turn from the error of her ways. For, as the official, present-day account of it concludes, "She died suddenly in the Inquisition building in Mexico City, and was buried from the Church of Santo Domingo close by," a burial which would not have been accorded her had she persisted in her abominable practices. In brief, her soul was saved.

Why we have cited this report by Father Serra is largely because of the references to "flying through the air" by persons who used caves, were sorcerers, some of whom were Indian but more of whom were "gente de razon," though not Spaniards, since probably they would have been so labeled. While it is quite possible the "personas de razon" were mixed bloods, it is equally possible that they were members of another people, remnants of the "bearded whites," references to whom were made by the Spaniards from Peru to California, and about whom Bierce knew through his extensive reading, including H. H. Bancroft's histories, as well as through his acquaintance with some of the men who wrote them.

What the significance of the foregoing is to our hypothesis about Bierce, Mitchell-Hedges and the crystal skull in British Honduras goes as follows:

Whether Bierce went to England in 1914 and returned months later, or whether he merely gave the letter to Mitchell-Hedges to mail from England and remained in British Honduras, he decided to do some investigating of either the Yalbac triangle or some other of many equally mysterious places in the general area. And, because of his asthma, it was probably a place in which there would be hills and hence caves and cliffs.

That possibility is not at all fantastic. Any reader of Bierce's works will instantly recognize the attraction the crystal skull and its origin would have had for him. Death's heads, so to speak, studded his psyche. The macabre had a tremendous pull for him. The possibility of there being unknown forces in the hands of remnants of older civilizations—and maybe white, at that—would seize his interest. Since he knew that the history of Mexico and Central America contained plenty of suggestions of the sort of thing described in the official findings of Father Serra and other inquisitors, he would have, through the stimulus of the skull, the country and his knowledge, precisely the kind of subject that would be most fitting to him at that time in his life.

Indeed, not only his going to Mexico as an intelligence agent, but his involvement with the crystal skull would be completely in keeping with a sage and beautiful comment by McWilliams on Bierce in his late fifties, "his idealistic-romantic spirit continued to make overtures towards that 'strangeness' of experience which finally lured him after its phosphorescent gleamings along the Mexican ranges."

Such a quest for knowledge of the early history of the skull would probably mean death, of course. But it would be a far more interesting death than that before a firing squad, or on some desert with vultures circling down to pluck out his blue eyes.

So if he ventured into the Yalbac triangle or some other mysterious place in the general area, one thing that might have happened to him is a disappearance on the order of those experienced by Coh and Bascombe. The most obvious explanation

of which—with a bow to the late Charles Hoy Fort—is that they were flown out of their glades by some unknown persons who then took them underground through the caves.

Naturally, it may as well be admitted at once that possibly Bierce is still alive and well and living underground, or so someone is bound to point out.

But on that score, it seems very strange that Mitchell-Hedges had nothing whatever to say about the Yalbac triangle, so far as we have found. Particularly since Dr. Gann did note that Mitchell-Hedges didn't accompany him when he went there, and it clearly was the sort of thing in which he would have been interested. So did Mitchell-Hedges go there alone on one of the occasions when Lady Richmond Brown said he took off into the bush for days?

In any case, the only hypothesis we can find that serves as a reasonable explanation for the varied phenomena in this book is that Bierce and Mitchell-Hedges were secret agents who went into Mexico in 1913 for the purposes stated, that they worked together, that Mitchell-Hedges acquired the crystal skull in an association with Bierce, and that the governments of Great Britain and the United States since then have gone to whatever lengths were required to keep from being revealed anything that would suggest that Bierce and Mitchell-Hedges were secret agents—a matter which, if revealed, or speculated on too much, might easily lead to the disclosure of other disturbing things.

How else is one to account for the following:

1) That Professor Morley's discovery of the death's head, with its detachable lower jaw having a unique and vital significance in Mayan numeration, has apparently never until now been related to the Mitchell-Hedges crystal skull—authenticated in the MAN article, which Morley must have known about—and the only one with a detachable lower jaw, though Morley and Dr. Gann, who knew about the skull and most probably knew of Morley's discovery, were well known to each other.

2) That Dr. Gann did not mention the skull in any of his works we have been able to find, and that Captain Joyce, Lady Richmond Brown and others who almost certainly knew about the skull were similarly silent.

3) That there should have been so little, yet so prominently displayed, about the crystal skull in the first and British edition of Mitchell-Hedges' autobiography, but nothing whatever about it in the American, and that those who should know why say they do not.

4) That Mitchell-Hedges left New York in the summer of 1913 about when Bierce did, that he returned from Texas to New Orleans about the time Bierce was there, and that he joined Villa's forces about the time Bierce did.

5) That Mitchell-Hedges was always silent on Bierce when the circumstances of his life would normally have made him otherwise, especially since both worked for Hearst, though at different times.

6) That Mitchell-Hedges would create the palpably false Laredo incident and make other glaring and easily checkable errors in his section on the days with Villa when, beyond any doubt, he knew they would be discovered.

7) That those glaring errors should get by the alert editors of two major publishing houses.

8) That Mitchell-Hedges always refused to say how or where he got the skull.

9) That while the crystal skull is obviously an unimpeachably valuable jewel, it has not been acquired by one of the great museums—an acquisition that would focus tremendous attention on the skull, a matter that would be undesirable, under our hypothesis, in the eyes of certain highly placed persons.

10) That the situation in Mexico and the United States in 1913 clearly called for added intelligence information from Mexico owing to Japanese and German threats posed to American and British interests.

11) That both Bierce and Mitchell-Hedges were not only admirably suited to be intelligence agents, but that they both had abundant connections of the kind needed for them to get such an assignment.

12) That Bierce's letter to Mrs. McCrackin comments that he will "go into Mexico with a pretty definite purpose, which, however, is not at present disclosable."

13) That Bierce so loudly advertised his going to Mexico, as if he wanted Mexicans and Americans to know all about his

plans as just a traveler.

14) That Bierce carried credentials to the Constitutionalists—Carranza and others opposed to Huerta—as well as being accredited to Villa.

15) That Bierce carried $2000 in gold with him into Mexico, a large sum for any man to take into Mexico at that time if seeking death in battle, suicide or merely casual travel.

16) That the letter of December 26, 1913 to Miss Christiansen and the letters he wrote to her on his "lonely tour" of the battlefields, as well as others, were destroyed by her, though she made notes on the contents.

17) That Bierce's killing of a Huertista was not the sort of thing he would have done normally, and that the only sensible explanation of his doing it was to make it plain that he favored the Constitutionalist side as a means of gaining the cooperation of Constitutionalist leaders when he travelled south.

18) That both the March 9, 1915 story in the Oakland *Tribune* about Bierce being with Lord Kitchener, and the April, 1915 letter from Bierce, presumably in England, to his daughter, and which is not known not to exist, are logically explained by our hypothesis, but they are not logically explained by Bierce's biographers, the majority of whom deny or ignore them.

19) That it was to the interests of both Great Britain and the United States to have the stories about Bierce in England discredited as thoroughly as possible, since otherwise they might easily lead to the strong suspicion that Bierce in particular had been in Mexico as a secret agent.

20) That the search for Bierce conducted by U.S. officials was actually perfunctory, a top director being a man who hated Bierce, and the whole thing being conducted in a manner plainly suggesting that the government did not want Bierce to be found in Mexico.

21) That if the crystal skull had been found or acquired by Mitchell-Hedges in any ordinary way not associated with Bierce, then its acquisition would have been widely publicized in the usual manner.

22) That if it was found or acquired as the result of an association with Bierce, then the kind of secrecy with which

Mitchell-Hedges surrounded the acquisition would be quite logical, since otherwise he could easily run afoul of the Official Secrets Act.

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NEW LIGHT ON THE BIERCE MYSTERY

Why did Ambrose Bierce have $2000 in gold with him when he went with Villa's army as an "observer" in 1913?

Why did Bierce write to a close friend, "Yes, I shall go into Mexico with a pretty definite purpose, which, however, is not at present disclosable"?

And why did the noted Britisher F. A. Mitchell-Hedges, who joined Villa's army at the same time, and who left New York and New Orleans at about the same time Bierce did in 1913, never mention Bierce in his autobiography?

Did his reason have anything to do with why he would never reveal how he acquired the famous crystal skull, and why all reference to it in the English edition of his autobiography was carefully removed from the American?

These are only some of the questions raised and answered in

AMBROSE BIERCE, F. A. MITCHELL-HEDGES
And The
CRYSTAL SKULL