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Contents for November, 1927

Cover Design	C. C. Senf
<i>Illustrating a scene in "The Invading Horde"</i>	
The Eyrie	580
<i>A chat with the readers</i>	
Despair and the Soul	Leavenworth Macnab 584
<i>Verse</i>	
The Invading Horde	Arthur J. Burks 587
<i>A weird-scientific story of America far in the future— Asiatic hordes invade City of the East in giant submarines</i>	
The Wolf	Sewell Peaslee Wright 609
<i>A weird tale of the Canadian Northwest—across the fire the man faced the evil thing that sprang for his throat</i>	
An Old House	Cristel Hastings 614
<i>Verse</i>	

(Continued on Next Page)

(Continued from Preceding Page)

- A Certain Soldier**.....**Clare Winger Harris** 616
An ingenious story of reincarnation and ancient Rome, by the author of "A Runaway World"
- The Lord of the Tarn**.....**G. G. Pendarves** 625
A tale of monstrous cats, the diabolical Eorl of Cumberland, and evil rites in the spectral abbey on Monk's Rock
- The White People**.....**Frank Belknap Long, Jr.** 633
Verse
- Back to the Beast**.....**Manly Wade Wellman** 634
A terrific experiment was this, by which the steps of man's evolution were retraced, and dreadful was its outcome
- The Time-Raider (Part 2)**.....**Edmond Hamilton** 639
A four-part serial story about an entity that sweeps back through time to seize its victims
- The Shadows**.....**Henry S. Whitehead** 663
A tale of West Indian Jumbee—a frightful thing leaped out of the shadows as Old Morris met his death
- Other Earths**.....**Will Smith** 677
Professor Noone of Yaleton took his friend on a voyage through the starry universe to seek the planet "Ago"
- Folks Used to Believe**
The Werewolf.....**Alvin F. Harlow** 692
One of the weird beliefs of our ancestors
- The Gray Rider**.....**Charles Hilan Craig** 693
Speed, more speed, was Lear's utmost desire, and he could not bear it when the Gray Rider passed him
- Weird Story Reprint**
The Thousand and Second Tale.....**Edgar Allan Poe** 697
A yarn about the actual scientific wonders of our modern world, which the sultan finds unbelievable
- The Haunted Mansion**.....**Marietta Hawley** 707
Verse

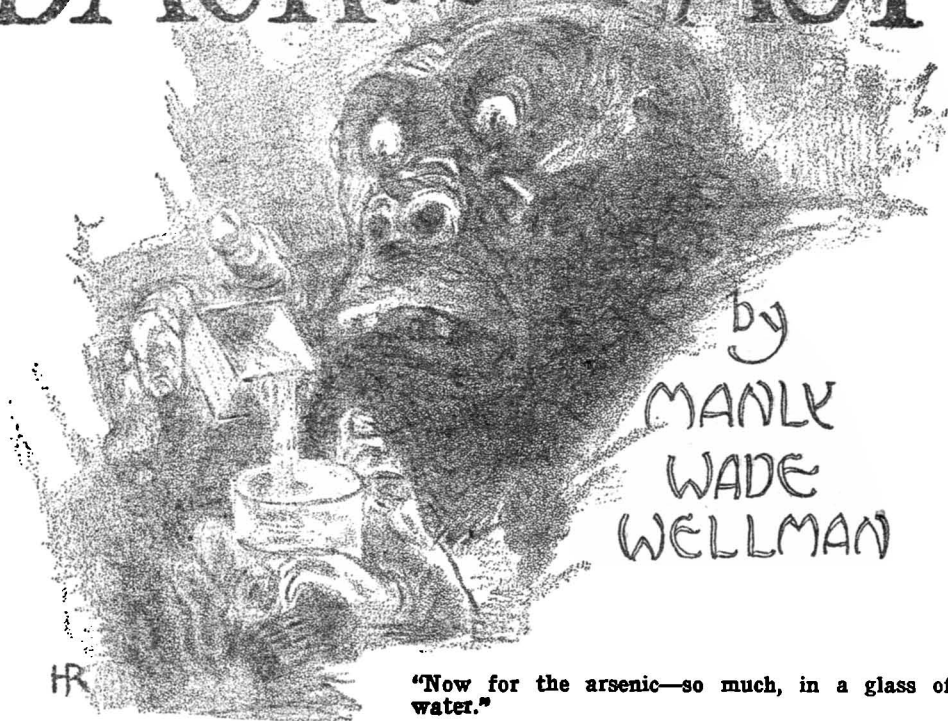
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BACK to the BEAST



by
MANLY
WADE
WELLMAN

"Now for the arsenic—so much, in a glass of water."

(From the Smith City Mirror, June 26, 1927)

POLICE are searching today for Dr. J. E. Lawlor, well-known physician and scientist, following a report from his secretary, James Brock, that he had disappeared from his home at 2100 Van Ness Avenue.

According to Brock, Dr. Lawlor locked himself into his private laboratory twelve days ago, ordering his servants not to disturb him, and to send food down by means of a dumbwaiter. As he had followed this plan several times before while working on experiments, Brock complied with his request. The time set was ten days and when there had been no response from the laboratory during the two

days following the elapse of this period, Brock feared some accident and, with the help of Georges Dmitri, Dr. Lawlor's cook, and Emil Bonner, his chauffeur, he forced the door this morning and found that the doctor was gone.

A weird angle is added to the incident by the dead body of a large ape which Brock found in a corner of the disordered laboratory. Although Dr. Lawlor was known to be interested in natural history and to have conducted several experiments with animals recently, Brock stated that he was sure the ape was not in the laboratory when it was closed twelve days ago. The table was covered with papers, which have been turned over to the police.

Brock, Dmitri and Bonner are held for questioning by Chief of Police John Walton.

Dr. Lawlor has no immediate family. A brother, Stanley Lawlor, of Topeka, Kansas, has been notified.

(From the Smith City Mirror, June 28, 1927)

ATTEMPTS to determine the species of the ape found dead in the laboratory of Dr. J. E. Lawlor, who disappeared last Saturday, were unsuccessful when Professor F. W. Baylor, head of the natural science department of the state university, said today that he had never seen such a creature before.

"There are eight kinds of anthropoid apes known to science," said Professor Baylor, "but this ape belongs to none of them. It has some of the characteristics of several, but resembles no single kind greatly. It is either a freak or of a species unknown until now."

Professor Baylor has ordered the animal embalmed and intends to send it to fellow-students of natural history in Chicago.

(From the Smith City Mirror, June 29, 1927)

JAMES BROCK, private secretary of Dr. J. E. Lawlor, 2100 Van Ness Avenue, was placed under arrest today to face charges of kidnaping and possibly murder of his employer last Saturday.

The arrest took place following the reading of papers purporting to be a journal of an experiment performed by the doctor, which Brock turned over to the police upon his employer's disappearance. Brock had been held for questioning, but was given his liberty Saturday.

The contents of the journal were not made public, but Chief John Walton described them as "preposterous and unbelievable, a forgery by

Brock to cover a very evident crime."

(Extracts from the papers given to police by James Brock as the journal of Dr. James Everett Lawlor)

JUNE 15—All is in readiness for my experiment—the final step in my great work that will afford scientists a true glimpse of how man appeared in the dim past. The narrow persons who refuse to believe in evolution will be forced to see the truth, for we will confront them, not with theories, but with proofs.

I have material now that would fill a great book—notes telling how I first discovered the combination of elements that induces deterioration and of my experiments with it, first on the lowest forms of life, then on more complex animals, with surprising and enlightening results. Years have been consumed in this study, but soon they will be paid for when I reveal what I have learned.

The elements for the two serums, products of nearly a lifetime of labor and observation, are at hand. One serum is the deteriorator, which when properly mingled and administered will make vital changes in the organs and tissues of an animal, changes which finally result in giving it the appearance of its ancestors untold ages ago. This change can be arrested by the administration of the counter-agent, which will restore the transformed creature to its former condition.

I do not suppose that any person less determined or less scientific in mind than I would dare perform this experiment upon himself; but after all, it is as safe as such a thing can be. I have studied its effects and powers too much and too long to go wrong now, and I know that I shall not be mentally incapable of handling it. The change is physiological, not psychological. Foretelling the

course of the whole process is a mere matter of rationalization.

As I plan it, I will let the deteriorator work in my blood for five days, then the counter-agent for five days, to make sure that the effects of the experiment are completely dissipated. Thus I expect to see in my mirror what my ancestors were like five thousand centuries ago, and then return to the body and semblance of Dr. Lawlor, all within two weeks at the least.

I have locked my door for ten days. Brock, a sound, sensible fellow who obeys my orders without questioning, will see to it that I am undisturbed. And after this private experiment, I shall present my findings to my fellow-scientists as the proof of their theories. Who can say that my name shall not be numbered with those of the great evolutionists?

June 16—For twenty-four hours I have had the serum in my blood. With what care I compounded it and injected it into the vein of my arm, you may well imagine. The effects were noticeable at once. My blood flowed faster and for a few moments I felt strangely light-headed, as if I had been drinking. This latter feeling passed away and I perspired freely, but felt no unpleasant sensations. Throughout the day I have taken notes on the progress of the experiment, and tonight my mirror shows me that it is a success.

The change in my appearance has not been so great as I expected, but it is very evident. I am florid and ruddy where I have generally been pale. I am far more robust and all over my body my hair has grown out, especially on the breast and shoulders and outsides of the arms—a strange condition for me, always smooth-skinned and of late years partly bald. I never felt better physically in my life, and I look, not the fine-drawn and slender scientist, but a full-bodied, really splendid savage.

In excess of well-being and in joy, at the certain fulfilment of my expectations, I danced and leaped up and down this evening. Then, a little ashamed of myself, I sat down to write.

June 17—The effects of the serum are more pronounced today. Where yesterday I was but a primitive man, still decidedly human, I am today a man with a pronounced bestial look. My forehead has receded, my jaw is heavy, with sharp-pointed teeth. The change works in me every moment; I can feel it in my flesh and bones. Among other things, I am positively shaggy. The hair makes my clothes a discomfort and I have left them completely off.

I am never weary of watching my body as it changes almost before my very eyes. It is especially interesting to see how springy and flexible my joints have become, and how my feet have a tendency to turn their palms inward. This is because of the great toe, which is beginning to stand out from the others like a thumb; excellent proof that our ancestors were tree-dwellers and could get a grip with their feet.

June 18—When I awoke on my cot this morning, my first glance was toward the mirror. It was unable to recognize myself, unable to recognize even the thing I had been last night. In the broad, coarse face, with flat nose, splay nostrils, little beady eyes under beetling brows, wide mouth and brutal jaws, in the hairy, hulking body, there was no reminder of what had once been Dr. Lawlor. Some scholars would be frightened at the speed and effectiveness with which the serum has worked, but I can think of nothing save the triumph to science.

I am stooped considerably and stand unsteadily on my legs; not that they are not strong, but the tendency of my feet to turn inward has increased, so that I walk for the most

part on the outer edges. Their prehensile powers are developed, too, and they can pick up objects quite easily.

It is also interesting to note that my mental processes have not changed one whit—I can think as clearly and as deeply as ever. As I predicted, the serum does not effect the brain tissues; or, if it does, it does not keep them from functioning properly.

I have been hungry all day. The food Brock sent to me was not sufficient, especially as regards meat, and I must send up a note with the empty dishes for him to increase the amount.

June 19—This part of the experiment will stop tomorrow, for I shall then mix and administer the counter-agent.

Tonight I see myself to be an eery creature, half beast, half man. I am hard put to it to walk without supporting myself on the table and the backs of the chairs. So must our ancestors have looked when they swung down from the trees to achieve their first adventures on the ground and to conquer the world.

These five days, what with the many notes I have taken, will provide a fitting climax for the scientific book that I contemplate. How it will astound the world! What honors and distinctions may descend upon me! Fame is mine, certainly; fortune, if I wish it, may follow.

So good-night and good-bye, my primitive self yonder in the mirror. Tomorrow I shall commence the journey back to the appearance of Dr. Lawlor, that I may immortalize you in all your fascinating grotesqueness.

JUNE 20—How could I—oh, how could I not provide against this? With all the machinery of my experimentation evidently flawless, I must forget a single item—an item maddeningly simple, maddeningly ob-

vious, and yet a thing that has proved my undoing.

Let me remain sane for a moment and marshal the incidents as they occurred. There is not much to tell. This morning I went to my shelf of chemicals for the ingredients to compound into the counteracting serum. My hands, which of course had become clumsy and primitive, seemed to have trouble in picking up the little vials, but this did not worry me as I began the combining of my materials. Two of them I mixed in a graduated glass and then reached for a pipette to administer the third.

But my unsteady manipulation did not allow the proper proportion to flow in. I released a drop too much, and though there was a corresponding effervescence, I could see that the mixture was a failure. I poured it out and tried again, with the same result. With growing uneasiness I made a third attempt, and again my clumsy hands failed me.

Too late, I realized that the mingling of the elements in the proper proportions and manner had been a task that required all the delicacy of a skilled chemist. My hands, no longer the deft, steady hands of Dr. Lawlor, were those of a sub-human creature, and as such not equal to the feat!

Horrible, horrible! I moaned aloud when I realized what had happened and what would follow. Without the counter-agent I could not neutralize, or even halt, the progress of the deteriorator. Down I must go, back along the road up which the human race has struggled for untold centuries!

Again and again I desperately tried to mix the dose, until I had used up all my materials. Once or twice I thought that I had approximated the proper mingling, but when I injected it, there was no effect.

I sit here tonight, a rung farther toward the beast from whence we

sprang, instead of on the road back toward man. Like one lowered into a well, I see above me a circle of light growing smaller and dimmer as I descend into darkness and horror! What shall I do?

[From this point forward, the journal is written in an almost unintelligible scrawl.]

June 24—For three days I have not written. I have not slept and have eaten only when the pangs of hunger roused me from my half-trance of misery. Horror has closed over my head like water.

At first I searched frantically for more materials for the counter-agent, literally wrecking my laboratory, but to no avail. I had used it all in trying to mix the saving dose three days ago.

Today was to have been the last day of my experiment. Perhaps the servants will force the lock if I do not come out. And then?

I could never make them understand. I have no more power of speech than any other beast, for a beast I have surely become. I can not bear to look in the mirror, for I see only a dark, hairy form, hunched over the table, a pencil clutched in its paw. And that is I, James Lawlor! What wonder that I border on the edge of insanity?

Let whoever reads these words take warning from my plight. Do not meddle with the scheme of things as

nature has planned—delve not into her mysterious past. I have done that, and it was my complete and dreadful undoing. If it had not come in this way it would have come in another, I do not doubt for a moment.

June 25—Morning. I have not budged from the chair where I sat to write last evening. I heard Brock's voice outside the door, asking me if I was coming out. I dared not make a sound in reply, and he went away.

Is existence bearable in such a condition? Even now, the sliding back into lower and lower form continues. It will not be long before I am no longer even the ape-thing I appear. Perhaps the serum will carry me back through the ages until I am the slimy sea-crawler from which all life had its beginning. Oh, God! . . .

And as if in answer to that name, comes the memory of what still remains in a drawer of my table. Arsenic—not an easy death, but a quick one. So shall I die, for if ever a creature was justified in taking its own life, that creature is myself.

I will leave this journal as an account of what has happened, and as a warning to others. The formulas for my serums and all that pertains to them I will destroy. Never shall another scientist meet with my fate if I can order it otherwise. There, the papers are flaming in the grate. Now for the arsenic—so much, in a glass of water—farewell!

[Here the journal ends.]

