Strange Creatures X

Amazing Indeed

Edited by
Chad Arment

Arment Biological Press

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

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Editor's Note

This one I enjoyed putting together. Included are some of the best pieces of classic cryptofiction written. Some I don't believe have been reprinted since their original publication. It's always fun to come across a story that includes cryptozoological elements, even if it isn't particularly well written, but some of these tales are likely to make you just sit back and let it sink in. (There are also some literary precursors to a few well-known "creature flicks.")

The first three tales are ones I tracked down individually. The rest are all from the pulp magazine, Amazing Stories. As far as I've been able to determine from U. S. copyright renewal entries, these are public domain stories. Thanks goes to Morgan Holmes for pointing several Amazing Stories tales to me; fortunately, a run of this particular serial is available on microfilm at one of my local universities. It appears that a number of early 1920s-1930s adventure pulp magazines may have contained this sort of story, so please keep an eye out. I'd very much appreciate hearing from anyone who can provide photocopies or scans of similar cryptofiction. I know of one university library in Virginia and another in northern Ohio with special collections in early pulp fiction; if you have access to these and would be willing to visit, please drop me a line.

Enjoy.

Chad Arment

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De Profundis

H. de Vere Stacpoole

I.

The Vladivostock-Nagasaki cable was broken.

The Vladivostock-Nagasaki cable leaves Peter the Great Bay in six thousand feet of water and crosses the great ten-thousand-foot depth south of latitude 42° N.

The floor of the sea of Japan south of latitude 42° N. forms a vast saucer three hundred miles broad by four hundred miles long, or roughly, from the north of Matsu Shima to the latitude of Possiet Bay, the most southerly bay in Siberian territory.

It was at Hong Kong, where she was lying for repairs, that the *President Girling*, of the Franco-Danish Cable Company, received news of the break with orders to mend it. She was a fifteen-hundred-ton boat, new built from the yards of Stefansson and Meyerling, with geared turbine engines and everything about her of the latest from the last thing in sea valves to the last thing in grapnels — Breim's patent hold-fast all-steel grapnel, the invention of the chief cable engineer of the *President Girling*.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning when the message came on board, and Grondaal, the master of the ship, received it just as he was stepping on deck from the saloon companion-way. He came forward at once to find Breim, the chief cable engineer, who was busy over some job in the bows.

Forward of the bridge lay the electric testing room and forward of that the picking-up gear, consisting of a great drum round which the grapnel rope was wound like the line on a salmon reel, and the engine that rotated the drum. Red-painted buoys showed bright in the sunlight that flooded the deck, where coils of buoy rope were being overhauled with a view to discovering defects or chafings. Breim, a big, bearded man, was superintending this business when Captain Grondaal came along to him, bearing in his hand the cablegram just arrived from the head office of the company in Copenhagen.

"We'll have to put out to-night," said Grondaal. "Lucky the stores are all aboard."

Breim took the cablegram and read it over slowly. It gave the position of the

break as ascertained by the electricians at Nagasaki; that is to say, the position as regards the length of the cable; the hydrographer of the *President Girling* would work out the sea position to within a mile.

"That's a good bit north of the great dip," said Breim. "Rotten bad coral bottom too, and fifteen hundred fathoms if it's a metre."

"There or thereabouts," said Grondaal. "You have everything ready?"

"Ay, ay," replied Breim. "I have everything ready."

They were men who did not waste words. Grondaal stood for a moment watching an incoming ship taking up her moorings, then he went aft to the electric testing room to warn the electricians, and Breim turned and went on directing Steffansson, the foreman of the cable hands.

Steffansson was a gigantic, white-haired man, an Icelander with fifty years of sea experience in the cod fisheries and cable service. He had worked for the Larssen Company of Copenhagen and for the Franco-Danish Company with whom he was now employed. He had captained a boat in the Icelandic fishing fleet and had put in a season at the Alaska canneries. One might say that he had always been a fisherman, for cable mending is three-fourths of cable work and nine-tenths of cable mending is fisherman's work.

Steffansson was the right hand of Breim, and the right hand of Steffansson was Andersen, the Dane who superintended the engine of the picking-up gear.

These three men formed a corporate body, one might say that they were the three parts of an intricate mechanism. In picking up a broken cable, when the great drum of the picking-up gear was rotating, Breim on the bow balks, Steffansson at the drum and Andersen with his hand on the lever of the engine, controlled the whole business just as the cells of a nervous ganglion control the most complicated muscular movements. A sign, a word, almost a thought of Breim's caught instantaneously by his assistants, was transmuted into tons of energy; the geared turbines of the main engines were under their control no less than the helm and the engine of the picking-up gear; a word from Steffansson to Grondaal on the bridge would cast the ship back or forward, head her to port or starboard, a sign to Andersen would rotate the great drum on which the grapnel rope was wound, paying out or hauling in.

They played with the cable once it was hooked, as a juggler plays with a ball, or a salmon-fisher with a salmon.

Breim, a well-to-do man with an instinct for sport, inherited from an English ancestor, often in his own mind compared the great picking-up drum to the reel on a fishing-rod. In principle it was, in fact, just the same. You could let out line or pull in, brake or release, and the engine worked by Andersen was better than any patent multiplier for hauling in the slack. The only difference was the size, a hook weighing a couple of hundred-weight instead of a few grains, and a wire-wove rope with a breaking strain of twenty tons instead of a twenty-thread line that a boy might snap.

Breim could have retired by this from the cable industry, and would have done so, no doubt, but for the element of sport in the business. He had caught shark with rod and line and he had once played a three-hundred-pound tuna for an hour and fifteen minutes before bringing it to gaff, but had you asked him which was the better sport, shark or cable, and had he truthfully replied, "cable" would have been the word.

The last of the men on shore leave were back by five in the afternoon, and as sunset was turning the sky behind China into the semblance of a vast stained-glass window, the *President Girling* unbuoyed.

Showing her stern to the rose-gold light of the west she slipped away from the anchorage, making less fuss over the business of departure than a trading junk. Then heading nor'-nor'-east, she passed, dissolving like a shadow in the twilight of the sea.

II

She passed the Pescadores in a rose and pearly dawn, and, pushing on up the Tung Hai Sea, entered the Sea of Japan by way of the Korea channel. From here it was a straight run to the spot against a head wind and a heavy sea.

The Sea of Japan is full of trickery. Nothing good could come from Sakhalin and the Kuriles, and a good deal of Sea of Japan weather comes from there, the great plains of Manchuria send their contingents of winds and storms, and Japan itself, though a bar to the Pacific swell, does not turn back hurricanes.

Grondaal knew this sea and its ways, and the heavy weather did not worry him. It is impossible to work cable in rough water, and the *President Girling* had often been held up for weeks on a job owing to the state of the sea; all the same the skipper was

cheerful, prophesying that all this smother was the tail end of trouble, not the beginning of it, and he was right, for at daybreak on the morning that they reached the spot, the Sea of Japan lay flat as the table of a sapphire to the hard-cut horizon, flat as a dead calm can ever make the sea, from the skyline to the vague blue of the awful depths beneath the keel.

Even before sunrise, the ship was astir. With the first touch of light on the yellow funnel and the bridge canvas, the vibration of the propellers ceased. Breim on the after gratings was superintending the working of the Kelvin sounder that was paying out its lead from a bobbin carrying three miles of piano wire, whilst Steffansson stood beside him marking the depth.

Then the sewing-machine clatter of the sounder hauling in the lead filled the air.

The lead gave a depth of a mile and a quarter, and the tallow on it told that the bottom was rocky.

Then Breim went forward, and the work of putting out the first mark buoy was put in hand.

The buoy, with a mushroom anchor and over a mile and a quarter of rope, was dropped. Then the ship put away a mile to the east and dropped the second buoy. Both buoys carried lighted lamps in case of work not being over at dark.

Somewhere between these two buoys the cable would be found.

Breim had now taken command of the ship; standing on the bow balks, he gave his orders whilst the grapnel — Breim's patent all-steel, never-let-go grapnel — was bent on to the grapnel rope. This rope, with a nominal breaking strain of twenty tons, passed, after leaving the drum, under a dynamometer that registered every strain put upon it; it left the ship over a wheel in the bows between the knight-heads, just where in ordinary ships the bowsprit comes in.

When the clanking drum had ceased its revolutions and the grapnel had touched bottom, Breim raised his hand, the engine-room telegraph rang and the *President Girling*, going dead slow, began to make back along the course to the first mark buoy.

The grapnel, dragging along the sea floor in search of the cable, clutched at everything in its path, rock or coral, and every strain put upon it was registered on the great clock face of the dynamometer by the jumping indicator, which had a permanent

point at two tons, that being the weight of the rope as weighed in sea water. It was now eight o'clock, and Grondaal, with the electricians and first officer, went down to breakfast, leaving Breim alone in his glory on the bow balks, and the third officer in charge of the bridge.

The saloon was a cheerful place, large, well decorated, a long table, capable of seating twenty, running down the middle. It was especially cheerful this morning, lit by the blazing sunlight, and Grondaal, at the head of the table, was in more than ordinary good spirits. He had prophesied good weather, and the brightness outside pleased him almost as much as though he had made it. They talked as they ate. Not a word about the sea. Anything but the sea. They talked of the new music-hall at Copenhagen, and the man who had built it and was likely to lose money over it; they talked of Jan Gudmundson's wife — Gudmundson was a past captain in the service, and how she spent his money and kept him in order so that he could not enter a beer hall without her apparition at the door waiting to lead him home. And then somehow— perhaps it was Jan Gudmundson's wife that suggested the subject — grapnels came on the *tapis*, and then, for a wonder and once in a way, a sea subject fell under discussion. Johansson, the first officer, started it.

"I've been twenty years at this business," said he, "and I've never yet seen the grapnel bring in a bit of wreck. Take the wrecks of a single year and multiply them by twenty and you will have what the last twenty years has laid on the sea floor. It ought to be paved with wrecks. Well, if they're there why don't they show up on the grapnel — give up a bit of themselves, eh?"

Grondaal went into a long argument to prove that a grapnel might go a dozen times over a wreck without detaching a plank or spar, and another to demonstrate that if it did it would be a hundred to one against it bringing its prey to the surface.

Hardmuth, the second electrician, a flaxen-bearded individual, a man with a round, innocent face and the clear, truthful eyes of a child, who had been listening to Grondaal with marked attention, now spoke up.

"I don't know anything about wrecks," said he, "but some years ago I saw the grapnel bring up something stranger than ship wreckage; it brought up a wheel."

"Steering?" asked Grondaal.

"No, the wheel of a vehicle, made of bronze."

"And where was that brought up, may I ask?"

"In the Red Sea."

Hardmuth was the ship's liar as well as second electrician; later on that day he was to have the fact borne in on him that Truth can be sometimes more fantastic than Invention.

III

The Nagasaki end of the cable was caught and buoyed by two o'clock that afternoon. At two-fifteen the hunt began for the Vladivostock end.

The weather had changed. With a steady barometer the temperature had risen, a damp, muggy blanket of heat had unrolled itself from the Manchurian plains and spread itself across the Sea of Japan. The line of the horizon had vanished in haze, the sun, with scarcely any diminution of brilliancy, had lost its sharpness, and the wind was as dead as though it had never been.

Breim, on the bow balks, was conducting operations with his coat off. Though everything was going splendidly he was out of temper on account of the heat, he was also anxious with the anxiety of a man who sees the possibility of pulling off a big *coup*. If they could only bring the Vladivostock end on board by, say, five o'clock, the whole job might be finished that day, and that would be a tremendous feather in the cap of Breim.

The grapnel had been lowered and the first grapple was half through when the pointer of the dynamometer, that had been indicating a strain of two tons and a quarter, rose suddenly with a flick to eight tons, held there for a moment and fell again to six.

Then it dashed up to ten tons, held there for five seconds or so, rose to fifteen and fell to seven, then rose to twelve and sank to five.

Steffansson, who rarely spoke, standing by the drum and watching these evolutions of the pointer, suddenly called out to Breim, asking him what was the matter.

Cable, once hooked, gives a slow and steady rise of strain, rock or weed tangling the grapnel may cause a sudden jump of the pointer, but when the grapnel frees itself the pointer always falls to normal.

It might have been supposed that the grapnel, dragging along the sea floor, was meeting and overcoming several obstacles in succession, but for the fact that the recessions were not to normal, but to six, seven and five tons successively.

"What's up?" cried Steffansson.

Breim made no reply. He had stopped the main engines and then put them to a few revolutions astern, taking all way off the ship. Then he bent and put his ear to the taut grapnel rope. He could always tell by the tune of the rope whether rock or cable was engaged by the grapnel. What he heard now was a new thing. A deep booming sound, like the beating of a gigantic heart at a vast distance. The rope might have been a stethoscope giving a vague hint of the beating heart of the world.

Breim straightened himself.

"Fish!" cried he to Steffansson. "We're on to a fish—look out."

"Fish!" cried Steffansson; "why, it's over a mile down!"

Breim did not seem to hear him.

"How much more rope is on the drum?" he cried.

"Not more than half a mile."

"Tell Johanssen to roust out another two mile of rope and bend it on," cried Breim. "Stand by at the engine, Andersen. Steffansson, see that the drum rope runs clear, no hitches."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the grapnel rope went forward, making an acute angle with the water and showing a surging ripple. The mammoth fish, or whatever it was below, had started ahead.

"Pay out slowly," shouted Breim to Andersen, then, as the leisurely clank of the drum filled the air, he reached the deck in two jumps, crossed it, and ran up the bridge ladder to the bridge.

From here he had a view of the rope ahead and of the dynamometer. Here he had the main engines under immediate control, and from here he could give his orders to Andersen at the picking-up engine. Here he had as complete dominance of the mechanism and the situation as a tuna fisherman with his rod and reel.

But it was not sport he was after in these first moments, though the sportsman in him was furiously alive; it was rope-saving, primarily, for he knew that if the thing below was not played it would break; the rope, and a mile and a half of wire-wove grapnel rope, to say nothing of the grapnel, costs money.

Eased by the slow paying out of the drum, the strain on the rope was only fifteen tons, and this despite the fact that had you looked over the side you would have seen a ripple at the ship's stern. The ship was being towed, just as the tuna-launch is towed when the tuna is making its rush, held by taut line and bending rod. Only the rush of this mile-deep monster was slower in proportion to size.

Whatever the thing was that had taken the grapnel for hook, two facts stood out concerning it. It was vast in size and sluggish for its size.

These two facts, when he recognized them together, gave Breim what he afterwards described as a "turn of the heart."

IV

Just then Grondaal came on the bridge. The thing that was happening had caused no commotion on the ship. No one knew of it but the cable men on duty. Grondaal was as ignorant as the others, and when he stepped on the bridge it surprised him to find Breim there. Then he saw the grapnel rope strutting out into the water, and for a second he was under the impression that they were going astern, an impression destroyed at once by the fact that there was no vibration of the propellers, also by the fact that the drum was paying out rope.

"Why, what's all this?" asked the astonished Grondaal.

"We're under tow," said Breim.

"Tow! What's on the grapnel?"

"The Lord He knows," replied the other, "something alive down there. The great-grandfather of all whales — seems to me. Hi, there, Steffansson, slower with the drum; put more strain on him."

Steffansson obeyed, braking the drum, and the indicator of the dynamometer steadily rose to eighteen tons, to nineteen tons, to nineteen and a half.

“Less strain,” cried Breim. The drum revolved slightly quicker, and the indicator stole down to seventeen tons.

“Keep it so,” cried Breim.

“Well, I’m d—d!” said Grondaal.

Breim wiped his forehead with his shirt-sleeve.

“I’m feeling that way myself,” said he; “there’s nothing to be done but stick on or cut, and cut’s impossible with all that rope out.”

“Maybe it’ll disentangle,” said the other; “if it’s a whale it will have got the grapnel in the jaws, and then turn like a log and get bound up in the rope—”

“It’s no whale,” said Breim; “what I’m afraid of most is a sudden jerk, and then that rope will go like a thread; you know these wire-wove ropes and how they mushroom out like an umbrella when broken and fly back and cut everything to pieces. Lord! Look at that fool of a cable hand, climbing on to the bow balks—get off there, get clear away from the rope; what d’you think you’re doing there, anyhow; get aft behind the drum.”

Grondaal looked at the compass card.

“We’re being taken to Vladivostock,” said he. “We’ll get there, maybe, at this rate, by Christmas; cold place that time of year — have you got a fur coat?”

Breim bristled.

“Well, order out the axes to cut,” said he; “you’re master of the ship.”

“Not I,” said Grondaal. “The chief cable engineer is master while cable work’s on. Do as you like.”

“Then I’ll stick to him till I bring him aboard or alongside,” replied the other; “that I swear by the great hat of Krivikur. My grapnel’s hooked him, and Breim’s at the other end of the rope. I’ll teach the lousy brute — cut! — I’d sooner cut my hand off.”

He was working himself up into a rage. The heat, the delay, Grondaal’s jest, and the knowledge that the thing below had calm command of the situation, condemning

him either to lose rope by cutting, or time by following, all conspired to raise his temper; his voice rose, and he was bringing his palm down with a bang on the bridge-rail when, suddenly, the dynamometer fell with a flick to two tons.

"He's off," said Grondaal.

Breim shouted to Andersen, ordering him to reel in. The engine throbbed, the drum reversed its motion and the rope came in slack and dripping, only for a moment, and then the dynamometer drove up steadily to fourteen tons, whilst the head of the ship slightly altered its pointing and the needle of the compass card fluttered.

"He's altered his course — that's all," said Grondaal. "He's making now for Possiet Bay, seems to me. Can't you liven him up?"

Breim made no reply for a moment. He was thinking hard.

The nominal breaking strain of the rope was twenty tons, but he knew it would stand a strain much above that. The worst that could happen would be the breaking of the rope. He determined on more active measures.

Leaning over the bridge-rail he gave orders for all hands to clear back into the alley-ways; all, that is to say, with the exception of Steffansson and Andersen. He told Steffansson to keep as much as possible to the rear of the drum. Andersen would have to take his chance and trust to the God of Fishermen.

He ordered the paying out of the rope to cease. The strain rose instantly to nineteen tons. He ordered Andersen at the engine to reverse the drum two revolutions. The jigger of the dynamometer dashed up to twenty tons. The thing did not register above twenty tons, what the real strain was heaven only knows. Breim put it down at twenty-five. He gave the drum another revolution.

Instead of the gun-like report of a burst rope, which he half expected, came the "flick" of the dynamometer; the pointer had fallen to normal, and then risen to two tons.

One of two things had happened: the increased strain had torn the grapnel free, or the creature below had risen owing to the strain.

"Pick up!" cried Breim.

The drum roared, and the slack came in, fathom after rushing fathom.

"You've freed the grapnel," said Grondaal.

"'Pears so," said Breim. He was disappointed. The fisherman had been roused to full life in him. Of all the fishermen in the world it had been given to him alone to fight Leviathan, using a fifteen-hundred-ton ship for a rod and a forty-foot grapnel drum for a reel, and now the fish was off.

Then suddenly his heart jumped in him.

The slack, incoming rope tautened with a snap, the sea-water on it shot out in a rainbow shower of spray; Andersen, not waiting for orders, shut off the engine, and Steffansson on his own initiative kept the drum brake released. The rope, instead of breaking, rushed out.

Breim knew what was happening below. Over two hundred fathoms of rope had come in, that meant that the thing below had risen two hundred fathoms, and it was now either running at that depth or sinking.

He let the rope run for a few seconds and then, just as the fisherman puts the brake on the line, he put the brake on the drum. Instead of breaking the rope made a more acute angle with the sea, and a swirl of water stood around it. The thing had not sunk, it was running, maybe making four knots; the ship was making the same speed, less the fraction to be deducted by the very gradual paying out of rope, for the drum, by Breim's orders, was now less controlled by the brake.

Breim was working now entirely regardless of the dynamometer, working altogether by his fisherman sense. It was inspiration pure and simple.

He jockeyed the thing below with lifting strains and alternate releases, so that at the end of an hour he judged it to be only half a mile from the surface.

The thing that filled him with wonder, and at the same time with hope, was the slow movement of the creature as compared with its undoubted bulk. If its velocity had borne any proportion to its size, the rope would have snapped in the very first minute of the struggle.

By this time the whole ship was alive to what was going on. The officers and electricians were on the bridge and the crew crowded in the alley-ways. Hardmuth had rushed below for his camera to photograph the result, whenever it was attained. As for Breim, he was unconscious of the audience about him. The bridge might have

been empty for all he knew or cared; his whole soul and mind were concentrated on the struggle and on that alone.

And yet it scarcely seemed a struggle, so destitute was the business of fuss or fury, just a long, dragging strain, the drum rotating, now to pick up a bit of slack, paying out now gradually, now ceasing to rotate.

Something had gone wrong with the dynamometer; unused to such strains and such usage, it had stuck, the pointer fixed at the maximum strain, even when slack was being hauled in.

V.

Half an hour before sunset, Breim had brought his prey to within a quarter of a mile of the surface, at least so he judged.

There was more than a mile of rope out, and he estimated that the thing was three-quarters of a mile from the ship.

His calculations took into consideration the depth of the sea just there, all the slack he had hauled in, all the rope he had paid out, the angle of the rope with the sea surface — or, in other words, the length of the rope between the point where it left the bow and the point where it entered the water. The thing was only a quarter of a mile from the surface, but the fact remained that it wanted, now, only half an hour to sunset. The moon would not rise till after dark. It would be the pity of the world if the great Unseen were to break from the sea under cover of darkness. It might also be dangerous.

Hardmuth, with his camera ready, was even more excited on this point than Breim. Hardmuth, the ship's liar and jester, was an earnest photographer — you know what that means.

The lower limb of the sun was just touching the sea line when the great event occurred.

Due east of the ship, and a mile away on the starboard bow, the water broke.

"Look out?" cried Breim.

The words came from him unconsciously. A horn was rising from the sea, a dark column, pointed, living, but eyeless as a worm. It rose, steadily driven up by some vast force acting from below, and stood triumphant, like the horn of Eblis, a column a hundred feet high, bulbous at the base, black as ebony, and creamed about by the sea.

The sea seemed to boil at its base, and the rays of the setting sun shone full upon the prodigy, lighting that upon which no sun had ever shone before.

The effect on the minds of the gazers might have been gauged by the utter silence that fell on the ship.

Afterwards, and putting their experiences together, the ship's company found that the dominant, heart-freezing idea, common to every mind, had to do neither with the size nor the monstrous appearance of the thing, but with the fact that it was living.

There were some who fancied it half a mile high, others who saw it in more true proportion, but there was not one who escaped the bending of the mind produced by the thought, "It is alive!" — a thought made more insistent by the sluggishness of its manner of appearance and by its calm immobility when revealed.

The fo'c'sle hands felt that, but to the keen intelligence of Breim all sorts of other considerations came crowding.

He had literally raised the dead, for what he saw was something belonging to a world long extinct, and, though it was living in the biological sense, it was extinct in the historical. It was as though some magician had reinformed with life a man of the stone age or a labyrinthodon.

Again, these vast and slow movements, this present immobility, were parts of its death struggle. The pressures under which it had been born and under which it had lived were part of the conditions of its life. They had been removed and it must die. Nay, it must now be dying.

A sound suddenly broke the stillness of the bridge, it was the click of Hardmuth's camera. The photographer had been the first to release himself from the spell.

On the sound, and as though it had been a signal, the column inclined slightly and sank, like a sword slowly withdrawn.

The last rays of sunset showed a troubled sea just there, and then, in the dusk and the haze that followed the closing of the hot day, things began to occur. Sounds came over the sea, sounds like the washing of water on a distant beach, and now and again a gurgle, like the gurgle of a vast, submerging bottle.

But the men on board the *President Girling* had other things to attend to now.

Breim's voice came bellowing from the bridge. The grapnel rope was slack. The thing had evidently freed itself from the grapnel, even before rising from the sea, and now the roar of the rotating drum hauling in the slack shut out all other sounds from over there, but it could not shut out the odour that filled the windless air, a smell of beach and ooze with a tang in it recalling tropical river mud.

It took half an hour to get the rope in; the grapnel, when it came, was hauled under the light of an arc lamp and carefully examined. It showed nothing, nothing with the exception of what seemed a tag of black leather tangled at the base of one of the prongs. The rope connection was slightly chafed.

As Breim was examining it a report like a boom of thunder came over the sea, and away over there in the half-darkness something white showed like a falling sheet of foam.

Grondaal on the bridge shouted to Breim.

"It's time to get out of here," cried he.

He had rung on the engines, and the ship, turning like a frightened thing, began to vibrate to the propellers going full speed. She had covered a mile on her new course when the sound came again, fainter this time.

They passed the light of the buoy marking the Nagasaki end of the cable, and left it spilling its amber on the water far astern.

Then, as speed was reduced, once again came the sound, faint and for the last time.

There were men on board who listened all night and watched under the light of the risen moon, but the sea had resumed its own, and, steaming close to the spot of the occurrence next morning, there was nothing to be seen, nothing but the sea surface oiling under the gentle swell away to the haze that proclaimed the birth of another hot day.

At eleven o'clock Hardmuth came out of the dark room, where he had been developing his marvellous plate.

He was as white as the foam that the propellers were kicking behind them.

He sat down on a life-buoy locker as though to take breath, and Breim, who was near by, ran to him, took the plate, and examined it, holding it up to the light.

It was the picture of a garden party at Copenhagen.

The wretched Hardmuth, disdaining kodaks and using his super-perfect single-plate camera, had employed a used plate.

It was said of Hardmuth that he never smiled or jested again—at least on board of the *President Girling*.

Hunting of the Soko

Phil Robinson

Lying on my back one terribly hot day under the great tamarind that shades the temple of Saravan, in Borneo, I began to think naturally of iced drinks, and from them my mind wandered to icebergs, and from icebergs to Polar bears.

Polar bears! At the recollection of these animals I sat bolt upright, for though I had shot over nearly all the world, and accumulated a perfect museum of trophies, I had never till this moment thought of Greenland, nor of Polar bears! Before this I had begun to think I had exhausted Nature. From the false elk of Ceylon to the true one of Canada, the rhinoceros of Assam to the coyote of Patagonia, the panther of Central India to the jaguars of the Amazon, I had seen everything in its own home, and shot it there. And for birds, I had hunted a so-called moa at Little Farm in New Zealand, the bustard in the Mahratta country, dropped geese into nearly every river of America, Europe, and Asia, and flushed almost all the glorious tribe of game birds, from the capercailzie of Norway to the quail of Sicily. My museum, however, wanted yet another skin — the Polar bear! I cannot say the prospect pleased me. I would much rather have sent my compliments to the Polar bear and asked it to come comfortably into some warm climate to be shot; but regretting was useless, so I gave the order of the day — the North Pole.

In London, however, I heard of Stanley's successful search for Livingstone, and then it was that the sense of my utter nothingness came over me. All Africa was unshot! It is true I had once gone from Bombay to Zanzibar, Dr. Kirke helping me on my way, and, thanks to Mackinnon's agents (who were busy prospecting a road into the interior) had bagged my hippopotamus, and enjoyed many a pleasant stalk after the fine antelope of the Bagomoyo plains. But the Dark Continent itself, with its cloud-like herds of hartebest and springbok, its droves of wind-footed gnu, its zebras, ostriches and lions, was still a virgin ground for me. But more than all these — more than ostrich, gnu, or zebra, more than hippopotamus or lion — was that mystery of the primeval forest, the Soko. What was the Soko? Certainly not the gorilla, nor the chimpanzee, nor yet the ourang-outang. Was it a new boast altogether, this man-like thing, that shakes the forest at the sources of the Congo with its awful voice — that desolates the villages of the jungle tribes of Uregga, carries off the women captive, and meets their cannibal lords in fair fight? With Soko on the brain it may be easily imagined that the Polar bear was forgotten, and I lost no time in altering my arrangements to suit my altered plans. My snow-shoes were countermanded and

solar helmets laid in: fur gloves and socks were exchanged for leather gaiters and canvas suits.

In a month I was ready, and in another two months had started from Zanzibar with a following of eighteen men. During my voyage I had carefully read the travels of Grant, Speke, Burton, Livingstone, Cameron, Schweinfurth, and Stanley, and in all had been struck by the losses suffered from fatigue on the march. With large expeditions it was of course necessary for most to go on foot, but with my pygmy cortège I could afford to let them ride. Good strong donkeys were cheap at Zanzibar, and I bought a baker's dozen of them, reserving three of the best for myself, and allotting ten among my men, to relieve them either of their burdens or the fatigue of walking, according to any fair arrangements — fair to the donkeys and to themselves — they chose to make among themselves. The result was no sickness, little fatigue, and constant good spirits. My goods consisted of my own personal effects, all on one donkey; my medicine-chest, etc., on another; fifteen men-loads of beads, wire, and cloth, for making friends with the natives and purchasing provisions; and three loads of ammunition. I was lucky in the time of my start, for Mirambo, "the terror of Africa," who had been scouring the centre of the continent for the past year, had just concluded peace with the Arabs, his enemies, and had moreover ordered every one also to keep the peace. The result to me was that each village was as harmless as the next.

Gaily enough, then, we strolled along, enjoying occasionally excellent sport, and wondering as we went where all the horrors and perils of African travel had gone. We had, it is true, our experience of them afterwards; but the ground has now become so stale, that I will pass over the interval of our journey from Zanzibar to Ujiji and thence to the river, and ask you to imagine us setting out for the forests that lie about the sources of the Livingstone in the district of Uregga, the Soko's home.

Nearly every traveller before me had spoken of the Soko, the man-beast of these primeval forests. Livingstone had a large store of legends and anecdotes about them, their intelligent cruelty and their fierce, though frugivorous, habits. Stanley constantly heard them. In one place he saw a Soko's platform in a tree, and in several villages found the skin, the teeth, and the skulls in possession of the people.

Wherever we went I was eager in my inquiries, but day after day slipped by, and still I neither heard the Soko alive nor saw any portion of one dead. But even without encountering the great simia, our journey in these nightshade forests was sufficiently eventful, for great panther-like creatures, very pale-skinned, prowled about in the glimmering shades; and from the trees we sometimes saw hanging pythons of tremendous girth. But the reptile and insect world was chiefly in the ascendant here,

and it was against such small persecutors as puff-adders, centipedes, poisonous spiders, and ants, that we had to guard ourselves. Travelling, however, owing to the dense shade, was not the misery that we had found it in the sun-smitten plains of Uturu, or the hideous ocean of scrub-jungle that stretches from Suna to Mgongo-Zembo. The trees, nearly all of three or four species of bombax, mvule, and aldrendon, were of stupendous size and impossible altitude, but growing so close together their crowns were tightly interwoven overhead, and sometimes not a hundred yards in a whole day's march was open to the sky. Moreover, in the hot-house air under this canopy had sprung up with incredible luxuriance every species of tree-fern, rattan and creeping palm known, I should think, to the tropics, and amongst themselves in a stratum, often thirty feet below the upper roof of tree-foliage, had closely intermeshed their fronds and tendrils, so that we marched often in an oven atmosphere, but protected alike from the killing sun and flooding rain by double awnings of impenetrable leafage. The ground itself was bare of vegetation, except where, here and there, monster fungi clustered, like a condemned invoice of umbrellas and parasols, round some fallen giant of the forest, or where, in a screen of blossom, wonderful air-plants filled up great spaces from tree-trunk to tree-trunk.

At intervals we crossed rivulets of crystal water, icy cold, finding their way as best they might from hollow to hollow over the centuries' layers of fallen leaves, and along their courses grew in rich profusion masses of a broad-leafed sedge, that afforded the panther safe covert and easy couch; and sometimes, on approaching one of these rills, we would see a ghostly herd of deer flit away through the twilight shade. And thus it happened that one evening I was lying on my rug half asleep, with the pleasant deep-sea gloom about me and a deathly stillness reigning over this world of trees, and wondering whether that was or was not a monkey perched high up among the palm fronds, when out from the sedges by a runnel there paced before me a panther of unusual size. From his gait I saw that it had a victim in view, and turning my head was horrified to see that it was one of my own men, who was busy about something at the foot of a tree.

I jumped up with a shout, and the panther, startled by the sudden sound, plunged back in three great leaps into the sedges from which it had emerged. All my men jumped to their feet, and one of them, in his terror at the proximity of the beast of prey, turned and fled away into the depth of the forest. I watched his retreating figure as far as the eye could follow it in that light, and laughing at his panic, went over to where my ass was tied, intending to stroll down for a shot at the panther. And while I was idly getting ready, the sound of excited conversation among my men attracted me, and I asked them what was the matter. There was a laugh, and then one of them, the most sensible, *English*-minded African I ever met, stepped forward.

“We do not know, master,” said he, “which of us it was that ran away just now. We are all here.”

The full significance of his words did not strike me at first, and I laughed too. “Oh, count yourselves,” I said, “and you will soon find out.”

“But we *have* counted, master,” replied the man, “and all eighteen are here.”

His meaning began to dawn on me. I felt a queer feeling creep over me.

“*All* here!” I ejaculated. “Muster the men.”

And mustered they were — and to my astonishment, and even horror, I found the man was speaking the truth. Every man of my force was in his place.

Then who was the man that had run away, when all the party started up from their sleep? *A ghost?* I looked round into the deepening gloom. All my men were standing together, looking rather frightened. Around us stretched the eternal forest. *A ghost!* And then on a sudden the thought flashed across me — I had seen the Soko.

I had seen the Soko! and seeing it had mistaken it for a human being! And while I was still loading my cartridge-belt, Shumari, my gun-boy, had crept up to my side, with my express in one hand and heavy elephant rifle in the other; but on his face there was a strange, concerned expression, and in the tone of his voice an uneasy tremor, with which something in my own feelings sympathized.

“Is the master going to hunt the wild man?” asked the lad.

“The Soko? Yes, I want its skin,” I replied.

“But the wild man cried out, *‘Ai! ma-ma’* [‘Oh! mother, mother ‘] as it ran away, and —”

“Here is the wild man’s stick,” broke in Mabruki, the Zanzibari; and as he spoke he held out towards me a long staff, seven feet in length. All the blood in my body ran cold at the sight of it. It was a mere length of rattan, without ferule or knot, but at the upper end the bark had been torn down from joint to joint in parallel strips, *to give the holder a firmer grip* than one could have had on smooth cane, and just below the second joint the stumps of the corresponding shoots on two sides had been left sticking out *for the hand to rest on.*

How can I describe the throng of hideous thoughts that whirled through my brain on the instant that I recognized these efforts of reason in the animal that I was now going to hunt to the death? But swift as were my thoughts, Mabruki had thought them out before me, and had come to a conclusion. “The *mshenshi mtato* [pagan ape] had stolen this stick from some village,” said he; “see,” and he pointed to the smoothed offshoots, “they have stained them with the mvule juice.”

The instant relief I felt at this happy solution of the dreadful mystery was expressed by me in a shout of joy; so sudden and so real that, without knowing why, my men shouted too, and with such a will that the monkeys that had been gravely pondering over our preparations for the evening meal were startled out of their self-respect and off their perches, and plunged precipitately into a tangle of lianes. My spirits had returned, and with as light a heart as ever I had, I ambled off in the direction the Soko had taken.

But soon the voices of the camp had died away behind me, and there had grown up between me and it the wall of mist that in this sunless forest region makes every mile as secret from the next as if you were in the highest ether — surely, the most secret of all places — or in the lowest sea. And over the soft, rich vegetable mould the ass’s feet went noiseless as an owl’s wing upon the air; and, except for the rhythmical jingling of his ass’s harness, Shumari’s presence might never have been suspected. And then in this cathedral solitude — with cloistered tree-trunks reaching away at every point of view into long vistas closed in gray mist; overhead, hanging like tattered tapestry, great lengths and rags of moss-growths, strange textures of fungus and parasite, hanging plumb down in endless points, all as motionless as possible; without a breath of life stirring about me — bird, beast, or insect — the same horrid thoughts took possession of me again, and I began to recall the gestures of the wild thing which, when I startled the panther, had fled away into the forest depths.

It had stood upright amongst the upright men, and turning to run had stooped, but only so much as a man might do when running with all his speed. In the gait there was a one-sided swing, just as some great man-ape — gorilla or chimpanzee — might have when, as travellers tell us, they help themselves along on the knuckles of the long fore-arm, the body swaying down to the side on which the hand touches the ground at each stride. In one hand was a small branch of some leafy shrub, far I distinctly remembered having seen it as it began to run. The speed must have been great, for it was very soon out of sight; but there was no appearance of rapidity in the movement, — like the wolf’s slow-looking gallop, that no horse can overtake, and that soon tires out the fleetest hound. As it began to run it had made a jabbering

sound, — an inarticulate expression of simple human fear I had thought it to be; but now, pondering over it, I began to wonder that I could have mistaken that swiftly retreating figure for human.

It is true that I did not want to think of it as human, and perhaps my wishes may have colored my retrospect; at any rate, whatever the process, I found myself, after a while, laughing at myself for having turned sick at heart when the suspicion came across me that perhaps the Soko of the forests of Uregga, the feast-day dish of the jungle tribes, might be a human being. The long, lolloping gait, the jabbering, should alone have dispelled the terror. It is true that my men heard it say, “Oh, ma-ma!” as it started up to run by them. But in half the languages of the world, mama is a synonym for “mother,” and it follows, therefore, that it is not a word at all, but simply the phonetic rendering of the first bleating, babbling articulation of babyhood, — an animal noise uttered as articulately by young sheep and young goats as by young men and women. The staff, too, was of the common type in these districts, and had been picked up, no doubt, by the Soko in some twilight prowling round a grain store, or perhaps gained in fair fight from some villager whom it had surprised, solitary and defenceless. And then my thoughts ran on to all I had read or heard of the Soko, of its societies for mutual defence or food-supply, and the comparative amiability of such communities, — of the solitary outlawed Soko, the vindictive, lawless bandit of the trees, who wanders about round the habitations of men, lying in wait for the women and the children, robbing the granaries and orchards, and stealing, for the simple larceny’s sake, household chattels, of the use of which it is ignorant. Shumari, a hunter born and bred, was full of Soko lore; the skin, he said, was covered, except on the throat, hands, and feet, with a short, harsh hair of a dark color, and tipped in the older individuals with gray; these also had long growths of hair on the head, their cheeks and lips. It had no tail.

“Standing up,” said he, “it is as tall as I am [he was only five feet one inch], and its eyes are together in the front of its face, so that it looks at you straight. It eats sitting up, and when tired leans its back against a tree, putting its hands behind its head. Three men of my village came upon one asleep in this way one day, and so quietly that before it awoke two of them had speared it. It started up and threw back its head to give a loud cry of pain, and then leaning its elbow against the tree, it bent its head down upon its arms, and so died, — leaning against the tree, with one arm supporting the head and the other pressed to its heart. There was a Soko village there, for they saw all their platforms in the trees, and the ground was heaped up in places with snail-shells and fruit-skins. But they did not see any more Sokos.... Another day I myself was out hunting with a party, and we found a dead Soko. I had thrown my spear at a tree-cat, and going to pick it up, saw close by a large heap of myombo

leaves. I turned some up with my spear, and found a dead Soko underneath.... When a Soko catches a man it holds him, and makes faces at him, and jabbers; sometimes it lets him go without doing him any harm, but generally it bites off all his fingers one by one, spitting them out as it bites them off, and his nose and ears and toes as well, and ends up by strangling him with its fingers or beating him to death with a branch. Women and children are never seen again, so I suppose the Sokos eat them. They have no spears or knives, and they do not use anything that men use, except that they walk with sticks, knocking down fruit with them, and that they drink water out of their hands. Their front teeth are very sharp, and at each side is one longer and sharper than the rest."

And so he went on chattering to me as we ambled through the dim shade in a stupid pursuit of an invisible thing. The stupidity of it dawned upon me at last, and I stopped, and without explaining the change to my companion, turned and rode homewards.

The twilight shadows of the day were now deepening into night, and we hurried on. The fireflies began to flicker along the sedge-grown rills and, high up among the leaf coronets of the elais palm, were clustering in a mazy dance. Passing a tangle of lianes, I heard an owl or some night bird hoot gently from the foliage, and as we went along the fowl seemed to keep pace with us, for the ventriloquist sound was always with us, fast though we rode; and first from one side and then from the other we heard the low-voiced complaining following. And the "eeriness" of the company grew upon me. There was no sound of wings or rustling of leaves; but for mile after mile the low *hoot, hoot,* of the thing that was following, sounded so close at hand that I kept on looking round. Shumari, like all savages — they approach animals very nearly in this — was intensely susceptible to the superstitious and uncanny, and long before the ghostliness of the persistent voice occurred to me, I had noticed that Shumari was keeping as close to me as possible. But at last, whether it was from constantly turning my head over my shoulder to see what was coming after us, or whether I was unconsciously infected by his nervousness, I got as fidgety as he, and, for the sake of human company, opened conversation.

"What bird makes that noise?" I asked.

Shumari did not reply, and I repeated the question.

And then in a voice, so absurd from its assumption of boldness that I laughed outright, he said, —

“No bird, master. It is a *muzimu* [spirit] that is following us. Let us go quicker.”

Here was a position! We had all the evening been hunting nothing, and now we were being hunted by nothing! The memory of Shumari’s voice made me laugh again, and just then catching sight of the twinkling camp fires in the far distance, I laughed at myself too. And, on a sudden, just as my laugh ceased, there came from the rattan brake past which we were riding a sound that was, and yet was not, the echo of my laugh. It sounded something like my laugh, but it was repeated twice, and the creature I rode, ass though it was, turned its head towards the brake. Shumari meanwhile had seen the camp fires, and his terror overpowering discipline, he gave one howl of horror and fled, his ass, seeing the fires too, falling into the humor with all his will, and carrying off his rider at full speed. My ass wanted to follow, but I pulled him up, and to make further trial of the hidden jester, shouted out in Swahili, “Who is there?”

The answer was as sudden as horrifying. For an instant the brake swayed to and fro, and then there came a crashing of branches as of some great beast forcing his way through them, and on a sudden, close behind me, burst out — the Soko!

Shumari had carried off my guns, and, except for the short knife in my belt, I was defenceless. And there before me in the flesh stood the creature I had gone out to hunt, but which for ever so many miles must have been hunting us. I had no leisure for moralizing or even for examination of the creature before me. It seemed about Shumari’s height, but was immensely broad at the shoulders, and in one hand it carried a fragment of a bough. Had it been simply man against man, I would have stood my ground — but was it? The dim light prevented my noting any details, and I had no inclination or time to scrutinize the features of the thing that now approached me. I saw the white teeth flashing, heard a deep-chested stuttering, inarticulate with rage, and flinging myself from the ass, which was trembling and rooted to the spot with fear, I ran as I had never run before in the direction of the camp.

The Soko must have stopped to attack the ass, for I heard a scuffle behind me as I started, but very soon the ass came tearing past me, and looking round I saw the Soko in pursuit. The heavy branch fortunately encumbered its progress, but it gained upon me. Close behind me I heard the thing jabbering and panting, and for an instant thought of standing at bay. I was running my hardest, but it seemed, just as in a nightmare, as if horror had partly paralyzed my limbs, and I were only creeping along. The horror of such pursuit was, I felt, culminating in sickness, and I thought I should swoon and fall. But just then I became aware of approaching lights, the camp fires seemed to be running to me. The Soko, however, was fast overtaking me, and I

struggled on, but it was of no use, and my feet tripping against the projecting root of an old mvule, I fell on my knees; but, rising again, I staggered against the tree, drew my knife, and waited for the attack. In an instant the Soko was up with me, and, dropping its bough, reached out its arms to seize me. I lunged at it with my knife, but the length of its arms baffled me, for before the point of my knife could find its body, the Soko's hands had grasped my shoulders, and with such astonishing force that it seemed as if my arms were being displaced in their sockets. The next moment a third hand seized hold of my, leg below the knee, and I was instantly jerked on to the ground. The fall partially stunned me, and then I felt a rough-haired body fall heavily upon me, and, groping their way to my throat, long fingers feeling about me. I struggled with the creature, but against its strength my hands were nerveless. The fingers had now found my throat; I felt the grasp tightening, and gave myself up to death. But on a sudden there was a confusion of voices — a flashing of bright lights before my eyes, and the weight was all at once raised from off me. In another minute I had recovered my consciousness, and found that my men, the gallant Mabruki at their head, had charged to my rescue with burning brands, and arrived only just in time to save my life.

And the Soko?

As I lay there, my faithful followers round me with their brands still flickering, the voice of the Soko came to us, but from which direction it was impossible to say, soft and mysterious as before, the same *hoot, hoot*, that had puzzled us on our homeward route.

My narrow escape from a horrible though somewhat absurd death was celebrated by my men with extravagant demonstrations of indignation against the Soko that had hunted me, and many respectful reproaches for my temerity. For myself, I was more eager than ever to capture or kill the formidable thing that had outwitted and outmatched me; and so having had my arms well rubbed with oil, I gave the order for a general muster next morning for a grand Soko hunt.

Now, close by our camp grew a great tree, from which hung down liane strands of every rope-thickness, and all round its roots had grown op a dense hedge of strong-spined cane. One of my men, sent up the tree to cut us off some of these natural ropes, reported that all round the tree, that is, between its trunk and the cane-hedge, there was a clear space, so that though, looking at it from the outside, it seemed as if the canes grew right up to the tree trunk, looking at it from above, there was seen to be really an open pathway, so to speak, surrounding the tree, broad enough for three men to walk abreast. I had often heard of similar cases of vegetable aversions, where, from some secret cause of plant prejudice, two shrubs, though growing together,

exercise this mutual repulsion, and never actually combine in growth. Meanwhile, however, the phenomenon was interesting to me for other reasons, for I saw at once what a convenient receptacle this natural well would make for the baggage we had to leave behind.

Leaving our effects therefore inside this brake, which we did by slinging the bales one after the other over an overhanging bough, and so dropping them into the open pathway, and removing from the neighborhood every trace of our recent encampment, we started westward with four days' provisions, ready cooked, on our backs. The method of march was in line, each man about a hundred yards from the next, and every second man on an ass, the riders carrying the usual ivory horns, without which no travellers in the Uregga forests ever move from home, and the notes of which, exactly like the cry of the American wood-marmot, keep the party in line. By this means we covered a mile, and being unencumbered, marched fast, scouring the wood before us at the rate of four miles an hour for three hours.

And what a wild, weird time it was, those three hours, marching with noiseless footfalls, looking constantly right and left and overhead. I could see the line of shadowy figures advancing on either side, not a sound along the whole line, except when the horns carried down in response to one another their thin, wailing notes, or when some palm fruit, over-ripe, dropped rustling down through the canopy of foliage above us. And yet the whole forest was instinct with life. If you set yourself to listen, there came to your ears, all day and night, a great monotone of sound humming through the misty shade, the aggregate voices of millions of insect things that had their being among the foliage or in the daylight that reigned in the outer world above those green clouds which made perpetual twilight for us who were passing underneath. Along the tree-roof streamed also troops of monkeys, and flocks of parrots and other birds; but in their passage overhead, we could not, through the dense vault of foliage, branch, and blossom, hear their voices, except as merged in the one great sound that filled all space, too large almost to be heard at all. In the midst, then, of this vast murmur of confused nature, we seemed to walk in absolute silence. The ear had grown so accustomed to it, that a sneeze was heard with a start, and the occasional knocking together of asses' hoofs made every head turn suddenly, and every rifle move to the shoulder.

At the end of the three hours' marching we came to a river, — perhaps that which Stanley, in his "Dark Continent," names the Asna, — flowing northwest, with a width here of only one hundred yards, — a deep, slow stream, crystal clear, flowing without a ripple or a murmur through the perpetual gloaming, between banks of soft, rich, black leaf-mould. We halted, and, after a rapid meal, re-formed in line,

and marching for two miles easterly up the river, made a left wheel; and in the same order, and at the same pace as we had advanced, we continued nearly two hours rather in a northerly direction, and then making a left wheel again, started off due west, crossing the tracks of our morning's march in our fourth mile, and reaching the Asna again in our tenth mile, — a total march of nearly thirty-two miles, of which, of course, each man had traversed only one half on foot. No cooking was allowed, and our collation was therefore soon despatched, and before I had lighted my pipe and curled myself up I saw that all the party were snug under their mosquito nets.

I had noticed, when reading travellers' books, that they always suffered severely from mosquitoes and other insects. I determined that *I* would not; so, before leaving Zanzibar, served out to every man twenty yards of net. These, in the daytime, were worn round the head as turbans, and at night spread upon sticks, and furnished each man a protection against these Macbeths of the sedge and brake. The men thoroughly understood their value, and before turning in for the night, always carefully examined their nets for stray holes, which they caught together with fibres. But somehow I could not go to sleep for a long while; the pain in my arm where the Soko seized me was very great at times; besides, I felt haunted; and indeed, when I awoke and found it already four o'clock, it did not seem that I had been asleep at all. But the time for sleep was now over, so, awakening the expedition, we ate a silent meal, and noiselessly remounting, were again on the war-trail. On this, the second day, we marched some three miles down the river, northwest, and then taking a half right wheel, started off northeast, passing to the north of our camp at about the eleventh mile. Here the first sign of life we had seen since we started broke the tedium of our ghost-like progress.

Between myself and the next man on the line was running a little stream, fed probably by the dews that here rained down upon us from the mvule-trees. These, more than all others, seem to condense the heated upper air, their leaves being thick in texture, and curiously cool, — for which reason the natives prefer them for butter and oil dishes. Along the stream, as usual, crowded a thick fringe of white-starred sedge. On a sudden there was a swaying of the herbage, and out bounced a splendidly spotted creature of the cat kind. Immediately behind him crept out his mate; and there they stood: the male, his crest and all the hair along the spine erect with anger at our intrusion, his tail swinging and curling with excitement; beside him, and half behind him, the female crouching low on the ground, her ears laid back along the head, and motionless as a carved stone. My ass saw the pair, and instinct warning it that the beautiful beasts were dangerous to it, with that want of judgment and consideration so characteristic of asses, it must needs bray. And such a bray! At every *hee* it pumped up enough air from its lungs to have contented an organ, and at

every *haw* it vented a shattering blast to which all the slogans of all the clans were mere puling. It brayed its very soul out in the suddenness of the terror. The effect on the leopards was instant and complete. There was just one lightning flash of color, — a yellow streak across the space before me, and plump! the splendid pair soused into a murderous tangle of creeping palms. That they could ever have got out of the awful trap, with its millions of strong spines barbed like fish-hooks and as strong as steel, is probably impossible; but the magnificent promptitude of the suicide, its picturesque completeness, was undeniable.

The ass, however, was by no means soothed by the meteor-like disappearance of the beasts of prey, and the gruesome dronings that, in spite of hard whacks, it indulged in for many minutes, betrayed the depth of its emotions and the cavernous nature of its interior organization. The ass, like the savage, has no perception of the picturesque.

After the morning meal I allowed a three hours' rest, and in knots of twos and threes along the line, the party sat down, talking in subdued tones (for silence was the order of the march), or comfortably snoozing. I slept myself as well as my aching arm would let me. The march resumed, I wheeled the line with its front due west, and after another two hours' rapid advance we found ourselves again at the river, some seven miles farther down its course than the point from which we had started in the morning; and after a hurried meal, I gave the order for home. Striking southeasterly, we crossed in our fifth mile the track of the morning, and in the thirteenth reached our camp. By this means it will be seen we had effectually triangulated a third of a circle of eleven miles radius from our camp — and with absolutely no result. During the next two days I determined to scour, if possible, the remaining semicircle. Meanwhile, we were at the point we had started from, and though it was nearly certain that at any rate one Soko was in the neighborhood, we had fatigued ourselves with nearly seventy miles of marching without finding a trace of it.

As nothing was required from our concealed store, we had only to eat and go to sleep; and so the men, after laughing together for a while over the snug arrangements I had made for the safety of our goods, and pretending to have doubts as to this being the real site of the hidden property of the expedition, were soon asleep in a batch. I went to sleep too; not a sound sleep, for I could not drive from my memory the hideous recollection of that evening, only two days before, when, nearly in the same spot I was lying in the Soko's power. And thinking about it, I got so restless that, under the irresistible impression that some supernatural presence was about me, I unpegged my mosquito net, and getting up, began to pace about. I wore at nights a

long Cashmere dressing-gown, in lieu of the tighter canvas coat. I had been leaning against a tree; but feeling that the moisture that trickled down the trunk was soaking my back, I was moving off, when my ears were nearly split by a shout from behind me — "Soko! Soko!" and the next instant I found myself flung violently to the ground, and struggling with — Mabruki! The pain caused by the sudden fall at first made me furious at the mistake that had been made; but the next instant, when the whole absurdity of the position came upon me, I roared with laughter.

The savage is very quickly infected by mirth, and in a minute, as soon as the story got round how Mabruki had jumped upon the master for a Soko, the whole camp was in fits of laughter. Sleep was out of the question with my aching back and aching sides; and so, mixing myself some grog and lighting my pipe, I made Mabruki shampoo my limbs with oil. While he did so he began to talk, —

"Does the master ever see devils?"

"Devils? No."

"Mabruki does, and all the Wanyamwazi of his village do, for his village elders are the keepers of the charm against evil spirits of the whole land of Unyamwazi, and they often see them. I saw a devil to-night."

"Was the devil like a Soko?" I asked, laughing.

"Yes, master," he replied, "like a Soko; but I was always asleep, and never saw it, but whenever it came to me it said, 'I am here,' and then at last I got frightened and got up, and then I saw you, master, and"—

But we were both laughing again, and Mabruki stopped.

It was strange that he, too, should have felt the same uncanny presence that had afflicted me. But under Mabraki's manipulation I soon fell asleep. I awoke with a start. Mabruki had gone. But much the same inexplicable, restless feeling that men say they have felt under ghostly visitations, impelled me to get up, and this time, lighting a pipe to prevent mistakes, I resumed my sauntering, and tired at last of being alone, I awoke my men for the start, although day was not yet breaking half-asleep a meal was soon discussed, and in an hour we were again on the move. Shumari had lagged behind, as usual, and on his coming up I reproved him for being the last.

"I am not the last," he said; "Zaidi, the Wangwana, is not here yet. I saw him climbing up for a liane" (the men got their ropes from these useful plants) "just as I was coming away, and I called out to him that you would be angry."

"Peace!" said Baraka, the man next to me; "is not that Zaidi the Wangwana there, riding on the ass? It was not he. It was that good-for-nothing Tarya. He is always the last to stand up and the first to sit down."

"No doubt, then," said Shumari, "it was Tarya; shame on him. He is no bigger than Zaidi, and has hair like his. Besides, it was in the mist I saw him."

But I had heard enough — the nervousness of the night still afflicted me.

"Sound the halt!" I cried; "call the men together."

In three minutes all were grouped round me — not one was missing! Tarya was far ahead, riding on an ass, and had therefore been one of the first to start.

"Who was the last to leave camp?" I asked, and by the unanimous voice it was agreed to be Shumari himself.

Shumari, then, had seen the Soko! and our storehouse was the Soko's home!

The rest of the men had not heard the preceding conversation, so, putting them in possession of the facts, I gave the order for returning to our camp. We approached. I halted the whole party, and binding up the asses' mouths with cloths, we tied them to a stout liane, and then dividing the party into two, led one myself round to the south side of the camp by a detour, leaving the other about half a mile to the north of it, with orders to rush towards the canebrake and surround it at a hundred yards' distance as soon as they heard my bugle. Passing swiftly round, we were soon in our places, and then, deploying my men on either side so as to cover a semicircle, I sounded the bugle. The response came on the instant, and in a few minutes there was a cordon round the brake at one hundred yards radius, each man about twenty yards or so from the next. But all was silent as the grave. As yet nothing had got through our line, I felt sure; and if therefore Shumari had indeed seen the Soko, the Soko was still within the circle of our guns. A few tufts of young rattan grew between the line and the brake in centre of which were our goods, and unless it was up above us, hidden in the impervious canopy overhead, where was the Soko? A shot was fired into each tuft, and in breathless excitement the circle began to close in upon the brake.

“Let us fire!” cried Mabruki.

“No, no!” I shouted, for the bullets would perhaps have whistled through the lianes amongst ourselves. “Catch the Soko alive if you can.”

But first we had to sight the Soko, and this, in an absolutely impenetrable clump of rope-thick creepers, is impossible, except from above. Shumari, as agile as a monkey, was called, and ordered to climb up the tree, the branches of which had served us to sling our goods into the brake, and to see if he could espy the intruder. The lad did not like the job; but with the pluck of his race obeyed, and was soon slung up over the bough, and creeping along it, overhung the centre of the brake. All faces were upturned towards him as he peered down within the wall of vegetation. For many minutes there was silence, and then came Shumari’s voice, —

“No, master, I cannot see the Soko.”

“Climb on to the big liane,” called out Mabruki. The lad obeyed, and made his way from knot to knot of the swinging strand. One end of it was rooted into the ground at the foot of the tree inside the canebrake, the other, in cable thickness, hanging down loose within the circle. We, watching, saw him look down, and on the instant heard him cry, —

“Ai! ma-ma! the Soko, the Soko!” and while the lad spoke we saw the hanging creeper violently jerked, and then swung to and fro, as if some creature of huge strength had hold of the loose end of it and was trying to shake Shumari from his hold.

“Help! help, master!” cried Shumari. “I am falling;” and then he lost his hold, and fell with a crash down into the brake, and for an instant we held our breath to listen — but all was quiet as death. The next instant, at a dozen different points, axes were at work clearing the lianes. For a few minutes nothing was to be heard but the deep breathing of the straining men and the crashing of the branches; and then on a sudden, at the side farthest from me, came a shout and a shot, a confused rush of frantic animal noises, and the sounds of a fierce struggle.

In an instant I was round the brake, and there lay Shumari, apparently unhurt, and the Soko — dying!

“Untie his hands,” I said. This was done, and the wounded thing made an effort to stagger to its feet.

A dozen arms thrust it to the ground again. “Let him rise,” I said; “help him to rise;” and Mabruki helped the Soko on to its feet.

Powers above! If this were an ape, what else were half my expedition? The wounded wood-thing passed its right arm round Mabruki’s neck, and taking one of his hands, pressed it to its own heart. A deep sob shook its frame, and then it lifted back its head and looked in turn into all the faces round it, with the death-glaze settling fast in its eyes. I came nearer, and took its hand as it hung on Mabruki’s shoulder. The muscles, gradually contracting in death, made it seem as if there was a gentle pressure of my palm, and then — the thing died.

Life left it so suddenly that we could not believe that all was over. But the Soko was really dead, and close to where he lay I had him buried.

“Master said he wanted the Soko’s skin,” said Shumari, in a weak voice, reminding me of my words of a few days before.

“No, no,” I said; “bury the wild man quickly. We shall march at once.”

The Killing of the Mammoth

H. Tukeman

Mr. Conradi's sudden death is still fresh in the public mind, and a letter that I have before me from that generous, but eccentric, millionaire will explain my position, and the *raison d'être* of the following pages, in the fewest words. The letter was evidently dictated from his death-bed.

> To H. Tukeman, Esq.,
> Wadington Hall, Kent.
>
> *Dear Sir*: In the event of my death, I release you fully from your promise of secrecy in regard to the killing of the mammoth, and I express the hope that you will make public the facts relating to the same. I have always refused to make any statement as to how or where I obtained this specimen, allowing the public to draw whatever inference it pleased but now that its existence is fully known to the scientific world I see that I have done you some injustice, merely to gratify a whim of my own. The price I paid you included this gratification — as set forth in our contract — but I am satisfied to go down to posterity as the donor to my country of the most remarkable specimen of fauna in the world.
> Thanking you for your faithful adherence to the spirit and letter of our contract, I am,
>
> Yours faithfully,
> Horace P. Conradi.

It was I then, Henry Tukeman, who secured the specimen of the "Conradi Mammoth," as it has been called, now in the Smithsonian museum, Washington, U. S. A., pictures of which monopolized the papers and magazines in the summer of last year, and over which the scientists of both continents are still quarreling. Mr. Conradi's offer to me was of such magnitude (at least three times what I could have expected to get from any other source) that I, a poor man, found myself unable to refuse it. Many people will, undoubtedly, call me unpatriotic in thus allowing a foreign country to obtain this wonderful specimen, and to this charge I can only reply that the re-purchase of Wadington Hall, with its noble deer park and broad acres, has been the dream of my life. For, till my father broke the entail and sold the estate, it had been handed down from father to son since the time of William the First, as the date and the Latin inscription over the old stable doorway testify.

In 1890, I journeyed, by way of St. Michaels and the Yukon River, to Alaska. The Klondike had not then been discovered, and the Alaska Commercial Company's steamer failing to get further than Fort Yukon, owing to the lateness of the season, it was at this point I found myself when winter set in. A small tribe of Indians live at Fort Yukon. A clerk at the trading-post, a private trader, and a missionary and his wife were the only whites there in 1890, except when a rare visitor called from Circle City, a mining camp eighty miles up the Yukon River. The fort, however, had its traditions, and I listened later to many an interesting yarn from the old tribesmen, who told in broken *patois* of the doings of the "Company" fifty years ago, when the Hudson Bay Company represented civilization from this far northwestern limit of their fur trade on the Pacific Slope, and from the Arctic Circle, to the Atlantic coast of stormy Labrador.

The Hudson Bay Company abandoned Fort Yukon many years ago, but the statement that I was a "Hudson Bay man" (an unpaid account was my mental justification), and the fact that I had had some years' experience with northern Indians, enabled me soon to become intimate with the tribe, though at the expense of losing the society of the white residents of the fort.

After I had decided to winter at Fort Yukon, I occupied a roomy, vacant cabin. One night I had opened some old "Graphics" for the benefit of "Joe" — otherwise "Na-thu-joyi-a" — an ancient head-man in the tribe. I was explaining the habits of the various animals portrayed in a series of African hunting scenes. Turning the page, we came to the picture of an elephant, whereupon old Joe became very excited, and finally explained to me, with some reluctance, that he had seen one of these animals "up there, " indicating the north with his hand. Nor could any denial of mine that any such animals existed on this continent shake him. To humor the old fellow, I asked him to tell me the tale, which he did after much persuasion; and I repeat it here, though for my readers' sake I omit the broken *patois*.

"Once, many summers ago, me an' Soon-thai, we go up the Porcupine River — Soon-thai is my son; he is dead; now. By an' by we leave the river, an' go up a little river many days, to the mountain. But the mountain is too steep an' very high, an' we cannot climb up it. We go back a little way, an' we shoot a moose at the mouth of a little gully. Soon-thai, he goes off, an' he finds the gully ends in a little cliff, an' he climbs up it, an' finds a cave. He is brave, Soon-thai — he goes in the cave, an' at the end is a small hole, an' Soon-thai looks through it, an' sees an easy way to climb up the mountain. There is a creek in the gully, which runs in the ground near the cave, but the water is bad.

"I go back, an' I blaze a big tree at the canoe, like this" — crossing his fingers — "where the gully is, for it is hard to see from the river. By an' by we take some meat, an' we go through the cave, an' it is full of big bones, bigger than my body, an' I am afraid; but we go through the little hole into the sunlight, an' I have courage, an' we climb to the top of the mountain.

"Beyond we see a big valley, an' lakes an' trees there, an' far away, on the other side of the valley, we see the mountains, an' beyond them, very far off, high mountains, with the snow on them which never goes away.

"Soon-thai is brave, plenty brave, an' he says, 'We shoot plenty beaver in the valley, eh?' I say, 'No, that is the devil's country,' an' I tell him it is the country called in Indian Tee-Kai-Koa (the devil's footprint). Then Soon-thai, he is a little afraid, but by an' by he says, 'Come, my father, we will not stay long; in two days we will shoot plenty beaver, an' then we will run back.'

"So we go down the mountain, an' we find lakes with plenty of beaver an' ducks an' geese, an' it is the month of the first salmon, an' the geese cannot fly, so we get plenty; but we see no moose or caribou sign in the valley. By an' by, after two days, we make a raft, an' cross a long lake, like a river, an' next day we see Tee-Kai-Koa!"

The old man paused, and stiffened in his seat; I sat silent and motionless, waiting.

"At sunrise we go in the woods to hunt. By an' by Soon-thai comes to me — he is a little way off on one side — an' he whispers, 'Look!' An' I come where he says, an' I see that sign, an' my knees are weak, an' shake. The ground is not hard there, an' I see a sign like this" — he drew a circle on the door — "an' deep in the ground as this" — he placed a finger on his arm, half-way from the finger-tip to the elbow. "An' I can lay my gun in the footmark, except for this much" — he indicated a finger length. "But Soon-thai, he is brave; he says, 'I will see this devil, an' if he is no bigger than a very big bear, I will shoot him from a tree, perhaps.' But I — I am afraid, yet I follow Soon-thai as if I slept. Oh, he was brave, my son—very brave!

"Presently we hear a splashing in a lake which is beyond some willows; an' there are no trees there; but we creep in very softly, an' we come to the reeds, an' wade through them to the edge, up to our knees in the water. He is there, the Tee-Kai-Koa, standing on the other side of the little lake."

The old man rose, and pointed before him. A strange glitter was in his eye, and the beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. I could not doubt for a moment

that he was describing what he had really seen. “He is throwing water over himself with his long nose, an’ his two teeth stand out before his head for ten gun-lengths, turned up, an’ shining like a swan’s wing in the sunlight. His hair is black an’ long, an’ hangs down his sides like driftweed from the tree branches after the floods, an’ this cabin beside him would be as a two-weeks bear cub beside its mother. We do not speak, Soon-thai an’ I, but we look, an’ look; an’ the water he throws over his back runs in little rivers down his sides. Presently he lies down in the water, an’ the waves come through the reeds up to our armpits, so great is the splash. Then he gets up an’ shakes himself, an’ all is a mist like a rain storm round him.

“Suddenly Soon-thai throws up his gun, an’ before I can stop him, he fires — boom! — at Tee-Kai-Koa. Ah, the noise! It is a cry like a thousand thousand geese, only shriller an’ louder, an’ it fills the valley till it reaches to the mountains, an’ all the world seems to have nothing in it but that angry cry. As the gunsmoke rises above the reeds, Tee-Kai-Koa sees it, an’ begins to run through the water towards it, an’ the noise of his splashing is as of all the wild fowl in the world rising from a calm lake at sunset.

“We turn an’ run, Soon-thai an’ I. We run through the reeds to the willows, an’ to the timber. But once I turn, an’ I can see plainly a streak of red blood on the long nose of Tee-Kai-Koa, as he throws it in the air an’ fills the valley with his cry. The smoke of the gun has blown across the little lake between us, an’ he turns to it, an’ stops, an’ whistles like a steamboat when the white steam is escaping.

“We run through the trees away from our camp, for it is towards it Tee-Kai-Koa has gone, chasing the smoke, an’ after we have run a long distance, we rest an’ listen. But again we hear the great cry of Tee-Kai-Koa as he seeks us, an’ we have new strength in our legs to run on an’ on, till the sun has gone down an’ come up again to where it stood when Soon-thai fired his gun. We have no axe, nothing but our guns; but the fear of that which is behind’us makes us strong to travel on without sleep or food.”

The old Indian sat down and wiped his hand over his forehead, and for fully ten minutes no word was spoken, — he perhaps thinking of his dead son, I racking my brains to remember what my school edition of Cuvier said about mammoths, for I had confirmed a wild idea that had flashed through my brain when the elephant’s picture was first noticed. Presently the old man rose, and stepped to the door of the cabin. I made a motion to him to stay, but he shook his head. “I am old an’ tired,” he said simply; “an’ to talk of Soon-thai, my son, makes me weak like a woman. Do not seek Tee-Kai-Koa, white man, lest you have no tale to tell us as I have told you.” And

he stepped out into the clear, frosty night, leaving me to wonder how he had divined my thoughts so accurately.

Later I got Joe's account of his return from the land of Tee-Kai-Koa. He had crossed the flrst range of mountains on the side of the valley opposite that on which he had entered it, and found on the further side of the mountains high, precipitous cliffs, which he had the greatest difficulty in descending. Making a boat out of a moose-skin, he had gone "many days" down a stream which flowed into the Chandelar, a river entering the Yukon about one hundred miles below the mouth of the Porcupine. While in the valley they had seen the huge footprints of the mammoth, but never more than those of one animal, and always of the same size, so that it seemed as if this prehistoric giant must be the last of his race alive there.

In the tribe of Indians wintering at Fort Yukon was an active, intelligent young fellow named Paul, who spoke English well, and was always in demand during the summer months as pilot on the steamers of the A. C. Company. Paul had a strain of white blood in his veins, derived, doubtless, from some hardy Scotchman of the old company, and I found, after becoming intimate with him, that he had as much curiosity as I had about Tee-Kai-Koa and a profound contempt for the superstition of its being a "devil."

When I told Paul of some elephant-shooting experiences of mine in Africa in the '70's, he proposed, in the most matter-of-fact way, that we should go off together during the coming summer, and bag the mammoth, if he really was there. He was doubly eager when I told him of the vast fortune awaiting any man who could get this absolutely unique specimen of supposedly extinct fauna to the hands of taxidermists in civilization. I had nothing heavier than a couple of Lee-Metfords, a weapon which I had never tried, even as an elephant rifle, and which seemed to be still less suitable as a mammoth slayer. But I had plenty of solid nickel bullets, and I was satisfied these would penetrate the hide or massive skull. It was therefore merely a question of quantity.

By spring we had all our plans completed for the journey, and I had a rough idea formulated as to how I should hunt the mammoth, and (what was equally difficult) preserve, when we had killed him, his vast hide and bones. Paul and I both swore secrecy: he because he did not wish the tribe to know, I for commercial reasons; and giving out that I had had a letter from the Hudson Bay Company calling me to the Mackenzie River district, we bid good-by to Fort Yukon on a fine morning early in July, and prepared to pole our way up the Porcupine River in a long, narrow poling-boat which we had built for the purpose.

I shook old Joe cordially by the hand, and promised to avoid the "devil's footprint" country, though I think the old fellow had a vague suspicion of what I had in mind, roused by my many questions throughout the winter. A round of presents to the Indians (not forgetting an extra one for Joe's pretty daughter) made my departure more easy, for I had become excellent friends with the tribe, and they were genuinely sorry to lose me. I held out no likelihood of returning for several summers, while Paul had stated that he would stay with me till I went "outside" once more to the "Grand Pays" and civilization. He had no kith or kin to worry about, and the handsome scamp's attentions to the girls were too impartial to call for any particular and individual congratulation.

On the nineteenth day after leaving Fort Yukon, we arrived at the mouth of the "little river" described by Joe, easily identificd by a high, sandy bank on the right hand. The high water in the Porcupine had delayed us, and after the second day on the "little river" we were unable, even with the utmost exertion, to make more than six or seven miles a day. Sometimes twice or thrice a day we would unload, to drag our boat over shallows or around log-jams, and on one occasion we had to portage everything a mile overland to avoid a cañon. We had cut our outfit down to the simplest necessaries, but I had secured from the steamer 500 feet of stout rope, three double-blocks and tackle, augers, a whipsaw, and a few other tools; and these, with our cooking utensils, winter clothing, and a few supplies, necessitated many weary journeys on the portages. And then the mosquitoes! I have had some experience of them, but I have never seen them so bad as they were on the upper reaches of the river during the month of July.

On August 2d — my birthday, I recollected — we came to the blazed tree. There we cached our stuff, pushing on to look out our route and have a peep at the "devil's country." The blaze was deeply cut, and showed plainly, though it was evidently many years old. The dug-out canoe had been washed away by a freshet. The gully was apparently nothing but a depression in the mountain-side, and it terminated in an abrupt declivity. This cliff extended, as far as we could see, to the head of the river. Soon-thai's object in climbing it had probably been to inspect some massive bones which projected from a ledge about fifty feet up. Above this rose an unscalable ascent of rocks and earth. Climbing to the ledge, we found the cave, or tunnel, as it more properly was. It was about 200 feet long, and wide enough for three men to walk abreast. The entire length was literally paved with gigantic mammoth bones, which made even the matter-of-fact Paul exclaim. I experimented on a skull, and also on a piece of spinal vertebræ, and was glad to find that the solid bullet of the .303 drilled through them with ease.

The end of the tunnel was blocked by a recent fall of rock and rubbish, which it took us some hours to remove. Had we not known there was an exit, we should have turned back, believing this to be a cave. Having effected a passage through, we found the "gully" to be in reality a considerable creek, which had evidently been blocked by a rock slide or an eruption. The water sank into the ground near the exit from the tunnel. I did not notice where the creek joined the river we had just left. Three hours' easy climbing took us to the summit of the divide from the tunnel.

I shall not easily forget the first view we had of the Tee-Kai-Koa River and Valley, as they will now be named on the maps. The sun was low in the sky when we won the summit of the divide, and a high range of snow-clad mountains to the northeast stood out so distinctly that they seemed to be but a few miles away. They were very rugged and precipitous, and dark patches of perpendicular cliffs assumed fantastic shapes against the intensely white background. As I knew the Noyukuk River must rise in these ranges, I estimated the distance to be about 200 miles. Below us extended a valley fifty miles wide, bounded by a range of low mountains which hardly ran above the timber line. This valley ran southward for about seventv miles, when the mountains on either side contracted sharply. I was at once satisfied that Joe's "long lake" was in reality a sluggish river, and I had no doubt I should find a deep cañon where the valley ended. Looking north, the valley showed no sign of narrowing, but turned to the northeast behind the opposite mountain range. From one end of it to the other, as far as eye could see, shining patches of water showed here and there, and the pine trees appeared to be larger than I should have expected to find them in these latitudes. The descent to the valley was on an easy incline.

I will not detail the weary work of the portage from the "little river." We had to use our blocks and tackle to land our stuff at the tunnel entrance. We had difficulty in obtaining water in our camp on the creek, the creek water being undrinkable from the presence in it of copper ore. And there were delays and troubles without number. Finally, however, we had everything at the summit, and a few days later, on the banks of the Tee-Kai-Koa River. As to Paul, I have never met his equal in any of my travels. He was strong, active, untiring, cheerful, and full of a native ingenuity which overcame obstacles as soon as they appeared, while his courage, and his quiet and absolute confidence in our ultimate success, acted as a nerve tonic to me when I found myself speculating whether we had too heavy an undertaking on hand.

We rafted across the Tee-Kai-Koa, the current being hardly perceptible, and camped on a small island about one hundred yards from the main bank. My plan of campaign was based largely on an assumption which, on reflection, I am bound to admit had very little foundation. Joe had told me how the mammoth had run after

the gun smoke, and assuming the huge beast to be fearless — what living thing could inspire it with fear? I speculated — I decided to make a fire within and beneath a pile of green logs, the largest I could find, and then from the biggest adjacent tree to open fire with our Lee-Metfords, trusting to the brute's blindly attacking the log pile and fire, under the impression that this was the source of danger. But from the moment of reaching the mammoth's country, we were extremely careful to build no campfires, unless the smoke blew back across the river, and only allowed ourselves the smallest fires by which to cook our meals. We found some large pieces of cottonwood bark, which helped us, since after being thoroughly dried in the sun this bark will burn to a white heat, and is almost smokeless. Paul kept the camp amply supplied with young ducks and geese; shooting them with a bow and arrow from a moose-skin canoe, the raw hide for which we had brought with us. He used an arrow with a large barbed head sharpened to a knife-like edge; fired from a hide in the reeds, it would skim into an unwary brood, often cutting the throats of two or three at a flight.

The first day that we explored back from the river we found enormous footprints of the mammoth, but they were not fresh. The track was nearly circular, and even on hard ground the indentations were made to stay, while in the softer soil around the lakes they were frequently three or four feet deep. Though lichen was abundant in the vallev, I saw no caribou sign, nor, indeed, signs of any other game whatever.

On August the 29th, we had our first sight of the mammoth. There he stood in a little clearing, the great beast that only one other living man had seen, tearing up great masses of lichenous moss and feeding as an elephant feeds. His lifelike presentation — an enduring testimony to the wonderful patience and skill of American taxidermists — which now occupies the new wing of the Smithsonian museum, has been so fully pictured in the magazines and newspapers of every country in the civilized world — has not his picture been hung on the line in the Royal Academy this year? — that it is idle for me to describe him closely, and I need only speak of the feeling of awe inspired by the sight of this stupendous beast, quietly feeding in oblivion of the two pigmies who were planning his destruction. His long, thick hair, hanging down beneath his belly like a fringe, had the effect of shortening considerably the appearance of his legs. The points of the immense tusks looked as if they could hardly belong to their owner, being, as all the world knows, thirty-one feet, nine inches away from the bases. The portion between the points and the bases was hidden from our sight by the scrub and long tufts of grass.

Paul must have watched him very coolly, for on comparing notes in camp (we had slipped quietly back without disturbing the monster), I found that he had observed details, such as the smallness of the eye and the absence of any tail, which

had escaped my notice. The shortness of the trunk, as compared with an elephant's, was what struck me the most.

About twenty-five miles below our first camp we had found a clump of spruce trees larger than any we had seen in the valley, and here we set to work. At one side of the two largest trees, and across a small dry watercourse, we built a solid erection of five rounds of logs, and placed within this a mass of dry and rotten wood, leaving one small hole where we could crawl in and light it. On top of the "house" we felled the nearest large trees, and others we felled and drew up by the aid of our block and tackle, stacking them up in such a manner as to leave a slight air-space, but pinning them very solidly together with green birch. When the structure was completed, it looked like a huge drift-pile of green logs. We put ladder pegs up to the branches (about sixty feet up) of the two highest standing trees, and selecting suitable places, built seats, and took up rope, with which we could lash ourselves in if necessary. By the end of September we had everything prepared, and we had but to prove the truth of my supposition, namely, that smoke would attract our quarry.

We had from time to time reconnoitered, and found that the mammoth was slowly working towards us. At first I thought it remarkable that we should have found him so near the place where the Indians had seen him years before; but the rapid lichenous growth in the vicinity probably made it a favorite spot, and the lonely giant had it all to himself. On October the 11th, the wind was favorable for our experiment, and having gone over the details carefully, we proceeded to make a preliminary trial, on the failure or success of which hung the fate of our large venture.

The mammoth had now worked up to within three miles of the wood-pile. Having first located him, we laid pieces of dry rotten wood about 300 yards apart through the trees, and directly in line. Having done this for about a mile and a half, and selected a large tree into which we drove ladder pegs, we crept back, and were lucky enough to find the mammoth standing on the far side of a small lake. We lighted the first piece of rotten wood, and then ran back to the tree at our best speed, igniting the other pieces on our way, and a final one near our tree, into which we hastily climbed to watch the result of our experiment.

We were scarcely ensconced among the branches when a cry resounded over the valley which made the chills run down my back. I have heard the scream of an angry bull elephant, the roar of an African lion, and the savage, half-human cry of the great gorilla; but none of these compare with the awe-inspiring cry of a mammoth. Perhaps the Indian's description of "a thousand thousand geese" approaches it most nearly, for there were two distinct pitches; but the very immensity of the volume of

sound as the brute approached us confused any comparison I tried to make. For five, perhaps ten, minutes we waited, strung up to the highest pitch of excitement. Then suddenly the huge form loomed up through the trees, and seeing our smoking fire, he rushed at the burning logs with a cry which shook the very branches on which we sat, and with his ponderous foot trampled them into the ground. Though the tree was fully seventy-five feet away from him, it trembled noticeably, and I was glad that I had placed our log-pile twice that distance away, with the dry watercourse to still further isolate us from the vibration. My chance conjecture had evidently hit the mark: the mammoth, with the instinct born when volcanoes were active and fire was the only foe to be dreaded by these mighty beasts, had hastened to stamp out the threatened conflagration.

Having satisfied himself that the fire was out, Tee-Kai-Koa proceeded to smell the ground. Our scent evidently troubled him somewhat, for he frequently blew with a sound not unlike escaping steam. After a while he turned away, and struck into the woods at right angles to the course we had to make to our camp. We climbed down the tree, and hastened off, well satisfied as to the result of our plan.

By the 16th, everything was ready, and before daylight we placed our riffes and cartridges in our stations in the trees. We then started out, and by 10 A.M. had located our quarry, about three miles away. He seemed to be restless, and kept sniffing the air. A very quiet breeze was blowing in the tree tops. We fired an armful of dry wood, and started back as fast as we could run; but the moment the smoke rose, that terrible cry came booming down the valley behind us, and we felt the earth vibrate as the mammoth charged down in our direction. High up in the branches of a stout tree we had felt comparatively safe; but it was a very different matter on the ground, and we knew it was a veritable race for life as we tore through the woods, touching off the prepared fires with a match as we passed.

At last we came to the log-pile, and in a few seconds a thin wreath of smoke announced that the battle would soon begin. We hastened to our respective stations, and awaited developments. We were not kept in suspense long. Rushing forth from the forest, and charging up to the wood-pile with an ear-splitting cry, the king of the primeval forests stood beneath us in all his pride of strength. He was evidently puzzled for a moment by the huge log-pile confronting him, through which the smoke was now rolling in a thick volume. But with the crack of our rifles came the most appalling scream of rage I have ever heard, and the vast brute, apparently unaffected by our shots, attacked the wood-pile with incredible fury. Charging his enormous tusks beneath it, he gave a mighty heave, and for a second lifted the whole mass of green logs — remember they were pinned together, and stood at least twenty-five feet high

— clear off the ground. Finding this more than even his colossal strength could compass, he seized a top timber, a solid green log twenty-five feet long and over a foot in diameter, and threw it clear behind him.

Meanwhile our rifles had not been idle, and I had already got through my second magazine-full, generally aiming behind the ear. So loud was the noise, sereeam following scream till the hills rang with the sound, that I could not hear the report of my rifle; but the barrel, hot in my hand, told me that the wicked little bullets were speeding on their mission. I glanced at Paul, and saw him aiming and firing with a coolness that I envied, for the din in my ears confused and worried me, and the sweat was running down my face as I fired again and again at the massive target.

The mammoth seemed to have no idea that his assailants were above him, but blindly attacked the burning wood-pile, seizing the logs and hurling them this way and that, till I saw it was only a matter of minutes until the whole edifice should be scattered far and wide. One log, smaller than the rest, came hurling through the air into my refuge, and crashed through the branches overhead. Another struck the tree about half-way up, splintering the bark, and nearly shaking me off my seat.

But the end was drawing near, for the great brute was bleeding profusely from the mouth and ears, and staggered uncertainly back and forth. A feeling of pity and shame crept over me as I watched the failing strength of this mighty prehistoric monarch whom I had outwitted and despoiled of a thousand peaceful years of harmless existence. It was as though I were robbing nature, and old Mother Earth herself of a child born to her younger days, in the dawn of Time.

Suddenly the noise ceased, the mammoth seeming to realize that the danger came from the trees behind him rather than from the now demolished wood-pile. Our rifles cracked again, this time to a square forehead shot. But the huge animal stumbled uneertainly forward, crossed the dry ditch, and turned towards Paul's tree, as if to tear it down. I saw Paul seize the piece of rope and quickly lash it round him, when the mammoth, stumbling half-way past the tree, suddenly swayed from side to side, pitched forward on his knees, and slowly, very slowly, subsided. As he rolled gently on his side, the tree, torn from its roots by the weight, fell forward, and for one horrible moment I thought that Paul and the tree would be dashed to the ground. But at an angle of forty-five degrees the tree swayed and stopped, upheld by the weight lying on its long roots, and Paul walked down the trunk, and climbed on to the body of the mammoth, waving and cheering to me.

When I joined him and stood beside our quarry, I could hardly realize that we had

killed so enormous an animal with such comparative ease and with the diminutive weapons that we held in our hands. Now that the excitement was over, I found that I had become deaf from the noise, nor did I recover my hearing for some days.

The deed was done, and we now had to justify it by saving the skin, bones, and every portion capable of preservation. This proved a tremendous task. The skin we cut into sections, using our block and tackle, attached to a tree, to pull it back. We skinned one side completely in this way; then took out the ribs, and removed the immense entrails, by the same means. The weather was our salvation, being cool and frosty at night; for though we worked like beavers, it took us ten days to get all the hide removed, scraped, and carefully rolled, and the several pieces tagged to identify their positions. The tusks were the most difficult things for us to handle, for with the portion of skull attached to them their weight was enormous. By the middle of December, the bones were all removed from the body, and carefully cleaned and numbered. When once we had the hide safely away, we were able to light a large fire and roast a lot of the meat. This greatly helped in cleaning the bones. I took careful measurements of the lungs, heart, and all the perishable portions. We worked steadily till nearly the end of January, not leaving the camp at all. The meat was not unpalatable, but terribly tough. We buried the best portions in the ever-frozen ground, and were thus able to preserve it perfectly.

It is unnecessary to detail how we spent the rest of the dark winter days, until they lengthened sufficiently for us to explore the valley at its lower end, about thirty miles from our camp. As I had expected, it terminated in a narrow and extremely deep cañon, where the river went rushing over the rocks, and I saw at once that no boat could possibly ascend it. We found this gloomy gorge to be about three and a half miles long. We could see the stars overhead when the sun was shining, so high and straight were its walls; and with the noise of the water beneath the ice, in this gloom, it was one of the weirdest places I have ever been in. At the foot of the cañon the valley widened as suddenly as at the head, and I saw that the river was navigable.

Our only chance of getting our prize out of the valley was to sleigh it over the ice through the canon; so we hurried back, and proceeded with all possible despatch to this rather formidable task. Fortunately, the months of March and April were remarkably fine, and as the sleigh trail improved with usage, and the sun began to make its power felt, we were able to increase our loads. We moved everything to the head of the cañon, and then made two trips a day to the foot, camping below. Finally we built a solid cache of heavy green logs in a safe place, and having shut everything securely in it, we built a small boat, and waited for the opening of the river.

The rest of my story is told in a few words. We journeyed down the Tee-Kai-Koa River to the Chandelar, and thence to the Yukon and St. Michaels, and proceeded by the first steamer to San Francisco. There I met Mr. Conradi — quite by accident — and finding him deeply interested in zoology, I disclosed the secret of the prize we had left on the banks of the Tee-Kai-Koa. I had kept the matter secret because I wished to find out for myself from the various authorities in America and Europe something as to the value of the mammoth. My design was, if possible, to get the British Museum authorities to purchase it. Mr. Conradi's offer astounded me — it was in millions of dollars — and after a week's thought I closed with him.

Paul absolutely refused to accept more than a quarter share, arguing, not without reason, that even this portion was more than he knew what to do with or could possibly spend. Civilization had few attractions for him; he soon tired of 'Frisco, and used to long impatiently for the wilds. He and I went north that summer, and wintered on the Tee-Kai-Koa River near our cache. In the spring, we conveyed the mammoth to a certain place on the Yukon River, where we met Mr. Conradi, and everything was packed in specially prepared cases. At the mouth of the river we were met by Mr. Conradi's steam yacht, which had wintered in North Sound, and at once sailed for San Francisco.

I do not know what it cost him to keep the crew silent; but judging from the wildness of the conjectures made by the newspapers in dealing with the matter, and from the fact that it never got published that the specimen was taken aboard at the mouth of the Yukon, the sum paid for secrecy was certainly sufficient, and must have been considerable. I believe that the most general]y accepted theory heretofore has been that Mr. Conradi found the carcass frozen in an iceberg in the Arctic Ocean. The various dimensions of the mammoth, both of the skeleton and the mounted specimen, are too well known to need tabulating here. The measurements, exactly as taken by me, were handed to the Smithsonian authorities by Mr. Conradi for publication, and accepted without question as his own.

Nœkken of Norway

Bob Olsen

The Tarn of Peril

"Whatever you do, laddy of mine, you must keep away from Bjerke Tjern!"

This warning, uttered in a squeaky voice by the wrinkled lips of Borghild Bjornsdatter, was my first introduction to that pool of mystery and death which the Norwegian country-folk called "Birch Tarn."

"Why do you say that, Granny?" I asked in my labored and somewhat broken Norwegian, "What's the matter with Bjerke Tjern?"

"Matter enough," she whined. "Anybody but a fool would know that Bjerke Tjern is the place where Nœkken abides. That ought to mean something to you, laddy mine, because it was Nœkken who slew all of your uncles."

It was true that my father's three elder brothers had all disappeared under very mysterious circumstances and that neither their bodies nor any other traces of them had ever been found. I had also heard rumors that their deaths had been accomplished by supernatural influences; but naturally I had given no credence to this superstitious nonsense. It was because of this complete and sudden eradication of my Norwegian relatives that I, the last male descendent of the Lungaard clan, had been sent from America to take over the management of the family estate requiring supervision.

"Are you sure that Bjerke Tjern is haunted, Granny Borghild?" I laughed. "If that is true, it makes me all that more eager to visit that interesting spot. I'd love to meet a huge Trold or a band of tiny Nissen. Perhaps I might be lucky enough to run into one of those beautiful golden-haired Huldren and have a dance with her."

"Scoff all you please," the old lady grumbled, "but if you have an ounce of brains in that noddle of yours, you will keep away from Bjerke Tjern, *especially at night*."

Stubbornness is a typically Norse trait. Some call it determination and class it as virtue. Others regard it as stupid, mulish perversity. Take your choice. For my own part, I must have inherited some of this Scandinavian obstinacy from my ancestors,

for I had hardly finished supper that twilight summer evening, when I became obsessed with an overpowering desire to visit the very place which I had been warned to avoid

Outside, near the ponderous log stable I found one of the Lungaard farm hands.

"How do I get to Bjerke Tjern?" I asked him.

For a minute or so, he just stared at me fearfully, his eyes bulging, his lower lip sagging.

Somewhat impatiently I repeated the question.

Finally he found his voice and stammered, "You'd better not go up there, Sir."

"Never mind the advice," I snapped. "Are you going to tell me how to get up to Bjerke Tjern, or—"

"It's up there," he muttered, pointing to a cleft in the mountains just north of our farm.

For a few hundred yards the trail was plainly marked; but it wasn't long before I had to force my way through a dense growth of weeds and underbrush which choked the remainder of the path. It was quite clear that the way to Bjerke Tjern had not been traversed for some time.

Crawling, climbing, stumbling over branches and creepers, I finally worked my way up to the gap in the hills, which the farm hand had pointed out to me.

When I reached the highest point in the path and looked down into the bowl-like depression on the other side of the ridge, the sight of which met my eyes made me gasp with delight. Below me lay a small lake, almost perfectly circular in outline, with the loveliest little toy island set in its exact center. Never in my life have I seen a body of water so clear and so still. Not even the tiniest of ripples disturbed its placid surface. It might have been frozen over, except that even the smoothest of ice could not possibly have reflected the surroundings with such perfect faithfulness. Like an image in a flawless plate glass mirror, the mountain peaks, the clouds, the gaunt white birch trees, the toy island and the lily pads were counterfeited within that magic circle of water.

It was about nine o'clock of a summer evening, although the sun was still visible. Like a great crimson ball it hung just over the hill to the southwest. With incredible speed it rolled downward. By the time I reached the ridge it had slid out of sight

behind the horizon. Down in that cupped amphitheater in which the tarn lay sleeping, the direct light of the sun must have vanished some time previously. Strange to say, however, it seemed to be illuminated much clearer by the mysterious Norse twilight than by the glare of a noonday sun.

One thing that heightened this illusion was the total lack of shadows. Like fluid light, the ghastly, crepuscular glow seemed to flow into every nook and cranny, bringing out all the details with startling clearness.

The light was not the only thing which had been transformed. There were equally drastic changes in the sounds which reached — or rather failed to reach my ears. A few minutes earlier the woods had been teeming with life. Numberless birds had been twittering and chattering in the branches. Twigs had crackled beneath the steps of small animals. The leaves had rustled continuously as they were whipped about by the brisk west wind.

But now, after sun-down, all these sounds had been suddenly hushed. Not a breath of air was stirring. Not a bird chirped. Not a branch creaked. It was as if Mother Nature was angry with her children and put them all to bed before their time.

In that deathly, sepulchral silence, I found myself treading on tip toes, almost holding my breath for fear that I might miss hearing some slight sound to tell me there were other living creatures besides myself in that place of mystery.

Carefully and stealthily I clambered down the slope which led to the pond. Cautious as I was I couldn't help making a lot of noise. Each time a twig snapped or a pebble rolled down the hill ahead of me, the sound seemed to be magnified and repeated again and again by the echoing hills which guarded the tarn.

When I reached the grassy shore my nostrils were greeted by a delightful perfume. Clearly it originated from a fleet of water lilies which rode at anchor a dozen yards beyond my reach. The waxy blossoms, nestling among the oval leaves and spear-shaped buds, were as beautiful as they were fragrant. I had an intense yearning to pluck them.

Searching for a way to accomplish this purpose without exposing myself to the frigid waters of the lake, I stumbled upon a weather-beaten rowboat. It was an ancient pram, exactly like the small boats which the Vikings used in olden days for making short trips across the fjords. Staunchly built of oaken planks it had obviously rested there, embedded in the mud, for many years.

Despite its age, the skiff looked quite sound and seaworthy, except that it was half full of rainwater. I tried to empty it by tipping it over on its side, but it was too heavy for me alone to handle. Then, a few feet away I discovered another mysterious object. It was a silver-mounted drinking horn, such as the Norsemen of yore used for quaffing their mead.

Using it as a bailer, I soon had most of the water out of the boat. I expected to have a job loosening the craft from its muddy bed, but it slid out easily at the first push I gave it.

Tossing the drinking horn into the bottom of the boat, I looked around, half expecting to find a pair of ancient oars conveniently laid out for me, but in this I was disappointed. So I opened my jack-knife and cut down a birch sapling. Amputating the top and lopping off the branches, I fashioned a stout pole about fifteen feet long. Equipped with this, I stepped into the pram and shoved off.

As the prow of the craft nosed in among the moored lily pads, I leaned over the stern and thrusting my hand far down into the water caught hold of one of the wiry stems and jerked the blossom loose.

Hardly had I plucked the water lily when I felt a jar which made me almost lose my balance.

The boat began to move!

Straight for the center of the lake it headed, gliding silently along as if it were being towed by an underwater cable. I peered into the water on both sides of the pram but could see nothing but the lily stems and the angular furrows which the nose of the boat was plowing in the clear, transparent water.

Halfway to the island the skiff stopped abruptly. I heard a cracking sound and was horrified to see the thick, oaken sides of the boat bend inward as if they were being crushed between the jaws of a powerful, hydraulic press. Along the seams in the bottom of the craft two large cracks yawned. Water, cold as a glacier stream, began to gush against my legs.

Grabbing the drinking horn, I started to bail in frantic haste.

THEN I SAW *IT*!

Between me and the island, another smaller isle reared itself above the surface of the water. At first it looked like some floating, inanimate object, so formless and so lifeless did it seem to be.

Slowly — so slowly that it didn't stir up a single ripple in that glassy surface, the Thing swelled upward until two bulging emerald eyes came into new just above the water level. How can I hope to describe what I saw in those unspeakable eyes? Hunger, lust, ferocity, wickedness, cruelty, and devilish, murderous *hate* were all written there.

In my terror I forgot to bail, but it wouldn't have made any difference anyway for the gunwales of the pram were already awash. The frigid water made my legs feel as if they were frozen in a solid block of ice.

Then the fish, or animal, or whatever it was, began to move leisurely toward me.

I waited no longer. Pulling myself out of the damnable spell of fear which had taken possession of me, I stood up, placed my feet against the high stern of the pram and with a mighty kick, dove into the icy water. Luckily for me I had done a lot of swimming in my youth. Apparently Nœkken (I suppose I may as well refer to that Thing by its Norse name) had never before had to deal with a swimmer who knew the Australian crawl stroke. Otherwise I am sure it would not have permitted me to get such a start. I must have broken a record for the twenty-yard dash in the sprint I made that day. Nevertheless, I had barely scrambled up on the bank when I heard Nœkken slithering out of the water behind me. Without turning around I ran toward the path with all the speed I could muster. I hadn't taken more than a few steps when I stumbled over an exposed root and fell flat on my face.

Something heavy and cold and slimy flowed over my foot and wrapped itself around my left leg. Then I felt myself being dragged, slowly and relentlessly toward the water. I managed to twist my body around so that I was in a sitting position. Glaring at me, only a few feet away were those horrible, fiendish eyes. They were embedded in a loathesome mass of translucent glair, resembling the body of a colossal, shapeless jelly-fish.

One edge of this preposterous monster had wrapped itself about my leg. The opposite side of it was still in the water, six or seven yards away. Apparently without effort, the creature seemed to flow along the ground, dragging me along with it. Frantically, clutching for something to hang to, my hand closed over the top of the birch sapling which I had dropped there a few minutes before. Using it as a whip, I struck again and again at the part of the beast which gripped my leg.

Against such a formidable foe my improvised weapon seemed ridiculously puny; yet it proved to be far more effective than I could reasonably have expected. Beneath the stinging blows of the switch, the jelly-like substance cringed and drew back. Jerking my leg free from that dire embrace, I leaped to my feet and dashed madly up that tangled trail which (in my hopes at least) led to safety.

As I crashed down through the underbrush on the southerly slope of the ridge, I saw, looming up before me, the figure of a man. It was Lars Thorvaldsen, Borghild Bjornsdatter's grandson.

Tall, broad-shouldered and blond, with prominent cheekbones and a firm, determined mouth, Lars was a typical Nordic farmer lad. Of all the men and women who made their home at Lundgaard, Thorvaldsen was the only one who had been educated beyond the rudimentary requirements of the local country schools. Having displayed unusual interest in scholarly attainments, Lars had been awarded a stipendium and a scholarship at the University of Oslo. He spoke perfect English, with the meticulous inflection of an Oxford graduate.

"Hi, there, George!" he greeted me. "Where the devil have you been? I've hunted for you endlessly."

"I've been to Bjerke Tjern," I panted. "There's a— there's a—"

As I paused to catch my breath, Lars suddenly grasped me by the arm and cried, "What's the matter with you man? You look like you've seen a ghost!"

"I have!" was my excited response. "I've seen Nœkken!"

"You've seen what?"

"Nœkken," I whispered. "Granny Borghild was right. There is something — something horrible, something supernatural up there in Bjerke Tjern!"

I half expected him to make fun of me. Instead he put his arm around my shoulder and said in a kind, soothing voice, "You're all excited, my boy. Here, sit down on this log and tell me what happened."

After first casting a furtive glance behind me to make sure that I had not been followed, I sat down and, in short, jerky sentences related to him my encounter with the monster of Bjerke Tjern.

In concluding my narrative I said, “I know, Lars, that you are not superstitious like the rest of the folks around here. You probably think I’ve been seeing things. But I’m telling you that I saw Nœkken just as clearly as I see you now. It caught hold of me and tried to drag me into the water. I’m sure it wasn’t imagination on my part.”

“Of course it wasn’t,” he conceded.

“Then you really believe me — you think that Nœkken actually exists?”

“Certainly.”

Without waiting for me to finish my sentence, Lars went on: “I’ve made quite a study of Norse folk lore. It’s a very interesting subject. Most so-called educated people are inclined to dismiss these stories lightly — regarding them purely as myths, which they think are based solely on ignorance and superstition. My investigations have led me to the conclusion that, after due allowances have been made for exaggerations which may naturally be expected when narratives of this sort are retold again and again, all of these familiar stories originated in actual, true experiences of sane, sober human beings.”

“Do you really believe that?” I asked in astonishment.

“Most certainly,” he assured me. “There isn’t one of these so-called supernatural beings, mentioned in folk lore, that cannot be explained in accordance with well recognized scientific facts.”

“For instance?” I prompted him.

“Well, suppose we start with Trolds. They were nothing but giants. Real giants are not at all uncommon, even today.”

“True enough,” I corroborated him. “And one of the best known of the modern giants is a motion picture actor and was born in Norway.”

“There are plenty of other giants, besides those who exhibit themselves in shows,” Lars rejoined. “Science explains them as eases of overdeveloped pituitary glands. Most of these giants are sensitive about their abnormal size. Consequently they prefer to live apart from other people. That trait ties in with the stories about Trolds, who were supposed to lead solitary lives.”

"Sounds reasonable," I commented. "But you could hardly say that Nœkken—"

He interrupted me with, "Giants are not the only freaks that can be accounted for by endocrinology. Take for example the little people who are called Nissen. They were nothing more nor less than midgets, of which there are thousands in existence today. Every biologist knows that midgets result from deficiency in the secretion of the thyroid gland. This hormone, you know, has been isolated and has been given the name of *Thyroxine*. Analysis shows that this substance contains iodine. It is a well known fact that midgets are prevalent in places where people drink water from melted snow and which consequently contains no iodine. Hence we would naturally expect to find many dwarfs, or Nissen, if you want to call them that, in the mountainous sections of Norway."

"To be sure," I agreed. "But the Trolds and Nissen were at least shaped like human beings. You could hardly attribute a monster like Nœkken to glandular disturbances of animal beings."

"Don't be so positive about that," he contradicted me.

"You mean?"

"Just this. Nœkken of course is not human in origin — at least one would hardly suppose so, to judge from the generally accepted descriptions of the being, with which your account seems to agree remarkably."

"Then in the name of creation, what is it?"

"My theory is that Nœkken is an abnormal development of some simple, extremely low type of organism."

"For instance," I persisted.

"Well it might be an over-developed amœba."

"Amœba?" I questioned. "What in the dickens is an amœba?"

"It's a microscopic organism. You know what protoplasm is don't you?"

I didn't know, but I nodded nevertheless.

“That’s all there is to an amœba.” He went on, “It’s just a single-celled blob of protoplasm. It can change its shape at will. That’s how it got its name. Amœba comes from a Greek word meaning change. The amœba obtains its food by wrapping itself around other microbes and digesting them.”

“Do you mean to infer that Nœkken mistook me for a microbe?”

“It probably wasn’t particularly choosey about its diet,” Lars laughed. “To a monster such as that, almost anything living would be acceptable food.”

By this time I had recovered sufficiently from my fright so that I could appreciate the ludicrous aspects of the adventure; so I came back with, “Is that so? By the way that baby went for me, I am sure it regarded me as an especially delicious morsel.”

“Maybe so,” Lars conceded.

“And, furthermore,” I continued, “I don’t think that thing I saw at Bjerke Tjern was anything like an amœba.”

“According to your description it was very much like a gigantic amœba,” Lars disagreed.

“But I thought you said an amœba is just a single cell.”

“Correct. What of it?”

“Oh nothing,” I said sarcastically, “Except that a single cell is always microscopic in size.”

“Not necessarily,” he contradicted me. “The yolk of an ostrich egg is a single cell and you could hardly call that microscopic. Nevertheless you are right when you infer that amœbas and other protozoa are usually minutely small. When one of them reaches maturity it divides forming two daughter amœbas. Sometimes two amœbas fuse together to form one organism.”

“What of it?” I challenged.

“Just this: It is quite conceivable that, under certain conditions, which may happen to exist in Bjerke Tjern, an amœba might continue to grow without dividing until it reached gigantic proportions.”

"And if that happened would it still be a single cell?" I asked.

"Possibly. Why?"

"I don't see how it could be possible for a single cell to be so large."

"Why not? After all, size is relative. The yolk of an egg is probably millions of times as large as a microbe. Yet each of them is a single cell. And surely it wouldn't take more than a few million yolks to make a creature the size of Nœkken."

"All right," I said. "Suppose we assume that the Thing in Bjerke Tjern *is* an overgrown amœba. What then?"

"Nothing, except that I think it is your duty to exterminate it."

"What?" I yelled.

"I said it is your duty to exterminate Nœkken before it kills any more people."

"No thanks," was my emphatic response. "I've had one bout with it. That's plenty."

As if to express his contempt, Lars cleared his throat and spat at a cluster of caraway stalks which grew beside the path.

"So you're afraid, are you?" he sneered.

"Not exactly afraid. But what's the use of borrowing trouble?"

"I just told you why. A monster like that is a constant menace to human life. It ought to be stamped out before it kills any more people."

"Granted," I agreed. "But why should I do the dirty work?"

Speaking in a disdainful tone, Lars said, "Because Nœkken has already killed three of your father's brothers. You are the only one of the Lundgaards who is left here now. Aren't you man enough to understand that you are the one who should avenge the deaths of your kinsmen?"

"I guess I'm man enough to assume any responsibilities that rightfully fall on my shoulders," I retorted angrily.

“Spoken like a true Norseman!” Lars exclaimed. “What do you say we go for Nœkken this very night?”

“We?” I echoed. “You mean that you will help me kill Nœkken?”

“Certainly I will help you. That is if you want me to.”

“I’ll be grateful for your assistance,” I assured him. “Never having hunted for giant amœbas, I’ll probably need coaching. Just what is the proper procedure in a case like this?”

“I have a dandy Krag-Jörgensen rifle,” he told me. “And I’m sure I can scare up some kind of gun for you. I’ll go and fetch them.”

“What’s the hurry?” I hedged. “Why do you want to go after it to-night?”

“Because it is evidently out hunting for food to-night. If it finds something to eat and returns to its lair it may not show up again for a long, long while.”

“But it’s getting late.” Showing him my wrist watch I protested, “Look it’s nearly eleven. In a few minutes there won’t even be enough twilight to see by. Why can’t we wait until to-morrow morning?”

“They say Nœkken never makes his appearance by daylight,” Lars reminded me.

“Then let’s make it to-morrow evening.”

Lars agreed.

After a sleepless night, pregnant with dread and worry, I arose early and went to the huge room which served as kitchen, refectory and assembly room at Lundgaard.

Early as I was, Granny Bjornsdatter had risen ahead of me. She had finished her breakfast and was sitting by the stone hearth embroidering a wonderful Hardanger tablecloth.

After we had exchanged greetings I said, “Please tell me more about Nœkken, little Grandmother.”

“What do you want to know about it, laddy of mine?” she mumbled through her toothless lips.

“I’d like to know what Nœkken looks like and how it behaves.” I suggested.

“Nœkken takes many forms,” Borghild began.

I was somewhat startled to hear that. It tailed so closely with what Lars had said about the proclivity of amœbas for constantly changing their shapes. However, Granny’s next statement was not nearly so scientific. It was, “Sometimes it takes the form of a dog or wolf. At other times it makes itself look like an oaken chest with copper bands. When some nosey dunce goes to investigate— opi! Out jumps Nœkken and the dunce is in his power!”

“Nœkken must be a clever fellow,” I remarked.

“You have said it. But its favorite trick is to take the shape of a big, black horse. When he catches sight of his victim he snuggles right up to him and coaxes the fellow to climb up on his back. If he is fool enough to do it, opi! Nœkken gives one big leap out into the tarn and devours the dunce with one big gulp.”

“But doesn’t Nœkken stay in the water most of the time?” I asked.

“Yes. It’s only when he is very hungry that he starts hunting on land. Generally he is content to lie in wait, floating quietly on the surface of the tarn like a stump or a log. Sometimes he contrives to have a pram handy, by the shore of the tarn. If any man is fool enough to get into that boat, he may as well say his prayers.”

I was becoming more and more interested in Borghild’s dissertation.

“What happens to the dunce if he gets into the boat?” I asked eagerly.

“First Nœkken sneaks up under the water and grabs hold of the bottom of the pram. Then he gives it a tug and tows it out into deep water.”

“And then?” I prompted.

“Sometimes he tips the boat over. But his favorite stunt is to squeeze the pram until it cracks open.”

Reaching out she picked up a small match box and held it up in her bony fingers as she went on, “Nœkken is so strong that he can crack the stoutest boat just like this,” and she crushed the flimsy box, scattering the matches all over the floor.

“What happens next?” I said with a shudder.

“Naturally the boat sinks and the dunce is at the mercy of Nœkken. It doesn’t matter whether he can swim or not, Nœkken is sure to get him. Sometimes he gobbles him up with the first gulp. But if he isn’t very hungry and the man is a good swimmer, Nœkken loves to play with his victim, like a cat with a mouse. Still another clever trick of Nœkken is to—”

“Excuse me Granny,” I interrupted her. “Do you mind if I ask you a question?”

“Certainly not, laddy of mine. What is it?”

“Suppose one wanted to do away with Nœkken. Isn’t there some way one could kill it or exorcise it?”

“There is only one way I know to slay Nœkken, and that is with an arrow made of mistletoe wood.”

“How about a silver bullet? Wouldn’t that be a good thing to kill Nœkken with?”

“Of course not, you dunce. Silver bullets are for were-wolves. Any fool knows that!”

“But how should one of these mistletoe arrows be made? Are there any special rules to be observed?”

“Naturally. In the first place it must have neither a metal nor a stone head. The point must be sharpened with a dirk that has killed a man and must be hardened by heating it over a fire made of caraway stalks. Crow feathers are best for the end.”

“How about the bow? Does that have to be made in any special way?”

“Of course not. Any bow will do. One can even throw the arrow if one is strong enough.”

What happened after I left Granny Bjornsdatter I hesitate to tell. Even to-day I can’t help feeling a bit ashamed of the way in which I permitted my supposedly educated mind to be swayed by atavistic superstitions. I excused myself by reflecting that Granny Bjorndatter’s descriptions of the Thing at Bjerke Tjern had been amazingly accurate. Naturally I did not give any credence to the parts about the creature assuming the shapes of wolves and horses, but I had to admit that the account of what Nœkken

did, to a dunce who embarked in a boat, coincided remarkably with my own experience. I began to think that Borghild knew more about Nœkken than Lars, with all his scientific training.

As far as the mistletoe myth was concerned, perhaps there was as much science as magic behind that idea. Who could tell us that the sap of this weird parasitic plant might not be poisonous to the thing that Granny called Nœkken?

I located a few sprigs of mistletoe in an old, run-down orchard belonging to one of our neighbors. From Lundgaard's stocked armory I selected a wicked-looking dagger with brownish stains on the blade. With it I fashioned two short arrows according to Granny's instructions. I also made a bow from a spruce sapling and spent a few hours practicing with it. Though I got so I could hit the end of a cask providing I got close enough to it, I certainly was no rival of Robin Hood or William Tell.

That evening Lars and I slipped away from the farm shortly after supper. I concealed my bow and my mistletoe arrows by rolling them up in a blanket of homespun wool which I lugged under my arm. In the other hand I carried a rifle. Lars was similarly armed.

When we reached the tarn, twilight had overtaken us, yet the natural amphitheater was illuminated with incomparable clearness. Taking up positions a few feet from each other, we sat on the grass with our backs against a couple of birch trees.

We decided it was best not to talk to each other. After all, what was there to say? Gradually almost imperceptably, the weird ghostly light faded. After what seemed at least ten hours of breathless suspense, I heard a rhythmic series of snores from the place where Lars was sitting. My eyes had become blurred from gazing at the glassy surface of the lake and I had just started to nod myself when I saw Nœkken. Only five or six inches of its body protruded above the surface in the midst of the fleet of lily pads which were moored about twenty yards from the shore. I would never have seen it had it not been for the luminous gleam in its baleful eyes.

Crawling softly to where Lars was reclining, I slapped him gently on the cheek. He awoke with a jump.

"It's there," I whispered. "Out there among the lily pads. You can see it can't you?"

"Like hell I can," he swore softly. "Where the devil is it?"

“Get your gun ready and I’ll show you. When I turn my electric torch on him, let him have it. Are you ready?”

“Let her go!”

I pressed the button of my American flashlight and directed its beam straight into the eyes of the creature that lurked among the lily pads. There was a sharp crash followed by deafening reverberations which the echoes repeated and magnified to the proportions of a long peal of thunder.

Like most Norwegians, Lars was a dead shot with a rifle. At that distance he couldn’t possibly have missed. In fact I am positive I saw the bullet spatter a tiny jet of spray just a fraction of an inch below one of the monster’s eyes.

I expected to see the body sink beneath the surface, but instead it started to swell up like a balloon does when the gas is first turned into it. Then it moved slowly toward us.

There was no need for the flash-light now. Lars, I knew, could see his quarry plainly. He ran to the edge of the water, pumping bullets into that ominous form as fast as he could work the bolt of his gun between repeated loadings of the magazine.

Suddenly I remembered about my bow and arrows and ran back to my blanket to get them. When I turned around again, the Thing was only a few feet from where Lars was standing. The muzzle of his rifle was almost touching it when Lars fired his last shot and took to his heels.

Moving with amazing speed the monster slid along the ground in pursuit.

With trembling fingers I fitted an arrow to the string of my bow, took quick aim and let fly. The dart hit the earth more than a foot behind the pursuing beast. Before I had time to get a second arrow ready the forward edge of the creature shot out and gave Lars a resounding slap on the back, sending him tumbling to the turf. Then, repeating the same tactics as it had used with me, it wrapped a portion of itself about Lars’ legs and started to drag him toward the water.

Screaming with terror, Lars clutched madly at everything that lay in his way. Luckily he managed to throw his arms around a young birch tree, locking his fingers together and hanging on with superhuman strength which fear inspires.

“Help, George!” He shrieked. “Help me or I’m a dead man.”

I picked up my rifle and pumped several shots into that horrid mass, taking care to aim at the parts which were farthest away from Lars’ body. The bullets seemed to have no effect whatever on Nœkken. It continued to heave and tug at Lars’ body until I could hear the joints of his shoulders crack.

When I had fired my last cartridge, I heaved the gun itself, straight at those two unspeakable eyes. It sank out of sight in that plastic mass of flesh, which closed oozingly over it.

Then I thought of my remaining arrow, which was sticking in my belt. I had dropped the bow when I picked up my gun. While I was hunting for it I could hear Lars groaning and screaming in agony. “Heaven help me!” he yelled in Norwegian.

“I can’t hold fast any longer!”

Just then a miracle happened. At any rate, to my tortured, fear numbed brain it seemed like a miracle.

Although it was only a few minutes after three o’clock, dawn was beginning to break over the hill to the northeast of us. The spot we had selected for our vigil was near the southwesterly edge of the lake. The first beams of that morning sun which crept down into that wooded bowl seemed to drench both Lars and Nœkken in rosy light.

Aided by this unexpected illumination, I quickly located my discarded bow. Carefully fitting my last mistletoe arrow to the cord, I drew as close to the monster as I dared. As I sighted along the shaft, I saw something which had previously escaped my notice but which was now clearly revealed by the direct sunlight.

In the midst of that translucent mass of jelly-like glair there was a globule of darker hue. It was about the size of a watermelon and it throbbed and squirmed within the outer covering of protoplasm. For all I knew it was the creature’s heart — if it had a heart — or it might have been its brain. Whatever it was, it looked like a vital organ and I decided that, if I was ever going to kill Nœkken, that inner spheroid would have to be my target.

Taking careful aim and drawing the cord of my bow back as far as I dared, I let the arrow fly. Straight through that slimy mass it sped, scoring a perfect bull’s-eye in its central core.

A terrific shudder ran all through that enormous body. Slowly its grip on Lars relaxed and it sank down as flat as an enormous pancake. Feeling himself free from that terrible embrace, Lars crawled out from under the heavy body, which was now inert and lifeless.

"Are you all right?" I gasped. "Can you walk?"

"Can I walk?" he yelled. "No! I can't walk a step. But just watch me run!" and he dashed up the tangled trail at a pace that would have made Frank Wyckoff turn green with envy. Needless to add, I lost no time in following him.

Remembering somewhat tardily the warnings which Granny Bjornsdatter had given us we waited until high noon before venturing back to the tarn. We found what was left of my gun. The stock was completely missing and the metal parts were corroded as if they had been soaked in nitric acid.

Surrounding the remains of the weapon was a ring of matted grass, which was seared to a sickly yellow hue. It was covered with a slimy, glistening substance such as one sees on the beach where a jelly fish has melted in the sun.

"That's all that's left of Nœkken!" I announced. "When it was hit by the direct rays of the sun, it just melted away. It looks like your amœba theory is correct."

"You are altogether too modest;" he complimented me. "The sun may have had something to do with Nœkken's demise, but I don't think there is any question but that you killed it when you shot that arrow into its nucleus."

"Nucleus?" I questioned.

"Yes. That's what they call the central, vital portion of an amœba. It was so small in comparison to the size of the whole creature that I must have missed it completely with my bullets."

"Then you really think that the mistletoe arrow did the trick?"

"Yes. But any kind of arrow would have served just as well. The mistletoe had nothing to do with it."

"O, ja?" I said. The inflection I gave to the Norwegian word, sound exactly like the American slang expression, "Oh, yeah?"

I bent down and picked up what looked like the branch of a birch tree.

“Do you see this?” I went on. “It’s the switch I used to beat off Nœkken when he tried to drag me into the water the day before yesterday. I guess you know now that it wasn’t such an easy task to accomplish. Just take a good look at this branch.”

He examined it and then said, in English:

“Well, I’ll be a dirty name. If that isn’t a sprig of mistletoe growing out of that birch switch. I’ll eat what’s left of Nœkken!”

The Eggs from Lake Tanganyika

Curt Siodmak

Professor Meyer-Maier drew a sharp needle out of the cushion, carefully picked up with the pincers the fly lying in front of him and stuck it carefully upon a piece of white paper. He looked over the rim of his glasses, dipped his pen in the ink and wrote under the specimen:

> "*Glossina pulpulis*, specimen from Tsetsefly River. In the aboriginal language termed *nei-nei*. Usually found on river courses and lakes in West Africa. Bearer of the malady Negana (Tse-tse sickness — sleeping sickness.)

He laid down the pen and took up a powerful magnifying glass for a closer examination. "A horrible creature," he murmured, and shivered involuntarily. On each side of the head of the flying horror, there was a monstrous eye surrounded by many sharp lashes and divided up into a hundred thousand flashing facets. An ugly proboscis thickly studded with curved barbs or hooks grew out of the lower side of the head. The wings were small and pointed, the legs armed with thorns, spines and claws. The thorax was muscular, like that of a prize fighter. The abdomen was thin and looked like India rubber. It could take in a great quantity of blood and expand like a balloon. On the whole, the flying horror, resembling a pre-historic flying dragon, was not very pleasant-looking — Prof. Meyer-Maier took a pin and transfixed the body of the fly. It seemed to him that a vicious sheen of light emanated from the eyes and that the proboscis rolled up. Quickly he picked up the magnifying glass, but it was an optical illusion — the thing was dead, with all its poison still within its body.

Memories of the Expedition to Africa

With a deep sigh he laid aside pincers and magnifying glass and sank into a deep reverie. The clock struck 12. 1-2-3-4-5, counted Professor Meyer-Maier.

In Udjidji, a village on lake Tanganyika, the natives had told him of gigantic flies inhabiting the interior further north. These monsters were three times as big as giants composing the giant bodyguard of the Prince of Sauggi, who all had to be of at least standard height. Meyer-Maier laughed over this negro fable, but the negroes were obstinate. They refused to follow him to the northern part of Lake Tanganyika. Even Mau-uru, his black servant, who otherwise made an intelligent impression,

trembled with excitement and begged to be left out of the expedition — because there enormous flies and bees were to be found, — that let no man approach. They drank the river dry and guarded the valley of the elephants. "The Valley of the Elephants" was a fabled place where the old pachyderms withdrew to die. "It is inexplicable," soliloquized Meyer-Maier, "that no one ever found a dead elephant."

The clock struck 6-7-8.

The natives had come along on the expedition much against their will. Meyer-Maier had trouble to keep the caravan moving up to the day when he found four great, strange looking eggs, larger than ostrich eggs. The negroes were seized with a panic, half of them deserting in the night, in spite of the great distance from the coast. The other half could only be kept there by tremendous efforts. He had to make up his mind finally, to go back, but he secretly put the eggs he had found into his camping chest to solve their riddle.

Now they were here in his Berlin home, in his work-room. He had not found time as yet to examine them, for he had brought much material home to be worked over.

The clock struck 9-10.

Meyer-Maier kept thinking of the ugly head of the tse-tse fly that he had seen through the magnifying glass. A strange thought occurred to him and made him smile. Suppose the stories of the negroes were true and the giant flies — butterflies and beetles as big as elephants did exist! And suppose that they propagated as flies do! — each one laying eighty million eggs a year! He laughed aloud and pictured to himself how such a creature would stalk through the streets.

A Strange Sound and the Hatching of an Egg

He broke off suddenly, in the midst of his laughter. A sound reached his ear, an earsplitting buzzing like that of a thousand flies, a deafening hum, as if a swarm of bees were entering the room; it burst out like a blast of wind through the room and then stopped. Meyer-Maier jerked the door open. Nothing. All was quiet.

"I must relax for a while," said he, and opened the window. He turned on the light and threw back the lid of the big chest, which contained the giant eggs. Suddenly he grew pale as death and staggered back. A creature was crawling out, a creature as big as a police dog — a frightful creature with wings — a muscular body, and six

hairy legs with claws. It crept slowly, raised its incandescent head to the light and polished its wings with its hind legs. Faint with fright, Meyer-Maier pressed against the wall with outspread arms. A loud buzzing, — the creature swept across the room, climbed up on the window sill and was gone.

Meyer-Maier came slowly to himself. “My nerves are deceiving me. Did I dream?” he whispered, and dragged himself to the camp-chest. But he became frozen with horror. One egg was broken open. “It breaks out of the shell like a chicken, it does not change into a chrysalis,” he thought mechanically. At last his mind cleared and he awoke to the emergency. He sprang to the door, snatched up his revolver, ran downstairs and out into the street. He saw no trace of the escaped giant insect. Meyer-Maier looked up into the lighted windows of his home. Suddenly the light became dim. “The other eggs” — like a blow came the thought — “the other eggs too have broken.” He raced back up the stairs. A deafening buzzing filled the room. He jacked his door open and fired — once, twice, until the magazine was empty— the room was silent. Through the window he saw three silhouettes sweeping high across the night-sky and disappearing in the direction of the great woods in the West. In the chest there lay the four broken giant eggs.

A Call for His Colleague

Meyer-Maier sank upon a chair. “It’s against all logic,” he thought, and glanced at the empty revolver in his hand. “My delirium has taken wings and crawled out of the egg. What shall I do? Shall I call the police? They will send me to an alienist! Keep quiet about it? Look for the creature? I’ll call up my colleague, Schmidt-Schmitt!” He dragged himself to the telephone and got a connection. Schmidt-Schmitt was at home! “This is Meyer-Maier,” sounded a tired voice. “Come over at once!”

“What’s the trouble?” asked Schmidt-Schmitt.

“My African giant eggs have burst,” lisped Meyer-Maier with a falling voice. “You must come at once!”

“Your nerves are out of order,” answered Schmidt-Schmitt. “Have you still got the creatures?”

“They’ve gone,” whispered Meyer-Maier, — he thought he would collapse, — “flew out of the window.”

"There, there," laughed Schmidt-Schmitt. "Now, we are getting to the truth — of course they aren't there. Anyhow, I'll come over. Meanwhile take a cognac and put on a cold pack."

"Take your car, and say nothing about what I told you."

Professor Meyer-Maier hung up the receiver.

It was incredible. He pressed his hand to his forehead. If the empty shells were not irrefutable evidence, he would have been inclined to think of hallucinations.

He helped himself to some brandy and after the second glass he felt better. "I wish Professor Schmidt-Schmitt would come. He ought to be here by now. He will have an explanation and will help me to get myself in hand again. The day of ghosts and miracles is long past. But why isn't he here? He ought to have come by this time."

Meyer-Maier looked out of the window. A car came tearing through the dark street and stopped with squeaking brakes in front of Meyer-Maier's residence. A form jumped out like an India rubber ball, ran up the steps, burst into Meyer-Maier's study, and collapsed into a chair.

"How awful," he gasped.

"It seems to me, you are even more excited over it than I," said Professor Meyer-Maier dispiritedly while he watched his shaking friend.

"Absolutely terrible." Professor Schmidt-Schmitt wiped his forehead with a silk handkerchief. "You were not suffering from nerves, you had no hallucinations. Just now I saw a fly-creature as large as a heifer falling upon a horse. The monster grew big and heavy, while the horse collapsed and the fly flew away. I examined the horse. Its veins and arteries were empty. Not a drop of blood was left in the body. The driver fainted with fright and has not come to yet. It is a world catastrophe."

Notifying the Police

"We must notify the police at once."

A quick telephone connection was obtained. The police Lieutenant in charge himself answered.

“This is Professor Meyer-Maier talking! Please believe what I am going to tell you. I am neither drunk nor crazy. Four poisonous gigantic flies, as large as horses are at large in the city. They must be destroyed at all costs.”

“What are you trying to do? Kid me?” the lieutenant came back in an angry voice.

“Believe me — for God’s sake,” yelled Meyer-Maier, reaching the end of his nervous strength.

“Hold the wire.” The Lieutenant turned to the desk of the sergeant. “What is up now?”

“A cab driver has been here who says that his horse was killed by a gigantic bird on Karlstraase.”

“Get the men of the second platoon ready for immediate action,” he ordered the sergeant, and turned back to the telephone. “Hello Professor! Are you still there? Please come over as quickly as possible. What you told me is true. One of these giant insects has been seen.”

Professor Meyer-Maier hung up. He loaded his revolver and put a Browning pistol into his colleague’s hand. “Is your car still downstairs?”

“Yes, I took the little limousine.”

“Excellent—then the monster cannot attack us.” They rushed on through the night.

“What can happen now?” inquired Professor Schmidt-Schmitt.

“These giant flies may propagate and multiply in the manner of the housefly. And in that case, due to their strength and poisonous qualities,” continued Professor Meyer-Maier, “the whole human race will perish in a few weeks. When they crept from the shell they were as large as dogs. They grew to the size of a horse within an hour. God knows what will happen next. Let us hope and pray that we will be able to find and kill the four flies and destroy the eggs which they have laid in the meantime, within fourteen days.”

The car came to a stop in front of the Police Station. A policeman armed with a steel helmet and hand trench bombs swinging from his belt tore open the limousine door. The lieutenant hastened out and conducted the scientists into the station house.

“Any more news?” inquired Meyer-Maier.

“The West Precinct station just called up. One of their patrolmen saw a giant animal fly over the Teutoburger Forest. Luckily we had war tanks near there which immediately set out in search of the creature.”

The telephone-bell rang. The lieutenant rushed to the phone.

“Central Police Station.”

“East Station talking. Report comes from Lake Wieler, that a gigantic fly attacked two motor boats.”

“Put small trench mortars on the police-boat and go out on the lake. Shoot when the beast gets near you.”

“The door of the Station-House opened and the city commissioner entered. “I have just heard some fabulous stories,” he said, and approached the visitors. “Professor Meyer-Maier? Major Fritsch-Wiholf! Can you explain all this?”

“I brought home with me four large eggs from my African expedition, for examination. Tonight these eggs broke open. Four great flies came out — a sort of tse-tse fly, such as is found on Lake Tanganyika. The creatures escaped through the window and we must make every endeavor to kill them at once.”

The telephone bell rang as if possessed.

“This is the Central Broadcasting Station. A giant bird has been caught in the high voltage lines. It has fallen down and lies on the street.”

“Close the street at once.” The major took up the instrument. “Call up the Second Company. Let all four flying companies go off with munition and gasoline for three days. Come with me my friends, we will get at least one of them!”

As armored automobile came tearing along at a frightful speed. “We appreciate your foresight, Major,” said Meyer-Maier, as they stepped from the steel-armored machine.

One of the Giant Flies is Electrocuted

Although it was five o'clock in the morning, the square in front of the broadcasting station was black with people. The police kept a space clear in the center, where monstrously large and ugly, lay the dead giant fly. Its wings were burnt, its proboscis extended, while the legs, with their claws, were drawn up against the body. The abdomen was a great ball, full of bright red liquid. "That is certainly the creature that killed the horse," said Schmidt-Schmitt, and pointed at the thick abdomen. He then walked around the creature. "*Glossina pulpulis.* A monstrous tse-tse fly."

"Will you please send the monster to the zoological laboratory?" The major nodded assent. The firemen, prepared for service, pushed poles under the insect and tried to lift it up from the ground. Out of the air came a droning sound. An airplane squadron dropped out of the clouds and again disappeared. A bright body with vibrating wings flew across the sky. The airplane dropped on it. The noise of the machine-guns started. The bright body fell in a spiral course to the ground. Crying and screaming, the people fled from the street and crowded into the houses. They couldn't tell where the insect would fall and they were afraid of their heads. The street was empty in an instant. The body of the monster fell directly in front of the armored car and lay there, stiff. In its fall it carried away a lot of aerial cable and now it lay on the pavement as if caught in a net, the head torn by the machine gun bullets. It looked like a strange gleaming cactus.

"Take me to my home, Major," groaned Meyer-Maier. "I can't stand it any longer. The excitement is too much for me."

In the Hospital

The armored car started noisily into motion. Meyer-Maier fell from the seat, senseless, upon the floor. When he came to himself, he lay in a strange bed. His gaze fell upon a ball which swung to and fro above his face. In his head there was a humming like an airplane motor. He made no attempt, even to think. His finger pressed the push-button and he never released it until half-a-dozen attendants came rushing into the room. One figure stood out in dark colors, in the group of white-clad interns. It was his colleague, Schmidt-Schmitt.

"You're awake?" said he, and stepped to his bed. "How are you feeling?"

“My head is buzzing as if there were a swarm of hornets living in it. How many hours have I lain here?”

“Hours?” Schmidt-Schmitt dwelt upon the word. “Today is the fifteenth day that you are lying in Professor Stiebling’s sanitarium. It was a difficult case. You always woke up at meal-times and without saying a word, went to sleep again.”

“Fifteen days?” cried Meyer-Maier excitedly. “And the insects? Have they been killed?”

“I’ll tell you the whole story when you are well again,” said Schmidt-Schmitt, quieting him. “Lie as you are, quietly—any excitement may hurt you.”

“They must not come into the room!” he screamed out to an excited messenger, who breathlessly pulled the door open.

“Professor!—” the man was in deadly fear—”the Central Police station has given out the news that a swarm of giant flies are descending upon the city.”

“Barricade all windows at once!”

“You wasted precious time,” screamed Meyer-Maier, and jumped out of bed. “Let me go to my house. I must solve the riddle as to how to get at the insects. Don’t touch me,” he raved. He snatched a coat from the rack, ran out of the house, and jumped into Schmidt-Schmitt’s automobile which stood at the gate, and went like the wind, to his home. The door of his house was ajar. He rushed up four flights and in delirious haste rushed into his workroom. The telephone bell rang.

The Danger is Over

Meyer-Maier snatched up the receiver. He got the consoling message from the city police-commissioner: “The danger is over, Professor. Our air-squadron has destroyed the swarm with a cloud of poison-gas. Only two of the insects escaped death. These we have caught in a net and are taking them to the zoological gardens.”

“And if they have left eggs behind them?”

“We are going to search the woods systematically and will inject Lysol into any

eggs we find. I think that will help," laughed the Major. "Shall I send some of them to you for examination?"

"No," cried Meyer-Maier in fright. "Keep them off my neck."

He set down at his work-table. There seemed a vicious smile on the face of the transfixed dead tse-tse fly. "You frightful ghost," murmured the professor with pallid lips, and threw a book on the insect. His head was in a daze. He tried his best to think clearly. An axiom of science came to him: if the flies are as large as elephants, they can only propagate as fast as elephants do. they can't have a million young ones, but only a few. "I can't be wrong," he murmured. "I'll look up the confirmation."

He took the telephone and called the city Commissioner. "Major, how many insects were in the swarm?"

"Thirteen. Eleven are dead. The other two will never escape alive. They are fed up with the poison-gas."

"Thank you." Meyer-Maier hung up the receiver. "Very well," he murmured, "now there can be no question of any danger, for each fly can only lay three or four eggs at once, — not a million."

An immense weariness overcame him. He went into his bed-room and fell exhausted on his bed. "It is well that there is a supreme wisdom which controls the laws of nature. Otherwise the world would be subject to the strangest surprises." He thought of the monsters and crept anxiously under the bed-clothes. "I'll entrust Schmidt-Schmitt with the investigation of the creature phenomenon, I simply can't stand further excitement."

And sleep spread the mantel of well-deserved quiet over him.

Danger

Irvin Lester and Fletcher Pratt

The wind rose in the night and by dawn the sky was streaming with torn and ragged masses of cloud moving from south to north like an army in flight. There was a shiver of cold in the air and the seas ran so high that effective work was impossible, so we gathered in Professor Hartford's cabin to help the old man brave out his discomfort by getting him to talk. The way in which he kept up his spirit, if not his body, through all the miseries of seasickness on that trip, was one of the finest exhibitions of courage I have seen anywhere.

As the senior member of the Museum's staff he was, in a sense, in charge of the expedition, though like the rest of us, he was inclined to let things run themselves while he pursued his specialty. Perhaps it was fortunate for him that the protozoa can be studied as well on a constantly moving steamer as on dry land; for the work kept his mind off his troubles. At all events, every day that was calm enough for him to be out of bed, found him poring over his microscope in search of hitherto undescribed forms in this remote corner of the Pacific.

On days such as this he lay in his bunk, and between uneasy heavings of the *mal-de-mer* that plagued him, lectured our crowd of assorted scientific experts on the importance of unicellular life. Very interesting lectures they must have been to the other chaps; even I was sometimes caught by the spell of the professor's keen and philosophical observation, and as a mere artist I always felt more or less a misfit among all those -ologies and -isms.

I remember this day in particular, partly because the evening brought us to our first view of Easter Island and partly because the conversation turned to those scientific generalizations; which are both easier to understand and more interesting to the non-scientific hearer. But even then, I probably would have recalled it only as one of a number of similar talks, had not after events given it a peculiar, almost a sinister significance.

Burgess, our entomologist, had been trying to draw the professor out by descanting on the rising tide of insect life. "Sooner or later," he declared, "we will have to fight for our lives with them. Science always plods along behind their attacks. They have taken the chestnut, the boll-weevil and corn-borer are taking two more of our economically important plants. Who knows but that nature is working in its slow way to send us after the dinosaurs?"

Slap, slap, went the waves against the cabin wall.

“Perhaps, perhaps,” mused Professor Hertford, “though I incline to think that the insects will never drive man from the planet. Evolution allows a group only one opportunity — the insects had their chance to rule the world in the Carboniferous, and failed.

“. . . No,” he went on, “there are many lines of evolution untried, but none of them lead through existing forms. When a more capable type than man appears, it will be in a wholly new form of animal life — perhaps even a direct evolution from the protozoa. So far as we know, evolution along that line has never taken place to any great extent. The division between the one-celled and many-celled animals is sharper than that between an insect and an elephant. Think of a one-celled animal, practically immortal as they are and possessed of intelligence. No matter what work we do, no matter what records we leave, the greater portion of human knowledge perishes with the minds that give it birth. Think what it would mean if one person could go on gathering knowledge through the centuries.”

“But,” objected Burgess, “a parmoecium hasn’t any brain tissue. You can’t have that without some nervous organization.”

“But, my dear Burgess,” said the professor, urbanely, “is brain tissue necessary to thought? You might as well say fins are necessary to swimming. Neither the polar bear nor the octopus have them, yet both can swim very well. Nature has a queer way of accomplishing similar results by all sorts of different means. Suppose thought is what Osborn hints it is — a matter of chemical reaction, and interaction — is there any need for brain tissue in which the thought must take place?”

“All true enough,” said Burgess, “but you must admit that without proprioceptors there can be no sensation, and with a cortex—”

The conversation became so technical that I was perforce eliminated from it, and wandered down the iron stairway to watch the engines. For a time I sat there, vainly trying to put on paper the flicker of those bright moving parts — so beautifully ordered, so Roman in their efficient performance of their task, whatever else was happening. But it was no use; a job for a Nevinson, and I clambered back to the deck.

There I found the weather had moderated. The whole southwest was streaked with the orange presage of a fairer day and, right in the center of the illumination, grey and ominous, a huge cone rose steeply from the water.

“That’s Puakatina,” said Bronson the mate, pausing beside me. “There’s an anchorage right beneath it, but we’ll have to work round to the west of Cook’s Bay to get shelter from the wind. I was here on a guano ship ten years ago. Damndest place you ever saw — no water, no fish, no nothing.”

Morning found us at anchor in the bay and already scattering to our several pursuits. For me, Easter Island was a fairyland. Never, among primitive work, have I seen such sculpture. It far surpassed the best Egyptian work, for every one of those cyclopean heads was a portrait, and almost a perfect one. I cannot better express my feeling for them than by saying that now, as I am writing this account with the memory sharp in my mind, of she strange and terrible events that took place later, I must still turn aside to pay tribute to those statues.

After all they are not so far from my story. Indeed, it was the statues that gave me what should have been a clue — a queer idea that all was not quite as it should be on this island — an idea that I would dismiss as an afterview, were it not that I find on the margin of one of my sketches, made at the time, a note to the effect that something very curious must have happened on the island. Those stones were carved by nothing less than a race of conquerors, with stern high faces, utterly different from the easy-going Polynesians of today. What became of them?

The same impression, of some weird catastrophe, was confirmed by other members of the expedition. There were almost no fish, very little life for the botanists to chew on, and Hertford announced at one of our cabin conferences that the waters, as Agassiz had reported, were quite devoid of plankton. He pooh-poohed the idea of the subsidence of a large land put forth by De Salza, our geologist. “Subsidence,” he said, “would leave the plankton and fish untouched. It is more as though some destructive organism had swept every trace of life from the locality. All the birds and the few fish are obviously recent immigrants, like the people.”

Despite my entreaties for more time to make sketches, the scientists had done about all they could with this barren land in a week or so, and we hauled up anchor for Sala-y-Gomez, three hundred miles further east, taking a couple of the islanders with us. In spite of its atmosphere of ruin and gloom I was sorry to leave Easter Island, but there was the possibility that Sala-y-Gomez might contain some traces of the Easter script or carvings, and I felt it necessary to refuse Hertford’s offer to leave me and stop on the way back.

Upon Sala-y-Gomez too, we came just at evening, marking it by the white line of foam along its low-lying shores as we felt our way slowly among the reefs, and here

occurred another of those trivial incidents which are straws pointing in the direction of hidden things.

I was standing by the rail with Howard, the icthyological man, idly watching the wires of the dredge where they interrupted the slow curls of water turned back by our bow when there was a heavy muffled clang, and we saw the lines of the dredge tighten to tensity. Howard signalled for it to be drawn in, and together we watched the big scoop, eager to see what it had encountered. To our surprise it held only a little sea-weed.

"Now that's odd," said Howard, searching the sea-weed, with a small hand glass. "I could have sworn that dredge caught something heavy."

"It did," I answered, pointing. There was a long scratch of bright metal along one side.

"Corals possibly," he remarked. "Hey, Bronson, any reefs charted here?"

The mate strolled up. "Not on the charts," he said, "but you never can tell. These Chilean charts aren't very good, you know."

"M—m—m" murmured Howard, continuing his examination. "There ought to be fragments of coralline formation here, but there aren't. Wonder what is could have been? Almost as though we'd caught something and it got away."

The thought of Hertford's comment about a destructive organism slipped into my mind, to be dismissed as not worth mentioning. Rock, shark, almost anything would have made that mark on the dredge.

There were no specimens ready to be sketched in the morning, and I went ashore with the first boat to wander about the island with my drawing materials. It must have been nearly noon when I rounded a jutting outcrop of rock to see before me a little sandy cove, placid and unresponsive in the heat, without a sign of life. Far ahead, a dark blob of rock was the only mark on the perfect line of the beach. It was so suavé a scene that I sat down to make a sketch. After I had pencilled it in and was mixing the brown color for the cliffs, I noted that the rock seemed to have moved, but I attributed it to imagination and went on with my coloring. It must have been quite ten minutes when I looked up again. This time there could be no doubt — neither the outline nor the position of the rock were at all as I had recorded them.

In some excitement, I started to climb down the cliff toward this singular rock that

changed place and form, but the distance was considerable, and while I was still a quarter of a mile away, it moved again, visibly this time, sliding down to the water's edge, where it disappeared beneath the gentle surge. The most peculiar thing about it was that there seemed to be no sensible method of progress; it flowed, like a huge, irregular drop of liquid.

I hurried back to the camp with my sketch and my tale, but found the rest in no condition to listen. Old Makoi Toa, one of the Easter Islanders we had brought along with us, had been killed, apparently by a snake. "He was fishing down the beach ahead of the rest," said Howard, "just out of sight beyond that rock. We all heard him scream, and hurried to the spot. When we got there he was already dead, with a round hole in his chest, and shortly after he turned that hideous blue black that people turn to who die of snake-bite. It might have been one of those sea-snakes but for the size of the wound."

"I'm sure I saw something sliding away into the water," added Greaves, the botanist, "but it didn't look in the least like a snake."

The shadow of the old man's death lay on our little cabin conference that night, inhibiting speech, though the means of it remained a mystery. It was not until I told my tale that there was any conversation at all. As I finished there was a little moment of silence, during which each one made the obvious parallel between the occurrence and the death of Makoi Toa, and then Professor Hertford asked to see my sketch. He looked at it closely for a moment.

"Unless I am mistaken, gentlemen," he said, "we are facing an unknown organism of serious potentialities. May I ask that you do not go ashore to-morrow unless you are well armed and in pairs?"

"What is it, professor?" asked de Salza.

"I would prefer not to hazard a guess just yet. I may be in error." And that was the last word on the subject that we could draw from him, although de Salza laughed at the idea of anything sinister in connection with this little spot of land.

The next day was bright and clear, and after attending the burial service for Makoi Toa, I sought Greaves and together we made for the spot where I had seen the moving rock. I admit we were culpable in not going armed as the professor advised, but who would then have thought....?

We reached the place about the same time I had been there the previous day, climbed down the cliffs with each other's help, and walked across the white sand of the cove, to where I had seen the moving rock. It was not more than ten yards from the edge of a place where the receding tide of years had left a number of little arched caves. Just where I had sketched the rock was a ridge of sand pulled aside by the weight of whatever had been there, and in the center of it, a round, bard ball, perhaps three or four inches in diameter. Greaves picked it up, turning it over curiously.

"Why, it's feathers and bones," he said, extending if to me, "just as though it had been regurgitated by a pelican or an eagle after a meal."

I reached my hand for it, and just then, by the grace of Providence, caught a flicker of motion out of the tail of my eye. I turned to meet it; my foot gave on the soft sand, and I fell prone. It was the fall that saved me for something sharp whistled not an inch past my shoulder as I went down. The next instant I heard Greaves shout, and felt him tug my arm, and in the same moment something cold and clammy and hard grated and gripped against my foot. A horrible fear, the fear of imminent death, turned me to ice; I seemed incapable of movement, but somehow got to one knee, and between my own efforts and Greaves' pull, the grip on my foot relaxed. I half stumbled, half-rolled down the sand, and as I did so, there was another whistling flash and something struck the pocket of my coat, going right through the cloth and the sketch pad beneath it, to fall short of my skin by the narrowest of margins. Greaves was pulling me to my feet, and in a moment we were running.

In the interests of science I regret that we stood not on the order of our going. Neither of us spoke till we turned and paused at the top of the cliff, after a breathless climb. The cove was as empty as it had been before.

"My God — What was it?" I gasped.

"I don't *know*, I don't *know*." Greaves was half sobbing with excitement. "Something big and sort of — all soft — threw those things at us — half a dozen of the them — My God."

We were both so much shaken that the journey back to the camp seemed interminable, and it was some time after our arrival before a consecutive story could be gotten out of Greaves. When he did tell his tale, it appeared that he had noticed the thing almost as soon as I — a great, dead brown object of uncertain form which had slid up softly from the water and shot out the darts I had seen without warning or sound, "as a cuttlefish does when you touch it," said Greaves, with a shudder. "The

horrible part about it was that the thing had no eyes but seemed to see perfectly and know just where to move to head us off. I thought I'd never get you pulled loose ... All the time I was dodging those darts I kept thinking about Makoi Toa...."

"I think you will agree," said Professor Hertford, when he had finished his rather incoherent account, "that my anticipations have been realized. Everything points to the presence in these waters of an efficient and destructive organism, capable not only of dominating the whole animal environment, but possibly even of depopulating Easter Island. From your description which is very rough and inaccurate, I should not be surprised to find it a giant new species of infusorian of jellyfish. Both types have those stinging tentacles. I am in favor of remaining until we obtain more data about this animal, but as some — er — danger may attend such a course, I should prefer to leave it to the majority."

What could we do in the face of such an appeal? Personally, I had felt the grip on my foot and had no desire to feel it again. I could understand the flame of scientific interest driving the others, but it was rather with foreboding than enthusiasm that I listened to the eager plans they made for entrapping one of the animals which had attacked us.

I doubt whether anybody except de Salza (who was a human fish, intolerant of anything but the record of the rocks) was absent from the group which gathered behind the top of the cliffs the next morning to watch the fluttering antics of a chicken pegged out on the sand where we had met our adventure. Howard and Grimm (the conchologist) were armed with the only two rifles the expedition afforded, it having been agreed that it was better to examine a dead specimen before trying to take a live one.

The sun grew unconscionably hot as it swung across the sky. We conversed in low tones and were wondering whether we had come on a wild goose chase when I saw Howard beside me, stiffen to attention. I looked around — there was a break in the ripple, and through it slowly emerged the shape of the monster, dull brown in hue. I felt a quiver of excitement; the chicken was straining to the limit of its rope. There was a crack! that made all of us jump, as someone fired. "No, not yet," cried the professor, but the dark form took no notice, only moved on, formless and flowing, with half a score of short tentacles waving before it. Then it appeared to notice the chicken, paused, waved a tentacle or two at it, and there was a flicking motion as one of the darts shot out. The chicken went limp and the monster flowed gently over it. When it had passed, chicken, rope, and even the stake, were gone.

Both men were now firing, but they might as well have been throwing peas. The fantastic mound of jelly rolled back into the water in the same leisurely fashion it had come out, and disappeared.

Everybody began to talk at once, "The thing must be bullet proof!" "Invertebrate, but what an invertebrate!" "So that's what cleaned up Easter Island!" "Did you notice the ossicles?" "It's a hydroid!" "More like a medusid." "What do you think, Dr. Hertford?"

On one thing the conference that followed was agreed: that the animal, whatever it was, must be captured and examined. Various wild suggestions about dynamite and chemicals came up to be laughed down, and it was Dr. Hertford, as usual, who supplied the determining factor.

"It seems to me," said he, "that it would be worth while to postpone our trip to the continent and attempt to take one of these animals in one of the mammal cages. I believe the one you shot at was at least seriously injured; it seems incredible that it could be altogether bullet proof. We may, therefore, have a wall before another appears. What do you say?"

De Salza's was the only dissenting voice. I kept silence. I wish I had not, for though my protest might have done little good, it would at least have taken a load from my conscience that can never be quite clear now. However, I made no protest. The cage was rigged up on the shore with another chicken inside and a trick arrangement to slam the door shut on the invader and we sat down at the cove to wait.

It was the afternoon of the third day from the installation of the cage, and I was in my tent at the camp, trying to capture the color pattern of a small and very wiggly fish when the excited voice of Howard hailed us to announce that the cage held a prisoner. At once everything else was forgotten and we all hurried off, pell-mell, Dr. Hertford for all his years, well in the lead.

Sure enough the little mammal cage was filled to overflowing with the brown jelly-like mass of the monster, a tentacle or two waving in a friendly manner from the edges of the mass where it bulged between the bars. I admit it gave me a gone feeling in the pit of the stomach to watch it; it was like nothing I had ever seen or heard of, but among the scientists it produced only the liveliest interest.

Warned by previous experience, they approached it with some caution, Howard carrying a piece of sheet iron from the ship before the professor like a shield-bearer

in the days of the Iliad, while Greaves and Grimm came behind at a respectable distance, bearing rifles at the ready.

As they drew near, I heard the professor cry out in excitement, “Why, it’s a protozoan! Look, the nucleus, and those cilia! And the triocysts! A single celled animal, by all that’s holy! Related to *Loxodes* unless I am mistaken.” Simultaneously, Greaves and Grimm, attracted by his words, drew a step nearer, and even Howard lowered the sheet iron to peer at the animal. And in that moment it happened.

With an indescribable swaying motion, the jelly-like mass in the cage seemed to surge through the narrow opening in the cage, and as it surged, the air about it was filled with the flash of those deadly darts. I heard Howard cry out, I saw Grimm leap; a gun was discharged, and the sheet iron clanged on the sand. Then there was silence and the brown mass in the cage oozed slowly across the sand to the four dead men, who writhed for a moment and lay still.

I think I must have gone a little mad in the next moments. I can never recall quite accurately what happened. I remember only a paralyzing mist of horror, and the walls of my cabin. They tell me that the cove was found utterly empty save for the cage with its door shut tight . . . I do not know . . . I do not know. A round ball, like the ball of feathers and bones found by Greaves was picked up later on the beach. It held shattered human bones, a fragment of blue cloth and a brass key, nothing more. I did not see it.

Even today, the memory of the horror of that moment gives me sleepless nights and days of shuddering. All too clearly I recall the words of that brave and gentle man who went to his death on the beach of Sala-y-Gomez, “When a type to replace man appears, it will be a direct evolution from the protozoa...” All too clearly, I remember his last words, and the desolation wrought by these animals on Easter Island and through that great stretch of the Eastern Pacific known as the Agassiz triangle, and I wonder how long it will be before they invade the continents.

It will be long, of that I am certain. The length of the time makes me wish to forget it and leave the future to care for itself. But I feel it a duty to the memory of Dr. Hertford to lay aside my own feeling. and place this story before the public, especially since de Salza, the only surviving member of that disastrous expedition, has cast doubt upon his conclusions and has disparaged his memory. If, in the face of a de Salza’s reputation, I have succeeded in convincing even a few that humanity is on the verge of a battle to the death with a perhaps superior form of life, I am content; I have accomplished my purpose.

The Malignant Flower

Anthos

Lala Daulat Ras had finished his story. For a while he stood there, stiff and straight as a statue in front of the Englishman who was immersed in deep thought. He measured him with a glance in which the mysticism of ancient wisdom of his native home and enigmatic cruelty were mingled. Then he left slowly with measured steps.

Sir George William Armstrong started up from his dreaming and gulped down a glass of whiskey. It was perfect lunacy what the Hindoo had told him, and yet, and yet one had to believe him word for word, for Daulat Ras was a Yoghi, and a Yoghi never lies. But he wanted to, and had to settle for himself whether occult powers abided in these strange men, who hate the European and very seldom bring to light the "nature secrets" of their land. Sir George was well off and without any ties. No sport was strange to him. He could certainly start the undertaking, but he needed a reliable as well as taciturn companion. The native servant familiar with the ways of the land, to whom he disclosed his plan, said he would sooner be thrown alive to a tiger or be buried in an ant-hill. So he had to turn to his faithful old John Bannister.

In the long full years of their connection, he had become more than a mere valet. Indeed, he was a sort of confidential friend. True and watchful as a dog, tenacious and indefatigable in hardships, courageous in danger. His skin was like parchment, no red blood seemed to flow beneath it, but in spite of his 65 years he was muscular and had a constitution like iron and steel. And Sir George took him into his confidence. But this it was which Daulat Ras had related:

Some ten days journey from here, in an accurately-indicated little valley of the Himalayas, which is about 200 yards long, there is a curious little bit of earth, a ravine hedged in by three high perpendicular walls. The only access is on one of the four sides, over a sort of quagmire or pond, out of which poisonous vapors rise. You had to row closely along the edge of it in a boat in order to avoid the poisonous gases. The ravine itself, completely overgrown with flowers, is the home for demons, mischievous satanic forms, mixtures of man and woman, against whom all the weapons of civilization are useless. In spring and in fall they reveal their mysterious power. Woe to him who treads upon their reservation. Death and insanity is his fate. If he escapes the destruction alive, he remains dead, — as far as earthly love is concerned. Mark this, — death for all earthly love.

John Bannister smiled sneeringly. His master stood immersed in deep thought. He thought of the blonde fiancée, whom in this very month he was to take to her future home. Near Calcutta, in a picturesque suburb, is a charming bungalow, which was even then being erected in feverish haste according to his directions. Then he would be at an end, once for all, as a restless globe trotter and adventurer. But till then, Harriet Richards was to suspect nothing of the goal of the journey, was not to be given one second of worry or of anxiety. He would pretend a business trip. And he laid out his plan. The railroad went part of the way. He would buy reliable maps of the country, would get provisions and a little row boat, would use porters until he would get to the entrance of the ravine. In the bright mid day he would enter it, while this last bit of the journey, he and his valued John Bannister should conquer alone. John rubbed his hands in satisfaction. He was satisfied with the party.....

The Hindoo had spoken the truth. The ravine was there. Behind dusky black marshlands was a bright tropical carpet of flowers in the most gorgeous colors of the young autumn. The goal was reached. The porters pushed the boat into the swamp and lay down trembling in a little hollow. Three hours of waiting was assigned them, enough time for the adventurers to go all over the little valley which was to be explored.

Countless little bubbles rose. The air was filled with strong biting vapors as the two discoverers glided along the edge of the turbid and scum-covered river. On each side the bare cliffs were in curious contrast to the blooming flora which awaited them in the valley. A quantity of withered thorn bushes, with dried and crooked branches, rose on the edge of the stream, which thickened steadily. The sun poured down obliquely. No wind stirred in this silent afternoon siesta of nature. As they got out of the boat, a heavy veil of vapor stretched over the upper valley. The atmosphere seemed to brew sultry over all and purple lightning jerked over the landscape. A hedgehog sprang up before them. Fearless and confident, he sized up the unusual visitors, trotted alongside of them for a while, then sat upon his hind legs and nibbled at an artichoke. Their shadows fell before them, dumb, trembling companions, while the adventurers, between bare cliffs, dropped down into the valley of the flowers, which stood in their second most exquisite bloom. Sir George forged ahead, carefully watching every step. Directly behind him came his companion, and both were armed to the teeth.

A wonder garden spread before their enraptured gaze. Flower after flower, each of inimitable brilliancy of color, pictures of never glimpsed dimensions, ever thicker, ever higher, rather trees than flowers. A whole forest through which it was only with difficulty that one could make his way. Orchids of the most varied kinds were here on the frontier of the highest giant cliffs of the world! Wary, dreamlike, gigantic flowers, with heat-trembling calyxes, covered the whole ravine, cutting off all vision beyond

it. Brusquely and undeterred, Sir George forced his way forward and onward, and his companion had more than once to warn him to look out for unknown dangers. What would rise up from behind or between this colored scenery? What kind of beings lurked behind it all, waiting for them?

There was nothing to be seen but flowers and more flowers. In feverish excitement they observed the size of the strange forest with its great plant growths as high as men, whose flowers in silent and majestic quiet were throned upon their stems. Nothing moved. Once only a Himalayan fox moved past them like a streak of lightning, and again there was the silence of a graveyard. Only the overcoming perfume of these myriads of blooms increased, and further progress seemed to oppress the very senses, and the two wanderers were overcome by a fantastic dreamlike mood. These flowers, these giant butterflies, or magnificent dazzling color, fluttering around them — were they not all satanically beautiful beings, which resembled reasoning creatures, benumbing the senses with a whirl, while they simulated the human organs — ear, eyes, lips, and tongue? Sir George gave free reign to his imagination. These ruthless beings which emitted this perfume out of their great languishing calyxes, at once seeming to have unsatisfied longing and dreaming, were they not half-flower, half-animal? Like slender white giant candelabra, their bodies rose upward. What kind of a secret did they hide?

And he began energetically and impatiently to forge ahead. Already he was easily ten yards ahead of his companion, half of the length of the valley through which they were walking was well behind him. The black, bare, steeply-rising cliff, which might have been poured from sealing wax, and which closed the valley, seemed to vibrate far in the distance, John Bannister started to run in order to catch up with his master, but his progress was ever retarded by creeping plants or round rock boulders, and now a sudden thicket rising from the ground cut off his steps and his view ahead. He forced his way through laboriously and found himself in an open glade nearly at the end of the ravine. And the sight that met his gaze.......... “But such a thing is impossible!” thought John Bannister to himself, as he rubbed his hand over his eyes. The unheard-of wonder did not vanish, but stood in a monumental quiet. In the middle of the glade a colossal flower rose up to a height of nearly 10 feet, the stem nearly a foot thick, looking like an immense hemlock cone. From the top five or six great leaves, resembling leather, reached down to the ground. From the blooms there dropped a fluid of overcoming strength of scent. And he saw Sir George William Armstrong, sunk in wonder, standing close by this queen of the valley. John Bannister involuntarily stood still. Something had moved. The pair of blooms of this great flower which hitherto had hung down, stiffened themselves visibly, — the piercing sweet perfume streamed out of them overpoweringly, and the three-fold thorny lips with their colored pattern trembled in the atmosphere back and forth, while the Doric column of the stem, dark yellow and sprinkled with black spots,

seemed to curve upwards, showing a labyrinthian net of blood red veins. What was this frightful spotted viperlike body, whose spots swelled up to thick berrylike eruptions?

Whatever it was, it meant danger. And John Bannister screamed out with the full strength of his lungs. "Sir George, take care, for Heaven's sake!"

But even then the awful thing came to pass. The flower slowly opened, and something bright and flesh-colored shot out of it. What dated so suddenly? Was it the sucking arms of an octopus? Was it the soft arms of a woman? From Sir George there came a scream that cut to the very marrow, and John Bannister, frozen stiff with fright, saw his master lifted by his shoulders, up, higher and higher, saw him hanging for a couple of seconds in uncertain balance, and finally disappearing slowly in to the calyx of the atrocious, malignant flower, whose petals once more drew themselves together with a start. In this way Sir George celebrated a symbolic marriage with nature, a festival more overcoming, but also more horrible than that for which he had prepared himself. Over the whole scene horror seemed to sweep on dark bat's wings.

There was the fraction of a second only, and John Bannister had remained his senses. He hastened to the flower with giant paces, drew his knife and tried to destroy the tough tentacles of the plant, closely clinging to each other. The knife went to pieces like glass in his grip, then he seized the axe, and accurately and carefully delivered blow after blow, which swelled up to a sort of clangor, as if a bell were cracking. After ten minutes of strenuous work, he had freed his master from his dangerous position, literally peeled out of a sheath.

Pale as death he lay before him on the grass, a grim and frozen smile as if half of supernatural pleasure, half of the fear of death was on his rigid features. But he breathed, lived, appeared uninjured, and allowed himself to be dragged away as if lifeless.

The return journey was silent and oppressive, first going back to the waiting porters, then the whole party returned to civilization. Nothing could induce Sir Armstrong to open his lips. He stared before him as if his mind had completely left him.

Later when Harriet Richards can to his bed in the hospital, he at first failed to recognize her. Then, while foam appeared at the corners of his lips, he rose up in his bed and with a frightful, piercing yell, he pushed her away....

And Sir George has not led Harriet Richards to the altar. Fourteen days after the catastrophe his hair became white as snow. A broken man for the rest of his life, he was taken to the City Insane Asylum, lingered there a year and a half until death set him free.

Returning from the burial, John Bannister suddenly saw Daulat Ras, the Yoghi, who seemed to have risen from the ground as by magic. "You had your warning," said he, and an undefinable expression played about his lips. "But how was it," cried out the other, "that Sir George rushed to his fate and to destruction, while I was spared?" On the features of the Asiatic lay the impenetrable mask of the Sphynx. With his forefinger he touched the parchment white face of the old servant. "Blood," said he, meaningly, — then he glided back and disappeared in the crowd of mourners.

Three years passed. Harriet Richards moved to Liverpool, and managed the household for her brother Jack, the ship-owner. Life resumed its usual way and even in her memory, the frightfulness of the events gradually paled. One evening, as Harriet sat in the comfortably-heated sitting room opposite her brother, the winter storm howling over the Atlantic, her glance rested on a column in the "Daily Telegraph."

Instinctively she took it up and read: "The Life Memoirs of the recently deceased Professor Dr. de Palfi, known as a botanist and explorer will soon appear. The professor's greenhouse, with their orchid cultures, situated in Vienna, his adopted home city, have enjoyed great European fame for the last ten years. In his memoirs, the professor tells in an impressive way of his extended explorations which took him into the most distant regions of all the continents. With the permission of the publisher we can quote from its contents today the sensational information that de Palfi on his last journey in which he reached the interior of Madagascar, actually came upon the much debated 'Man Eating Plant.' It is supposed to be a very rare variety of *Cypripedia gigantea* belonging to the class of the giant orchids, and is the largest flower on earth. These plants, growing in certain remote valleys, have described to them the power to seize small and also larger animals, and even men, who come within their reach. In the spring and fall, always according to de Palfi's observation, the pericarp, or seed container, forms a sort of natural trap. It thrusts out a quantity of sharp clawlike points, which, as they sink into the flesh, are strong enough to hold the large animals prisoners. Within, the plant is covered all over with suction caps, containing a sort of resinous gum that acts like birdlime in a bird trap. By virtue of a certain plant stimulus, a reflex motion back and forth sets up, enabling the enormous orchid to draw into itself even the body of a full grown man. The plant, it is understood, is a pure flesh-eater. It feeds itself principally on large animals and men. Sometimes the victims can be freed from the embraces of the flower after the murderous attack of the plant. Otherwise the captured individual is completely absorbed and fourteen days later the bare skeleton is cast out."

The Paradise of the Ice Wilderness

Jul. Regis

We were half a dozen good friends, enjoying a glass of beer at the village inn, and we had just asked the sea captain for a story.

He put down his pipe and produced two small cuttings from his pocket-book. He cleared his throat and began:

Well, I should like to refute those strange hypotheses and statements which have been produced from many quarters regarding what occurred at the bay of Chantanga east of Cape Tscheljuskin in North Siberia during the winter of 1896-'97. It happened during the trip along the coast of North Asia, which I then made with the Swedish whaler, *The White Bear*, and the story which I am going to tell you will thus be the narrative of an eye witness to a queer occurrence in North Siberia on Christmas Eve in 1896.

For those among you who peradventure have not heard anything about the matter, I will read both these cuttings.

"December 29th, 1896. A Curious Discovery. On the morning of Christmas Day, a trapper of Russian nationality arrived at the little town of Popigaisk, near the mouth of the Chantanga in Chantanga Bay, telling the people in town and asking to be believed, that he had seen, some miles north of the town, fresh tracks of a large animal; and he was quite sure that this animal was a mastodon. If the man was right in his supposition, this means an astonishing bit of news. Our correspondent adds that a heavy snowfall has already blotted out the tracks of the animal."

"January 9th, 1897. A Christmas Guest from the Primitive Ages? A week ago we published a short article regarding a queer discovery in unknown Siberia. It seems now as if the discovery may be confirmed from another source. Many persons have certainly been looking for the tracks of the mastodon without result, but if we dared believe the Esquimau Amsalic, he has been close upon making a nearer acquaintance with the strange animal. He, too, had been searching for the tracks, until dusk began to fall and with it a fine, thick snow, which made it impossible for him to proceed any further. He was about to turn back, when, in the darkness, he heard a loud cracking — like that of ice breaking up in spring, he said. The next instant heavy clumsy feet resounded against the frozen ground and a clumsy, gigantic body of unusual shape

rushed past by him so closely that he felt the rush of air. The animal had undoubtedly been frightened by something, perhaps by Amsalic himself. Since this narrative has been made public, several hunters have set out to hunt the mysterious animal."

When these articles were printed, I was frozen in with my ship and crew in the Polar Sea, but I have been told that they aroused considerable interest in certain quarters. Various ideas were debated; everyone had his own version of the matter. The most fantastic comments were published. Nevertheless, the truth seems more fantastic still.

On August 1st I sailed from Hammerfest, as captain, with my vessel, the old splendid White Bear, which, in spring, 1899, collided with an iceberg and sank off Archangel. The plan of the expedition was the usual one: to proceed along the north coast of Europe and Asia as long as possible, hunting for the whales and seals which are getting scarcer year by year. It was no new and untried enterprise. Already in the middle of 1800 an attempt had been made to create a regular whale traffic in those waters. Such an expedition usually stayed away a year, but proceeded in the summer as far as possible. In the winter it lay frozen in by the ice and returned the following spring with heavily-laden vessels.

We thus coasted along the shore of Kola and Kanin south of Koljugow and up towards Karuporten, a voyage which is a little longer in reality than in description. We were lucky. In three months we were able to discharge a full cargo at the company's station on Nova Semlja. Encouraged by our progress we continued eastwards, so that at the beginning of the winter we found ourselves at 114° eastern longitude in Nordenskiolds sea, after having followed about the same course as the Vega. Here, at the mouth of the Chantanga, we ultimately became icebound for the winter and had to prepare for an arctic winter sojourn.

The vast ice desert which surrounded us would have been irritating in its monotony if the eye had not found a fixed point in the expanse of white. Hardly fifty yards to our right was s little island, also covered with ice, from which one had a view of the narrow sound that separates the island from the mainland. The island was a mass of rock, in some pasts unusually high over the water's edge, while the mountain top in its center had a height of say three thousand feet. The island, which has no name on the chart, was christened by the crew "Hermit Island."

While the ship was being pushed out of the water by the ice, we built ourselves a winter hut on the island. Our new residence was very comfortable. The house was divided into one large and one small room. In the former resided a part of the crew

and in the latter the mate, trapper Jenssen, the controller of the company, a young man, named Berg, who was much like on board the steamer on account of his friendly and pleasant manner, and lastly myself. The rooms were lighted and warmed by a dynamo which we had on board.

Under such circumstances it is not surprising that life is likely to be lonely and sad. And it was worst at Christmas time. We felt homesick, while we were sitting at a late breakfast on the 24th of December on Hermit Island. Everyone of us was taken up with his own thoughts, even the controller, Berg, showed a gloomy face, and we expected no pleasant Christmas.

But if we wanted a stimulating interruption, we got it. We had not quite finished our meal when the ship's cook threw open the door and rushed in, followed by a sailor. I asked in astonishment what was the matter, but the man was so bewildered that he could not reply, and the sailor explained, instead.

"Well, captain, we have made a discovery!" he said.

Their whole appearance was one of such helpless astonishment that I followed the two men without a word. My four comrades accompanied me, of course, and our two guides led us to the foot of a cliff, where the whole of the crew was standing staring at something. Not a little inquisitive, we made our way to them through the snow. At the side of the perpendicular stone wall a compact mass of ice had been gathering through the ages. Its size and color hinted a great age. The secret which it was hiding would, however, never have been revealed, if the cook, who was a very smart fellow, had not made a fire on exactly this spot in order to get some fresh water for the kitchen. The result was astonishing. When the cook returned for more water, the fire had melted a deep hollow in the ice at the side of the cliff, and when, by chance, he cast a glance through this ice window, what he saw was sufficient to make him sit down in the snow, dumb with astonishment.

The sparkling fire continued its work, and when we arrived, the hollow was over six feet deep, making a cavity in the ice wall outside of which the fire was burning. There was nothing unusual in all this but through the clear ice wall, the contours of a big animal could be seen. Embedded in the blue ice, we saw two curved tusks, each as long as a full-grown man.

"Ohoy," exclaimed Berg, his jovial mind soon mastering the astonishment. "More fuel! We are going to melt out the poor thing!"

Wood was fetched and the fire crackled and blazed.

The flames threw red reflections in among the ice rocks, and the shadows were deep violet and farther away blue. Above us the stars were sparkling and bright northern lights fluttered over half the sky. The intense heat caused the icy water to rush around our feet, but, while the undermost layers of wood hissed and sputtered and smoked in the snow-water, the uppermost flamed briskly, fed with dry bushes, which in more protected places had carried on a hopeless fight against the arctic cold. Round the fire all the crew of *The White Bear* were standing, gazing almost in stupor, at the scene and at each other. The contours of the big animal emerged more and more. The ice grew thinner and whiter. All at once a little black spot appeared. It grew bigger, and a brown-grey, hairy hide was bared.

"What the — is it not a mammoth?" cried Berg in his impulsive manner.

So it was. My men wished to cut out the animal with their axes, but I forbade it, fearing to injure the body. The ice melted slowly away, and finally the colossus stood free, under an arched roof of dripping ice. The shapeless beast measured about eleven feet in height and twelve feet in length — the trunk wag longer than the tallest man among the crew. The second mate, who always boasted of his knowledge, remarked that such discoveries had been made before in several places in Siberia and that the ice hermetically sealed and preserved the dead body and saved it from decay, as the cold hindered the activity of the decaying organism. The flesh of the animal before us was, therefore, as fresh as if it had lived yesterday and not several thousand years ago. In order to confirm his word, the man inserted his knife in the animal's side and behold — some drops of blood squirted out of the cut! At this sight, several of the fellows paled and I, too, grew more than astonished. This blood, that I saw dripping before my eyes, had been coursing through the veins of the animal during the primeval ages!

The crew, however, had brought more wood and the red flames from the fire threw a weird shining reflection on the thousand or more years old ice wall.

This scene in the darkness of the frozen expanses of the Polar Sea at Christmas time was so like a saga, that we hardly should have been astonished if the big animal body had awakened to life and stepped out among us. The hide was steaming, and the hairy trunk shook. Berg was polishing his nose loudly — would the mastodon lift its trunk in a thundering answer?

In eager curiosity the ship's mate was running about the animal, fingering it,

measuring it and all the while holding a short scientific lecture to us others who were regarding the wonder in silence.

But this animal? Did not the legs shake under it? Did it not slowly alter its position? What would happen now?

Frozen and hungry, but not less interested, we waited breathlessly for the continuation of the adventure. And it came, though it took time.

When the fire had been fighting the thousand year old ice for some hours the colossus from antiquity began to stagger, and with a noise which shook the ground, the gigantic animal fell heavily on one side, extinguishing the flames as if he had blown out a candle. But simultaneously something else happened. Just where the colossus had been standing beside the wall of the cliff, we discovered a vault and within this we saw . . .

Several years have now passed since this event happened, but still I can hardly describe what we heard and saw when the thousand year old ice-field revealed its secret to us. During the whole of a long winter we had only seen ice, ice in every conceivable formation.

The monotony of the white and solitary ice-fields that stretched to the horizon had almost killed us. We had lost all hope of a change. I do not know whether you will understand me, but the mere prospect of an adventure of such unexpected proportions as this quite bewildered us.

Before our eyes there opened a rocky passage, covered with bleached skulls and skeletons, the bones of animals. These were creatures from hoary antiquity, which had guarded the secret! Above us loomed the heavy rock formations of the mountain, in their shadow hiding a world-startling mystery. For already from without we could see that the passage led into the depths of darkened caverns, into a system of passages and caves.

“Forward boys — follow your leader!” cried Berg and stormed into the darkness.

“Wait — a lantern!” I cried.

“Not necessary — it is already lighter here!” His answer sounded hollow, as if it had come from a mine.

We stood bewildered, not believing our eyes or ears. Finally four others and

myself penetrated into the passage. From a distance, Berg called to us. The echoes changed each of his words to a rattling volley of musketry.

It was a low irregular vault, half dark for about a thousand yards ahead and filled by violently scattered rocks which in some places only gave space enough to creep through. The cleft finally widened into a high vaulted grotto, which lost itself in twilight in all directions — a silent and sinister place, whose inhabitants had been dumb for generations. Everywhere these bones! Eloquent, even if dumb evidences of races that perished long ago! A cold, dry air of decay and death filled our nostrils, yet the place was not uncanny or even sinister. The ground was covered with gorgeously shaped plants, many of which were luminous or strangely colored. There were ferns of a height that seemed enormous to us — unknown kinds of trees, flowers in subdued tints, mostly pale red, some with white stripes. It was a radiance of pale and clear colors that was delightful. While we were devouring the scene with our eyes, Berg joined us. Some yards farther on we were stopped by a murmuring sound. A watercourse slowly sought its way between the stones. And on its margins we found big bleached human bones. I took one of the grinning skulls in my hand. It stared at me with its empty eye cavities as if it were saying:

"Solve my secret, if you can!"

But where did this vegetation come from, this rich verdure in the midst of the ice wilderness? After having followed the watercourse for a while, we found the explanation. It stopped suddenly at the foot of a wall of rock, where a whirlpool was in action. I dipped my hand in the water. It was warm. A subterranean spring then — and further away — very, very high up — faint light was visible. There must be an opening.

The mate declared that we were standing on a volcanic crater bottom in what had been a fire-vomiting mountain, extinct long ago.

It was a paradise we had discovered, a paradise of twilight and solitude, it is true, but a pleasure garden compared with the cold expanse which outside stretched in all directions. We balanced ourselves on the stones and crossed over the watercourse and walked up the opposite shore, which sloped up from the water. Arrived at the top we found before us a large expanse, whose borders were lost in the darkness on all sides. Here and there phosphoric fungus growths spread a pale light over the bed rock. I sniffed the air.

"Queer," I remarked. "It seems to me as if..."

"It smelt of stables, yes," Berg interrupted me with a snort.

“And hundreds of them,” added the mate emphatically.

Berg set up an hallooing. The echo replied with a hollow roar that startled us.

“What a mighty echo,” remarked Berg, a trifle pale. After it had died away, a sinister silence fell over the cavern. We did not move.

“Down there, where the earth is softer...” the mate muttered in a perplexed voice.

“What?” I exclaimed.

He pointed along the shore.

“Do you not see the earth is full of footprints?”

“By Jove!” exclaimed Berg. “Footprints of the mammoth!”

“Or of a still bigger animal,” the mate continued. “Some are old and dried up. Some were made later. Some were made today!”

He spoke the last sentence in such bewilderment, that we all drew nearer. All at once it seemed darker and uncannier about us than ever before.

“Hm,” said Berg with a voice which he tried to make steady. “For my part I am turning back.”

“Yes, let us go back!” I repeated.

At the same instant the echo was heard before us again, though we had only spoken in whisperings. Out of the darkness came a roar, strong as the trump of doom, and uttered at short intervals. It was heard again and again, followed by a sound as if a sledgehammer were regularly being thrown against the earth. My hair seemed to rise on my head and I lifted my arms, for I thought that the mountain was going to fall over me.

Something panted and stamped among the rocks, something roared and rumbled. Without a sound the mate held up his hand and pointed.

I followed his glance.

“Great Heaven!” I whispered.

There — between some gigantic ferns stood a comrade to the prehistoric animal we had just melted out of the ice, but living and, it seemed, of quite a different kind. The legs were those of an elephant, the body large and the throat thick and covered with long, straggling, red bristles. The head was enormous and finished almost abruptly with a large, broad mouth. The tail, which was furiously whipping the leaves of the giant ferns, was long, resembling that of a lizard.

The giant lizard, or whatever I am to call the thing, set up a hissing sound and approached us.

There was no mistake about it; its eyes were staring at us! It looked at us with a greediness which unrolled a perspective of horrible views for our inner sight.

For a moment we stared at each other, the animal from antiquity and the men from the Swedish whaler, *The White Bear*. Then the mate set off at top speed over stock and stone towards the entrance of the passage, followed closely by the rest of us. One of us cried out, but I do not think it was I.

We were running for life, and after us came a roll like thunder, when four heavy feet stamped against the bottom of the crater and the panting animal voice rose and fell. I sent up a silent prayer to the great Someone, that we might be permitted to get outside ere those feet....

The mate was running like a madman before me, to my left Berg, behind us the others and lastly the animal. In this order we entered the passage.

As it was very narrow and hardly would permit an animal of such dimensions to pass through it, we felt pretty safe here, but we didn't think of that. We imagined that the beast was close on our heels and on we ran. We used up the last remnant of air in our lungs to reach the entrance. But the cold had already begun to close it, and we had hard work to break it open again. Without a snowstorm raged, and it was a white death that confronted us. When we had worked halfway out to the ship, a man with a lighted but snowed-over lantern, met us. The North wind had raised its mighty voice, and the ice was already jamming *The White Bear*. For two weeks we worked day and night to save the ship. When we finally succeeded, we had drifted so far out that we dared not risk another attempt to reach the Hermit Island.

The ice wilderness up there still hides a sealed-up paradise. But by all top-lanterns and yard-arms, I am in no hurry to penetrate into that hidden region a second time.

The Worm

David H. Keller, M. D.

The miller patted his dog on the head, as he whispered: "We are going to stay here. Our folks, your ancestors and mine, have been here for nearly two hundred years, and queer it would be to leave now because of fear."

The grist mill stood, a solid stone structure, in an isolated Vermont valley. Years ago every day had been a busy one for the mill and the miller, but now only the mill wheel was busy. There was no grist for the mill and no one lived in the valley. Blackberries and hazel grew where once the pastures had been green. The hand of time had passed over the farms and the only folk left were sleeping in the churchyard. A family of squirrels nested in the pulpit, while on the tombstones silent snails left their cryptic messages in silvery streaks. Thompson's Valley was being handed back to nature. Only the old bachelor miller, John Staples, remained. He was too proud and too stubborn to do anything else.

The mill was his home, even as it had served all of his family for a home during the last two hundred years. The first Staples had built it to stay, and it was still as strong as on the day it was finished. There was a basement for the machinery of the mill, the first floor was the place of grinding and storage and the upper two floors served as the Staples' homestead. The building was warm in winter and cool in summer. Times past it had sheltered a dozen Staples at a time; now it provided a home for John Staples and his dog.

He lived there with his books and his memories. He had no friends and desired no associates. Once a year he went to the nearest town and bought supplies of all kinds, paying for them in gold. It was supposed that he was wealthy. Rumor credited him with being a miser. He attended to his own business, asked the world to do the same, and on a winter's evening laughed silently over Burton and Rabalais, while his dog chased rabbits in his heated sleep upon the hearth.

The winter of 1935 was beginning to threaten the valley, but with an abundance of food and wood in the mill, the recluse looked forward to a comfortable period of desuetude. No matter how cold the weather, he was warm and contented. With the inherent ability of his family, he had been able to convert the water power into electricity. When the wheel was frozen, he used the electricity stored in his storage batteries. Every day he puttered around among the machinery which it was his pride to keep in

perfect order. He assured the dog that if business ever did come to the mill, he would be ready for it.

It was on Christmas Day of that winter that he first heard the noise. Going down to the basement to see that nothing had been injured by the bitter freeze of the night before, his attention was attracted, even while descending the stone steps, by a peculiar grinding noise, that seemed to come from out of the ground. His ancestors, building for permanency, had not only put in solid foundations, but had paved the entire basement with slate flagstones three feet wide and as many inches thick. Between these the dust of two centuries had gathered and hardened.

Once his feet were on this pavement, Staples found that he could not only hear the noise, but he could also feel the vibrations which accompanied it through the flagstones. Even through his heavy leather boots he could feel the rhythmic pulsations. Pulling off his mittens, he stooped over and put his finger tips on the stone. To his surprise it was warm in spite of the fact that the temperature had been below zero the night before. The vibration was more distinct to his finger tips than it had been to his feet. Puzzled, he threw himself on the slate stone and put his ear to the warm surface.

The sound he now heard made him think of the grinding of the mill stones when he was a boy and the farmers had brought corn to be ground into meal. There had been no corn-meat ground in the mill for fifty years, yet here was the sound of stone scraping slowly and regularly on stone. He could not understand it. In fact it was some time before he tried to explain it. With the habit born of years of solitary thinking, the first collected all the available facts about this noise. He knew that during the long winter evenings he would have time enough to do his thinking.

Going to his sitting room, he secured a walking stick of ash and went back to the cellar. Holding the handle of the cane lightly, he placed the other end on a hundred different spots on the floor, and each time he held it long enough to determine the presence or absence of vibration. To his surprise he found that while it varied in strength, it was present all over the cellar with the exception of the four corners. The maximum intensity was about in the center.

That evening he concentrated on the problem before him. He had been told by his grandfather, that the mill was built on solid rock. As a young men he had helped clean out a well near the mill and recalled, that instead of being dug out of gravel or dirt, it had the appearance of being drilled out of solid granite. There was no difficulty in believing that the earth under the mill was also solid rock. There was no reason for

thinking otherwise. Evidently some of these strata of stone had become loose and were slipping and twisting under the mill. The simplest explanation was the most reasonable: it was simply a geological phenomenon. The behavior of the dog, however, was not so easily explained. He had refused to go with his master into the cellar, and now, instead of sleeping in comfort before the fire, he was in an attitude of strained expectancy. He did not bark, or even whine, but crept silently to his master's chair, looking at him anxiously.

The next morning the noise was louder. Staples heard it in his bed, and at first he thought that some bold adventurer had come into the forest and was sawing down a tree. That was what it sounded like; only softer and longer in its rhythm. Buzzzzzz—Buzzzzzzzz-Buzzzzzzzz. The dog, distinctly unhappy, jumped up on the bed and crawled uneasily so he could nuzzle the man's hand.

Through the four legs of the bed, Staples could feel the same vibration that had come to him through the handle of his cane the day before. That made him think. The vibration was now powerful enough to be appreciated, not through a walking stick, but through the walls of the building. The noise could be heard as well on the third floor as in the cellar.

He tried to fancy what it sounded like — not what it was — what it was like. The first idea had been that it resembled a saw going through oak; then came the thought of bees swarming, only these were large bees and millions of them: but finally all he could think of was the grinding of stones in a grist mill, the upper stone against the lower: and now the second was Grrrrrrr—Grrrrrrrrr instead of Bzzzzzzzzz or Hummmmmmm.

That morning he took longer than usual to shave and was more methodical than was his wont in preparing breakfast for himself and the dog. It seemed as though he knew that sometime he would have to go down into the cellar but wanted to postpone it as long as he could. In fact, he finally put on his coat and beaver hat and mittens and walked outdoors before he went to the basement. Followed by the dog, who seemed happy for the. first time in hours, he walked out on the frozen ground and made a circle around the building he called his home. Without knowing it, he was trying to get away from the noise, to go somewhere be could walk without feeling that peculiar tingling.

Finally he went into the mill and started down the steps to the cellar. The dog hesitated on the top step, went down two steps and then jumped back to the top step, where he started to whine. Staples went down the step, but the dog's behavior

did not add to his peace of mind. The noise was much louder than it was the day before, and he did not need a cane to detect the vibration — the whole building was shaking. He sat down on the third step from the bottom and thought the problem over before he ventured out on the floor. He was especially interested in an empty barrel which was dancing around the middle of the floor.

The power of the mill-wheel was transferred through a simple series of shafts, cogs and leather belting to the grinding elements on the first floor. All this machinery for transmitting power was in the basement. The actual grinding had been done on the first floor. The weight of all this machinery, as well as of the heavy millstones on the first floor, was carried entirely by the flooring of the basement. The ceiling of the first floor was built on long pine beams which stretched across the entire building and were sunk into the stone walls at either side.

Staples started to walk around on the slate flagstones when he observed something that made him decide to stay on the steps. The floor was beginning to sink in the middle; not much, but enough to cause some of the shafts to separate from the ceiling. The ceiling seemed to sag. He saw that light objects like the empty barrel were congregating at the middle of the cellar. There was not much light but he was easily able to see that the floor was no longer level; that it was becoming saucer-shaped. The grinding noise grew louder. The steps he sat on were of solid masonry, stoutly connected with and a part of the wall. These shared in the general vibration. The whole building began to sing like a 'cello.

One day he had been to the city and heard an orchestra play. He had been interested in the large violins, especially the one that was so large the player had to stay on his feet to play it. The feeling of the stone step under him reminded him of the notes of this violin the few times it had been played by itself. He sat there. Suddenly he started, realizing that in a few more minutes he would be asleep. He was not frightened but in some dim way he knew that he must not go to sleep — not here. Whistling, he ran up the steps to get his electric torch. With that in his hand, he went back to the steps. Aided by the steady light, he saw that several large sacks had appeared in the floor and that some of the stones, broken loose from their fellows, were moving slowly in a drunken, meaningless way. He looked at his watch. It was only a little after nine.

And then the noise stopped.

No more noise! No more vibration! Just a broken floor and every bit of the machinery of the mill disabled and twisted. In the middle of the floor was a hole

where one of the pavement stones had dropped through. Staples carefully walked across and threw the light down this hole. Then he lay down and carefully put himself in such a position that he could look down the hole. He began to sweat. There did not seem to be any bottom!

Back on the solid steps he tried to give that hole its proper value. He could not understand it, but he did not need the whining of the dog to tell him what to do. That door must be closed as soon as possible.

Like a flash the method of doing so came to him. On the floor above he had cement. There were hundreds of grain sacks. Water was plentiful in the mill race. All that day he worked, carefully closing the hole with a great stopper of bags and wire. Then he placed timbers above and finally covered it all with cement, rich cement. Night came and he still worked. Morning came and still he swaggered down the steps, each time with a bag of crushed stone, or cement on his shoulder or with two buckets of water in his hands. At noon the next day the floor was no longer concave but convex. On top of the hole was four feet of timbers, bags and concrete. Then and only then did he go and make some coffee. He drank it, cup after cup, and slept.

The dog stayed on the bed at his feet.

When the man awoke, the sun was streaming in through the windows. It was a new day. Though the fire had long since died out, the room was warm. Such days in Vermont were called weather breeders. Staples listened. There was no sound except the ticking of his clock. Not realizing what he was doing, he knelt by the bed, thanked God for His mercies, jumped into bed again and slept for another twenty-four hours. This time he awoke and listened. There was no note. He was sure that by this time the cement had hardened. This morning he stayed awake and shared a Gargantuan meal with the dog. Then it seemed the proper thing to go to the basement. There was no doubt that the machinery was a wreck but the hole was closed. Satisfied that the trouble was over, he took his gun and dog and went hunting.

When he returned, he did not have to enter the mill to know that the grinding had begun again. Even before he started down the steps he recognized too well the vibration and the sound. This time it was a melody of notes, a harmony of discords, and he realized that the thing, which before had cut through solid rock, was now wearing its way through a cement in which were bags, timbers and pieces of iron. Each of these gave a different tone. Together they all wailed over their dissolution.

Staples saw, even with the first glance, that it would not be long before this cement

“cork” would be destroyed. What was there to do next? All that day when hunting, his mind had been dimly working on that problem. Now he had the answer. He could not cork the hole, so he would fill it with water. The walls of the mill were solid, but he could blast a hole through them and turn the mill race into the cellar. The race, fed by the river, took only a part of what it could take, if its level were rapidly lowered. Whatever it was that was breaking down the floor of the mill could be drowned. If it were alive, it could be killed. If it was fire, it could be quenched. There was no use to wait until the hole was again opened. The best plan was to have everything ready. He went back to his kitchen and cooked a meal of ham and eggs. He ate all he could. He boiled a pot of coffee. Then he started to work. The wall reached three feet down below the surface. A charge of powder, heavy enough to break through, would wreck the whole building, so he began to peck at the wall, like a bird pecking at a nut. First a period of drilling and then a little powder and a muffled explosion. A few buckets of loosened rock. Then some more drilling and another explosion. At last he knew that only a few inches of rock lay between the water and the cellar.

All this time there had been a symphony of noises, a disharmony of sounds. The constant grinding came from the floor, interrupted with the sound of sledge or crowbar, dull explosion of powder and crashing of rock, fragments on the floor. Staples worked without stop save to drink his coffee. The dog stood on the upper steps.

Then without warning the whole floor caved in. Staples jumped to the steps. These held. On the first day there had been a hole a few feet wide. Now the opening nearly occupied the entire area of the floor. Staples, nauseated, looked down to the bottom. There, about twenty feet below him, a mass of rocks and timbers churned in a peculiar way, but all gradually disappeared in a second hole, fifteen feet wide. Even as he looked they all disappeared in this median hole.

The opening he had been breaking in the wall was directly across from the steps. There was a charge of powder there but no way of going across to light the fuse. Still there was no time to lose and he had to think fast. Running to the floor above he picked up his rifle and went to the bottom of the steps. He was able to throw the beam from his search light directly into the hole in the wall. Then he shot — once — twice and the third time the explosion told him he had succeeded.

The water started to run into the cellar. Not fast at first but more rapidly as the mud and weeds were cleared out. Finally an eight-inch stream flowed steadily into the bottomless hole. Staples sat on the bottom steps. Soon he had the satisfaction of seeing the water fill the larger hole and then cover the floor, what there was left of it.

In another hour he had to leave the lower steps. He went out to the mill race and saw that there was still enough water to fill a hundred such holes. A deep sense of satisfaction filled his weary mind.

And again, after eating, he sought sleep.

When he awoke, he heard the rain angrily tapping at the windows with multifingers. The dog was on the woven rug by the side of the bed. He was still restless and seemed pleased to have his master awake. Staples dressed more warmly than usual and spent an extra half hour making pancakes to eat with honey. Sausages and coffee helped assuage his hunger. Then with rubber boots and a heavy raincoat, he went out into the valley. The very first thing that he noticed was the mill race. It was practically empty. The little stream of water at the bottom was pouring into the hole he had blasted into the stone wall hours before. The race had contained eight feet of water. Now barely six inches remained, and the dread came to the man that the hole in the cellar was not only emptying the race but was also draining the little river that for thousands of years had flowed through the valley. It had never gone dry. He hastened over to the dam and his worst fears were realized. Instead of a river, there was simply a streak of mud with cakes of dirty ice, all being washed by the torrent of rain. With relief he thought of the rain. Millions of tons of snow would melt and fill the river. Ultimately the hole would fill and the water would rise again in the mill-race. Still he was uneasy. What if the hole had no bottom?

When he looked into the basement he was little reassured. The water was still going down, though slowly. It was rising in the basement and this meant that it was now running in faster than it was running down.

Leaving his coat and boots on the first floor, he ran up the stone steps to the second floor, built a fire in the living room and started to smoke — and think. The machinery of the mill was in ruins; of course it could be fixed, but as there was no more need of it, the best thing was to leave it alone. He had gold saved by his ancestors. He did not know how much, but he could live on it. Restlessly he reviewed the past week, and, unable to rest, hunted for occupation. The idea of the gold stayed in his mind and the final result was that he again put on his boots and coat and carried the entire treasure to a little dry cave in the woods about a half mile from the mill. Then he came back and started to cook his dinner. He went past the cellar door three times without looking down.

Just as he and the dog had finished eating, he heard a noise. It was a different one this time, more like a saw going through wood, but the rhythm was the same —

Hrrrrr — Hrrrrr. He started to go to the cellar but this time he took his rifle, and while the dog went after him, he howled dismally with his tail between his legs, shivering.

As soon as Staples reached the first floor, he felt the vibration. Not only could he feel the vibration, he could see it. It seemed that the center of the floor was being pushed up. Flashlight in hand, he opened the cellar door. There was no water there now — in fact there was no cellar left! In front of him was a black wall on which the light played in undulating waves. It was a wall and it was moving. He touched it with the end of his rifle. It was hard and yet there was a give to it. Feeling the rock, he could feel it move. Was it alive? Could there be a living rock? He could not see around it but he felt that the bulk of the thing filled the entire cellar and was pressing against the ceiling. That was it! The thing was boring through the first floor. It had destroyed and filled the cellar! It had swallowed the river! Now it was working at the first floor. If this continued, the mill was doomed. Staples knew that it was a thing alive and *he had to stop it!!*

He was thankful that all of the steps in the mill were of stone, fastened and built into the wall. Even though the floor did fall in, he could still go to the upper rooms. He realized that from now on the fight had to be waged from the top floors. Going up the steps, he saw that a small hole had been cut through the oak flooring. Even as he watched, this grew larger. Trying to remain calm, realizing that only by doing so could he retain his sanity, he sat down in a chair and timed the rate of enlargement. But there was no need of using a watch: the hole grew larger — and larger and larger — and now he began to see the dark hole which had sucked the river dry. Now it was three feet in diameter — now four feet — now six. It was working smoothly now — it was not only grinding — *but it was eating.*

Staples began to laugh. He wanted to see what it would do when the big stone grinders slipped silently down into that maw. That would be a rare sight. All well enough to swallow a few pavement stones, but when it came to a twenty ton grinder, that would be a different kind of a pill. "I hope you choke!" he cried, "Damn you! whatever you are! I hope you choke!!" The walls hurled back the echo of his shouts and frightened him into silence. Then the floor began to tilt and the chair to slide toward the opening. Staples sprang toward the steps.

"Not yet!" he shrieked. "Not to-day, Elenora! Some other day, but not to-day!" and then from the safety of the steps, he witnessed the final destruction of that floor and all in it. The stones slipped down, the partitions, the beams, and then, as though satisfied with the work and the food, the Thing dropped down, down, down and left Staples dizzy on the steps looking into a hole, dark, deep, coldly bottomless surrounded

by the walls of the mill, and below them a circular hole cut out of the solid rock. On one side a little stream of water came through the blasted wall and fell, a tiny waterfall, below. Staples could not hear it splash at the bottom.

Nauseated and vomiting, he crept up the steps to the second floor, where the howling dog was waiting for him. On the floor he lay, sweating and shivering in dumb misery. It took hours for him to change from a frightened animal to a cerebrating god, but ultimately he accomplished even this, cooked some more food, warmed himself and slept.

And while he dreamed, the dog kept sleepless watch at his feet. He awoke the next morning. It was still raining, and Staples knew that the snow was melting on the hills and soon would change the little valley river into a torrent. He wondered whether it was all a dream, but one look at the dog showed him the reality of the last week. He went to the second floor again and cooked breakfast. After he had eaten, he slowly went down the steps. That is, he started to go, but halted at the sight of the hole. The steps had held and ended on a wide stone platform. From there another flight of steps went down to what had once been the cellar. These two flights of steps clinging to the walls had the solid stone mill on one side, but on the inside they faced a chasm, circular in outline and seemingly bottomless; but the man knew there was a bottom and from that pit the Thing had come — and would come again.

That was the horror of it! He was so certain that it would come again. Unless he was able to stop it. How could he? Could he destroy a Thing that was able to bore a thirty foot hole through solid rock, swallow a river and digest grinding stones like so many pills? One thing he was sure of — he could accomplish nothing without knowing more about it. To know more, he had to watch. He determined to cut a hole through the floor. Then he could see the Thing when it came up. He cursed himself for his confidence, but he was sure it would come.

It did. He was on the floor looking into the hole he had sawed through the plank, and he saw it come: but first he heard it. It was a sound full of slithering slidings, wrathful rasping of rock against rock — but, no! That could not be, for this Thing was alive. Could this be rock and move and grind and eat and drink? Then he saw it come into the cellar and finally to the level of the first floor, and then he saw its head and face.

The face looked at the man and Staples was glad that the hole in the floor was as small as it was. There was a central mouth filling half the space: fully fifteen feet in diameter was that mouth; and the sides were ashen gray and quivering. There were no teeth.

That increased the horror: a mouth without teeth, without any visible means of mastication and yet Staples shivered as he thought of what had gone into that mouth, down into that mouth, deep into the recesses of that mouth and disappeared. The circular lip seemed made of scales of steel, and they were washed clean with the water from the race.

On either side of this gigantic mouth was an eye, lidless, browless, pitiless. They were slightly withdrawn into the head so the Thing could bore into rock without injuring them. Staples tried to estimate their size: all he could do was to avoid their baleful gaze. Then even as he watched the mouth closed and the head began a semicircular movement, so many degrees to the right, so many degrees to the left and up — and up — and finally the top touched the bottom of the plank Staples was on and then *Hrrrrrr — Hrrrrr* and the man knew that it was starting upon the destruction of the second floor. He could not see now as he had been able to see before, but he had an idea that after grinding a while the Thing opened its mouth and swallowed the debris. He looked around the room. Here was where he did his cooking and washing and here was his winter supply of stove wood. A thought came to him.

Working frantically, he pushed the center burner to the middle of the room right over the hole he had cut in the floor. Then he built a fire in it, starting it with a liberal supply of coal-oil. He soon had the stove red hot. Opening the door he again filled the stove with oak and then ran for the steps. He was just in time. The floor, cut through, disappeared into the Thing's maw and with it the redhot stove. Staples yelled in his glee, "A hot pill for you this time, a HOT PILL!"

If the pill did anything, it simply increased the desire of the Thing to destroy, for it kept on till it had bored a hole in this floor equal in size to the holes in the floors below it. Staples saw his food, his furniture, the ancestral relics disappear into the same opening that had consumed the machinery and mill supplies.

On the upper floor the dog howled.

The man slowly went up to the top floor, and joined the dog, who had ceased to howl and began an uneasy whine. There was a stove on this floor, but there was no food. That did not make any difference to Staples: for some reason he was not hungry any more: it did not seem to make any difference — nothing seemed to matter or make any difference any more. Still he had his gun and over fifty cartridges, and he knew that at the last, even a Thing like that would react to bullets in its eye balls — he just knew that nothing could withstand that.

He lit the lamp and paced the floor in a cold, careless mood. One thing he had determined. He said it over and over to himself.

"This is my home. It has been the home of my family for two hundred years. No devil or beast or worm can make me leave it."

He said it again and again. He felt that if he said it often enough, he would believe it, and if he could only believe it, he might make the Worm believe it. He knew now that it was a Worm, just like the night crawlers he had used so often for bait, only much larger. Yes, that was it. A worm like a night crawler, only much larger, in fact, very much larger. That made him laugh — to think how much larger this worm was than the ones he had used for fishing. All through the night he walked the floor and burned the lamp and said, "This is my home. No worm can make me leave it!" Several times he went down the steps, just a few of them, and shouted the message into the pit as though he wanted the Worm to hear and understand, "This is my home! NO WORM CAN MAKE ME LEAVE IT!!"

Morning come. He mounted the ladder that led to the trap door in the roof and opened it. The rain beat in. Still that might be a place of refuge. Crying, he took his Burton and his Rabalais and wrapped them in his rain coat and put them out on the roof, under a box. He took the small pictures of his father and mother and put them with the books. Then in loving kindness he carried the dog up and wrapped him in a woolen blanket. He sat down and waited, and as he did so he recited poetry — anything that came to him, all mixed up, "Come into the garden where there was a man who was so wondrous wise, he jumped into a bramble bush and you're a better man than I am and no one will work for money and the King of Love my Shepherd is" — and on — and then —

He heard the sliding and the slithering rasping and he knew that the Worm had come again. He waited till the Hrrrr-Hrrrrr told that the wooden floor he was on was being attacked and then he went up the ladder. It was his idea to wait till the Thing had made a large opening, large enough so the eyes could be seen and then use the fifty bullets — where they would do the most good. So, on the roof, beside the dog, he waited.

He did not have to wait long. First appeared a little hole and then it grew wider and wider till finally the entire floor and the furniture had dropped into the mouth, and the whole opening, thirty feet wide and more than that, was filled with the head, the closed mouth of which came within a few foot of the roof. By the aid of the light from the trap door, Staples could see the eye on the left side. It made a beautiful bull's eye, a magnificent target for his rifle and he was only a few feet away. He could

not miss. Determined to make the most of his last chance to drive his enemy away, he. decided to drop down on the creature, walk over to the eye and put the end of the rifle against the eye before he fired. If the first shot worked well, he could retire to the roof and use the other cartridges. He knew that there was some danger — but it was his last hope. After all he knew that when it came to brains he was a man and this thing was only a Worm. He walked over the head. Surely no sensation could go through such massive scales. He even jumped up and down. Meantime the eye kept looking up at the roof. If it saw the man, it made no signs, gave no evidence. Staples pretended to pull the trigger and then made a running jump for the trap door. It was easy. He did it again, and again. Then he sat on the edge of the door and thought.

He suddenly saw what it all meant. Two hundred years before, his ancestors had started grinding at the mill. For over a hundred and fifty years the mill had been run continuously, often day and night. The vibrations had been transmitted downward through the solid rock. Hundreds of feet below the Worm had heard them and felt them and thought it was another Worm. It had started to bore in the direction of the noise. It had taken two hundred years to do it, but it had finished the task, it had found the place where its mate should be. For two hundred years it had slowly worked its way through the primitive rack. Why should it worry over a mill and the things within it? Staples saw then that the mill had been but a slight incident in its life. It was probable that it had not even known it was there — the water, the gristmillstones, the red hot stove, had meant nothing — they had been taken as a part of the day's work. There was only one thing that the Worm was really interested in, but one idea that had reached its consciousness and remained there through two centuries, and that was to find its mate. The eye looked upward.

Staples, at the end, lost courage and decided to fire from a sitting position in the trap door. Taking careful aim, he pulled the trigger. Then he looked carefully to see what damage had resulted. There was none. Either the bullet had gone into the eye and the opening had closed or else it had glanced off. He fired again and again.

Then the mouth opened — wide — wider — until there was nothing under Staples save a yawning void of darkness.

The Worm belched a cloud of black, nauseating vapor. The man, enveloped in the cloud, lost consciousness and fell.

The Mouth closed on him.

On the roof the dog howled.

The Octopus Cycle

Irvin Lester and Fletcher Pratt

There was a long, uneasy swell on the surface of the Indian Ocean as though someone were gently rocking the floor beneath it, and a hot, moist wind blew against the face of Walter Weyl, A.B., A.M., B.Sc., as he stood against the rail of the pudgy little Messagéres Maritimes steamer, wondering whether he would dare to chance a spell of seasickness by lighting a well-cured pipe for the fourth time that afternoon.

It was hot — and off to the west, Tamatave's houses gleamed white and blistering against the green background of the Madagascar jungle, blued by the distance. Away to the north the coastline stretched illimitable. It would be another day at least before the steamer arrived at Andovorata, and Walter Weyl, A.B., A.M., B.Sc., would be able to get at the heart of the mysterious occurrences that had brought him there.

His mind traveled back to the letter from his friend of college days, Raoul Duperret, now on French government service in that mysterious land — Madagascar. He saw it again before him, the characteristic French handwriting, the precise French phrasing:

"... alas, we cannot pursue these investigations, through lack of money. To you, then, my friend, I appeal. To you belongs, permit me to say, that combination so rare of the talent for scientific investigation and the means to pursue it. To you also will appertain the credit for any discovery.

"Let me, in detail, tell yon of what we know. Diouma-Mbobo is a chieftain of the blacks in the part of the island, who have never been rescued from cannibal practices. He is, as far as we know, a man who rules by law and is of a truthfulness. Thus, when he accused the Tanôsy, who are the next tribe to him, of stealing people and eating them, we took measures and did not too much believe the denials of the Tanôsy. But Diouma-Mbobo's people continue to disappear, and when the commandant sent a whole company of Senegalese to preserve order, they still disappeared. What is still more distressing, is that some of the Senegalese also disappeared, and save but a solitary rifle or two found in the jungle, no trace of them remains.

"There is some fear in the island and we are in danger of losing our grip on the natives, for we cannot at all explain these disappearances nor prevent them. The commandant says, 'Send a battalion of chasseurs,' but it is my belief that a battalion

of chasseurs would likewise fail, and I send for you, for I believe the agency that destroys men thus is not human. No human would neglect the rifles.

"As you know, Madagascar is a country apart. We have here the giant spiders, large as bats; the lizards, large as sheep, and no, not a single snake. All our animals are *outré,* impossible even, and what if one more impossible than all...? And thus it is to you, my rich American friend, I appeal for myself and my country."

It had offered precious little real information, that letter, but enough to have caused Walter Weyl to drop a learned monograph on the ammonites of the Upper Cretaceous and hurry across ten thousand miles of ocean with microscopes, rifles and all the equipment of the modern scientist, to the aid of his friend.

The sun went down suddenly, as it does in the tropics, and the sea was purple darkness all at once. The lights of Tamatave twinkled away behind and were blotted out; off to the west was only the menacing blot of the huge island, forbidding and dangerous in the gloom. Weyl sat musing by the rail, listening to the hushed voices of a couple of men in the bows.

Forgetting his dinner below, he fell into a half-doze, from which he was suddenly awakened by a sense of approaching evil, definite, yet which could not be located. He looked about lazily. The Southern Cross hung brilliant in the sky; there was no other light but the flare of portholes on the water, and no sound but the slap of waves against the bows. Yet the night had suddenly become dreadful. He struggled lazily to put a name to the sense of impending doom, and as he struggled there was a sudden and terrible scream from the bow — the cry of a man in mortal anguish and fear.

"Oh—o—o—u—" it went, running off into a strangled sob, and through it cut the shout of the other sailor, "Secours! Secours! Ferent ..." and the sound of a blow on soft flesh.

Weyl leaped to his feet and ran forward; there was the sound of a slamming door, and a quick patter of feet behind him. In front was the blackness of the bows, out of which emerged a panic-stricken man who charged against him, babbling incoherent French, and bore him to the deck. As he went down he caught a glimpse of two waving prehensile arms, like lengths of fire-hose, silhouetted against the sky.

Somebody ran past him, the deck leaped into illumination as lights were switched on, and he picked himself up to see — nothing. The bows were empty. There was a babble of conversation:

“Where is Ferentini?”

“What is the trouble?”

“Who is there?”

There was confusion, stifled by the appearance of the captain, a eupeptic little man in a blue coat and a tremendous moustache which swept his shoulders. “This uproar — what does it mean?” he said. “Let the sailor Dugasse come forward.”

A big Basque, obviously panic-stricken and with rolling eyes, was shoved into the light. “Tell us the reason for this,” demanded the captain.

“Ferentini and I,” he gasped, “we were talking, so, in the bow. One, two big arms, like a gorilla, seize him by the neck, the chest, and zut! he is gone. I strike at them, but he is gone.”

“Assassin!” said the captain briefly, “Confess that you quarreled and you threw him over.”

“No, no. He was taken. I swear it. By the Holy Virgin, I swear it.”

“Put this man in the lazarette, you Marulaz, and you Noyon. There will be an investigation. Take his knife away from him.”

“His knife is gone, monsieur,” said one of the seamen who had stepped forward to take charge of the sailor Dugasse.

“Without doubt, he stabbed the other. Put him in irons,” was the captain’s succinct reply, as he turned toward the cabin and his interrupted dinner.

Walter Weyl stepped forward. “I think the man’s story is true,” he offered. “I think I saw something myself.”

“Permit me to inform you, monsieur, that I am the commandant of the vessel,” remarked the eupeptic captain, with the utmost courtesy. “There will be an investigation. If the man is innocent it will do him no harm to spend a night in the lazarette.” And again he turned away.

Dissatisfied, but realizing that he could do nothing, Weyl walked toward the bows,

to see if he could find any trace of the strange encounter. There was nothing, but as he was about to return and go below, his foot struck something, which on investigation with a flashlight, proved to be the knife of the sailor Dugasse.

The blade was wet, and as he picked the weapon up there dripped slowly from it a pale, greenish oleaginous liquid, totally unlike human blood. With this bit of evidence in his hand, he started thoughtfully for his cabin.

Chapter II

Two days later the friends sat under the giant mimosa, in whose shade Raoul Duperret had built a little cottage on the height overlooking Andananarivo. A table had been dragged outdoors and was now piled with a miscellaneous collection of instruments, papers and microscope slides.

Weyl leaned back in his chair with a sigh and lit his pipe.

"Let us see what we have, after all this study," he said. "Check me if I go wrong. Diouma-Mbobo's people and about a dozen of the Senegalese have disappeared mysteriously. So did the sailor Ferentini on the boat that brought me here. In no case was any trace found of the man after he disappeared, and in the cases on the island when anything was found it was always a knife or a rifle.

"This report," he ruffled the papers, "from one of the Senegalese, says that he saw his companion jerked up into a tree by a huge black rope, but when he rushed to the tree he could see nothing. It was late in the evening. Now this account agrees singularly with that of the sailor Dugasse — and moreover, if natives were responsible for the disappearances, they would at least have taken the knives, if not the guns.

"Therefore, I consider that the disappearance of Ferentini, the Senegalese and the natives was due to the same agency, and that the agency was not human; and, therefore, I think the Tanôsy and the sailor Dugasse, although he is still in jail, should be acquitted."

Duperret nodded a grave assent.

"But I am sure it was nothing supernatural. I saw something on that boat, Duperret, and the Senegalese saw something. Moreover, there is Dugasse's knife. I have analyzed that liquid which dripped from it; it is blood, indubitably, but blood different

from any I have ever seen. It contains a tremendous number of corpuscles of a new character, not red, but greenish yellow, and the liquid in which they float is similar to that of all other bloods. More than anything, it resembles the blood of an oyster, which is impossible, as oysters do not lift men into trees. Therefore, I accuse some hitherto unknown animal of these deaths.

"But what kind of an animal are we dealing with?" Weyl went on without paying any attention to an interruption from Duperret. "Evidently a very swift and formidable one. It killed Ferentini in a few seconds. It dragged a powerful Senegalese, who was provided with a rifle, off with equal swiftness, and the stabs of Dugasse were as futile against it as the rifle of the other black boy.

"In both cases, the attack came from above, and I am inclined to think, since we were attacked some distance off the coast and the natives some distance inland, that the animal possesses extraordinary mobility — probably wings. This would make a bird of it; which is impossible because of the blood; therefore, making the whole thing absurd... But in any case, the hunt for this animal, or animals, for there may be more than one, will be a dangerous business."

"All is decided then?" asked Duperret. "Very well, let us depart. I am eager for action, my friend." And he stood up, stretching his muscular frame toward the towering tree.

"Done," said Weyl.

He rose. "You have same influence with the military authorities, you of the civil arm? If the matter were put to the commandant in the proper way, do you suppose we could get an escort? I need not conceal from you that this big-game hunt is likely to be a serious business. Any animal that devours live men..."

"The commandant and I were at St. Cyr together," replied Duperret. "He will doubtless appoint a lieutenant and a demi-company of African chasseurs to assist us."

Chapter III

A week later found them with a dapper French lieutenant, Dubosc by name, making the best of insufficient pup tents and canned French sausage by a dank, slow stream a few miles out of Fort Dauphin. Around them lay or squatted a perspiring group of black soldiers in the uniform of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, while round them again,

further from the sun of the white men's presence, were as many natives, equally sable of hue, and with no uniforms at all. These were the guides lent by Diouma-Mbobo, silent and somewhat scared men, for that portion of the jungle had earned a bad reputation from the repeated disappearances.

Weyl was annoyed. "If we only knew what we were looking for and where to find it," he said to Duperret that evening, "but here we are three days out, with our labor for our pains. Hunting for one animal in this jungle is like the old needle and haystack saying."

"Yes, and I'm afraid for the guides," the Frenchman had answered. "They'll desert unless they are given something to do."

Night found them as restless as the guides. Weyl woke to a sense of something impending, looked out and saw only the calm sentries speaking in low tones as they encountered each other at the end of their rounds. He felt reassured, and dropped off into another hour or two of slumber punctuated by fierce dreams, woke again and saw a moonlit shadow on the flap of his tent. "Raoul!" he called softly.

The Frenchman bent and entered.

He was fully dressed.

"Nerves keep you awake, too?" said Weyl. "I've been awake before, but everything's quiet. But why are you dressed?"

"I have a premonition. Also, I hear something unusual. You hear that strange whistling? No, you would not. You are not used to jungle noises. To me it is very much to notice. Something..." and he looked at his friend, who, though in a strictly unofficial manner, was recognized as commander of the expedition. "Shall we rouse the soldiers?" he questioned.

"They'll need sleep if we're to march all day," Weyl answered.

"But I am thinking we will not need to march. However—" Raoul was about to dismiss his feeling as a fancy and threw another glance over his shoulder through the open tent flap.

In an instant he was on his feet, almost tearing the tent from its pegs, a half cry escaping his lips that caused Weyl to leap up beside him, seizing the revolver that lay by his hand.

Three, four, half a dozen snakelike arms, mysterious in the moonlight, hovered for an instant over the heads of two sentries who had met at the edge of the trees, and before they had comprehended their danger, before they could be warned, they were gripped, lifted from their feet and their cries stifled before they reached the gloom of the branches fully ten feet above.

Weyl, with a horror such as he had never felt before, seemed to clutch at his throat, fired rapidly into the tree. Something dropped with a crash of leaves; a veritable chorus of whistlings and swishings rose around the camp, and in the tents and along the sentry line there were sudden lights and activity, shouts of "*Qui vive*?" "*Aux armes*!" and the thick note of a hastily blown bugle as its owner was roused from sleep.

Men ran from their tents to stand gazing. "Raoul!" shouted the American. "It's here! The machine gun!" and, pistol in hand, in his sleeping garments, he dashed for the tree.

He glanced up. A subdued rustling gave no clue to its source, nothing to shoot at, but out of the tail of his eye he caught a glimpse of motion among the giant ferns, and the peculiar whistling again became audible.

He turned, and was suddenly conscious of an insane disbelief in his senses. What he saw resembled nothing so much as an enormous umbrella, standing ten feet high on stilt-like, but prehensile arms, while at the point where they gathered, a huge, bulbous head rose and fell rhythmically as the thing emitted that singular, high-pitched whistle. There was something unspeakably loathsome, some touch reminiscent of putrefaction and decay about it.

An arm, like a huge snake, lifted from the ground and swung aimlessly about under the leaves. Abruptly, another animal, the duplicate of the first in all respects, came from behind a tree to join it, and the two, despite their clumsy form and lurching uneven movement, began to advance toward him with a rapidity that was astonishing.

Weyl awoke to the necessity of flight. He raced back toward the camp, where Lieutenant Dubosc, aroused by the shots and cries, and aware that something was impending, had formed the Senegalese in a rough, slanting angle of a line, the men facing the jungle, while behind them Diouma-Mbobo's natives crouched in frightened curiosity.

The American turned as he reached the line. Behind him, into the clearing, with an odd semblance of order, came a half-dozen, a dozen, twenty of those terrible

umbrella-like shapes, moving deliberately, but covering the ground as fast as a man runs.

A shot was followed by an order, a bugle note, and the irritating crash of the volley, which shaded into the rattling drum of the machine guns. When his eyes again became used to the dark after the flame of the rifles, Weyl saw that the giant, shapeless beasts were moving forward as swiftly and imperturbably as before. Had all the shots missed?

Another volley collapsed into a frantic and spasmodic burst of firing, as no effect was visible on the hideous shapes that came on swiftly.

Weyl aimed his revolver carefully at one bobbing head, and the shot was drowned in a crashing chorus of fire; the beast came right on. He was dimly conscious of shooting again and again in a kind of frenzy at those horrible bulby umbrellas that kept coming closer, dim figures of horror in the green moonlight, huge and impregnable, towering over the little group of humans who shouted and cursed and fired impotently.

One man, half maddened, even ran forward, waving his bayonet, and was gathered gently up by two of those big arms as a child might be picked up by its parent.

A thrill of wavering ran down the line; one or two threw away their rifles, when suddenly, right at their feet, one of the monsters collapsed. There was a chorus of whistling and they moved backward, apparently without turning, as rapidly and silently as they had come...

A feeble cheer rose from the Senegalese, a cheer that was silenced instantly, for a glance revealed that half the hastily formed line was missing, the men gone as completely as though they had never been.

Weyl was aware that he had been clicking an empty pistol, that his throat was dry, that Duperret sat at his feet, his face in his hands, seemingly without power of motion. Senegalese and natives, frightened to the verge of madness, babbled like children all around him. The iron voice of Dubosc rose:

"Silence, my children!"

Out in the clearing before them was no sign that men had battled for their lives, save one ugly, loathsome shape, that sprawled on the ground and twitched feebly in the gloom.

Chapter IV

The survivors of that unbelievable, one-sided battle dragged themselves back into Fort Dauphin five days later. One man was violently insane, tightly bound, and as for the rest, it seemed that only remnants of sanity remained. The emotional blacks had almost collapsed under the strain, and nothing but incoherent gibberings could be extracted from them by the soldiers who cared for the exhausted, weaponless, starving and almost naked remainder of the trim company of Chasseurs who marched out with drum and bugle only a fortnight before.

Weyl begged off from an immediate report to the commandant, and went to bed, where he slept the sleep of exhaustion for twenty hours on end, and Duperret did likewise.

Weyl woke vastly refreshed, and with the horror that had been dragging at his mind relieved, though with such a feeling of weariness as he had not known since college football days. The black boy at the door obligingly brought him the latest newspapers, now not quite a month old, and he re-established his touch with the world of men by reading them over the tiny breakfast of coffee and rolls which was all the fort physician would allow him.

An item in one of them caught his eye, and caused him to sit up in his chair with a whoop of joy, that brought a scandalized glance from Major Larivet, the white-moustached old Alsatian who was in command of the fort, and a grin from Duperret, the first since that dreadful night of the attack.

The item, in bad French, was a translation from the bad English of a New York newspaper telling of Weyl's departure for Madagascar. It was filled with the exalted pseudo-science of which newspapers are fond and contained much ingeniously sketchy biographical and geographical data, but its appeal was obvious.

The American leaned forward over the cups.

"Does your fort boast a typist?" he asked. "Lieutenant Dubosc has probably already told you of the terrible experience we have had. I am anxious to make my report on it through the newspapers."

"Monsieur," said Major Larivet, gravely, "he died an hour ago by my side. I know nothing but that I have lost many men from my command."

"So..." said Weyl, "All the more reason I should make my report in writing. I need not conceal from you the fact that we are facing a danger which threatens not merely Fort Dauphin and Madagascar, but the entire world."

There was incredulity on the major's face, but he replied courteously, "My means are entirely at your service, gentlemen."

Beginning his report with scientific exactitude, Weyl included Duperret's letter, noted the sudden midnight attack on the steamer and went on to the details of the expedition:

"....For hours after the attack," he wrote, "W were unable to get anything like control out of the chaos in the camp. I think another attack of these unspeakably loathsome 'Umbrella Beasts' would have brought complete panic; certainly hardly any rifles but Duperret's and mine would have met them.

"We could not hope to escape by an immediate dash for the fort, though it was less than thirty hours' march away. The beasts seemed to be on every side, and they would have every advantage in the jungle, where we would have been instantly swept into the trees by their swinging tentacles.

"Fortunately, these hideous monsters appeared to have gathered their fill of human food for the time being, and meanwhile the idea of fire occurred to us. All the wood we could gather without too closely approaching the trees was collected and heaped in piles about five feet apart in a complete circle. These were set alight, and we huddled in the center of the blazing ring, almost roasted by the heat, but feeling infinitely safer. With the coming of day, the heat was almost intolerable, but we gained confidence as it became apparent that the beasts would not dare the fire, though we could hear them whistling in the trees.

"Our situation was bad. The supply of wood was not inexhaustible, and that of water was already used up. I am convinced that these beasts were possessed of a comparatively high intelligence. The manner of their attack, the character of the one killed in the battle, led to this conclusion; and they were evidently deliberately laying siege to us with the intention of starving us out of our refuge.

"Our rifles were useless, and to make a sudden dash through the lines would certainly involve the sacrifice of most of those present — perhaps all. So we sat down to plan a way out. Obviously, we had to find a means to make ourselves immune to their attacks.

“I thought I had it when I remembered that no barbarian, beast or insect, would tolerate castor oil. Desperate as was our situation, the idea of escaping a deadly and horrific death by means of that homely remedy made me want to laugh hysterically. I remember Duperret watching me trying to smother the urge, looking queerly at me, quite obviously doubtful of my mental balance. His speculative and startled glance added to the absurdity of the thing, and I almost lost my self-control. I realized we were all on the edge of madness.

“The idea had, of course, to be discarded. We had castor oil among our medical supplies, but barely enough to discourage the insects of the tropical jungle; certainly not enough to smear ourselves from head to foot to keep off those giant monstrosities menacing us from all sides.

“The solution we hit upon finally may not have been the best, but it was simple, and like many another, did not occur to us till we were ready to give up in despair. Duperret, Dubosc and I had spent the entire first day of our siege discussing and rejecting ways and means, and we had just about decided that the only thing to do was to make a concerted dash into the jungle, firing into the trees, and trusting to luck and mobility to carry us through, when the lieutenant startled us with a sudden leap, and shouted something wild, something we did not understand.

“We feared for his sanity as mutely we watched him dashing about furiously from spot to spot in the clearing, tearing up handful after handful of liana grass and throwing them on the fire.

“When, however, a dense cloud of thick, choking, black smoke rolled up, and when Dubosc turned to us with a triumphant light in his face, we understood dimly what his idea was, and in a frenzy of relief several of us danced foolishly in a circle about the fire and its column of smoke.

“In a council that followed, we decided that our attempt to escape had better be made during the day, once we had all noticed that there was less activity among our besiegers during the hours when the heat was most intense. We kept our fires burning, then, throughout the night until dawn. Nobody slept; we were too apprehensive, and too busy improvising torches for our protection during the march. The beasts, evidently fearful of the fire, remained in their trees all that night, and though they continued to whistle about us (this seems their sole mode of communication) there seemed to be less whistling from the side to which our smoke drifted. This assured us that our lieutenant’s plan would work.

“At dawn, bearing our smoking flambeaux, we set out. Arms and equipment were useless; they were discarded. To prevent the panic that appeared imminent among the men, Dubosc threatened to shoot down any man who left the formation, and to insure obedience, only Duperret, he and myself were allowed to retain revolvers.

“As we neared the trees, there was crowding among the men, but a few sharp words brought them to their senses. We halted just at the edge of the clearing, and Duperret and I leading the shivering company, threw our branches down under the trees and piled more wood on to make a little blaze. There was a discernible commotion in the foliage above us, but we could see nothing. When the noises subsided, we ventured in a hundred yards or so and built another fire.

“This scheme was resorted to at intervals all along our march. Progress was necessarily slow. At some dark spots, where the jungle was thick, it was necessary to proceed in narrow files, and these were the most dangerous, not only because of the ‘Umbrella Beasts’ but also because of the fright and impatience of the men.

“It was in one of these places that a casualty occurred. One of the chasseurs suddenly broke from the line and ran, shouting madly, to wave his torch at a vinous growth hanging from a tree, which he must have taken for a tentacle of one of the beasts. He stumbled, his torch flying from his hand as he fell. His danger then evidently deprived him of what senses he had remaining, for, regaining his feet, he ran, not back into the line but deeper into the jungle. We heard a strangled cry in a few moments. That was all. None of us dared to leave the company to bring him back.

“Another time, a man went raving mad, and made a violent attack on Dubosc. Before he could be caught, he stabbed that brave man twice in the breast.

“Now, as to the animals which attacked us. I had one before me for some sixty hours, though with little opportunity to examine and none at all to dissect it. My observations, though somewhat scanty, lead me to the conclusion that we are dealing with a hitherto unknown member of the great mollusk family. The family includes the octopus and oyster, neither with red blood, and it was the nearly colorless fluid that puzzled me about the blood of the beast that attacked the ship.

“The beast that was killed at the camp had a larger body than any known member of the family, and tentacles at least fifteen feet in length and correspondingly powerful. A protective covering of chitin appears to have been developed, and due to the lack of any internal skeleton and the fact that the muscles must base on it, this protective covering to its body is of a thickness and strength sufficient to be quite impervious to

rifle bullets. The one we killed had received a bullet full in the eye, which passed through into its brain.

"It is this brain that offers the most remarkable feature of these creatures. A brief investigation shows me that their brains are certainly larger than those of any animals except the big apes, and probably as large as those of the lower races of man. This argues an intelligence extremely high, and makes them more than ever dangerous, since they can evidently plan acts and execute them in concert.

"They have eight tentacular arms, covered on the lower side with the usual cephalopod type of suckers, the center of each sucker being occupied, as in some species of octopus, by a small, sharp claw. The thickness, and therefore the muscular strength of these arms is enormous. It is no wonder men proved utterly powerless against them.

"I am unable to say anything about either their method of breeding or what device they have arrived at for breathing air; probably some protective covering keeps the gill-plumes moist, as in the crayfish, making access to water at times necessary.

"In the face are two very large eyes, capable of seeing well in the dark and located directly in front of the large brain. The mouth consists of a huge beak, razor-edged. There are no teeth. Add this formidable beak to their extraordinary powers of swimming, their swift progress on land, their giant strength and their great intelligence, and it becomes evident that the human race is faced with a great peril.

"There is nothing whatever to prevent these animals from swimming the ocean or attacking the greatest city. One of these beasts could kill a hundred people in an hour and hardly any weapon we possess would be of the slightest use..."

As he wrote, Weyl's mind was again filled with the terror of that mad march through the jungle with the "Umbrella Beasts" whistling on every side, and his imagination shuddered at the picture of London or New York under an invasion from those grim Madagascar jungles; all business stopped, every door barred, the octopuses triumphantly parading the streets, breaking in here and there and strangling the last resistance of families cowering in corners, powerless against the invulnerable and irresistible animals. Here and there some squad armed with dynamite or some other weapon more powerful than rifles, would offer a brief resistance, but they too would go down in time. Civilization throttled, and in its place a ghastly reign of animalism...

Chapter V

Major Larivet was inclined to skepticism over Weyl's report. In a brusque, but kindly way, he had suggested that it be delayed, "...till you have had time to think it over. Perhaps, when the effect of your experience has — ah — worn off —"

Weyl gazed at him in astonishment at this suggestion, but he was to remember it forty days later.

Meanwhile, there was nothing to do but wait till the report reached the outer world, and some echo of it in the form of men, aeroplanes, scientists with their instruments and death dealing concoctions arrived to wipe out that terrible blot. And during the waiting, even Major Larivet's skepticism vanished under the pressure of events.

The octopuses, as Weyl called them, had confined their raids to isolated districts up to the time of his expedition, but now, acting apparently upon a well-formed plan, they became bolder and began a systematic extermination of every native in this part of the island.

Three days after the return of the expedition, a native runner dashed in half-crazed with fright to report a twilight raid on a whole village, from which hardly a soul escaped. As the days drew on, this ominous news was followed by such demonstrations of the power and intelligence of the octopuses as confirmed Weyl's darkest fears.

A village on the coast was attacked, and the natives, taking to their clumsy boats to escape the terror by land, found themselves no less helpless on the water, the only news of the dreadful event coming from some native who had gone there and found only a circle of empty huts.

Alarm of panic proportions spread like wildfire among the Malagasy, and in a stream that became a torrent they poured into Fort Dauphin for protection.

Daily the reports of depredations showed that the octopus terror was spreading and coming nearer, and Major Larivet found himself faced with the problem of feeding several hundred hungry and frightened natives with means wholly inadequate.

The climax came with the arrival of four men, or rather, shadows of men, who babbled that they were the last of the great tribe of the Tanôsy. Fighters to the core, instead of flying, they had stood out in battle array against their antagonists. The

result had been unspeakably horrible — they had seen their comrades torn to pieces before their eyes, and the women and children hunted down.

It was while things were in this state that the little tin-pot mail boat arrived with its cargo of supplies and European newspapers.

Weyl's heart rose as he marched off to his quarters eagerly with the papers under his arm, but it sank like lead when he and Duperret opened journal after journal, in quick, disappointed perusals.

Not one, they perceived, took the matter seriously. Weyl's phrase, "Umbrella Beasts," had been seized upon by humorous commentators with gusto, rolled on their tongues and spun off their pens to tickle the ribs of readers. Of serious acceptance there was not a sign. The general tone of the papers was one of howling derision. It was suggested that Weyl had gone crazy, that he was a publicity-mad mountebank. But the more usual spirit of the papers was that of the French wit who blared: "Weyl's Umbrella Beasts; Inseparable companions for that rainy-day walk. No one acquainted with the dictates of fashion can afford to dispense with this novel combination of household pet and Protective Implement!"

And the cartoons... !

Weyl looked up from the papers to meet Duperret's glance. There were actual tears in the Frenchman's eyes.

"It seems to be up to us," said Weyl, after a moment. "Well — I am not a rich man, as it is reckoned in America, but I can command a considerable amount of money, and can borrow more. I will write a cable-gram to be sent off immediately, and have every cent spent for materials to fight this thing."

Together they composed the carefully worded message to Weyl's assistant in the laboratory in New York, and together they took it to the dock and delivered it to the captain of the boat with the most urgent instructions to send it the moment he arrived at Andovoranbo.

Chapter VI

Not long after daybreak the American was roused from his sleep by a confused shouting under the window. Hurrying into his clothes, he dashed out to see the little

mail boat wallowing crazily off the jagged rocks that guarded the entrance to the harbor, her funnels silent and smokeless. Within ten minutes she was right among the breakers, pounding in the surf, but there was no sign of officers, crew, or lifeboats.

It was late in the afternoon before he could secure a native dhow to get out to the wreck. When he stepped on the slanting deck of the wrecked boat, Weyl found what he had feared. There was no one on board — only a blood-stain here and there.

Every man in the settlement was quite capable of visualizing what had happened. Writhing, black-grey tentacles reaching up out of the midnight sea, the swarming of hideous bodies over the ship, relentless groping arms searching out the screaming seamen, the fatally prehensive embrace of repulsive flesh ...

That very night Fort Dauphin received notice that it was under close siege. A mile out on the northeast beach two natives were taken by an octopus that came unexpectedly out of the water on them, and on the opposite side of town a soldier was pursued along the sand right up to the walls of the fort. Later the report ran in that one of the sentinels on the west side had disappeared.

But neither Weyl nor Major Larivet was quite prepared for the bold attack on the fort two days later.

Twilight was just blueing the edges of the jungle a quarter mile from the bastions of the fort, and the three white men were smoking gloomily over their coffee, when a shot and a shout from the sentry brought them to their feet.

They hastened to the bastion. Out of the jungle in the same regular, military order they had preserved on that fatal night of the first attack, came the octopuses, huge ugly heads bobbing above, undulating tentacles below.

Larivet, with a gleam in his eyes at being at last able to come to grips with the enemy, snapped sharp orders as the artillerymen swung the two “seventy-fives” into position. Duperret and Weyl watched breathlessly, heedless of the wild cries of alarm that issued from the natives who had seen the octopuses. The mouth of the gun swung down slowly. An order. Brief motions, the crash of the discharge, and right in the center of the advancing line a terrific burst of flame and dust.

An octopus staggered, stumbled with wildly flailing arms and flopped inertly to the ground.

Crash! The bright flames from the two guns mingled, and in the flare of the explosions three more of the monsters went to oblivion. They were not invulnerable, then! There was a ray of hope!

Weyl found himself cheering frantically. He felt a pressure at his shoulder and saw a couple of natives beside him, their courage revived. The black artillerymen worked like mad. They could not miss at that point-blank range.

All down the octopus line were gaps, and the wounded beasts strove to right themselves. They wavered, broke, and in disorderly flight headed back into the jungle, pursued by the avenging shells of the seventy-fives till they had passed from sight.

The natives were crowding about, shouting with emotion and hurling epithets after the retreating monsters. They were saved — at least for the time being.

But the conference of the three white men that night was grave.

“We have not really accomplished very much,” said Weyl, “except to show them that we have weapons against which they are not invulnerable. I don’t think they will attempt to rush the fort again, but they are terribly intelligent. They may try a surprise attack at night or from the sea, or may even give us a regular starvation siege.”

“No, they will not soon approach your guns again,” agreed Duperret, “but what are we to do if they attack the town from the other side. The fort surely cannot hold all the people you have here.”

‘’Gentlemen,’’ said Larivet gravely, “in that case we can only do our duty. I shall have one of the guns moved to the other side of town. Meanwhile we can do nothing but wait till someone comes to help us.”

“Or until we go to them,” from Weyl.

Duperret paled slightly, and stood up. “I offer myself as a messenger,” he said. “I will take a dhow out. If I am attacked, well, I know where to shoot them — in the eyes. I—”

“No, Raoul, no,” said Weyl, “let me try it. It would be simply—”

He was interrupted. A native servant entered excitedly.

“Him one piece boat in town,” said the black. “White man comes.”

“Boat? White man?” queried Larivet, puzzled. A cheery voice in the doorway answered him, “I say, is anybody here?” it said, and in marched an extraordinary figure of a man.

A large sign saying “Englishman” could not have stamped his face more effectively than his expression of cheerful vapidity. His clothes were white, scrupulously clean, and meticulously pressed, and in one hand he bore what looked like a small fire extinguisher. He extended the other toward Weyl.

“You’re Weyl, aren’t you?” he said. “Mulgrave’s my name; Henry Seaton Mulgrave. Earl of Mulgrave and Pembroke, and all that rot. At your service.”

“Of course I remember,” said Weyl cordially. “You gave that extraordinary paper on the Myxinidae before the British Association. Ah, that paper! Allow me,” he said, and translated into rapid French for the benefit of Larivet, “to present the Earl of Mulgrave, one of the most distinguished of living scientists.”

There were bows, a drink offered and accepted, and the visitor, carefully placing his fire extinguisher in the corner, curled his lanky frame up in a chair.

Chapter VII

“Seriously, though, y’know,” Mulgrave said after finishing his whisky and soda, “if it hadn’t been that I was a bit in the doldrums at the time your report came out, I believe I would have joined the rest of the world in thinking you somewhat — er — balmy, despite your excellent reputation. But I needed a cruise anyway, and came on the chance there was something in it; sort of a sporting venture, d’y’see? It did seem quite a bally cooked-up sort of mess, the way those journals played it up, y’know.”

Weyl’s nod of understanding was followed by an inquiring look at the queer contrivance the Englishman had placed in the corner.

“Flammenwerfer,” Mulgrave answered the silent query. “Germans used ‘em in the war. Superior bit of frightfulness. Shoots out fire. And really quite effective, even against your bally octopuses, I assure you.”

“But,” Weyl exclaimed, “you can’t possibly—”

“Oh, yes, I have,” Mulgrave smiled. “The ruddy animals hadn’t the decency to wait for a proper introduction, and paid us a visit on the Morgana — my yacht, y’know — just outside the harbor. I fancy when we got through with them they were rather scorched. Morgana was war-built and has steel decks, so we didn’t mind putting the Flammenwerfer to work against them. We’ve got what’s left of one stretched out on the deck. Others got away.”

Weyl breathed a sigh of relief and thankfulness that this casual Englishman had come prepared. How easily the mail boat disaster might have been duplicated! He shuddered.

“Well then, part of our horrible problem seems to be solved, thanks to your foresight, Mulgrave. At least we have a means of wiping them out. But here’s the difficulty. It will take years, killing them off one by one, as we’ll have to do with your pump gun. I tell you, they infest the whole island, thousands of ‘em. They’re increasing and multiplying faster than we could possibly kill them off. That’s the only way I can explain this recent outbreak. They were few enough in number, before this, to remain in obscurity except in isolated districts, and known only to ignorant and superstitious natives.” Weyl’s forehead creased in perplexity and worry. “If they keep on — well, they’ll need the whole globe. And that means only one thing; man will have to get off it to make room for them. They’re powerful enough, and intelligent enough, to have their own way about it, too. Don’t doubt it. Unless—”

Mulgrave evidently did not share Weyl’s anxiety, though he did not seem to underestimate the danger. “I’ll finish that last sentence of yours, Weyl, although I’ll admit things are a bit worse than I had thought. But meanwhile, let’s look over our resources, and try to find out a bit more about the nature of the beast we’re up against. The post-mortem of that lamentably deceased visitor on the Morgana’s deck ought to tell us something of his weak points. Do you want to go out there now?”

With chairs tilted back against the cabin of the Morgana, the three men regarded the sundown sky in a moody and depressed silence. Their dissection of the octopus killed by Mulgrave’s pump-gun had added little to their knowledge of the anatomy of the menacing brutes, save a confirmation of Weyl’s hypothesis that their breathing, while on land, was conducted by means of the same gills which supplied them with oxygen in the water, protected, like the lobster’s, by a covering of chitin.

Mulgrave’s chair scraped on the deck. “Well, let’s get back ashore,” he said. “Can’t do any more now I fancy, unless they decide to stage a party for us this evening.”

“It comes down to this, then,” said Weyl, continuing the conversation which had been abandoned with the end of their anatomical researches. “Fire, or some kind of guns heavier than the ordinary service rifle, are the only things that will do any particular good.”

“Have you thought of gas, my friend?” asked Duperret.

“Huh,” answered Weyl shortly. “Airplanes? Chemicals? And what about all the men on the island — for we should have to cover it all with gas to be of any use.”

“The time is rather short, too, I fancy,” chirped Mulgrave. “How long will provisions last?”

“Not long,” agreed Duperret, moodily. “A week, or perhaps a little more.”

“Then, within seven days, or at the most ten, we must concoct a plan and put it into force — a plan that will wipe out God knows how many of these unearthly enemies of the earth. It must be extermination, too, for if one pair were left to breed... I’m more than half convinced that the thing is hopeless. Yet I don’t like to show the white flag. These are, after all, only beasts. Super-beasts, it is true, but the equals and heirs of man? I hate to believe it.”

“But, my friend, you forget the force of mere numbers,” said Duperret. “So many rats could easily overpower us, guns and all, from mere lack of time to kill them as fast as they came on. Comparative values, as of man and beast, are insignificant.”

Weyl nodded a pessimistic agreement.

“There’s only one chance,” he said. “If we could find some way to attack them in the water — they must go there to breed at least, and I fancy they must make periodic visits to the water to wet their gill plumes in addition.”

Chapter VIII

It was three days later.

Another octopus attack on the little fort had met with a bloody repulse, and a score of the great bodies lay at the edge of the jungle in varying stages of decomposition, where they had been blown to extinction by the swift shells of the seventy-fives. A conference was in progress on Major Larivet’s verandah; a conference of beaten men.

“As a last resort,” Duperret was saying, “there is the open sea and Mulgrave’s yacht.”

“Why, as for that,” Weyl answered, “it wouldn’t hold a tenth of us, even crowded to the rails. Besides, leave those natives behind? Damn it, they trust us.”

“It would hardly be cricket,” said Mulgrave. “What of the mail steamer? Aren’t they apt to send someone to look us up when she does not appear?”

“Not even yet is the boat due at Andovoranto, said Major Larivet, “and there is the time for the news to reach Andananerivo... The lack of news to them will be but a token that we have pacified the Tanôsy and are in need of nothing.

“Yes,” Duperret agreed, “I know these officials. They are aware of something unusual only when they have seventeen dossiers, each neatly tied in red tape and endorsed by the proper department head. My friends, we are alone.”

“Which means,” Weyl continued, “that we have about a week more to live before the food runs out or they overwhelm us. And then — good-by world of men!”

There was little silence, broken only by the sound of Mulgrave puffing at his pipe. It was ended by a shot and a shout from one of the sentries at the western side of the fort; the signal of another attack.

During that night the great octopuses twice fought their way down to the fort, and twice were repulsed, though the second effort, bigger and more violently sustained than the first, only ended when Mulgrave, called in the crew of his yacht and their flammenwerfer.

As the following day drew on, the unrest in the jungle about the army post became more pronounced. Major Larivet, Duperret, and Weyl, worn with lack of sleep, kept vigil by the little counterscarp, listening to the innumerable whistlings and rustlings so near to them, while the soldiers and natives, visibly shaken, were difficult to keep in line.

When evening came, it seemed as though the octopuses had concentrated their forces for a great drive. The whistlings had increased to such a volume that sleep was nearly impossible, and as soon as the sun went down, the movements of dark forms could be observed where the animals were silhouetted against the sky along the beach.

The first attack came half an hour later. It was a sporadic outburst, apparently, consisting of only three or four individuals, and these were quickly dispersed or slain by a few bursts from the seventy-fives. But it was followed by another, and another, the numbers of the attackers ranging all the way from three to fifteen or twenty. Unlike the previous attempts on the fort they were frenzied and unorganized as though the directing intelligence behind them had suddenly failed. Immune to fear, the living octopuses came right on, through the hail of fire and died at the foot of the rampart, or dashed over it even, to be wounded to death by bayonets fixed on long poles with which the black soldiers reached and stabbed frenziedly at eyes and softer parts.

Once, during a lull in the combat, the commandant and Weyl were called to witness a monstrous dud, at the very edge of the fort between two of the hideous beasts. The ungainly creatures locked in each others' tentacles, rolled hideously together, tearing at each other with their great beaks, till a Senegalese reached over with one of those improvised bayonet pikes and dealt first one and then the other mortal stabs. Weyl felt a singular sensation of nausea.

Toward dawn it became evident to the exhausted artillerymen and their wearied leaders that the octopuses were now aiming not so much at conquest, as at escape. They no longer blundered into the fires that had been built about the fort and village; no longer hurled themselves upon Mulgrave's crew of flame-throwers and the shells of the seventy fives. They seemed to be heading for the beach, to be striving to reach the water.

And when dawn broke, the men in the enclosure saw a few stragglers from the hideous army at the edge of the jungle, making their way, like the others, with ungainly flappings and swishings, always toward the beach. It was impossible to watch them without feeling an almost physical sensation of illness, of sinking. But what did it mean? No one among the harassed defenders of Fort Dauphin was prepared to say.

Chapter IX

Mulgrave's wearied crew had gone aboard with their ship, and the white men, refreshed by a few hours' sleep and a bath, were discussing the question. "I am of the opinion," Weyl was declaring, "that they have certain periods when they must wet their gill-plumes again, and last night's disturbance represents one of those periods. If we could only attack them at such a time—"

He was interrupted by the arrival of an excited Senegalese, who addressed Major Larivet:

“The boat she is smoke. She go.”

“How?” “What?” cried the four, leaping to their feet and starting down the road in the direction of the pier.

It was too true. The Morgana, out beyond the reef line, was marked by a tiny plume of smoke from her funnel, and as they gazed, she seemed to move a bit.

“Quick!” shouted Weyl, “let’s push off a dhow.

Followed by the Englishman, and at a longer distance by Duperret, he raced for the pier and leaped into the little craft. “Grab a sweep,” he called to Larivet.

Propelled by sail and oar, the little craft began to swing out from the pier, and then catching the land breeze in its full strength, heeled over. Duperret drew in his sweep, useless at that speed. He shaded his eyes and looked toward the Morgana. Suddenly he turned with a short bitter laugh.

“Look,” he said, pointing. A few hundred yard. ahead of the dhow, Weyl and Mulgrave saw a globular grey shape among the waves. From it, lying flush with the water, radiated — tentacles. Weyl put the tiller over to avoid it, and as the craft swang saw another, and then another. It was the end.

But even as he prepared to wear the little ship round and run back for the pier, if indeed they could make that temporary safety, they saw out beyond the loathsome globular head and spreading arms a triangular fin-shape that cut the water with hardly a ripple.

It was charging straight at the octopus, and as they watched, there was a swift turmoil in the water, the flash of a sleek, wet, black body, a vision of dazzling teeth, had the globular head of the octopus disappeared into a boil of water from which rose two tentacles, waving vainly. Off to the right, another of those knife-like fins was coming, followed by more — a half dozen, a dozen, a score; and suddenly around each of them there gathered the whirl and flush of a combat.

The dhow drew ahead, right toward the center of one of the tumultuous whirlpools. Out of it dissolved an octopus that was only half an octopus, its tentacles torn and a

huge gash across that inhuman parody of a face — an octopus that was striving vainly to escape from a flashing fate that ran behind it.

Weyl shouted — Duperret began to weep; the unaffected tears of joy of the emotional Frenchman and Mulgrave, stirred from his imperturbability, was shouting, “Killer whales!” to an audience that had eyes and ears only for the savage battles all about them.

Everywhere, they could see through the clear tropical water that the killers, stronger and swifter, if less intelligent, were the victors. The octopuses, routed, were trying to get away as vainly as the natives had tried to escape from them.

“Let the bally yacht go,” shouted Mulgrave to Weyl. “I want to enjoy this.”

For fifteen, twenty minutes, they watched, until they saw the vanishing fin of a killer moving off to northward, signal that that part of the battle was over, and that the killers were departing for new fields of triumph. Three men, with hearts lighter than they had known them for weeks, manoeuvred the boat back to the pier.

Chapter X

“They seem to be gone, sure enough,” said Weyl, tossing down on the table a brace of the native pheasants. It was only two days later, but he had returned from a four hours’ trip into the jungle.

“I didn’t even come across the traces of a single one of them — unless you can call a trace the fact that they seem to have cleaned out about all the animals in this district. Even the monkeys are gone.”

“Do you think they will come back?” asked Major Larivet.

“I am sure they will not,” said Weyl. “There seem to be perfect shoals of killer whales off the coast, attracted no doubt by the octopuses, which are their favorite food. You may be sure they would hunt down every one, as the killers are very voracious.”

“But what made them appear in the first place?”

“God knows. It is, or was, since they are now gone, some phenomenon allied to

that which produces the lemming migrations every twenty-eight years. You, Mulgrave, are a biologist. You know how, once in twenty-eight years, these little rat-like animals breed in such numbers that they overrun whole districts, and then migrate into the ocean where they are drowned by the thousand.

"These octopuses would have plenty of opportunity to develop their extraordinary size and intelligence, as well as their quality of breathing air by life in the shallow, deserted lagoons all around Madagascar, and if they were actuated by a life-cycle similar to that of the lemmings, they would breed in the vast numbers which we saw. It seems the only logical hypothesis.

"In any case, there is nothing for the rest of the world to fear. A sort of wireless telegraphy seems to exist among animals with regard to neighborhoods where food can be obtained in quantities, and just as you will see the condors of the Andes flock to where food is, the killer whales gathered around this visitation of giant cuttle fish.

"It is one of Nature's numerous provisions to right the balance of things on the earth when they threaten to get out of joint in any direction. If any other enemy of man were to multiply as these octopuses did, you may be sure he would find an animal ally.

"We were merely panic-stricken and foolish to think we could accomplish anything. We should have waited."

"And now, my friend," said Duperret, "I suppose I must bid you farewell."

"Yes. I am anxious to get back to my monograph on the Ammonites of the Upper Cretaceous. It will astonish the scientific world, I think."

The Ancient Horror

Hal Grant

"It will be interesting if they happen to find the lizard and it turns out to be the real thing."

"What thing?" I asked. Rutherford had been reading the paper to himself.

By way of reply, he handed me the paper, at the same time pointing to a head-line carrying the information that scientists were on their way to Africa to search for a PREHISTORIC MONSTER SEEN BY HUNTERS IN NORTHERN AFRICAN SWAMP."

From the writer's description, I gathered the idea that the creature was supposed to belong to one of the species of gigantic saurians that roamed the earth during the reptilian age, some five hundred millions of years ago.

I thought the story a hoax and said so. Rutherford didn't agree with me, calling my attention to the fact that the men — whose names were given — were all well known, which made it unlikely that any writer would use them in connection with anything that savoured of deceit.

"I believe they have evidence warranting such an expedition, or they would not go. Moreover, I shall not be surprised to read, at some future date, that they have discovered the thing, whatever it is, and that it furnishes them with some very interesting experiences."

Well, every one has a right to his opinion, even though he has no foundation upon which to base it, so I didn't argue with him, beyond saying that I presumed he had some very good reason for being so positive.

Perhaps he thought I was a trifle sarcastic. At any rate he looked at me through contracted eyes for a moment, as if trying to make up his mind about something; then, having filled his pipe, he reached for a match and, after lighting the tobacco, he said quietly, "Yes, I do believe there are living descendants of those saurians and that they are, in appearance, like the old fellows we read about. Also, I believe I have good reason for thinking there are some that resemble no known species, and, since you won't take any stock in my belief until you have some proof, I am going to give you some, provided, of course, that you will accept my unsupported word that what I tell you is true."

Rutherford is not one given to making statements that are not true. If he says he knows a thing to be so, from personal knowledge, that settles it. He always was that way, even in school. More than once I have known him to take a licking when, by simply mis-stating the facts, he would have saved himself. Knowing him as I did, I told him to go ahead and give me the proof, if he wanted to, but, that I'd take his word for the "reason" without any further evidence. I hadn't the slightest idea as to what his "proofs" were, or I should not have taken the chance of missing them. Aside from a tale of fiction, I've never heard, or read of anything that approached his story for horror. And the setting was perfect. Rutherford and I, alone in the hunting lodge on the shore of a northern lake at night, with the November wind howling through the trees that surrounded the house on three sides, and driving torrents of rain and sleet against the windows and upon the shakes that covered the roof. An eerie night, for an eerie tale.

"I've never told this story before," he began, "because there is little chance of being thought anything but a liar. I've often wanted to tell it though, and this moment seems very opportune. Every word is gospel truth."

"In this case, as in all others, cause and effect are operative," he began. "If I hadn't caught the flu in the winter of nineteen hundred and five, I should never have known anything about it.

"I had a pretty bad case of it and, only by the skin of my teeth, did I manage to pull through. Even at that, I barely missed 'going west,' for I was left with a lung complication that my doctor thought was a touch of T.B.

"As soon as the weather permitted, he ordered me into the mountains for an indefinite time. 'Any place,' he said, 'where there are lots of pine trees and clean air.' It seems odd that, out of all the familiar places on earth, which I might have chosen, I should have selected a place I had never heard of before, just because the name, when I read it on the route marked out in a railway time table, reminded me of a little girl I used to like back in my school days.

"Maybe you will remember her, Elsie Hampton. She went to school with us, back there, in Stowe, Vermont. She lived back on the hill, beyond the big house that Butler, the hotel man, built. You remember, he never finished it? Got killed by being thrown out of his buggy, while driving a crazy horse. Drunk at the time, if I remember correctly."

I nodded and, refilling his obnoxious pipe, he went on.

“That’s how I happened to go to Hampton and, as it turned out, I would have had some trouble finding a better place, every thing considered. It was two thousand feet above sea level, just at the edge of the foothills. There were plenty of pines, firs and balsams. Air as clear as crystal. Fishing and hunting ‘till you couldn’t rest and, to make it more attractive, it was off the tourist track. Nobody ever stopped there (it was before the days of ‘Automobile Tramps’ and there was no such thing as a ‘Tourist Camp’).

“But the town was modern and up-to-date, provided with gas, electricity and a plentiful supply of pure water, piped from a reservoir ten miles back in the hills. There had been a hot controversy over the construction of the reservoir, due to the heavy cost, but the ‘Boosters’ had won out, and in the end, every one was happy.

“I had been there but a short while when things began to happen that set the town by the ears, particularly that part of the town that had opposed the idea of putting in the reservoir. One beautiful afternoon, just at the time the women were getting supper started, every tap in town went dry. Inside of half an hour the water works department was being called up and ‘called down’ by indignant housewives, who wanted to know what had become of their water supply.

“Well, the department found it out almost as soon as the women did, and it wasn’t long before the engineers were loping along the pipe-line leading to the reservoir, followed by a crowd of idlers; being one of that class, I was with them.

“There was no break in the pipe and no cause for the stoppage of the water ways found until the reservoir was reached. Here they found cause in plenty. The huge, artificial lake was dry and the creek that fed it was pouring into a great hole in the center of the basin, near the dam and, from the roar that issued forth, one could guess that the water was falling some distance.

“Ordinarily, a hole may be stopped up. This was more than a hole; a continuous stream of water of considerable size failed to fill it. Evidently there was a cavern, or a number of caverns, underneath the surface with outlets, possibly sufficiently large to carry away any overflow.

“There were two newspapers in Hampton. One backed up the ‘Boosters,’ while the other stood with the ‘Conservatives,’ and the reservoir incident furnished the rival papers with a plentiful supply of material for publication.

“As might be guessed, the conservative organ was mean and caustic. Of course, nobody could have foreseen such a catastrophe — for it amounted to that.

“The other paper tried to explain, and really did explain. The cause was entirely obvious. The creek, for at least that part of it that had passed over the spot where the hole now was, had flowed over the this rock cover of an underground chamber, or chambers, of huge dimensions. In view of what occurred a year later, I believe there must have been at least two, or more. This thin plate, or cover, had been strong enough to support the weight of the stream, but it was constantly growing thinner and it was apparently not strong enough to bear the greater strain imposed upon it by the water in the reservoir.

“The conservative paper admitted this but tried to convince its readers that the engineers should have known, from the formation of the rocks, that such an accident was liable to occur.

“And so they went at it, hammer and tongs, until, like a bolt from the clear blue sky, came another phenomenal occurrence. This, I suppose, might have been anticipated, although I don’t see how.

“A man by the name of Wilson owned a large farm that abutted upon the creek. In fact, a part of the lake formed by the reservoir encroached upon Wilson’s property, and would have covered a large part of it, were it not for a retaining wall that had been built to keep the water back. This wall ran from a point near the upstream end of the reservoir to within a hundred feet of the dam. The remaining space was filled by a sort of mound, rising some fifteen feet, or more, above the surface of the water at high level. This mound was very much like a turtle’s shell in shape, a hundred feet in length, about fifty feet wide at its base. I mention the mound at this point in the story, because it played an important part in a later incident, and I want you to remember the details.

“One morning, while the principal topic of conversation was still the reservoir cave-in, Wilson came into town, all het up! Winding up in the Mayor’s office, he sprung a sensation upon that official by declaring that his farm had ‘sunk out of sight.’ This was, to be sure, a mean and unusual trick for a farm to play upon its owner and the Mayor was both astonished and sympathetic. Wilson didn’t want sympathy, he wanted damages, which put an entirely different light on the story. At first, the Mayor thought Wilson was crazy, but he soon changed his mind and, calling in the County Attorney, asked Wilson to tell the story in detail.

“Wilson said he had been aroused from sleep by a strange noise, a sort of tearing sound mixed with a great roar and, upon getting up and going to his window, which faced the reservoir, he had seen a great gush of water, spurting up through the hole

in its bed, and that a few moments later there had been another tearing, crashing noise and all his best garden land had broken away from higher and less valuable land, and 'dropped plum out of sight.'

"He was still standing, open mouthed, at the window when there came another explosion, followed by a tearing noise and a great chasm appeared in the northern end of the depression into which his farm had sunk and through this came a rushing volume of water. By this time, Wilson said, he thought he'd 'better put on some clothes and investigate.'

"Continuing, he said that, when he reached the side of the cave-in, he saw that it was rapidly being filled with water that came pouring into it through the rent in the upper end. He had watched until morning when, the water, having reached a point a few inches below the firm edge of his remaining land, had ceased to rise, and he concluded it had gone as high as it ever would.

"At first he was mystified, but at last decided that his misfortune was due to the cave-in of the reservoir, the water having washed the underpinning from beneath his property. Well, both the Mayor and the County Attorney agreed with him — forgetting in the excitement induced by the fantastic story, that Wilson was there to secure damages.

"Of course the Mayor couldn't do anything for Wilson, and the County Attorney, seeing no better way out of the tangle, advised the man to get a lawyer and bring suit.

"The case didn't come to trial — not then — for the city figured a way out of the trouble into which the cave-in had drawn it.

"Analysis showed that the water in the newly formed lake was the same water the city had been getting from the reservoir and so an appraiser fixed a valuation upon the sunken property that satisfied Wilson, and, this settled, preparations were begun to connect up the lake with the pipe line.

"But, the chain of unusual happenings was not yet at an end. The day before Wilson was to receive the money for his land, water began to flow through the hundreds of taps that had been left open since they ran dry. An investigation revealed the fact that the reservoir had begun to fill up again and, as soon as the news reached the County Attorney's office, payment to Wilson was held up, pending such a time as might be needed to show whether or not the reservoir would fill and remain full.

"When it became apparent that there was to be no more trouble with the water

supply, the City called the deal off. Wilson then took his case into court and lost. He carried it up on an appeal, and lost again, the higher court sustaining the lower and justifying itself in so doing by stating that what had occurred was 'an act of God,' for which the city was not liable.

"During the trial, I became acquainted with Wilson and, afterwards he invited me out to his place. I was glad to go with him for his invitation carried with it the assurance of better conditions of living for me, for I had been unable to secure suitable quarters in any of the farm homes outside of Hampton. I conjectured that, if Wilson's place suited my fancy, I could very likely make arrangements with him which would enable me to remain at his place indefinitely. I did succeed in doing so and, who knows but that I might have met with the same unpleasant experience he did, had not Fate willed it otherwise.

"Adventure, like romance, lies just around the corner. One does not need to go to Africa, as these scientists are doing, in order to find adventure any more than it is necessary to go to Europe for romance, and the adventure ahead of me that summer day, as I sat in Wilson's rattling Flivver, en route to his place, was very real. No other man ever lived through an experience more bizarre, more horrible than the one that was waiting for me, at Wilson's place.

"It didn't take us long to cover the distance between Hampton and the farm which, even with most of the tillable land under water, was a beautiful place. That part of the property covered with the water from the reservoir had been practically the only really flat land in the whole estate; the rest was rolling and hilly, and for the most part, covered with timber. The lake lay almost in the center of the 'farm,' as Wilson called it and, while it completely ruined the farm for agriculture, it added immensely to its charm and beauty. Roughly oval and nearly a mile in diameter, it twinkled in its bed like a great sapphire encircled with emeralds. Owing to its depth, which, according to Wilson's estimate, was something about five hundred feet, the water would remain cold always, which made it an ideal place for any trout which entered from the creek, to live and breed in.

"I said as much to Wilson that evening after supper. Evidently, he had never thought of such a thing; his mind was centered upon his loss. He mulled the thing over in his mind for a moment, and as the possibilities of such a proposition grew upon him, he said, 'if that danged lake had fish in it, I wouldn't take any price you could name for it. I could get more out of the water then than I ever got out of the land and still own it.' And I knew he was right. Given fish, he had the world by the tail. It would make a wonderful summer resort, for cottages could be built along the lake which would bring high rent for the season. He surely needed fish.

“And the fish came, but not until we had about given up all hope that they would. I had become Wilson’s star boarder, for he had invited me to stay there as long as I liked, as his guest. I spent the days helping Wilson keep house. He was a widower for some years, and wandered about the lake, looking for signs of fish.

“Then, one afternoon, just at sun-down, I saw one leap out of the water. I shouted to Wilson, who answered the call on the run and got there in time to see another one jump up out of the blue depths. He gripped my arm and said, ‘Rutherford, I shall need some help, financially. If you want to go in with me, we’ll split the profits. What do you say?’ I thought the matter over for a moment, then told him I’d furnish the needed capital. We stayed there, at the side of the lake, until dark, talking the matter over and watching the ‘dollars,’ as Wilson was pleased to call the trout, jump out of the water. We then went back to the house to make further plans for the next season

“Two weeks later we had a dozen summer cottages well on the road toward completion. We expected to build more, later, but we figured a dozen, to start with, would be sufficient, which shows how nearly a couple of greenhorns can come to making a correct guess. We could have rented a hundred, if we had them. Later I wished I had never thought of building a single cottage. But who could have dreamed of such consequence?

“The cottages, which were erected on a sufficiently large, cleared space, on the southeast shore of the lake, were completed before the cold weather set in, and after closing the board shutters over the windows to protect them from possible breakage, we devoted our time to planning a campaign for the Spring.

“Winter passed reluctantly it seemed to Wilson and me, but it gave way to Spring at last and shortly after I went to the city. There I had a series of talks with certain dealers in fish, which resulted, as soon as the fishing season opened, in a big window display of strings of trout that made the disciples of Isaac Walton almost wild to swing a fly over their habitat. A carefully worded legend that accompanied the display gave the necessary information. The season opened with all our cottages occupied and we were making money.

“Very shortly after, we began to hear strange noises, in the night. If we had been very near a seaport town I should have thought the sound, though rather sharp, was given by a ship’s siren. However, since we were better than eighteen hundred miles from the ocean, and a thousand miles from any other body of water large enough to float a ship, we concluded that it was a particularly awful whistle on the railroad, that ran some three miles to the west of us. It bothered us for about a week, then, like all

other noises that occur at frequent intervals, it ceased to bother us much. There was some speculation among the cottagers but, when we told them it probably came from some engine, they accepted the statement for fact, and forgot all about it. Besides, what does a little noise amount to when the fishing is good? And it was.

"There was only one fault to be found with our lake, or its environment. Owing to the altitude and the added fact that it lay so deep down among the hills, the nights were too chilly to permit of comfort on the lake after dark. However, there was plenty of warmth during the daytime, so it didn't matter so very much.

"Along about the first part of July, however, we had a stretch of very hot weather. The warmth continued well into the night, and the early evening hours found the lake pretty well dotted with boats and canoes, passing back and forth near the shore and pretty well out into the lake.

"The first break in the calm order of our lives came one evening, during this hot spell. Wilson and I were down at the lake, cleaning some trout we had caught. It was about eight, or a little later and it was getting dark rapidly. We had practically no twilight. We had just finished our job when a long, agonizing scream, as one in mortal anguish, came vibrating over the lake, from some point down in the southwestern corner. Dropping our fish, Wilson and I ran down the shore, in the direction of the cottages, only to find all the women, and a couple of men huddled in a frightened group, down by the shore. In reply to our queries, one of the men said that the scream came from young Barnaby who, with his father and mother, occupied one of the cottages.

"As it chanced, no one had been out on the lake, except the young man. All the other men, with the exception of the two who were on the shore when we got there, were in Hampton, laying in more supplies. When his mother called to young Barnaby to come in, he answered he would be 'back in a few moments,' but for some unearthly reason, had started toward the deepening darkness of the western shore. The boy's mother had remained on the cottage porch, following the lad with a mother's anxious eyes, as he paddled away into the shadows. The two men, also watching from the shore, commented upon the boy's 'whim.'

"Up to this point there was perfect agreement; then started differences of opinion, as to what followed. One man said he was certain the boy had started to change ends, in the canoe, and had capsized it in so doing. His neighbor was equally certain that he had dimly seen the young man stand up in the canoe and, with the paddle, strike at something and then suddenly pitch forward, out of the canoe, screaming as he fell.

“All this was told by the two men, while the four of us, in two boats, were racing toward the spot where the boy was last seen.

“Although the man who declared the accident had been due to the boy’s attempt to ‘change ends’ still stuck to his opinion, I felt, somehow, that he was wrong. Barnaby was, I had been told, a crack swimmer and, considering that he must have been close to shore when be fell into the water, I was convinced that merely being capsized would hardly have elicited such a cry of agony. No! I felt, absolutely, that there had been some sort of an attack made upon him and that he had tried to fight off the attacker, whoever, or whatever it was, with his paddle, and that he had failed in the attempt. And, as I tried to guess what sort of danger the unfortunate boy had faced, chills of horror went down my spine.

“So thoroughly convinced was I that something terrible had happened to Barnaby, and that he was beyond help, that the sight of his overturned canoe, as we drew near it, acted only as a sickening confirmation. Yet, knowing that it was useless, I urged a careful search and, with the others, called his name, again and again. They may have hoped; I did not. I merely knew the boy was dead.

“I kept my thoughts to myself, however, since my suspicions would only make matters worse. It would be bad enough to believe her only son had been drowned, but, I doubted whether her reason would bear the shock of the awful thing I had in mind. Wilson followed my example.

“Having no grappling irons, we would not drag the lake that night, but I told Mrs. Barnaby, who bore up remarkably well, that I would get some from Hampton in the morning. Hampton had none, so we had to devise them from clumsily made heavy rods and hooks.

“Young Barnaby’s father wanted to go with us, but I prevailed upon him to remain with his wife. I felt it was best, because, while I did not expect to recover the body, I realized the possibility of something very sinister, and I felt it would be better for him not to see what the irons might bring to the surface. Maybe he sensed something of my thought, for he consented at last to remain behind.

“We loaded the clumsy drag with the rope attached (I had bought eight hundred feet, in order to make sure we had enough) into the boat and, with Wilson at the oars, pulled over to the place where the accident occurred. We had some trouble getting the drag into the water, owing to its awkward shape and weight, but we finally succeeded in lowering it. It seemed as if the drag would never reach bottom. Five hundred feet is a long way down.

“When, finally, the drag came to rest, I sat down in the stern of the boat and told Wilson to row slowly. He did. He did even better than that; he hardly moved at all. I thought the drag might have caught on some snag, but Wilson assured me there was no such thing in the whole area of the lake. It required the combined efforts of eight men, two to a boat, to pull that thing.

“We worked all day, dragging every foot of the lake within a radius of several hundred yards from the spot where the boy went down. We found nothing that day nor the next day, nor any day within the week of heartbreaking labor.

“It was labor lost, but it was necessary. There was no use running the risk of, not only driving a mother and, perhaps, a father crazy, but of ruining our business. And, of course, I might have been mistaken.

“The Barnaby cottage was vacant the day after we ceased to drag the lake, and it looked, for a while, as though the others might be, too; but, after talking the matter over, the occupants decided that it was only an accident, sad, indeed, but only too common and, since going back home would not help these parents to recover their boy, they might just as well try to forget. So they stayed and the vacant cottage was soon rented again.

One thing, however, they didn’t forget — that the ‘accident’ happened in the evening; so, although the warm spell continued, they kept off the lake after sundown.

“Nearly a month went by with no untoward happening. Even those night noises ceased and I began to think I had let my imagination run wild, and that young Barnaby’s death had been due to a simple capsize of his canoe. Then, there was another accident and, this time, it was a particularly horrible one. To add to its sinister aspects, it took, for its victims, the young couple who occupied the cottage in which the Barnaby family had lived.

“The young man and his wife, — their name was Whipple, — had been married only a little over a year. Mrs. Whipple, a rather frail woman of the neurotic type, temperamental, crotchety and stubborn as the Devil, was soon to become a mother and her condition, of course, didn’t make her any easier to get along with. She was a beauty, though, and Whipple adored her.

“But, unreasonable as she was, Mrs. Whipple realized that she was in no condition to risk being tipped into the water, even if she had been a good swimmer, so she kept off the lake, contenting herself with sitting in the bow of the boat, which was

tied to a stake driven into the ground, a few feet from the edge. There was absolutely no shore, no beach, and the water, at the edge of the lake, grew suddenly deep.

"No one will ever know what prompted her to insist upon going out on the lake that night. Probably it was just an unaccountable whim, common to women. Had Whipple been a little more coaxingly diplomatic, he might have talked her out of the notion, but, unfortunately, he emphatically negatived her suggestion that he take her 'for a little boat ride' before they went to bed, and the fat was in the fire. What had been, when made, just a simple, wheedling request, became a demand, backed up by evidence of approaching hysterics.

"According to Holy Writ, which is accepted by many people as being true, Eve succeeded in getting Adam to eat the apple, even when he knew the consequences were going to be disastrous, so what could be expected of a man, so deeply in love with his wife, who only *feared the possibility* of an unpleasant result of his yielding? Whipple held out, for a little time but, in the end, she devilled him into taking her and, to make the matter worse, she insisted upon going, 'straight across to the opposite shore and back.'

"I was present at the time; that is I was within hearing distance, having been, engaged in conversation with the man next door to Whipple. When I heard him, grudgingly, consent to take his wife across, I had a feeling of dread, a premonition of something dreadful in connection with it. Using all the tact I possessed, I tried to dissuade her from going. But it was useless. She listened, politely enough, for she was well brought up, but she was unshaken and what more could I do? True, I might have taken hold of the painter and refused to allow Whipple to take the boat, as I had a 'hunch' to do. But that would have necessitated an explanation, which I could hardly give, so I contented myself with saying that I wouldn't do it under the circumstances. Which helped not at all.

"I've known people to laugh at 'a hunch.' They claim there is nothing to it, that the 'feeling' is due to some trifling nervous disorder, entirely physiological. Some attribute it to over-stimulation of the nerves by alcohol, or tobacco. Well, perhaps it is due to any one, or all of these causes, but I've never known it to fail in my own case, and I've had plenty of chance to test it out. The proof, of course, is entirely one-sided, for, if I 'feel' that I'll be sorry later if I do a certain thing, and I obey that 'hunch,' I never know that punishment would really have followed had I disregarded the feeling. It is like taking the Pasteur treatment for suspected rabies infection. If the treatment is taken before rabies develops in the person, it can never be known, for certain, that there was any need for the treatment. All that is known is, if there is

an infection and the treatment is not taken, the person dies, most horribly. So with a 'hunch.' It may be all bunk, as the cold-blooded, matter-of-fact people claim, but it doesn't cost much to play the 'hunch' and, as a rule, I do.

"I stood there, on the shore, watching the outline of the boat grow dimmer and dimmer as it neared the middle of the lake. It was the second night of the new moon. The starless sky was like black velvet. And it seemed ominously still to me. At the first terrible ullulation of a woman in deadly peril, which came echoing across the black stretch of water, I felt, not so much of surprise, as confirmation of a previous certainty. None the less; my very soul sickened with dread and horror and when, an instant later, the hoarser cry of a man smote my ears, I knew the tragedy was complete — both Whipple and his wife were past help.

"I must have been very close to hysteria for, when Wilson, whose teeth were chattering, grasped my arm, I shook him off with an oath, and ran for the boat, closely followed by the other men.

"As a rule, I am not much bothered by 'nerves.' It is not due to any courage of an unusual sort, for I have known fear many times, but I certainly had them that night, when we pulled across the lake toward the spot from which had come those terrible cries. Although I have crawled out into the mud and filth of 'No Man's Land,' in the blackness of a rainy night, knowing that death would be my portion it I should betray my presence by a sound, my nerves were steady although fear was in my heart. I knew in what manner I should die and the knowledge helped. But the awful mystery that lay behind the need for going out on the lake shook me and, had any one touched me, suddenly, I am sure I should have screamed.

"A hundred yards distant from the farther shore we came upon the boat and drew alongside of it. It was empty. Suddenly my eye caught sight of something white at the bottom of the boat, near the stern. Pulling the craft along, I reached for the object. It was a bit of muslin, torn from a woman's dress, and remembering that Mrs. Whipple had been wearing a white dress that night, I turned sick.

"When I lifted my hand from the gunwale of the boat, preparatory to beginning a search that I knew would be fruitless, I noticed that it felt sticky. It struck me as strange, since the boat had not been lately painted. I was about to dip my hand into the lake, to wash it when a thought struck me. Lighting a match — for it was too dark to see anything clearly — I looked to see what had befouled my hand.

"It was blood.

“Wilson had been watching me and as I hastily dipped my hand into the lake, with a shudder I could not prevent, he asked in the tone of one who dreads the answer, ‘Was that—’ He didn’t finish the question. I nodded and I felt the boat quiver as a spasm of shaking seized him.

“We knew, but we continued to search — we and the others, who had caught up with us. Although I was ignorant as to what it was that had brought about the death of three people, I was certain there was something sinister and terrible in that lake of ours, and I was afraid.

“When we dragged the lake, we found no bodies — and I knew there would be nothing left to find.

“This ended our enterprise. One week after the last accident found every cottage vacant. And no wonder. Not only were the women wrought up to the breaking point over the affair itself, but their nights were made hideous by their dreams and the infernal sound of that siren, whistle, or whatever it was which grew increasingly worse. It was a heartshaking sound.

“After the last of our guests had packed up and gone, Wilson and I determined to solve the mystery, for we were convinced there was a mystery hidden somewhere in that lake.

“Fortunately for us, nothing had been said concerning the disappearance to arouse suspicion in Hampton. It was known that some people had been drowned, which was, of course, unfortunate, but not unusual. And we did not further enlighten them.

“I have no idea just what it was that suggested a connection between the sounds that disturbed our slumber and the happenings on the lake, but I found myself associating them in my mind. Wilson, when I mentioned it to him, scoffed at the notion. ‘How,’ he asked, ‘could a noise tip a boat over?’ and when I tried to explain that the thing that made the noise might be the cause, he wanted to know how a locomotive could leave its rails and accomplish such a thing. You see, he had accepted as fact, the idea that the sound we had been hearing emanated from a mechanical contrivance. I told him my idea of the situation and I’m inclined to believe that he thought I had gone crazy, for when I asked him to put in a night with me, trying to locate the noise, he refused.

“In deference to his opinion that the disturbance could be traced to some engine, I made it a point to investigate. The men were very courteous and obliging, and blew

the whistles of engines that traveled over that stretch of the company's right of way, but none of them gave forth the sound, the origin of which I was trying to discover.

"I told Wilson about my findings, and when I told him I was convinced the noise came from the lake, he consented to stand watch with me, but I could see that he took no stock in my belief.

"For three nights we watched but heard nothing, and Wilson was ready to drop the matter. I had a hard time getting him to go out the fourth night, but grudgingly he came with me.

"Since the noises seemed always to have come from the southwestern shore and, because it was there the accidents had occurred, we had used that as our watching post. Unlike the eastern shore, which was open and fairly flat, the western side dropped sharply down to the water. Some of the trees, their footing broken away by the cave-in, lay flat in the water, attached to the shore only by their roots, their branches obscuring considerably the nearer reaches of the lake.

"We found one tree which had rooted a little farther back from the line of break, had therefore, partly escaped the fate of its fellows. Held by its roots, it reached out over the water, at an angle of some twenty degrees. It was a large conifer and its tough branches with broken limbs placed across them, afforded a safe and comfortable resting place, although being out over the lake and with nothing to break the wind, it was far from warm. As I have said already, the nights out there were cold.

"There were no dangerous land animals about, so we carried no arms and, I feel sure any arms we might have taken would have been useless against the creature we were hunting. So, with a packet of lunch and a thermos bottle of hot coffee, Wilson and I set out for our point of observation.

"The night was clear, when we started from the house, but, after an hour or so, it began to thicken and a mean, cold drizzle set in. We were warmly dressed, however, so, aside from the ordinary discomfort of damp skin, wherever it was exposed, we suffered none.

"It was, as nearly as I could judge, (I didn't think of looking at my watch) about half past ten o'clock when I was aroused from a half doze by an odd noise that I could not for a moment classify. It woke me up, however and now fully alert, I waited for a repetition of the sound. I heard it again presently, and this time I recognized the sound. It was a grunt, a regular hog's grunt. If it differed in any respect from the

familiar vocalizations one hears coming from the pig-pens, I didn't realize it at the moment, although it did seem to be an unusually healthy grunt.

"My only feelings, as I remember, were those of mild astonishment; not so much because I had heard the grunt of a hog, (which might have escaped from its pen and wandered down to the lake), but because the sound came from the lake, and not from the land.

"There is nothing in the sound of splashing water to scare one. Yet, there by the lake, with the cold drizzle wetting my hands and face, I shivered when I heard that noise.

"Wilson, his back against a crotched branch, was fairly asleep, (though he swore he wasn't) and I was in the act of waking him when, like a blast from the siren of an ocean liner, the most awful roar I ever heard, tore through the night air, from out there in the darkness, nearly shattering my ear-drums.

"It fairly brought me to my feet and, as for Wilson, if I had not been lucky enough to grab his coat, as he was disappearing downward, through the branches of the conifer, what happened to him later, might have happened to him that night.

"I had only just recovered from my mental balance and got Wilson back to safety when it came again. And I knew it was the same screaming noise we had been hearing all the time. And I knew also that that noise was in some way responsible for the distressing disappearances of our tenants, and I knew that the originator of that sound was of enormous size.

"It would be difficult to adequately describe my feelings, as I sat crouched there upon our none too secure platform, peering out into the black darkness, trying to discover what manner of creature it was that had given voice to that soul-shaking scream. Fear I knew, but there was something else beside fear; something of unrecognized dread; perhaps a premonition of some dreadful occurrence. And when the splashing sound came nearer, I had to exercise great self-control to keep from backing out of those branches as quickly as possible and out of the neighborhood. And Wilson, I believe, was even worse off, for his teeth were chattering and he seemed dumb with fright.

"Then the splashing noise gave way to another sound, this time to a swishing, sucking sound, like that made by an oar, pulled forcibly through the water. Whatever that thing was, it was swimming, not like our ordinary animal swims, — by moving its legs — but, rather after the manner of a seal — by paddling with flippers. And it was heading toward the north end of the lake.

“As the sound of its movements through the water came from directly in front of us, I dimly perceived, like a vague, black shadow against a wall of blackness, a vast, undulating body. I could not make out its shape for there was not light enough, but I knew it was enormous and, as I thought of it in connection with the terrible screams of those unfortunate men and that helpless woman, the muscles of my throat tightened and — I am not ashamed to admit it — tears filled my eyes. Wilson apparently had been following the same line of thought. He was almost un-nerved. and sat there picking at his fingers and repeating, over and over, ‘Poor little woman! Poor little woman!’ When I could stand it no longer, I shook him and made him shut up.

“When the last of the monster’s shadow had passed, we painfully rose from our cramped position and crawled back to shore and started for home, around the north end of the lake, hoping to get another and, perhaps clearer view of the monster. But we didn’t catch sight of it again. Perhaps it changed its course or, more likely, had sought its hiding place.

“I am not a drinking man but when we reached the house and Wilson poured a stiff peg of liquor for himself, I asked him to give me one too. And we needed that drink if ever any drink was needed, for we were pretty badly shaken up.

“It was long past our usual bed hour, but we didn’t feel very sleepy, although probably from force of habit, I suggested turning in. Wilson, however, much to my secret delight, refused to take any chances of dreaming about that thing. ‘No, sir!’ he said, ‘I’m going to keep my clothes on and stay awake.’ So, after another drink, we filled our pipes and prepared to wait for daylight.

“‘What kind of a fish was that?’ Wilson’s question aroused me from the train of thought into which I had wandered and, my mind engaged, I replied, an aquatic antique. This did not, of course, make things any clearer for him so I asked if he knew anything about the history of the earth, and the strange creatures that had lived upon it, in ages long past. His knowledge was very limited so, drawing on my memory of lessons learned years before, I tried to answer his query in such a manner as to enable him to understand the probable meaning of what we had seen.

“So far as repeating what I had read was concerned, my task was simple. But any proper answer, that is, one that would cover what we had dimly glimpsed out there on the lake, required something more and I was obliged to resort to deductive reasoning in order to supply it.

“Briefly I told him that the age of the earth was estimated to be between 860,000,000

and 1,000,000,000 years and that, according to the age of the rocks, this great span of years was divided into ages, such as the Azoic, followed by the Palæozoic, Mesozoic and Cenozoic. I told him that, accepting the idea that roughly 1,000,000,000 years represented the earth's age, the Mesozoic era lay back of us some 500,000,000 of years. Then I told him, as well as I could, what sort of monsters and giant reptiles inhabited the earth and its water at the time; then, in an effort to account for the monster in the lake, I drew upon my imagination. Perhaps I guessed wrongly, but I know of no other way. For there is no record, so far as I know, of any creature, except some of the land species possibly, that could equal, in size, the thing whose shadow we had seen.

"I am inclined to believe I was not far wrong because it is common geological knowledge that vast continental changes were taking place at that remote time, and basing my conjecture upon that fact, I told him that during some of those tremendous upheavals, certain ones of the reptile family had probably been caught in some of the great caverns that were formed and, unable to escape, had adapted themselves to their changed environment.

"True it was, that this thing was different from any species known, but is it *certain that all the reptiles that lived away back in those ages had been classified?* I wasn't at all certain that they had been, so this creature might be a direct descendant of some distinct and unknown class. Or, I thought it might be possible that reptile might be some sort of hybrid, bearing a composite resemblance to its ancient forebears. Why not? If you can crossbreed asses and horses and get offspring which, though unmistakably different from either of its parents, in all essential features, resembles both, why could not some similar sort of crossbreeding have occurred with members of the reptile family?

"All sorts of fossil remains of pre-historic reptiles have been discovered in North America, and those creatures, when alive, lived here. Moreover, America, it is known, is fairly honeycombed with caverns, some of enormous extent. Many have water in them; although not sufficient, perhaps, to accommodate a lizard as large as this particular one. Is it certain that *all the caverns have been discovered?*

"Take this particular case for an example. When the bed of the reservoir caved in, where did the water go if not into some vast cavern, or caverns? And, had there not been such a cavern or caverns under the bed of the creek, would there have been any cave-in? Of course not.

"Following this line of deduction, I came to the conclusion that, in the subterranean

depths, this reptile, with perhaps many others, had been born and, since even a lizard cannot live in water that is entirely stagnant, inlets and outlets must have existed, to keep the water, at least comparatively fresh.

"Space alone, is limitless, so there must have been a limit to this cavern or caverns and, when the water broke through from above, it was filled to the point where the rock walls were burst and the earth, having lost its support, fell, forcing the water upward and forming the lake. When the water reached a certain level, or was on a plane with the bed of the creek, the reservoir filled up again, underground, the outlet having been too small to carry away the flow of the stream. If my premise was correct, then the presence of the lizard in our lake was easily accounted for. It simply came up through the same hole through which the water came.

"That was the explanation I gave Wilson and I thought, and still think, that it was correct.

"After breakfast I went to the north end of the lake. I believed I had hit upon the real solution of the reptile's presence in the lake and wanted to verify it if possible. I had an idea that the lizard might take it into its head to come up from below, and give me a chance to see it. I wanted Wilson to accompany me but he said he had too much work to do about the place.

"I waited near the hole until about noon, but seeing no sign of it, I concluded that it had either come up early or, what was more likely, was hiding down there in the darkness, until nightfall. Instead of turning homeward, however, I decided to settle another question. For some time now, we had seen no trout jumping and I thought they might have been frightened out of the lake and returned to the reservoir. Wilson and I, although we did not know until the night before, just what had caused the accidents, thought it better to go without fish than to take any risks out on the lake. But if they were in the reservoir again I meant to catch a few.

"The knoll, or mound, about which I told you in the beginning, lay directly between me and the reservoir and, since it was easy to climb I started up its side. It was covered with low brush and weeds that hid the surface of the ground from view, but did not greatly impede my progress. I plowed my way to the top and started across the rounded back, toward the reservoir. I had gone only a few paces when, without warning, the ground gave way beneath my feet and I soon found myself, in a heap, in the gravel, at the bottom of what seemed to me to be an over-sized cistern.

"I was not injured but I was considerably shaken up, for I had fallen about ten

feet. For a moment I was inclined to laugh at myself, for I cut a funny figure sitting there, hunched up. But there was nothing to laugh at. I found myself in a serious position, for I was imprisoned at the bottom of a hole, surrounded by unscalable walls of loose gravel. Moreover, no one had seen me at or near this isolated place, so unless a miracle happened, no one ever would come in time to find me alive. Well, sitting there, staring at the opening through which I had fallen would do no good, so I began to take my surroundings into serious consideration.

"It soon became evident that the hole had been dug by some one for a definite purpose; what that purpose was I had no idea. The opening at the top, I discovered, had been covered with planks which, in the course of a short time had become covered with earth and vegetable matter; in turn this furnished soil in which had grown the weeds that hid the spot. None of the boards had fallen into the hole, nor was there anything I could use to enable me to reach the opening. As there was nothing else I could do, I decided to kick gravel from the walls and heap it up until the pile was high enough to enable me to reach beyond the broken boards, grasp some bush, or other thing, and get out.

"I knew I had a tedious job ahead, for I had only my hands to use as a shovel. At one side of the hole, quite a pile of gravel had fallen of its own weight, which gave me a good start, I thought. Throwing double handfuls into the center of the floor soon proved to be a bad job. My hat also proved too slow a method, so I spread my coat, filled it, then carried it over to the slowly growing mound, on which I dumped these accumulations.

"I had a heap about three feet high when, in scooping up another double handful, my fingers came in contact with the surface of a box. I soon had it uncovered fully and found it to be about a foot deep, fifteen inches wide, and about two feet long. I was about to kick the cover off, in order to find out what, if anything, it contained, when I was moved to examine it a little more closely first. It was a good thing I obeyed the impulse, because, after carefully prying off the cover, which had begun to show signs of dry rot, I discovered a two gallon canister of nitro-glycerine.

"The reason for the hole became apparent at once, it had been used as a chamber for explosives while the reservoir was in process of construction, and this box very likely had been overlooked when the work was finished.

"Very carefully I carried it over and laid it on its side, on top of the little heap of gravel. Digging further I found another box, and another, until I had found fifteen. I piled these, pyramid fashion, under the hole through which I had fallen; then holding

my breath and taking care not to make a false step, I climbed to the top and soon found myself in the sunshine once more where I could breathe freely.

"When I reached the reservoir, I found the trout jumping. The fish problem settled, I started back toward the house for my tackle. I was about half the way to the fence when I saw Wilson, a long stick in his hand, trying to head off a cow that had broken from the corral, and was now headed for the lake.

"Mules are supposed to be, and are, stubborn, but when it comes to downright 'orneryness,' I think a cow is pretty much of a fool. Added to this, cows are nervous things, ready to stampede at a moment's notice and when they get a notion into their heads, you can't club it out.

"Now, this cow was a Holstein, and valuable so, when Wilson saw her heading for the lake he very naturally objected, considering the sort of tenant that lake harbored.

"I was too far away to be of assistance and the beast was too much for him alone. Dodging past his swinging club, she drove, head on, for the water, her tail, so it seemed, flapping, in derision. She was still on the gallop when she reached the water, so she went entirely under. I saw her come up, a few yards from the bank and, cow-wise, start for the farther shore. I don't know why a cow will always, under similar circumstances, make for the farthest point, unless it is because as I said, they are just plain fools.

"In his anxiety over his cow, Wilson forgot something he should have remembered: if the lake was a dangerous place for the Holstein, it was even more dangerous for him. But he may never have thought about the lizard at all. At any rate he ran to the little dock that projected out into the water, and, getting into the boat that was tied there, began to row frantically after old bossy.

"I was too far away to warn him of his danger, although it didn't actually seem great then; the lake, like a great blue gem bathed in the golden rays of the afternoon sun, suggested nothing further than dimpled beauty, made somewhat sinister by the knowledge that, deep down in its sapphire depth there had been, and might at the moment be, a nameless and monstrous horror. I guess I have become a bit of a fatalist; it seems to me, things are pretty much laid out for us from the beginning. We are supposed to be 'free moral agents,' according to the clergy, yet I wonder if we really are. Of course, Wilson did not *have to go out on the lake*. Nor would he have gone if he had stopped to think. But blame can hardly be attached to him for not stopping to think. He never did.

“By the time I reached the spot where the cow went into the water, the animal was about a hundred yards from shore, headed back, for Wilson had overtaken her and made her turn back. There wasn’t a thing to be nervous about, so far as appearances went, but I was worried, and I urged him to hurry. He waved his hand and nodded and that was the last thing he ever did. His hand had barely grasped the oar again when, silently, from the blue depths, there came into view, just behind Wilson, the awful head and neck of the creature, whose shadow we had dimly seen that night, when we sat crouched on a shaky platform spread over the branches of the fallen conifer.

“Up it rose, to a height of seven or eight feet, while I, gazing upon its utter frightfulness, stood paralyzed and dumb. I saw its cavernous mouth, fully three feet from snout to the angle of the jaw; saw it open and reveal its gleaming, needle sharp teeth over the head of the unfortunate man; and I was utterly helpless. If my own life had been at stake, I could not have uttered a cry of warning.

“I think Wilson must have sensed something, somehow, for I noticed (I can see that look even now) a look of fear spread over his rugged features. But it was too late for, just as he was m the act of turning his head to see what was behind him, the end came. There was a slight working of the terrible jaws, perhaps due to some sort of gustatory suggestion of the thing’s instinctive machinery, then, like a flash, down came the obscene head, the jaws closed, with a snap and Wilson, only his legs protruding beyond the lizard’s snout, was snatched from his seat with the speed and ease with which a hen picks up a kernel of corn.

“Horror unspeakable overpowered my mind, and I think I lost consciousness for a moment. Maybe I went mad for a time, for I have no remembrance of having gone to the house, nor, until awakened by a terrific crash of thunder, did I have a realization that anything had taken place.

“When I regained my senses, I sat slumped over in one of the kitchen chairs. I felt dazed, like one who has been on a long drunk. Shadows of strange memories passed through my mind, suggesting nothing definite. Then another frightful crash swept the cob-webs from my brain and I felt memory coming back with a rush.

“Other things came quickly, and perhaps fortunately, to occupy my mind, and demand my attention, for one of the worst storms I had ever witnessed, was brewing fast and furiously. The house, stout though it was, trembled and creaked beneath the onslaught of the elements gone wild.

“Getting up from the chair I staggered to the window. The sky was overcast with

heavy clouds, those immediately overhead being a grayish black, while, down in the southwest an unearthly, greenish mass of whirling cumuli, writhed and twisted, high up in the heavens. That there were several currents of air, coming from as many different directions was evident, from the manner in which the tops of the trees behaved. They fairly threshed about. Presently the temperature began to drop and great clouds from the northwest drove past, beneath the blackness far overhead, and then the flashes of lightning became appalling, as the fire forks darted from cloud to cloud, while deafening peals of thunder sent every loose thing a-rattle.

"Then the rain came; came in torrents that were veritable cascades of driven water, beating in at every crack and crevice. There was a blinding flash a hundred yards from the house and a tall tree, splintered into kindling, flew in all directions; this the gale whirled and tossed about, finally driving it into the lake, the surface of which was beaten into froth.

"I heard a crash overhead and knew the chimney had gone by the board. This was followed by a ripping sound, and the roof of the chicken house, looking like the flapping wings of some enormous bird, went sailing away across the lake; and when the house itself began to slide upon its foundation I expected it to follow. It did not, however; neither did it lose its roof, although, as I discovered later, there wasn't a whole shingle left on it.

"Suddenly the hideous racket was augmented by a sound that over-rode all other noises. Every window pane was shattered; every door was driven from its hinges, while through the openings, a deluge of water rushed, flooded the house and knocked me into a corner.

"I have heard about the 'Crack of Doom' many times, and, if it is going to be any worse than that crack, I don't want to hear it. However, it seemed to serve one useful purpose, for after it came, the awful racket began to subside and, within the hour, only an occasional rumble bore evidence of energy still at work. The rain continued, however, until it seemed the oceans were being drained to furnish the water.

"Wet, cold and weary, I waded through the water that swashed back and forth through the lower rooms, to the stair leading to the second floor. I dragged my aching body up the stairs, down which little streams trickled, for the windows, upstairs, also were shattered, I went from room to room, seeking some place of shelter out of the wind, where I might perhaps find some dry clothing and lie down. The second floor was pretty well soaked but I found shelter at last, in a large closet in the rear. This part of the house was toward the east and since the storm had come from the southwest and north, it was comparatively dry there. In this closet I found Wilson's

Sunday suit, some shirts and a pair of shoes, together with a few pairs of socks. The suit was too small, and the shoes too large, but I was in no position to be particular, so I put them on. Unless you have been in a similar predicament, you cannot know the comfort of dry clothing of any kind or make.

"After wringing out my own clothes and hanging them over the backs of chairs to dry if the rain ever let up I piled some things on the floor and, upon these, for a bed, I soon forgot all about the storm and what had gone before it.

"A ray of sunlight on my eyes, reflected from a mirror, awoke me. My watch had stopped, so I didn't know just what time it was, although I judge it must have been about nine o'clock. I was a bit stiff and hungry, but otherwise, in pretty good shape. After drawing the chairs, over which my clothes hung, into the sunshine, I went down stairs, dug the wet ashes out of the stove, made a fire and cooked some ham and eggs and coffee for myself. Then I started out to learn the extent of the damage.

"There was plenty. The roof of the barn had fallen in, driving the walls outward. Luckily the weather had been warm, so the cattle were still kept outside. I found them at last, in a small apple orchard, apparently no worse for having been out in the storm, contentedly eating grass. I say had been, because practically every one of the trees had been ruined, the branches having been torn off.

"Then, for no particular reason, I strolled down to the lake. Except for a lot of floating shingles, branches and boards, it was the same, smiling, beautiful blue body of water — the last place in the world, I thought, where such terrible tragedies could take place, and the most unlikely hiding place for the horror that had caused the events. Soon I became aware of a muffled sound like a rushing of water over a fall, and wondered what caused it. A little later, I noticed that the floatsam was drifting toward the north end of the lake. This was odd, since there was no current and, curious to learn why, I started in the same direction. Soon the muffled sound became louder. It was coming from the lake! Puzzled for a moment, like a flash the explanation came to me and I started north on the run.

"I soon reached the place where the noise came from a great rent at the end of the basin in which the lake lay. I looked toward the mound, or, rather, toward the place where the mound had been, for it was there no longer, and if I had been in doubt as to what had caused the rent, I was soon in possession of full knowledge. That unearthly crash had been caused by the explosion of those fifteen cases of nitro-glycerine, and there may have been more buried in the sand, when a streak of lightning found its way into the pit in which they were.

"The rocky floor of the pit must have been a sort of pot cover, over the subterranean cavern, or caverns, and the force of the explosion had torn it away rending the rocks and earth into a great tear, extending through the wall which held the lake. It had done even more; it tore out the wall between it and the reservoir, for I found, upon going around the chasm to the dam, that the water was rapidly lowering. While I stood there, amazed at the force of the charge, a large block of concrete from the end of the dam nearest me, broke loose and fell with a splash, into water. Evidently, I thought, the whole dam was being undermined and was liable, at any moment, to fall. I made haste to get away from the place, and I acted wisely, for within ten minutes the whole enormous structure of concrete crumbled and fell; a part of it going completely out of sight in the hole in the bed of the reservoir, while the rest went in the opposite direction.

"It was apparent, since the chasm was enlarging momentarily, that it would not take long to empty both reservoir and lake and, being minded to see the finish, I went back to a point of safety, on the eastern shore, sat down on a rock and waited for the end.

"Sitting there, wondering into what profound depths the waters of the lake and reservoir were plunging, speculating upon the possible truth of some tales I had read concerning people discovered living in a 'World Beneath a World,' I forgot, for a time, what was taking place before my eyes.

"I was aroused from my reverie by a snort, and coming back to actualities, I looked to see what had produced it. There was the great lizard, from whose throat it had emanated, not fifty yards before me.

"At last I saw the monster, and monster it truly was. My powers of description are far too limited to adequately describe that monster. Its body, at least the upper part, was fully exposed. Swan-like in shape, it appeared to be nearly sixty feet from the point where the neck joined the body, to the end of its tail, which resembled, in a way, the tail of a duck. This body, armed or equipped with flappers, similar to those of a seal, but enormously larger, was a greenish black and was covered with what might have been, the slime and ooze of ages. Its neck, flexible as that of the swan, was fully two feet in diameter at its base, tapering slowly to the head, eight feet from the body. The head was a composite of the crocodile and the tyrannosaurus, but much larger, with loosely articulated jaws, permitting of tremendous extension, as is the case with certain snakes. The mouth, armed with teeth fully six inches in length, was at least three feet long from the snout to the angle of the jaws. To add to its frightfulness, the upper canine teeth, or fangs, curved outward and downward over the lower jaw, and were as near as I could judge, at least ten inches long. A more

horrible creature I couldn't imagine, and I wondered whether it might be a member of some species that had never been catalogued, or whether it was what it appeared to be, a hybrid. I think it was the latter and, since it was the only one that had come into the light of modern times, I also wondered if the thing could have begun its existence away back there in the mesozoic era. It seemed impossible, and yet, who knows. At any rate it certainly looked ancient enough to have been born long before creation began. Doubtless, I thought, there were others like it, somewhere, for it seemed unlikely that only one specimen would have been caught in one of the cataclysms of those ancient days. But, whether or not I was right, can never be told.

"Apparently the lizard was terrified at something; probably at the idea of being sucked into the chasm, into which the water was pouring, for it was making violent efforts to draw away from that end of the lake. It was a losing game, however, for the suck of the water, powerful as was the reptile, was too strong and, thresh the water as it might, and did, it was slowly being drawn back. Whatever else might be said of the lizard, it was no coward, for, realizing the fact that it was a losing game, it suddenly turned and, with a terrific bellow, using its flippers to accentuate its speed, in a sort of 'devil daring spurt,' it drove head-long into the vortex.

"During the day the waters continued to enlarge the chasm and, by night the lake had nearly vanished, as had also the reservoir.

"The following morning the city engineers were out, and as well as I could, I explained what had happened. As it chanced, I did most of my talking to the man who had supervised the construction of the reservoir, and was therefore the only one who knew about the nitro-glycerine. I realized that my knowledge of its presence in the pit caused him some worry, and he explained that he had given orders for its removal, but they evidently had been forgotten or disregarded by the workmen, so I told him I would not mention the matter to anyone, for which he seemed very grateful. Since it could have done no good to tell about it then, I deemed it best to forget about the matter.

"But I mentioned the lizard to no one. I explained the disappearance of Wilson, by telling them that he had fallen into the lake, from a rowboat, while trying to drive back to the shore a cow that had gone into the water. That also was the story I told the lawyers who settled up the estate.

"As soon as possible I gathered up my traps and came back to the city. I have tried to forget the experience, for it was far from pleasant, but this story in the paper brought it up again and, I repeat, I shall not be surprised to read that those men have found some hold-over from the mesozoic era, for I believe there are specimens still alive. Why not?"

Vampires of the Desert

A. Hyatt Verrill

When I sailed for Peru, to accept a position as field paleontologist for the International Petroleum Company at their oil fields near Talara, I little dreamed what amazing experiences and astounding adventures were in store for me.

The life of a paleontologist is not, as a rule, an exciting or adventurous one. In fact, there is scarcely a branch of scientific field work that promises so little in the way of adventure, peril or thrills. Fossils, interesting as they may be to the trained scientist who studies them, are not what one might call dangerous game. Neither are they elusive, shy nor suspicious of human beings. And, aside from the ordinary and to-be-expected hardships of camp life and field work, hunting fossils is perhaps the safest and tamest of professions. And as I was to hunt and study the smallest and most abundant of fossils — namely, diatoms and foraminifera — for the presence of certain species of these minute fossil animals is known to have a very direct bearing upon petroleum deposits, and as my hunting ground was in the open desert where there were neither wild animals nor wild men, and as my entire field of activities was within sight and sound of the busy oil refineries, the wells, the pump-houses and the well ordered "camp" or town, the possibility of any excitement, any danger or anything unusual never occurred to me. And had anyone suggested such eventualities, I most assuredly would have laughed them to scorn. Yet, so strange is fate and so whimsical her moods, and so little do we know of the future that, within a few months after my arrival at Talara, I was to have some of the most astounding, even incredible experiences that ever came into the life of any man. Indeed, were it not that the facts are well known, and that meagre reports of the remarkable occurrence have already been published in the press, I should hesitate to write of them for fear of being classed as a romancer and as writing fiction in the guise of fact. But I feel that, as precisely the same things may — in fact, probably will — recur again somewhere — even if not in Peru — and many human lives, perhaps entire communities, may be destroyed by such recurrences, the public should be acquainted with all the facts and details of the visitation, and thus should be prepared for its repetition.

But before beginning my story, I wish to disclaim the undue credit that has been accorded me for solving the baffling mystery of those terrible times and for saving the lives of hundreds — probably thousands — of my fellow men and fellow women. Any man with scientific training, a knowledge of zoology and with an interest in the unusual forms of animal and plants life could have done more than I did. It merely

chanced that I was on the spot, that my scientific interests had been aroused before the happenings occurred and that I had always taken a deep interest in the botany of the tropics. Never before had this fad been of any real value to me or to anyone else. In the first place I never had visited the tropics and in the second place I made paleontology my life work and confined my studies to invertebrate paleontology at that. Yet I cannot help feeling that my amateurish interest in plant life must have been inspired by the Divinity and for the sole purpose which it later and so fortunately fulfilled.

One thing more I must mention, for it had a very great bearing upon the affair and enabled me to make dedications and to understand matters that otherwise would have been impossible to understand. During my postgraduate course at Yale I was greatly interested in the deep-sea researches of the United States Fish Commission under the direction of Professor Verrill, who was my instructor.

Largely, this was due to the fact that — as is well known, — the ocean's beds are composed mainly of foraminiferous ooze, the accumulated billions of skeletal remains of foraminifera, and that many living species — closely akin to the fossil form — are obtained from great depths. But I soon found, when on the "Albatross" in company with the Professor and his assistants, that one branch of science — or more especially one branch of any one department of science — hinges upon another. Thus to study diatoms intelligently, I was compelled to make a fairly intensive study of other and higher forms of marine life. Such, for example, were the ascidians, or sea cucumbers; the corals and sea-anemones, the sponges, and such forms of life as the hydroids and bryozoans as well as jelly-fish. And had I not thus acquired a fairly comprehensive and accurate knowledge of the life histories and habits of these harmless and interesting marine creatures, I never would have been able to make head or tail of the affair during that nightmarish time at Talara.

Talara, as I have hinted, is situated on that barren, treeless, waterless strip of South America's coastal desert that stretches from the vicinity of Guayaquil in Peru southward to central Chile. It is not, however, a flat or level desert. Rather it consists of desert sandhills rising to rocky hills, equally bare and sterile, and forming an incorporate part of the desert, and which become higher and more numerous as they approach the Andes, into which they merge. In fact, the sand of the desert proper is nothing more or less than the accumulated detritus of those hills, decomposed and washed down through countless ages. Originally — or at least at some remote period — the area was beneath the sea. Hence the presence of fossils of marine organisms. And it was to study these remains, which millions of years ago were beneath the waters of the Pacific, that I was employed by the International Petroleum Company; for, strange as it may appear, some of the largest of the world's known oil deposits are in this desert country of Peru.

For countless centuries this desert has been rainless; in fact, it is a desert merely because of lack of rainfall, and as the sand is impregnated with nitrates, phosphates and potash, it is fertile and capable of producing huge crops of agricultural products when watered or irrigated. Possibly my readers may think that this somewhat lengthy dissertation upon the Peruvian desert is quite unnecessary to my story, but let me assure them that it is most essential, and I request that those who may read this story of the incredible occurrences at Talara will read this portion very carefully. Otherwise it will be practically impossible to secure an intelligent idea of the happenings and their causes and to realize that they were neither miraculous, supernatural nor at all beyond the realms of cause and effect in nature.

Also, I must try the patience of my readers still further by briefly sketching the causes for the rainless, desert condition of this coast. The Humboldt Current, flowing northward from the Antarctic, tempers the normal temperatures of the tropical coasts of the equatorial and subequatorial regions of the west coast of South America and at the same time acts as a condenser for moisture-laden atmosphere that otherwise would reach the coast. Added to this is the fact that the warm, moisture-filled air from the vast Amazonian jungles is covered by the cold Andes heights, and its moisture is then deposited as rain and snow before it passes westward over the Andes.

At Talara, however, the Humboldt Current does not actually wash the coastline. A small, warm water current, known as the Niñ*o* or child; flows southward from the Bay of Panama and forces its way between the Humboldt Current and the shore. And the relative size and volume of these two currents vary considerably according to the force and direction of the prevailing winds and because of other causes — very possible seismic disturbances of the sea bed. From the earliest times, as proved by my studies of fossils and by the observations of more eminent scientists, these currents have varied. Often the variation is slight and temporary, but at other times it has been of long duration and very marked. Even a slight variation in either current has a decided effect upon the climate of the Peruvian coastal land. The temperature alters materially, mist and even light rains fall, and with miraculous suddenness vegetation springs up from the bare desert and barren hillsides. Usually the change continues for only a few days or weeks, but in the past ages such changes of currents, climate and the resultant vegetable and animal life obviously — proved by fossil remains — endured for many years.

In fact, one of the first and most interesting discoveries I made was that the desert soil — to a depth of twenty-five feet or more — was in many spots composed of alternate layers or strata of sand, some clear and some containing a large percentage of plant seeds. It was thus evident that alternating periods of dryness and dampness

had occurred from the most remote times, and while the proportionate number of strata and their relative depths varied somewhat, there was abundant evidence to show that from the most ancient times there had existed regularly defined and periodic eras of rainfall and lack of rainfall, with the accompanying abundance of vegetation and lack of vegetation. The lower layers of seeds were fossil, but the upper ones were comparatively recent and with so slight a layer of sand superimposed upon them that a heavy rain would unquestionably enable them to germinate and sprout. That this was the case, was in fact proved when in 1924-5, after a comparatively short period of rainy weather, the hills and deserts about Talara — and as far south as Antofogasta, Chile, became covered with a rank semi-jungle as high as a man's waist. Moreover, nearly all of the plants that then appeared were strange to the inhabitants and totally distinct from any found elsewhere in South America. And in examining the seeds which I discovered, I found that — with few exceptions — they were of species, genera and even families entirely new to me.

It was this discovery that again aroused my long-dormant interest in tropical plant life and I was about to try my hand at growing some of the more unusual seeds, when Nature saved me the trouble. A severe earthquake shook the entire west coast of South America, causing a vast amount of damage in southern Chile, raising Juan Fernandez Island several hundred feet above its former level and upraising the sea bed between that island and the coastline for at least two hundred feet. As a result, the greater position of the Humboldt Current was deflected to the west into the Pacific, the warm Niño current increased in size and volume, and heavy rains at once commenced to fall along the coasts of Peru and Chile. Irreparable damage was caused in many localities. Estuaries, fields, villages and even large towns were swept away by floods that came pouring down the ancient dry river beds from the mountains. Buildings of sun-dried adobe, well adapted to the formerly rainless climate, melted and were reduced to mud, and in a few weeks such cities as Piura, Trujillo and others were utterly obliterated.

In Chile the nitrate beds were completely destroyed, many large and prosperous communities were rendered uninhabitable, and even Lima, Peru's capital — being built largely of adobe — suffered losses totaling millions of dollars. Fortunately the capital's more modern buildings and residences were of concrete and remained unaffected, and for similar reasons Talara suffered little. The native shacks and the old churches and government edifices crumbled and vanished, but the majority of the buildings at the port, as well as the mining camps of Negritos and Lobitos, being of wood, concrete or corrugated iron construction, suffered none at all. Neither did the torrential rains cause any appreciable damage to the petroleum industry.

The sand, being washed away, allowed some of the derricks to topple and fall, many pipe-lines were broken and similar small damages resulted, but on the whole the rains appeared more of a blessing than a curse in the district. The climate, although warmer, was less oppressive; the bare desert and hills became almost instantly covered with tender green, and hollows that became filled with water were the resort of flocks of wild geese and ducks that afforded great sport for the employees of the company.

Finding that my paleontological work was seriously — though I hoped only temporarily — interrupted by the rain and the disruption of some of my favorite localities for study, I had an abundance of spare time which I devoted to examining with the greatest interest the plants that had sprung up from the seeds I had discovered. Also, being a keen sportsman, I spent considerable time hunting, both about the pools I have mentioned and in the embryonic jungle that — within two weeks — had become waist-high and almost impenetrably dense. To my surprise and delight I discovered that with very few exceptions the growth was composed of plants which hitherto had been known only in a fossil state. There were many forms of tree ferns, of the horse-tails, of giant lycopodiums and of odd aberrant leguminous plants that — as nearly as I could judge — were the ancestors of our common beans, peas, etc. At first I was greatly amazed to find these supposedly extinct and fossil forms thus growing in abundance, but a short investigation and a little logical reasoning soon convinced me that it was a perfectly normal and easily explicable condition. From the most remote geological times the country had been periodically wet and dry as I have said. Hence plants that for a few years or centuries grew in the district, would have had no time to alter or evolve to higher forms before a rainless period occurred. Thus the earliest types of plant life that had existed in the district had been perpetuated with no great changes from the far-distant geological periods.

Probably on no other spot on earth could such a condition have occurred, and I decided to take advantage of the unique opportunity to write a monograph on the subject, to describe the habits and appearances of the plants, and to secure accurate photographs as well as to preserve specimens for the benefit of science.

It was while doing this that I came upon a small group of the most peculiar shrubs. I say shrubs, though they were not shrubs in the true sense of the word. They were rather more like attenuated and branched tubers, like gigantic, slender and distorted sweet-potatoes growing above ground. The stalks were fleshy but fibrous and very tough. There were no leaves, and the growth, as well as the branching habit, was by means of joints or articulations, one tough olive-colored section budding from another

and increasing in size and length until it, too, developed additional joints. When I first found the things, they were quite small — the largest barely a foot in height — but they grew with truly amazing rapidity. In a few days they were as high as my waist and all my interests became centered upon them. I found no others, although every natural surrounding and condition seemed identical with other localities, but, I reasoned, this was not surprising, as the same conditions that had led to the perpetuation of long-extinct species would at the same time have acted to localize each form.

The more I examined the odd growths, the more they puzzled me. In many respects they could not be classified among any of the various botanical genera, families or orders. I prepared sections and examined them under the microscope. I tried all means of identification — but in vain. Oddly enough, they bore many resemblances to the algæ or marine plants, and especially to those natural-history puzzles, the bryozoans and hydroids which seem to form connecting links between the animal and vegetable kingdoms. But who ever heard of a bryozoan or a hydroid growing on land? Still, I reasoned, in the remote periods of the earth's existence there may have been such, for there are land algæ as there are also marine arachnids or spiders. Why not land bryozoans and hydroids?

It was a fascinating thought, but until my strange growths saw fit to flower or seed I could not determine what they were. Hence my elation can be judged — at least by any scientist — when I discovered signs of the plants budding as if about to flower. At this time they were six feet or so in height with main stems as thick as a man's body and most remarkable appearing things. The buds — if buds they were — broke through the outer bark or skin at the terminal joints of the branches, and at the same time I noticed a distinct swelling or enlargement of these joints.

I can best compare the effect to the flowering of cacti. As the buds increased in size — with remarkable rapidity — they gave promise of being even more interesting and stranger than the plants themselves, and also of developing into blooms of great beauty.

There were indications of long delicate petals of brilliant colors, and it was obvious that the flowers would be of truly gigantic size. But my expectations had fallen far short of the reality, when, on visiting the spot one morning, I found one of the buds had partly opened. I had never seen anything like it or even resembling it. It was not by any means fully developed, and I judged from its appearance that it was a night-blooming plant and that in order to see the flower in its full glory I would be obliged to visit the spot after dark. However it was sufficiently open for me to obtain a good idea of its character, and I examined it with the most intense interest. It appeared semi-transparent, was very fleshy, or I might even say gelatinous, and was

coated with a shining, moist, and apparently sticky substance. At the stem or base, for there was no true stem, it was a dark intense purple and bulbous in form. Beyond this purple area was a border or fringe of pure white membranous growth, and beyond this were the innumerable long and multicolored petals — or so I judged them — that were folded or coiled together like the partly opened petals of a gigantic chrysanthemum flower.

In size the strange bloom was nearly four feet in length by three feet in diameter. It had no appreciable odor, and though I was greatly tempted to do so, I forebore touching it for fear of injuring it and preventing it from expanding to its full perfection. Yet, strange as it may seem, there was something about it, despite its beauty of form, its colors and its translucent gelatinous appearance , that was repellent. It was no doubt on account of its bizarre appearance, for I have noted that the human mind naturally recoils from or at least is suspicious of any unusual or strange form of some well-known natural object. Even human freaks have this effect upon the majority of persons, and the flower and the weird growth that bore it were sufficiently unusual and strange to create a vague dislike and even distrust in even my scientific mind.

However, I determined to visit the things after night-fall, and turned my attention to hunting. I returned to my quarters in time for breakfast with a fine bag of ducks and snipe. The rains had now ceased for several days, but the newly formed streams still flowed across the former deserts, and there was sufficient moisture in the soaked earth to keep vegetation going for some time. I mention this, because the cessation of the rains had a very direct bearing upon subsequent events.

It was while I was eating my breakfast that I had a phone call from Lobitos asking me to come over as soon as possible as a new field was being prospected and they wished me to make microscopic examinations of the samples from the test-holes. I was rather disappointed at thus being summoned away, when I had counted upon witnessing the full development of my strange plants, but I comforted myself with the thought that there would be many more flowers, and that I should not be long absent. So, packing my field outfit, I ordered the car and started for Lobitos. The work, I found, would take me much longer than I had expected, and I wondered if I would be able to return before all the remarkable flowers had blossomed and faded. Little did I dream how soon or in what a remarkable manner I should again meet with those puzzling, amazing productions of the unusual plants I had found.

It was on the second day of my stay at Lobitos that news of the murders at Negritos reached us. Two Indian or rather Cholo laborers had been found dead in front of

their barracks. Apparently they had been garroted or strangled to death, but there was no clue to the murderer and no known incentive for the crime. Both men had been — as for that matter were all the Peruvian Cholos — quiet, peaceful, hard-working and very inoffensive fellows. Their companions declared that neither had been in a brawl, a discussion, or an argument during the preceding evening or night; no one had heard hard or angry words, and as both bodies still had their week's wages upon them, robbery was discarded as a possible motive for the crime.

But Negritos was terribly stirred up over the tragedy. For years the place had been a model of law and order. There had not been a murder, a robbery, a burglary nor any serious offense committed for fully ten years and the only arrests had been for drunkenness, gambling or petty thefts among the natives and for trespass. And as Negritos and Lobitos were "dry" camps, even drunkenness was very rare. Hence two murders, occurring on one night, and without any known reason, created a great sensation. Moreover, there seemed little doubt that the crimes were committed by some stranger.

The Peruvian Indian or Cholo is not a particularly brave or desperate character. He abhors bloodshed or violence in any form, and neither I nor any of the officials could imagine a docile Cholo deliberately attacking and successfully strangling two men. And why, it was asked, had there been no outcry? It seemed inconceivable that the two men could have been killed so quickly that they could not have cried out. And why did the second victim remain quietly waiting, while his companion was being killed? In fact, the more we discussed it, the more mysterious it became.

"In my opinion," declared Sturgis, the chief engineer, who had had a tremendous amount of experience with the natives, "it's the work of a Chilean or a Colombian. Likely as not those two Cholos had worked somewhere where there'd been Chilenos or Colombians, and had got into some sort of trouble with them — maybe won too much at gambling, or it might have been over a woman. Then this bird drops in here, recognizes the fellows, and evens scores. The only thing that bothers me is why they weren't knifed — that's the Chileno method as a rule — and why they weren't robbed — no such a criminal ever lets a chance of pocketing a few dollars get by him."

"Hmm, in all probability the murderer didn't have time," suggested Henshaw. "He may have been scared off. But how the devil could one man strangle two others?"

"Maybe they weren't strangled," I put in. "I'll bet no one has made an examination to learn if they weren't knocked over the heads first. You see knifing a man isn't always a safe and quiet method of putting him out of the way — he's liable to yell. And it

would have been as hard for a man to knife two Cholos without their giving a cry as it would have been to strangle two of than. In my opinion they were knocked senseless and then garroted. And doesn't it seem more like the work of an East Indian or an Oriental than a South American? Aren't there some coolies — Hindus — working up at Porvenir on the railway? And how about those Chinese and Japs at Talara? I'll bet it was one of those fellows."

"Maybe you're right," agreed Sturgis. "I hadn't thought of the Hindus or Chinese. But anyhow, Stevens will round 'em up whoever 'twas; he was chief of police in Manila and he's no slouch, even if this camp has got so darned law-abiding that he's grown fat and lazy."

At this moment the telephone rang, and Henshaw, who answered, turned to me. "You're wanted at Negritos, Barry," he said. "Stevens wants you to help him on this murder case. Says he needs a microscopist and asks if you're not a doctor of sorts — Doctor Samuels is off on leave, and that interne Rogers refuses to conduct a post-mortem unless he has a competent man — biologist or M.D. or anatomist or some kind of an 'ist' — along with him."

I was surprised, of course. But after all it was not surprising. I was the only microscopist available, and I had at one time taken a course in anatomy with the idea of becoming a surgeon. But I was not sorry to leave Lobitos. It was an unpleasant spot at best, and I was wishing I might have a chance to examine my remarkable flowers. Still I could not leave at once, I had to complete my work at Lobitos, for that, after all, was my real job, and taking the 'phone I told Stevens I would go over to Negritos the next morning early. He swore and raved a bit — he was a testy old chap — but I pointed out that I was employed to conduct paleontological studies and not police-court investigations, and that I was answerable only to the New York office. In fact, I grew a bit peeved myself and added as a clincher that I was coming only to oblige him and out of curiosity, and that unless I were requested politely and not ordered, I wouldn't go at all. This quieted him. He apologized, begged me to hurry, and rang off.

Poor old Major Stevens! I was fated never to hear his voice again, never to see his ruddy face grow apopletically purple as he sputtered, fumed and swore. And I and all the others were fated to have the shock of our lives before another twenty-four hours had passed.

I was aroused from a deep sleep by the furious ringing of the 'phone, and lifting the receiver heard an agitated, excited voice. "For God's sake, get back here!" it

cried. “This is Merivale speaking. It’s terrible — three more men murdered here last night — two women killed at Talara and — when we went to call Major Stevens we found him dead — strangled like the others. We need every white man we can get — there’s a fiend incarnate here somewhere. We must find him and stop this thing. And, Barry, bring Henshaw with you.”

I was aghast. What did it mean? Seven, no, eight murders within two days — and Major Stevens among them. It seemed incredible. What was the motive? Who wee the murderer? How could he have committed the crimes without detection, when, as I felt sure, the camps had been patrolled and policed after those first two deaths? Of course, the motive for killing Major Stevens was plain. The murderer feared him and took this means of getting him out of the way. But the others — the Cholos. Only on the theory of a homicidal maniac could I explain it. Henshaw and Sturgis were as shocked and horrified as I was, and both agreed that some crazed native must be at the bottom of the killings, unless, as Sturgis suggested, some Oriental had run amuck. But when we reached Negritos in record time, and learned more of the details of the crime, we were at an utter loss.

Merivale was in charge, and though he was a competent enough young chap, and an excellent executive, he was so flabbergasted and upset over the Major’s death that he didn’t know which way to turn. In fact, he could scarcely give an intelligible account of the events that had occurred, and I found McGovern, the boss driller, far more lucid. He had been a little of everything in his day and at one time had been a New York policeman with a beat in one of the toughest sections of Manhattan’s lower East Side.

Major Stevens, knowing of his police record, and cognizant of McGovern’s ability to handle men, had sworn him in as a deputy, and had placed him in charge of policing the camp. He was a huge, burly fellow; red-haired, freckle-faced, and was personally acquainted with every man, woman and child in the district. He had known the two Cholos killed on the first night, and he assured me as he said he had assured the Major, that both were the most industrious and law-abiding of natives.

“Sure, Pablo an’ Gonzalez was hard-working, dacint lads,” he declared. “Didn’t I have thim worrkin’ over to thoity-two week afore last. Niver the gamblin’ nor drinkin’ sort, sor, an’ peaceful as lambs. Now who the divvil, I’m askin’ ya, would have raison for bumpin’ of thim two lads off? An’ they weren’t robbed, neither. No, sor, ’tis not robbery nor a row nor nothin’ of that kind that caused it. ’Twas some extr’o’d’nary motive, as ye might say, an’ ye’ll have to find the motive afore ye find the murderer, if

ye ask me. Who do I think it might be? B'gorra, how should I know? And then these others last night. Yes, sor, the camp was lit bright as day and the gang of us patrollin' the place. Sure, there was fourteen of us all gumshoin' about, an' meself wit' three boys on duty fernist the Cholos' quarters. An niver a sound of a foight nor a cry nor nothin'. Thin with the comin' av day loight come a scream from Block Wan, an' another yell from Block Foive, an' wimmen a-runnin' an' me an' the boys beatin' it to find what the trouble was an' all, an' there they be — the three of thim, deader'n busted drills, an' never a mark onto 'em savin' of the red marks about their necks. B'gorra, no' I'm mistook. Wan of thim had marks on his chest an' another on his face like they'd been shot wit' rock salt, if ye know what I mean. An' then off I goes to tell da Major — God rest his soul — and to find him dead by the same token. 'Tis downright unnat'ral, sor. Damned uncanny. An' I don't mind admittin' it's got me goat, sor."

"What about the women killed at Talara?" I asked.

But McGovern had no definite information about them. They had, so it was reported, been found dead, obviously killed, on the desert just outside the town, and as they had been alive and well at a late hour the preceding evening, and had started for their homes on the hillside beyond the cemetery, about eleven, it was certain they had been murdered sometime between that hour and daybreak.

"I'll be damned if I see how a man could kill three Cholos and the Major up here and two women at Talara at the same time," cried Henshaw. "McGovern and his men didn't see a soul on the street or on the road, there was no car out and it's a sure bet the murderer didn't travel by airplane. And everyone swears those three men in Blocks One and Five were not dead at midnight. And there's the Major — he was all right at two o'clock this morning."

"I don't consider that part of the affair as remarkable as the other facts," I told him. "A man could walk to Talara in a couple of hours. But why should the fiend kill five men here and two women there? How did he manage it without being seen or heard by McGovern or his men, and why didn't any one of the five — or rather, eight — cry out? And how did he kill them? I tell you, Henshaw, there's something deep in this that we haven't thought of yet. In my opinion the murdered people have been killed by some means we haven't suspected — that strangling is just a bluff — it's some terrible poison or something of that sort — perhaps administered hours before the men die."

"How about that knocking them on the head theory of yours?" asked Henshaw.

"That might be it if it was not for the Major," I said. "I can't imagine anyone sneaking up on him."

"It would have been easy enough," declared Henshaw. "He was sitting close to his open door and very likely fell asleep. If I were in your place I'd get on with the post-mortem and see if you can find any signs of any injury or of poison. But I don't envy you your job."

"It's not mine," I informed him. "And if you don't look out, I'll call you in to help. We've got to get into this. I'm going to do all I can and Merivale wants me to take charge as senior here. I wish to Heaven old Doctor Daniels were here. Young Rogers is a good doctor — good enough for his routine or hospital work, but he's never made a post-mortem in his life and I know very little about such things. However, I suppose Rogers can find out if there are injuries and if there was poison given. I'm merely going to be present and make microscopic examinations of the stomach contents and blood."

But the results of the post-mortems left us as much in the dark as ever — in fact more puzzled than ever. The Cholos all seemed to have been victims of pernicious anaemia, or to have bled to death, although there were no wounds that would have accounted for any considerable loss of blood. The marks upon their faces and chests that McGovern had mentioned were punctures, but seemed barely to penetrate the skin, and there were no blood stains of any considerable extent upon the men's garments. In two cases there were severe contusions on the heads, but these might have been caused by falling upon the stones. The third man, however, had a small puncture in his jugular vein, and the left eye was injured and appeared as though the eyeball had been pierced and the liquid had run out. Yet there was no blood upon the fellow's clothes. We did not make a post-mortem upon the Major, but externally there were no marks upon his body that seemed adequate to have caused death, aside from the red line about the throat that was present on all the bodies. And, unlike the Cholos, he appeared to have lost little, if any, blood. We got into telephonic communication with the resident doctor at Talara who reported that the dead women bore no marks of violence aside from numerous small punctures on the breasts and backs, which marks he compared to the marks that might have been caused by bird-shot fired from a distance, yet there were no shot in the wounds. Neither did my microscopic examination of the stomach contents, the tissues or the blood reveal the presence of recognizable poison, and Rogers' chemical tests showed no toxic reactions.

Of course all this took time, and it was late in the afternoon when the disagreeable work had been completed. All ordinary work had come to a complete standstill. No

one could put his mind on work; the executives and bosses were all too much engrossed with the procession of mysterious tragedies to carry on, and the Cholos had a glorious loaf, apparently quite unmoved and undisturbed by the uncanny fate of their friends and companions. And naturally the camps were in a tremendous state of excitement and nervous tension. The women were frightened almost out of their wits, no children were allowed out of doors, and even in broad daylight everybody acted as if they expected to be struck down by some invisible hand at any moment.

The men too seemed to be filled with superstitious dread. The mere fact that men were murdered — even had there been three times as many — would not have troubled the hard-boiled rough-necks who made up the working force of white men. Most of them had led wild lives. They had been in many a mining camp where human life was held cheap and murders were everyday matters, and the majority of them had been in the World War. A score of men — either native or white — killed in a riot, a strike, a quarrel or a drunken brawl would not have caused them a moment's thought. But the mysterious manner of the eight deaths, the inexplicable reason for the murders, and the fact that there seemed no clues in the murderer filled these tough, case-hardened old-timers with the fear of the supernatural. Indeed, more than one openly expressed his opinion that the men had not been killed by anything human, that some old Incan devil or evil spirit had had a hand in the tragedies, and that the only safe course was for everyone to clear out and stay out.

Of course, the intelligent population scoffed at such ideas. We knew well enough that murders had been committed, and we felt confident that whoever had so far eluded us would be captured if he attempted to repeat his crimes. And we arranged such a complete cordon of guards, sentries and police about the camp — that we felt positive that if the murderer put in an appearance that night he would never escape us.

Looking back upon it now, I can realize how really silly and amateurish our plans were. On the previous evening the murderer had committed his fiendish crimes despite the brilliant illumination of electric lights and the presence of a large force of men, and had escaped unseen. And yet we thought that by darkening the streets, by hiding in the shadows, and by giving orders that no inhabitant was to be on the streets after eleven, that we could apprehend a murderer who had shown such devilish ingenuity in eluding everyone hitherto.

It was a dark, starless night, and only enough lights had been left burning to enable us to see moving figures, should they appear upon the streets.

Fully fifty men were on duty in the camp, and I had also posted a dozen men outside the limits of the camp where they could watch the surrounding desert. These men were carefully hidden, some in the dense shadows of the oil derricks, others behind piles of pipe, and still others back of rocks or other objects. It seemed to us at the time that it would be utterly impossible for any living creature to approach the camp undetected or to make a way through the streets unseen by the armed watchers. Of course there was the chance that the maniac or fiend or whoever he was would not appear, that he had satiated his lust for killing, or that, knowing we were awaiting him, he would keep away until the excitement and watchfulness had died down, or perhaps forever. But we reasoned that he must be a maniac or a drug-fiend and that in such case he would continue his attacks and, moreover, would not reason that he was courting disaster by reappearing.

Nothing had occurred up to midnight. I had gone the rounds several times, all the men reported on duty, thoroughly wide awake, and not a sign of anyone other than the patrols had been seen. One o'clock, two o'clock passed, and then suddenly echoing horribly through the darkness — came a frenzied scream of deadly terror. Instantly, with chills running up and down my back, I dashed in the direction of the cry, and I heard the racing footsteps of half a dozen of my men behind me. But we had not gone fifty yards before we were met by a flying figure rushing madly towards us from the desert. It was McGovern, and never have I seen mad terror and fear so depicted as upon the big Irishman's face. His eyes rolled, his mouth twisted and slobbered, his teeth chattered and his bulky muscular frame shook and trembled like that of a frightened child. He was almost bereft of his senses. He actually clung to me, and he babbled and mumbled incoherently. With the utmost difficulty we finally got him to talk intelligibly. And the tale he told was incredible.

He had been sitting, he declared — interlarding his story with many ejaculations and frequently crossing himself — upon a pile of lumber in the shadow of a newly-erected derrick about one hundred feet beyond the barracks known as Block Seven. He insisted he had been wide awake, that he had felt no fear, and that he had continually turned and peered in all directions. No human being, he declared positively, could have approached him unseen, and yet, suddenly and without sound or warning, something soft, cool and damp had been thrown over his head, almost smothering him; a muscular arm had encircled his neck, fingers had gripped his throat, and he had felt blinded, choked, strangling. Terrified almost to madness, using all his tremendous strength, he had struggled, fought, tried to tear the throttling arm loose, to throw off the smothering thing that had dropped — like a wet blanket as he described it — over his head. For a time it had seemed as if his struggle had no effect. He turned, twisted, tried to reach his adversary's body, but in vain. Then,

whether by accident or design he was not certain, he had flung himself down, had rolled in a pool of thick crude oil, and instantly the strangling hand released its grip, the covering over his head had been jerked away, and leaping up, screaming at the top of his lungs, McGovern had turned and raced towards the camp.

Scarcely waiting to hear the end of his amazing tale we dashed forward to the spot where the Irishman had been attacked. But there was no sign of a living thing in the vicinity. In fact, we would have doubted the Irishman's story, would have thought he had dozed off and had dreamed the whole thing, had it not been for the oil smeared over him, the marks where he had struggled from the pool, and the distinct red imprint upon his neck.

For an hour or more we searched the desert, every possible hiding place in it, and were on the point of giving up when a shout from Jackson brought us on the run. He was standing beside a pile of rusty scrap-iron, his eyes staring, and pointing towards a huddled form lying in the shadow. I flashed my electric torch and sprang back with an involuntary cry of shock and amazement. There, limp and lifeless, his rifle still across the knees, was the dead body of Henderson, one of the patrol.

"Mother of God!" cried McGovern who, still shaking and trembling, had kept close by my side. "The divvil got the poor b'y. Glory be, sor, will ye now be after sayin' 'tis anny human sowl as does be doin' the killin's?"

We stared at one another with blank, frightened faces. It was uncanny, incredible. Whoever the murderer might be, he was possessed of almost supernatural powers, it seemed. Silently, unseen, unheard, unsuspected, he had stolen upon Henderson, had killed him before the poor fellow could utter a sound. And death must have been instantaneous; for otherwise, had there been any struggle, the rifle would not have remained across Henderson's knees. The only explanation was that Henderson, unlike McGovern, had been attacked while he slept. And this, I felt sure, proved that Henderson had been killed before McGovern had been attacked, for otherwise he would have been awakened by the big Irishman's frenzied shrieks.

But the amazing, the baffling events of that night were not yet at an end. When, bearing Henderson's body, we returned to the camp, Merivale and Rogers met us with two of the patrol, and at my first glance at their faces I knew that some tragedy had occurred.

"My God, Barry!" exclaimed Rogers. "the watchman at the hospital has been murdered! He couldn't have been dead five minutes when I found him — and you

may think me crazy or not — I caught a glimpse of the fiend that killed him. I'm not mad, I don't drink, and I was wide awake, but I swear as I am alive this minute that I saw a dim shadowy form rise from his body and vanish — yes, absolutely vanish in thin air, before my eyes."

"Nonsense!" I ejaculated, striving to steady my voice, for the manifest terror of the two was a bit contagious. "If you saw the man, who was be? What was he like?"

"Man!" cried Rogers. "It wasn't a man. It was a — a — thing — a — a — ghost!"

"Blessed Mary, protect us!" exclaimed McGovern, crossing himself devoutly and pressing close to my side as he glanced furtively into the shadows as if expecting some terrible demon to materialize. "Didn't Oi say 'twas no human sowl that was afther murderin' the b'ys. An' 'twas no man born of woman as fought wit' me' sor."

I forced a laugh. "You were dreaming, Rogers," I declared. "You *imagined* you saw something. None of us believes in ghosts or supernatural things."

"He was *not* dreaming," put in Merivale. "I was up when Rogers yelled and I saw it, too. And it wasn't anything human."

I gasped. I could not doubt the statements of two men. The watchman had been killed; both insisted they had seen a thing, some phantasmal object that had vanished. What *did* it mean? What could the thing — the death-dealing phantom — be? But I did not and do not believe in ghosts nor in anything supernatural. Everything, I have always argued, is explicable by natural causes, and recovering from my first vague feelings of dread and the tingling of my nerves at the uncanniness of the men's stories, I attacked the matter from a common sense point of view.

"Perhaps you both did see something," I agreed. "But if you did, it was no ghost. Even if we believed in ghosts and I do not, and I don't believe either of you do — no one ever heard of a ghost injuring anyone. And the being who has committed these crimes has muscular strength, is flesh and blood. McGovern here was attacked by him, and he can tell you, when he gets over his mad superstitious terror, that it was no ghostly, spiritual, wraith-like thing that he fought with. If it appeared to vanish, it was merely because it slipped out of sight in the darkness. But of course there is a remote — a very remote possibility that it is *not* a human being. It may be some strange bird of prey, although I have no faith in such a theory. No bird, nor for that matter any animal, strangles men to death. In my own opinion it is some demented

Oriental — perhaps a member of the East Indian Thugg clan. The manner in which a cloth is thrown over the victim's head, and the strangling, are both strikingly like the methods of the Thuggs. I believe that what you two saw was the cloth or blanket or poncho that the fellow uses. In all probability, he is nude or nearly so, and therefore almost invisible in the darkness. But the cloth he uses may be light-colored. As he escaped after murdering the watchman, this cloth showed up for an instant before he gathered it up. That would have given the effect you describe, Rogers. And coming as you did from light into darkness, your eyes would have failed to see his form, and moreover, your eyes being attracted by and focused upon the cloth, you would have failed to see his body. Anyhow, we now know the fellow's method. He smothers his victims' cries by his cloth — that is why there has never been a cry nor a scream when men have been attacked — and then strangles them."

"Fine!" exclaimed Merivale with sarcasm. "But how about those punctures? And what's his big idea? And how does he get by the patrols and get away?"

"I don't think the punctures as you call them have anything to do with the case at all," I replied. "How do we know they were not on the bodies of the people previous to their being killed? A lot of these Cholos have sores and eruptions, you know. And maniacs are notoriously clever in eluding those set to capture them. A naked Hindu or Chinaman can slip through the shadows where no white man could pass undetected."

''Well, I hope you're right," said Rogers. "I don't believe in spirits any more than you do, Barry. But I'll admit had a bad turn when I saw that ghostly-looking, cloud-like thing float away from the watchman's body and vanish. But I expect the excitement is over for tonight. The cast is beginning to lighten. It's almost morning."

But though the excitement was over for the night, as Rogers said, the coming of day brought most exciting news to us at Negritos. Sturgis called up from Lobitos, and my face paled when he informed me that two men found killed — strangled — at his camp. Hardly had he finished speaking when Colcord called from Talara and reported that four murders had been committed there. An hour or two later our wireless operator picked up a message from the Grace Liner "*Santa Julia*" with the astounding news that three persons — two men of the crew and a passenger — had been found dead upon the ship's deck that morning, and that all appeared to have been garroted. And, as if that were not enough, we heard from Paita that there had been a similar killing there.

My brain whirled; I could scarcely believe my senses, and the others were struck dumb by these incredible reports. How was it possible that such things could have

occurred? How could the murderer have killed victims in Negritos, Lobitos, Talara — fifty miles away at Paita — in the same night? And even if it were possible for any human being to have rushed hither and thither over such an area, there was the incredible fact that he, it, whatever it was, had struck down victims aboard a steamship twenty miles from the coast.

Henshaw was the first to break the tense, awed silence. “Damn it!” he ejaculated. “It’s impossible. I’m not superstitious and I’m willing to admit anything within reason. But this is too much. No human being could have done this. Either there’s a crowd of the murderers — an organized gang — or else, well, I’m not going to admit the ghost or spirit theory yet, but if it’s not the work of a gang it’s the work of some damn force or power or plague and not anything human.”

“McGovern will assure you it was neither plague nor disease,” I reminded him. “And,” I added, “Rogers and Merivale actually saw something. Isn’t it possible — even if highly improbable — that it is the work of some new and strange creature — some bird or gigantic bat, some sort of vampire?”

“I’m beginning to think anything’s possible,” declared Henshaw. “And by the way, it looks as if we’d have to shut down if this keeps on. All my gang at Lobitos have quit and half the Cholos here have cleared out. McGovern tells me he’s leaving for Lima this afternoon; the drillers and riggers are ready to quit, and every woman in the camp who can get away is going to leave this damned place by the first ship.”

I nodded. “Yes, I know,” I replied. “And I can’t much blame them. Any murders are bad enough, but with the mysterious and uncanny added as they are here, no one wants to hang around. And no one knows who may be the next victim. Do you know, one thing that puzzles me is why so few of the whites have been attacked. Poor Major Stevens is the only white man killed so far, and the only other one attacked was McGovern.”

“You forget those three on the “*Julia*,” he reminded me. “They were all white.”

“And there have only been two women killed,” put in Merivale.

“I don’t see as those facts make any great difference,” declared Rogers. “The fact remains that people are killed every night, that beginning with two the first night the — well, murderers — have increased their toll to eleven — if we include McGovern, who escaped by the skin of his teeth — last night. At that rate of progression there should be twenty-five deaths tonight, fifty or sixty tomorrow night and several hundred by Saturday.”

"My God!" cried Henshaw, "I hadn't thought of it that way. Why, damn it, Barry, if this goes on everyone will be wiped out in a week!"

I forced a smile. "Provided Rogers' mathematical series of progression continues, there won't be a living man or woman left on earth in a year or so," I remarked. "But we have no reason to assume that the same increase will continue. Put it another way. The murders began here with two, and last night only one was killed here. Possibly the activities of the killers will be devoted to other localities in the future. But to my mind the all-important thing is to find out who or what they are, why they are killing people at random, and how to put a stop to it. It is not the number of deaths, but the fact that there are any; the fact that no one is safe — that is important. As a mere matter of lives lost — why, last year more men were killed by accident right here in Negritos than all those who have been murdered. It's the manner, the cause of death, that makes it so terrible."

"Well, how are we going to get anywhere? And what more can we do than we have done?" demanded Merivale.

"I suggest we put a barbed wire entanglement around the camp," said Rogers. "If the — the thing — gets in through that, we'll know it's not human."

"And flood the whole damned place with search-lights," added Henshaw.

"We'll do both," I agreed. "And if the — well, the murderer — gets in and attacks anyone, we'll be able to see him at any rate."

But — though it sounds utterly incredible and impossible — despite the barbed-wire barrier and the flood of light, another person fell a victim to the mysterious death that night — and this time a white woman, Mrs. Veitch, the schoolteacher, who, throughout the terrifying and exciting times had remained unperturbed and had slept nightly on her sleeping-porch. And from such places as Piura, Salaverry, Trujillo, and Catovia came reports of the same weirdly mysterious deaths.

"I tell you it's a plague or a disease," declared Rogers. "McGovern just imagined he was attacked."

Henshaw snorted. "And didn't you yourself swear you and Merivale saw something?" he asked.

“I did,” admitted Rogers, “but I’ve come to the conclusion we were both deluded. We must have imagined it. If you can suggest anything within reason — other than some virulent disease — that can kill people hundreds of miles apart and can come in here through barbed wire and flood-lights and strike down victims, then I’ll admit anything. But every detail is like the effect of some plague — the way it has spread, the unexpected way it strikes, the lack of wounds on the bodies, the condition of the blood of the victims. And those marks or punctures all indicate some terrible, unknown malady.”

“One thing I have noticed,” observed Henshaw, “is that this whole business has started since that earthquake and the change in the climate. It’s only since the rains started and vegetation grew up that these deaths have occurred. That in a way would bear out the plague theory. I don’t know, but it’s possible that there’s some germ in the soil that has been revived and made active by the wet weather.”

“On the contrary,” I declared, “we had no deaths during the intensely rainy period. All the murders have occurred since the rains stopped and the weather has been dry, and that looks to me as if it had no connection with the rain.”

“Hmm, well, we may have a chance to decide upon that,” said Henshaw. “It’s clouding up and looks and feels like more rain.”

He was not mistaken. It began to rain that afternoon; by nightfall it was pouring, and throughout the night it came down in torrents. And not a death occurred, not a murder was reported within the rainy area, although six men were killed and three women murdered about Salaverry and Trujillo, where no rain fell. Of course, as I pointed out, this might have been a coincidence, but when, on the four succeeding nights, it rained and no deaths occurred, and when the rain had extended southward to Chancay and not a murder took place anywhere, we began to feel that the rain had a lot to do with it and that Rogers’ theory of the deaths resulting from some disease was the correct hypothesis.

And as days followed days and not a recurrence of the killings was reported, and as the weather continued rainy, we all decided that, regardless of the fact that none could explain it, no scientific or medical solution could be given, yet the mysterious deaths had been brought about by some germ or spore or microbe that was only virulent during dry spells after heavy rains. As Rogers put it: Some unknown deadly germ was bred or developed from a dormant state by the rain, but only became active when the weather was dry. But even he could offer no suggestion to account for the fact that the deaths occurred only during the night.

However, as the plague seemed over, as all were now convinced that there was no human element in the matter, and as the rains seemed likely to continue indefinitely — the Weather Bureau and the meteorological experts agreed that unless another alteration of the ocean's bed took place, the climate would remain permanently wet — those tragic, terror filled nights were almost forgotten. The drillers and riggers, having had no opportunity to sail away, overcame their fears and returned to work; the Cholos drifted back to the camps from the hills, and the women abandoned their packing and preparations for departure and decided to live on at the camps.

Once more I was free to carry on my studies, and one of my first acts was to make a visit to the strange plants I had been so long forced to neglect.

Much to my chagrin I found them wilted, dead, and with only the scars on the back to show where the flowers had been. In vain I searched about, looking for fruit, seeds or even remains of the blooms. But several weeks had passed, the rains had been severe, and decomposition of all dead vegetation was very rapid. I was greatly disappointed, but it could not be helped, and transforming my botanical expedition into a hunt, I started through the jungle in the hopes of securing some quail or pigeons. I had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile when I reached the banks of one of the recently formed streams and, following up this, I came upon a partly decomposed, mushy, gelatinous object lying at the edge of the water. For a moment I thought it the body of some fish or animal, but there was little odor of decaying animal matter emanating from it, and as I bent nearer I discovered that it was the wilted and decaying flower of some unknown plant. Something about it appeared familiar, and suddenly it dawned upon me that it was the blossom of one of my queer shrubs. Quite obviously it had been blown or washed to the stream and had been carried by the current until it had found a resting place on the shore. It was a very poor specimen, but I examined it with great interest. From what I could determine, it differed but little from the flowers I had seen before in their nearly opened bud-form. The purple color had faded to a dingy brown, the white had turned yellow and was discolored, but I could still distinguish the gigantic bulbous calyx, the membranous fringe that encircled the long semi-circular petals, the thread-like filaments that I assumed were stamens, and the fragment of a thick, fleshy, spiny pistil. In full blossom and freshly opened upon its parent stalk, it must have been a gorgeous and truly remarkable sight, I decided; but it was beyond preservation and with a sigh of regret that I would probably never have the opportunity of witnessing the strange plants in bloom, I turned away.

But a few minutes later I came upon another of the decaying flowers. This time, to my amazement, I discovered that the jointed, leafless shoots of new plants were sprouting from the earth about it. Here was a most interesting state of affairs. There

were no seeds or fruit but new plants wore germinating from the flower itself, apparently. Still, upon second thought, I realized this was not so remarkable. Many of the Cacti and Bromeliads, I knew, would grow from portions of the stalks, even from the buds or flowers, and I had long before decided that my plants were closely related to if not members of the Cacti or the Bromeliad group. But more than anything else I was greatly elated to know that I might yet have a chance to witness the blooming of the growths. If the rains continued, they would spring up and develop rapidly, and in a fortnight more should bud and blossom. That afternoon I found several more of the old flowers, and in every case new stalks were sprouting up. At that rate, I thought, in a few months the whole mountainside would be covered with the plants, and I imagined what a truly wonderful sight would be presented when they were covered with hundreds, thousands, of the huge, magnificent flowers in full bloom. What a pity they were night-bloomers like the cereus! But even so, a hillside covered with the gigantic white and mauve flowers when viewed by moonlight would be a sight never to be forgotten, and worth coming many miles to view.

Almost daily I visited some of the plants. They grew rapidly, seeming to absorb the remains of the flowers, and to my surprise I found them scattered over a very wide area. And my surprise was increased when, in speaking of them to my friends, Merivale said he had run across one of the growths far out in the area of the former desert, and Sedgwick declared he had been attracted to some of the queer-looking plants when he was more than half way to Lobitos. It seemed incredible that the big flowers could have blown so far, and I could only account for it on the supposition that there had been other plants that I had not located at the beginning of the rainy period.

When, soon after, I saw indications of the nearest plants budding, I became quite excited, and I watched with intense interest as the buds swelled, the flowers developed, and glimpses of the white and purple blooms showed through their rough brownish integument. Finally the time came when I felt that on any night the blooms might open and, fearing that I might miss the sight, for I felt sure the flowers lasted in their full perfection for only one night, I decided to visit the plants that evening. But the rain came down in torrents and when, after half-wading through the water and mud and drenched to the skin, I reached the nearest clump of plants, l found the flowers in exactly the same state as they had been in the day before. Very obviously they would not expand during rainy weather, and cursing myself for an idiot — for I should have known that this would be the case and that few night-blooming flowers open except in fine weather — I returned to camp, deciding to await dry weather before again going tramping off on such another wild-goose chase.

But I was doomed to bitter disappointment once more. I was unexpectedly

summoned to a new oil field being prospected at Langosta Bay, and as luck would have it, dry weather commenced almost as soon as I left. Langosta, being quite out of the world and a mere prospecting camp in the desert — for owing to some freaky wind current or its location this area had not altered in climate like the rest of the coast — no news of the outer world reached us except when — once a fortnight — Lima-Guayaquil plane dropped in on us with mail and newspapers.

Hence it was two weeks after my arrival at Langosta before we had any news of our friends at Negritos and Talara. And when the Ford tri-motored plane came gliding down and we received our letters and the papers, we found them filled with most amazing and fearful tales. Everywhere during the past week, men, women, children and even domestic animals had fallen victims to the baffling, mysterious death that stalked abroad at night and struck down silently, instantly. More than fifty had been killed in and about Talara; as many more had succumbed from the plague at Negritos, for by this time everyone was agreed that it *was* some terrible, unknown malady. Nineteen out of the total population of four hundred had died at Lobitos. Several of the native villages in the hills had been completely wiped out, and scores had been killed at Paita, at Salaverry, about Trujillo and back in the hills about Piura. A few deaths had even been reported from as far south as Casma and as far north as Tumbes, but the center appeared to be about Talara and Negritos, and a theory was advanced that the germs of the deadly, terrible disease were brought up by the drilling or by the oil. Work had completely ceased at the camps. Nearly all the Cholos and most of the whites had left the stricken district, but finding a rigid quarantine in force at Lima and in all other parts, the poor frightened inhabitants had been forced to return to their homes, where they were living in a state of terror almost impossible to describe.

Doctors and specialists were being rushed from the States and the Canal Zone to the locality with orders to make a thorough investigation and to locate the death-dealing germs, and the International Petroleum Company had employed the most eminent specialists at enormous salaries and with offers of veritable fortunes in the form of rewards to anyone who could discover a way of checking the inroads of this new menace to the entire population of the country.

The first to arrive had been Doctor Heinrich, the noted German biologist, who had been in Guayaquil making an intensive study of tropical fungus diseases of the skin. He had dashed to Talara by plane and had at once plunged into the problem with his customary energy and thoroughness.

But his first reports somewhat amused me, despite the seriousness of the situation. The deaths, he announced, were the result of some malady that attacked the respiratory organs, the effect being to smother the victim. This primary effect was followed almost instantly by a high fever, a constriction of the throat muscles, and the consequent rupture of small blood vessels. The germs, which he felt sure entered the system through the almost invisible openings in the skin, caused, as a third and final effect, extreme anæmia. Examination of the blood remaining in those stricken showed practical elimination of the red corpuscles, and in some cases practically no arterial blood whatever. Undoubtedly, the learned doctor proceeded to explain, the remarkable statements of McGovern and others describing the feeling of a cloth being thrown over their heads and a strangling arm encircling their necks, was the result of the smothering effect of the germs entering the human system. In mild attacks — which had been extremely rare — the symptoms had all been identical in this respect. All those who had been attacked described the smothering cloth, the pressure upon the neck, the mad struggle to escape. These were precisely the mental impressions that would result so he averred — from the effects of the malady as he had described them. Pressure upon nerves and arteries, caused by the spasmodic contraction of the muscles affected by the germs, would induce pressure upon the brain and mental illusions. Hence the victims, feeling smothered, would imagine the cloth and the external pressure, and might quite reasonably be expected to imagine seeing objects that did not exist.

Hence, he argued with Teutonic logic, the fact that several persons had sworn to seeing indescribable forms rushing off when, by herculean efforts, they had recovered from the attacks, merely proved that they had been temporarily mentally deranged by the effects of the germs entering their systems. He had, he continued, made a very careful examination of all such persons, and had found them invariably excited, in a state of nervous exhaustion, and subject to violent and sudden fits of terror and to suggestion. He had endeavored to isolate the germs from samples of their blood, but so far without success, and he concluded his study almost positively that the disease was neither contagious nor transmissible; that it was in a way similar to tetanus, and that it was unquestionably the result of the alteration in climatic conditions. “In all probability,” he wrote,” the germs have been present but dormant in the deserts for centuries. The rainfall has invigorated and propagated them, and as they become active and dry, they are carried by the wind to find lodgement upon their living hosts. It is a notable and suggestive fact that the activity of the disease is confined to dry periods and to the hours of darkness; also that while the deaths resulting from the disease have spread southward — with the prevailing winds — they have not spread northward against the prevailing air currents, except in a few isolated cases.”

As preventative measures, he recommended remaining indoors after dark — he pointed out that with one or two exceptions no one in well-closed houses had suffered — bathing in carbolic or other disinfectant solutions, and refraining from excitement, overeating, exhaustive exercises or nervousness.

Poor old Doctor Heinrich! The very morning after he had published his report — which contained nothing we did not already know — he was found dead on the steps of his own home, another victim of the "night death," as it was now called.

And as if his death had been the signal, the rains had come again, and not a death had been reported since.

"Looks to me," observed Torrens, the long, lean-jawed Texas engineer, "as if what you all need over at Negritos is a lot of fire-hose. The bugs don't look to bite when its wet. Just keep a lot of hose playing 'roun' the camp and the bugs'll keep away."

"I'm not at all sure that such a scheme might not work," I said, "but it would not help the rest of the world. And there's another queer feature to the whole horrible business. Not a death has been reported from any of the sections that are still dry — from this district, for example, or from Cacamaquilla or the Huaranay country."

"'Pears like to me the bugs sure like places where there's sunshine after showers," drawled Torrens. "Mebbe they'd dry up and turn into bug mummies out in the desert country — feel like I might get mummified myself if I'm here much longer. And they're night birds, too. All jokin' aside, ain't it possible they can't stand sunshine or heat and that's why they don't wander thisaway? Anyhow you look at it, it's damn bad, and I'm sure glad those bugs ain't mooning around here. Lord Amighty, it's smotherin' enough without them addin' to it."

The next news we had told a very different story. The rains had recommenced, and for ten days not a death had been reported. The doctors and specialists had reached Talara, and had been busy making an intensive investigation, but I could not see that they had reached any definite conclusions nor had they come to any agreement aside from the fact that all believed that the deaths were the result of some unknown and remarkable germ or microbe. Some held that it was a minute microscopic animal and not a true germ; others declared it the spores of some plant-like growth related to the fungi or moulds, and others were equally insistent that it was the microbe of a true disease.

Neither did they agree as to the origin, the manner of dissemination and the habits of the thing. Some claimed it was the result of the climatic changes, others that it had been introduced from some other locality, and others declared that it was a new development or form of the mysterious Chan-Chan fever.

One savant was positive that the germs were carried by night-flying insects, and in support of his theory pointed out that such insects invariably appeared in large numbers on clear nights after heavy rains. His colleagues were equally positive that the germs were blown about by the wind, and as proof called attention to the fact that the strongest winds always blew at night, that during dry weather there was always a breeze, while during the rains it was almost calm, and he further argued that wet weather would lay the germs as it did any other dust. But there could be no argument in respect to the results and the deadly character of the new malady, and all the schemes so far tested had proved ineffectual in so far as preventing attacks was concerned. No, I am mistaken in that statement; no person who had remained indoors with doors and windows closed or screened had been attacked, and as all the white residents of the district had obeyed orders and had been careful to remain indoors after nightfall, no deaths of the whites had occurred, and only Cholos and other natives, who slept in open barracks or sheds, had succumbed, aside from several members of the patrol, who had been found dead at their posts. This, declared the authorities, shed a ray of hope. If everybody kept indoors from dark until dawn, there was every reason to think that the deaths would entirely cease, and, so argued the learned doctors, if the deaths could be completely checked for a time, the germs, finding no hosts, would soon die out. And in order to prevent all possibility of the germs finding victims, all the Cholos and Indians had been rounded up and were nightly locked in barracks and no live stock of any sort was allowed at large after sundown. And as it was now established that the “Night Death” was due to microbes and to no human or outside agency, all police and patrols were abandoned, and soon after sunset the entire country was as silent and deserted as the tomb. Just how well this plan had worked out could not be determined, because, as I have said, the rains had again commenced, and no one positively could state whether the cessation of deaths was due to the weather or to the precautions taken.

These were the conditions that existed when, having completed my work at Langosta, I returned to Negritos.

As it was still rainy, and as I felt certain that there was no danger as long as it was wet weather, I decided to have a look at my long-neglected plants. There were severe penalties provided for anyone violating this rule about going abroad after dark, but I intended fully to risk it if I found my plants were about to blossom, for I was

determined that I would see the strange growths while in flower. I was not greatly surprised to discover that the growths had increased amazingly. But I was surprised to find how far and how much they had spread. They were in fact everywhere, scattered through the jungles, sometimes singly, again in groups, and in some spots forming miniature forests and covering large areas of the hillsides.

I found, however, that a comparatively small portion of the plants bore buds, although those that showed no indications of approaching florescence appeared on vigorous and as fully matured as the others. This I accounted for on the theory that a certain proportion were sterile (a condition that exists commonly among many of the cacti and allied plants) and incapable of producing flowers, and my theory was more or less borne out by the fact that those that had no flower buds had developed leaves.

These leaves were remarkable growths and resembled the gray pendant lichen known as Spanish moss more than anything else. But they were quite different in structure, being composed of innumerable slightly wavy threads or filaments sprouting from a short, fleshy stem, and pale bluish-green in color. While examining these — for my interest had been transferred from the buds to the leaves — I discovered another interesting peculiarity of the remarkable plants. In every case where the growths had sprung up from the fallen decayed blossoms the stems bore the filament-like leaves and no flower buds, whereas — and this took me some time to discover — growths had sprung up from directly under the bunches of drooping, hair-like leaves. Not for some time did it dawn upon me that my strange plants had a most amazing life cycle. In other words, there was a two-phase cycle: the flowers producing non-flowering plants that in turn bore leaves (or perhaps flowers of another form) which, falling to earth, produced plants that bore only flowers. Such a mode of growth and reproduction was not, I knew, unknown among plants. Several of the parasitic tropical plants, known popularly as "air-plants," have a similar habit, the seeds producing non-flowering plants with jointed stems which break apart, each section developing a plant that bears flowers and seeds; and several ferns have a similar mode of propagating themselves; while among the marine plants the dual habit is not unusual. To me this was particularly interesting, as it tended to prove that the ancient forms of plant growth that had been brought into existence from long-dormant semi-fossil seeds by the rains had habits closely related to the marine forms of plant life. And as I had long held to a theory — and had written several monographs on the subject — that all plants originally were marine forms and that, with the receding of the waters and the increase of land, certain species and genera adapted themselves to a terrestrial existence, I was, of course, greatly pleased to find that, in my strange growths about Negritos, my theory was borne out to a certain extent. I was in fact quite convinced that many of the plants on the hillsides were very closely akin to

existing marine forms and that my strange, jointed, rapid-growing, huge-flowered, night-blooming shrubs were the most closely related of all to marine growths.

Their amazingly rapid growth, their fibrous character, the semi-translucent flowers, all reminded me of bryozoans or algæ more than of true terrestrial forms of plant life.

And now this new discovery of their mode of propagation was another point in favor of my newly improvised theory.

Moreover, as I now realized for the first time, it would not be at all surprising to find the nearest air-breathing relatives of marine plants here in Peru. As I have said, all, or nearly all the plants, were extremely ancient forms that hitherto had been known only from fossils; and, in the second place, the country, as I knew from my paleontological studies, had been beneath the sea at no very remote period (geologically speaking) of the past. Hence, assuming that I was correct in my theory of the evolution of plant life, it would be natural that the earliest terrestrial forms of plant life and those most closely resembling their maritime ancestors, should be found here.

All of this of course passed through my mind far more rapidly than I have written it, and having located several plants that I judged would bloom that night — provided the rain ceased — I returned to Negritos, feeling that I had accomplished a great deal in support of my pet botanical theory. In my mind I was already composing an article on my discoveries for publication in the Journal of the International Society for Botanical Research.

It did not, however, stop raining that night nor for several nights; but at length the sun shone again, the last clouds drifted away over the Andes, and I prepared to sneak off and fulfill my long delayed desire to witness the blooming of the plants that had interested me — in fact, I might say had obsessed me for months.

There was no great difficulty in getting away from camp unseen. Everyone was within doors, there was no patrol, no police, no guards, nobody to detect me, and I chuckled to myself at the thought of how different were the present conditions to those when the first mysterious deaths had occurred and the place had been alive with armed guards searching for an imaginary murderer or maniac.

My thoughts reverted naturally to the incidents of those days, to McGovern and his terror of something that had not existed except in his overwrought and superstitious mind; to Rogers and Merivale and to the terrifying, nervous dread that had filled all of

us when the nightly deaths had seemed to savor of the supernatural and uncanny. Of course I realized I was taking a risk there was a remote chance that I might be attacked by the malady that stalked its victims invisibly and unannounced on dry nights like this. But I am something of a fatalist; besides, scientific ardor is not easily dampened by thoughts of personal risks or dangers, otherwise few great scientific truths would have been discovered. But even a scientist is not always immune to vague, indefinable fears, and I felt a peculiar and far from pleasant or comfortable sensation of impending danger, as if some unseen, indescribable peril hovered near.

Once or twice as I glanced, half-nervously, at the star-bright sky, I fancied I saw dim, cloud-like, moving forms passing swiftly overhead. Little chills tingled along my spine as I recalled Rogers' horrified expression when he spoke of the "thing" he had seen vanishing from the vicinity of the dead watchman. Was it possible, I thought, that there were such things as ghosts, spirits, forces of which we knew nothing? With an effort and a forced laugh I threw off my foolish, almost superstitious feelings. Probably I had not seen anything, and if I had, what more reasonable than to suppose them drifting clouds or even large night-flying birds — herons, jabirus or wood-ibis perhaps. Still, it *was* dashedly lonely, eerie and mysterious out there alone, with the black loom of the Andean peaks in the distance, with the dark shadows of the hills, with the thousand and one unaccountable noises of the night on every hand, and with not a living soul, the glimmer of a light to indicate a fellow human being in the whole vast expanse. And though I had no concrete ideas nor thoughts of meeting anyone or anything, I involuntarily gripped the hilt of my machete — which I invariably carried on my trips into the jungle — and kept a keen watch on my surroundings. But nothing happened. I saw no signs of life — except an occasional night-hawk or a fluttering, burrowing owl, and presently reached the edge of the dense vegetation.

The plants that I had selected to visit were close to the edge of the jungle, and as I had already cut an open trail through the growth, I approached the spot readily, noiselessly, and came within sight of the group of tall, stout, articulated stalks. I had not come in vain; looming ghostly in the darkness I could see three of the immense white and purple flowers fully expanded and looking as large as beach umbrellas in the uncertain light of the stars. For a moment I gazed at them entranced, drinking in the wonder and beauty of this floral display; then I stepped closer to examine the details of the blooms.

Suddenly I started and stared. There was no breeze here in the shelter of the hills, not a leaf of the vegetation stirred, and yet — incredible as it seemed — the flowers were moving, vibrating, pulsing, as if alive! Could it be the effect of the light or of my eyes striving to see clearly? No, I was positive it was no optical illusion. I focused my

gaze upon one blossom, watched it. It *did* move! The bulbous purple calyx seemed to pulse slowly, deliberately, the white membranous fringe that was now spread flat, like a gigantic plate with convoluted edges, waved and fluttered; the long, fleshy multicolored petals undulated, and the slender, attenuated stamens waved, twisted and coiled about the great, rough central pistil. To my amazed, incredulous eyes the flower actually appeared to breathe, to be endowed with sensate life, to be struggling, feeling, exploring the air about it, as if searching for something. I was fascinated and at the same time filled with a nameless fear. Still staring, I drew back, my eyes fixed as though hypnotized upon that giant flower that now, for some inexplicable reason, appeared to me a horrible, uncanny, monstrous thing. And then my hairs seemed to rise on end. I felt a gripping terror, cold chills ran over me. Before my very eyes the great palpitating flower freed itself from the stalk and softly, silently, rose in air like a white balloon, and with stamens trailing and fringe undulating, it came slowly drifting towards me. I could not take my eyes from it. My mouth seemed dry. I was incapable of movement. I could not even cry out. For an instant it hovered above me and then — God, will I ever forget it! — the monstrous thing dropped swiftly, like a descending parachute, towards me. In a flash, in the fraction of a second, I remembered McGovern's description of the smothering, clammy cloth that had dropped over his head. In a flash I realized that it had been no hallucination, that the "thing," the "ghost," which Rogers and Merivale had seen, had been no figment of their imaginations. And in the same flash of intelligence I knew that the "night death" was no malady, no microscopic germ. I knew that it was these awful, silent, monstrous, living flowers of the mysterious plants.

A trailing, slimy thread-like stamen touched my cheek, and with a hoarse, inarticulate cry I leaped back. I felt a rasping something graze my neck. The air seemed suddenly shut off from my panting lungs, and with a mad, savage yell of frenzied terror I slashed viciously upward and outward with my machete. I felt the blade bury itself in some soft, yielding body. Thick, ill-smelling, salty liquid spurted over me. A pulpy, horrible mass struck my shoulder, and clinging, twining, snaky, sticky, nightmarish fingers seemed to close upon my left arm, my throat, my body.

Screaming, struggling, slashing, almost bereft of my senses, I tore the things loose, leaped aside and freed myself of the gruesome awful thing that lay, panting, pulsating but writhing helplessly upon the ground. I felt weak, faint, almost paralysed. Then some sixth sense caused me to turn. And just in time. Two more of the terrible, silent, deadly things were drifting down upon me! Before I could run, before I could move they were dropping toward me. But my first awful, superstitious terror had left me. The things, uncanny, terrible, supernatural as they seemed, were real. They were neither ghosts, nor demons nor spirit. They could be destroyed, killed.

Alert, watchful, I waited until the trailing, writhing stamens and the great flesh-colored pistil — that even in my deadly fear and excitement I mentally likened to a great boa with weaving, ominous head — were close above me. Then with all my strength I struck and leaped aside. With a soft swish the keen steel sheared through the mass. The thing veered, canted, capsized like a rudderless airplane, and with vicious blows I slashed it; hacked it until it fell. But I almost lost my life in doing so. The third monstrous thing was upon me. I felt its hellish smothering folds about my head; the swaying, rope-like central organ rasped across my neck. Only the fact that I was stooping, bending forward, saved me. With a scream I grasped the thing, wrenched it loose and felt my hand lacerated and stung as if with a thousand red-hot needles as I did so. I thrust and lunged with a machete, and, ducking, dodged from beneath the enfolding mass.

I was sick, nauseated, weak with terror and with my efforts. Everywhere about me I knew were more of the weirdly, horrible, deadly things. At any instant a dozen, hundred might be upon me. Even the stalk from which these three had been freed bore several more ready at any moment to float free and attack me. And overcome with such fear as I never knew could exist, panting, screaming, I turned and raced towards the open country and the camp. Once or twice I glanced back, expecting to see the dim, ghostly shapes pursuing me. But I saw nothing. Perhaps there were no others, maybe only those three bloomed into life that night. But even while I ran, while I spent my breath in shrieks that could have been heard in the distant camp, the truth dawned upon me. I had escaped the "night death" by the narrowest of margins, but I had solved the mystery. I knew the truth and, bizarre, incredible, impossible as it seemed, I knew the secret of those strange plants, of the death-dealing, living blossoms. The plants were land hydroids, gigantic representatives of those puzzling marine growths that seem a connecting link between plants and animals. And, like their small marine prototypes, they bore living, carnivorous organisms — gigantic jelly-fish — that floated through the air instead of through the water.

And, like the marine jelly-fish that bud from hydroids, these gigantic man-eating things, those vampires of the desert, in their turn propagated plant-like growths that bore seeds or spores which produced hydroids with living independent organisms in place of flowers.

That I could think and could reason collectively and sanely while I raced, stumbling and fear-stricken towards the dark camp may seem strange; but there are queer kinks in the human brain, and my subconscious mind worked along scientific lines even while my conscious mental processes were devoted to striving to reach safety

before some of those ghastly, vampirish, night-borne creatures overtook me. Although I was unaware of the fact, I must have yelled and screamed in my excess of terror as I ran, for presently lights glimmered in the blackness ahead, and as I reached the first buildings I saw a door open and plunged, exhausted and spent, through the portal. Even in my half-mad, half-fainting state I recognized Merivale and Johnson.

"Shut — shut the door!" I gasped. "Keep everyone inside if they value their lives! I — it — they —" I staggered forward and dropped senseless onto a couch.

I opened my eyes to find my two friends bending over me with anxious faces.

"Thank God you've come to!" cried Johnson. "What on earth has happened, Barry? Where have you been and what was that you said about 'it' and 'they'?"

With a tremendous effort I steadied my shaken nerves and, in broken, jerky sentences told than of my terrible experience, of the horrible man-eating creatures that had attacked me. The two men exchanged glances, and I could see that they thought me mad or suffering from some hallucination. My anger was aroused at their skepticism, although Heaven knows they had every reason to doubt the truth of my wild and incredible tale.

"Damn it!" I shouted, sitting up. "It's true — every word of it. Look here—" I showed them the palms of my hands, bent my head that they might examine the back of my neck. Merivale whistled. There were same red punctures that had appeared on the corpses of all those who were killed by the "Night Death."

Johnson glanced at me keenly. "By Jove, I'm beginning to believe you, Barry," he declared. "I admit the yarn sounded like the ravings of a madman at first. Gad! to think of gigantic, carnivorous jelly-fish flying through the air in the darkness — it gives me the creeps."

"And it bears out everything and solves everything!" exclaimed Merivale. "I knew that I never imagined that ghastly thing which Rogers and I saw after we found the dead watchman. And McGovern wasn't drunk or dreaming. By the Lord, Barry, you've solved the mystery. We must get Rogers and the rest and tell them."

But though Merivale and Johnson were convinced, the story was far too wild, too impossible and too fantastic for the others to swallow. Doctor Hepburn pooh-poohed it and advised Merivale to give me a sedative and put me in bed, adding that I had probably had a mild attack of the malady and had imagined the ridiculous details,

but that it was my own fault for having disobeyed orders in going out after nightfall. Only Rogers, who like Merivale felt that his hitherto discredited statements were borne out by my tale, believed in my story. "Very well," I announced, "wait until daylight and I'll prove it to them. I wish to heaven some of these idiots had been with me."

And though they discredited my statements — or at least put them down to the effect of the supposed malady — a crowd assembled the next morning to listen to my story at first hand and to see me attempt to prove the truth and accuracy of my tale. But when, reaching the spot where I had fought so desperately against the awful things, I pointed to the dismembered, pulpy, discolored objects upon the ground, and they saw the swollen buds of others upon the strange plants, doubts began to give way to belief. Still stubborn, old Hepburn would not give in. He declared that in his opinion the things were flowers and nothing more, that he didn't believe they could move independently, and that having fallen a victim to the "germ" of the plague while watching the flowers expand, I had imagined all the rest when in a semi-delirious state and had blindly slashed at harmless blooms of the plants.

"Possibly," I said soothingly, "as you are supposed to be a scientist of sorts, you may know the differences between plant and animal forms of life. In that case I suggest we examine these creatures that you claim are flowers — vegetable growths."

He snorted. But he could not refuse in the presence of the others. To me it was a most repugnant undertaking, and I shuddered as we examined the mutilated things. Presently Hepburn rose and extended his hand. "I apologise, Barry," he said. "You were quite right. Gentlemen" — turning to the group about us — "Doctor Barry deserves the greatest praise and our heartfelt thanks. He has solved the mystery of the Night Death; he has laid the ghost. These — er — creatures are unquestionably invertebrate animals — much like gigantic jelly-fish in their anatomy. They are literally vampires — blood suckers and, like their marine relatives, strictly carnivorous. These slender, thread-like filaments that I mistook for stamens are tubes ending in toothed suckers and through which the blood of their prey is drawn. It was the marks of these suckers that were impressed as punctures upon the skin of those killed by the Night Death as we have called it. In all probability the creatures in life exude some powerful poisonous emanation that renders their prey almost instantly unconscious, once the things have dropped over them. Do you not agree with me, Barry?"

I nodded. "Entirely," I assured him, "or rather" — with a laugh — "you now agree with me. The things are composite, polypod jelly-fish — communities of animals similar to the Portuguese Man-of-War."

"How in thunder can they fly?" demanded one of the men. "They're heavy, they haven't any wings, and you can't tell me that petticoat arrangement can lift 'em up by waving back and forth."

"I imagine," I replied, "that the balloon-like body is filled with some sort of gas produced by the creatures themselves. As they broke off from the parent stem last night they floated upward without visible effort. I—"

"Well, what's the answer?" asked Elliott, the camp superintendent. "Now that Barry's solved the mystery of the devilish things, the question is, "How are we going to stop it?"

"Chop down and burn all the damned trees," suggested someone.

"An excellent scheme as far as it goes," I assented. "But how are you going to destroy them all? There are thousands — perhaps tens of thousands — scattered everywhere. They grow so rapidly that by the time half are destroyed there will be as many new ones to replace them. Wherever one of these things drops to earth, a dozen shoots sprout up, and each of these produces dozens more that bear from three to ten of these vampires."

"Well, here goes to end these," cried the first speaker as, leaping forward, he commenced hacking down the thick stalks. Others joined him, and in a few moments not one of the plants was left standing in the vicinity.

"Fine!" I commented. "But by tomorrow or next day, if you return here, you'll find twice as many have grown up. And as deaths have been caused by these creatures as far away as Piura and Chancay, there is every probability that colonies of the plants have started in those distant localities."

The men gazed at one another with blank faces. "For God's sake, what *are* we to do?" demanded Johnson. "If those hellish things keep on increasing, the whole of South America — perhaps the entire world — will be destroyed."

"Undoubtedly — if they are not checked," I agreed. "I — we — must think of some method of exterminating them. There must be some means, if we can hit upon it. But for the present the best thing is to round up every available man and destroy every sprout, every one of the fallen creatures in the neighborhood."

It seemed a herculean task, but two thousand men can accomplish a vast amount

of work, and a small army began scouring the hillsides and valleys in a desperate war upon the sources of the terrible Night Death, while full accounts of my discovery and pleas for co-operation in extirpating the things were flashed by radio to every town and settlement within a radius of more than one hundred miles.

But this hand-to-hand battle I knew would never result in the complete elimination of the things. And it could not be continued indefinitely. It was essential that some means of wiping the things from the earth should be devised, and I racked my brains and conferred for hours with the others in what appeared to be a hopeless effort to evolve or invent some such means.

Somehow I could not get the idea out of my mind that the fact that the vampires moved only at night and only in dry weather lay the key to the solution, and yet, try as I might, I could not see how we could turn these facts to our advantage. And then sudden recollection of McGovern's experience came to me. Oil! Oil had routed the thing that had attacked him. We had oil in unlimited quantities. Why not spray the entire country with oil? I dashed to my fellows and explained my scheme, and instantly all fell in with it. We had three places at Talara and a dozen more available at Lima and elsewhere. Before nightfall our planes had been equipped with spraying apparatus, and the next day they were flashing — like gigantic dragon flies — back and forth above the jungle, spraying every square foot of the country with the heavy oil.

Within a week twenty planes were at work. Soon the greenery vanished under the black coating, and far and near — to well beyond the most distant spots where the Night Death had taken its toll — the country was drenched with the shower of crude petroleum. The most careful search failed to reveal a single living plant of the terrestrial hydroids, and when no more deaths occurred, even in dry weather, and when the people, regaining confidence, remained out of doors at night, we judged that the operations had met with entire success.

Still, for weeks an airplane patrol was maintained, until Nature again took a hand and removed all danger of the recurrence of the terrible deadly plague. With the eruption of Orsini volcano in southern Chile, the ocean's bed again altered, the Humboldt Current resumed his long interrupted course and once again the west coast of South America became a rainless, barren desert. And until the climate again changes, the Night Death will be a thing of the past, the Vampires of the Desert will never reappear.

Perhaps this will never happen within the present century or again such changes may take place tomorrow or next year.