

★ *Famous*
FANTASTIC
Mysteries ★

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THIS magazine is the answer to thousands of requests that we have received over a period of years, demanding a second look at famous fantasies which, since their original publication, have become accepted classics. Our choice has been dictated by your requests and our firm belief that these are the aces of imaginative fiction.

—The Editors.



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Fruit of the Forbidden Tree

By LESLIE BURTON BLADES

Into the infinite they hurled their brains, to solve the ultimate mystery

I READ the scrawled note attached to a bulky manuscript that I had just received, with a sudden sense of disaster, vague and terrifying, for I knew these men well and I could not but accept the half-mad note as reality.

Carry has gone out, vanished utterly, and in a moment's time. I am alone in the laboratory among all the psychological apparatus with which we have experimented so long.

Would to Heaven we had never attempted this last mad project. But it is too late to regret, for he is gone. In the room a vibrant, unseen force, like an unbodied will, is forcing me to complete what I began.

When you receive this it will probably be over, but I want you to come to the laboratory, do what must be done, and give this report to the world. It is our last

great contribution to science, and both Carry and myself desire it to be published.

As ever,
Davis.

Something had happened at the laboratory of my two friends, the great experimental psychologists, which had resulted in tragedy.

Hastily collecting the report, I called my car and drove at once to the laboratory as Davis had requested.

Save for the vast collection of experimental appliances for testing brain force, the books on the mind, a few disordered papers and its usual furniture, the place was empty.

I submit the report mailed me, without explanation. Nothing I can say will be

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of value and the document must speak for itself. What it declares is true. I knew both men and I have seen the laboratory where they ended their work. For the rest, psychologists must attempt explanations which a mere novice like myself could only clumsily propose. It follows:

**REPORT OF EXPERIMENTS
IN ANALYSIS OF THE
COMPOSITION OF
THE HUMAN SOUL**

**Experimental Psychologists,
Davis and Carry**

A. and S. Laboratory, February 3, 1939

The laboratory was heavy with cigar smoke and the big incandescent in the center of the table flared through the gloom, lighting Carry's face oddly as he sat opposite me.

"Davis," he said slowly through his veil of smoke, "we have succeeded in telepathy, we are skilled in hypnosis, and we have demonstrated the ability of consciousness to turn into itself and observe its own inner workings. Why not go on to an analysis of the human soul? We might discover its composition—the soul stuff."

I stared at him in amazement for I knew that his entire scientific career had been that of a materialistic psychologist who denied soul, asserting that the mind was a mere cooperation of living nerve and muscle cells.

"Of course you are surprised," he remarked casually for I had allowed him to read my thought telepathically. "I don't believe in the soul any more today than I ever did, but I am a scientist and therefore willing to assume its existence till we can test it."

"We can never do that," I asserted positively. I was always opposed to Carry's wild hypotheses. "That is the mystery which science cannot explain."

He smoked in silence for a moment, then I was allowed to see his mind. We rarely talked aloud at such times, preferring to communicate telepathically as a quicker and clearer method of understanding.

"You know," he was thinking, his lips

closed around his cigar, "we have made larger leaps in our work before. This seems simple. We can go at it from our separate points of view. You believe that mind is an ethereal pure spirit in touch with the body by some non-material attachment. I don't; but we can accept your belief as a starter. I will go at it my way, you by yours." •

"I do not see the method," I answered though my voice was silent.

"I will take the evolutionary view and go down into the remnant nerves of my spine and sympathetic system. They are after all the heritage of man from his beast ancestry and if I could get my consciousness into them I might discover what this life energy—soul if you like—really is."

"But to get down into them is not possible."

"I think it is. We could do this: You hypnotize me and direct my mind into them. I will report back telepathically what I find. I might descend clear into protozoan life, and if the mystery still operated I would go back of organic life, to the unknown—the beginning of life, God—and report findings through my body which would still be under your control."

THE proposal was stupendous with possibilities. If he succeeded, we would have discovered the origin and essence of life itself. With that knowledge man could mold soul in the future as easily as a present day biologist works with organic matter, bacteria and their activities, or as a chemist with material elements.

There was an obvious danger, however. If Carry got so far from his body he might be unable to return.

"I know," he said aloud, "I might go under, but it's worth risking."

"I don't believe that is the direction one would have to go. If the soul is analyzed it must be done by going up into forms of consciousness beyond—above the human."

"That is your part of the experiment," he replied. "You can attempt it and one of us will succeed. Which will it be?"

"Neither," I said shortly. "The risk is too great and I won't attempt it. There is my wife, you know."

He nodded appreciation, for single though he was, he was not without tenderness though one rarely saw it in his cold manner.

We dropped the subject there but it kept recurring over a period of two years; then my wife died.

Such a shock as her death was, can only be appreciated by those who have buried their life's love and are left childless to go on through desolate years.

For months I suffered in silence and during that time Carry's proposal kept recurring more and more vividly. I came to feel that should I succeed I might penetrate the spirit world and find her.

One night I became aware of her presence in my room. I could almost see her brown eyes looking at me and I was sure I heard her voice urging me to attempt the experiment Carry had proposed. Again and again that feeling came to me until at last I told Carry we would make the experiment he desired. That was a month ago. Tonight we have undertaken it and as dawn comes this report will end. With it our story will be completed and I will follow Carry.

Even as I write, here in this silent laboratory I am driven by mad emotion, a translated longing which is thrust into my very soul-center by some terrific force that makes the air quiver about me.

Dawn, and will I see it? Yes, but from what sphere I know not. While strength lasts I must write, however, for in that alone is there peace. In this report alone can either of us live henceforward. May the world find our work good.

At eight o'clock we locked the laboratory doors, drew the blinds and faced each other. I shall never forget the expression on Carry's face. His piercing eyes seemed already penetrating the veil that shrouds the spirit world. Above that bulging forehead that always suggested clifflike ruggedness of mind, his shock of black hair tipped with silver looked unusually rumpled. The

firm thin lips upon which a smile so seldom appeared now curved in boyish anticipation as though he were in expectation of some great happiness.

"Davis," he said in a tone of eager delight, "tonight will go down in history and be forever memorable as the great time of scientific discovery."

"Yes," I answered, "and we will go with it if we live."

"What matter if we live or die? Man, we will be the same to the future. Come now, are you ready?"

He crossed to the large divan we had arranged in one corner, and sat down. Then, as if moved by a premonition, he looked around taking in every detail of the room that had framed his life work. Something in his eyes stirred me for I fancied I read a vague but certain knowledge in them that he was seeing it all for the last time; his books, the charts, our many instruments, and me.

"For Heaven's sake, Carry, don't look at me that way!" I realized as I spoke that I was nervous and agitated.

"Come on, Davis, let's begin," his even voice soothed me and he lay full length upon the divan.

"Before I hypnotize you"—I paused beside him—"what is it exactly you want me to do with your mind? I must be sure of what I am doing."

"Direct it into the unused nerve ganglia, set it to work there reliving the life in which that nerve was operative. Get its telepathic report of the experience. Keep it going down, down—till it passes out of nerve cells and is in cooperation with mere living protoplasm; and if need be, send it back of all life."

I met his unperturbed gaze. "Carry, old man, I'm afraid," I faltered brokenly. "There are things not even science in the interest of mankind dares touch, and the source of being—the origin of life, heretofore closed to our vision—is one. God is jealous of his mysteries."

"I am waiting, Davis."

Without a word we clasped hands and I sent him to sleep with the directions driven

into his sleeping mind like a sharp wedge of my will. It was as though an invisible arm of my soul reached into his and held it fast that it might be drawn back from its wandering—but alas, the figure is sad. The sense of security it created is now a flaming reproach, yet I went on with the work and shall go on with it still, till I have found my friend again.

THERE was a moment of tense silence and my straining mind caught no word from the soul of that daring explorer. Then my name flashed before my consciousness. We had finally established telepathic communication.

"Davis," a long pause; then in a swift short thought, "We can do it! I am deep in my own spinal cord. Is my face altering? Look closely and tell me. I must know at once."

"No, why?" I studied his calm features so reposed.

"I am occupying what is left in my nerve organism of the first biped life of my ancestry. I felt that I must be taking on his—their squat forehead and pointed brute nose."

I took a pen and began to make notes as he went on. It might be of some little value to submit a few of his reporting phrases verbatim.

I shall do so, hoping that they may aid future psychologists.

NOTES

I have not time left before I follow Carry, to revise these notes, therefore I shall merely submit them as taken. Before his statements in italics I have placed his initials. All else is comment of my own upon my feelings as I listened.

C. I find I can roar like a gorilla. Not one, but some gigantic beast like it, you know. No soul as such. Abounding energy. Ha-ha-ha! Laugh for sheer joy in life. Life, a great swell of impulses, mainly interpreted as—love of blood, hunger, passion, fighting.

As I received this I was suddenly gripped by a terror, for in that thought-message a new guttural quality of speech-

form had appeared, slightly blurring the words. I felt in some way chilled as though I confronted a hairy savage thing that reached for me with great muscular arms, eyes bloodshot and merciless.

C. "That's it."

Carry's own thought answered my feeling.

C. You've got the picture. Good. No soul, only great strength of muscle flooded with life. Don't know what life means as such. Going on now.

I waited, pen in hand beside the still form of my friend. My heart beat regularly. I was taken with tendencies to shiver, and then out of the silence a terrific roar burst upon my brain. It was so vivid I started, thinking it actual sound but Carry's lips were closed and no sound had escaped them. I gripped the pen and waited. After a moment I got his thought. It came from what seemed infinite distance, fainter than usual, and more confused.

C. Davis—greatest feeling of power. Big as a house. Must be deep in old life-forms like Ichthysaurus, you know. Scaly and brutal, raging all over like a shivering savage. Blood mad but no soul. Not much sensitivity. Mere raging life-stirred flesh.

There was a silence here, then again:

C. Great heavens, feel as if I could crush your whole petty civilization under one hand—no, not hand, flipper, Davis—big steel-clawed flipper. No soul, though. Brain mighty small and coarse. Not much spinal cord but lot of energy. Energy seems to be the essence of life, not soul. Motion, that's it—lust for movement.

For fifteen minutes I waited spellbound in that laboratory. When I was almost in despair and reached to touch Carry's face that I might bring him to himself, I fancied that he called, or rather felt his thought as it reached me.

C. Pterodactyl. Flying on wide, featherless wings. Immense heights. Teeth that clash together. Almost no brain and what a lust for extension of movement! Being itself becomes mere elaboration of motion. Flying, flying!

Of course I was familiar with these forms of which he spoke for it was necessarily part of my knowledge to understand the life history as geology reveals it, but that in no way reduced the sudden agony that sent my blood cold.

I became aware of a slight palpitation of the air in the laboratory as though unseen electric currents moved around me. A dim sensation of pain attacked my head, and vague impressions of a ruthless will opposing mine made me afraid. Was a stronger will, an unknown mind-force attempting to break my hold on Carry's mind far down in the dead past? I gritted my teeth and sent his name out with all brain power.

C. Here, I don't understand things. Mere glutinous mass of stuff, no nerves—life, yes, but vague, groping and not limited to organism. Mere life force everywhere among great masses of rolling protoplasm, water and blazing, burning heat. No eyes. No individuality—no thought. Not even instincts.

For Heaven's sake, tell me my body is real, alive and with you!

The last was a cry of anguish and I answered but my thought seemed blocked by that increasing force about me. I was not sure that he got it. If so, he made no reply.

His body was now stiff and cold yet his heart acted, and his respiration was even, though shortened.

I laid a hand on his breast to keep close watch of his heart, then I became aware that his flesh was changed—different in some inexplicable way, and I shouted aloud to him in terror.

JUST one more of these noted statements it seems advisable to include. The two or three others I have destroyed. It came to me after an interminable wait. All the tense nervous fear of a lost man had flooded me. I sat oppressed and white, for that unknown power had swelled in the room until it crowded me. The lights went out and yet I could see. There was no defined light such as we of the modern

world know, yet the room was not dark.

Every article in it seemed held, crowded by light whose essence was substance that could form itself around an object. I was shrouded in it and found movement difficult. My chest was heavy, and I gasped. While invisible, more terrible, was that gigantic throbbing will that seemed tearing at my own as I sought to hold to that of my friend much as a fighter seeks to separate an antagonist's grip from his throat.

C. Davis, unable to think. Lost beyond matter in the preworld time. Great swirling vortex of fire-mist, brilliant, light, awful, and charged with will, savage. Trying to drown me in fire. Can never reach body again. Going under. Goodby. If my soulless body still breathes, kill it, Carry.

As he ceased I was shaken as though some vicious hand had laid hold of my shoulder. I started to my feet. A ghastly pallor was spreading over Carry's face. His skin was hard, seamed and scaly.

I caught up an electric galvanizer and applied it to his chest. It sputtered, snapped into silence and was useless.

In despair I reached for a revolver we kept in the table drawer, while that dominating force seemed to be throbbing a rhythmic agony through me.

"Wait!"

I turned to meet the open eyes of the body on the divan. They were not Carry's eyes, for no intellect shone in their red fire depths. Only a rending fear was there looking out at me with eager hunger for aid, and his thickened blue lips moved clumsily as he spoke blotched, uncertain words without precision, as though an animal suddenly found tongue.

"I got back but not for long. Consciousness burned to nothing. Mere cinder of a soul, but I know what we want to know. The soul is a spark of Divine God—and God is, is—"

He ceased speaking, and his body jerked spasmodically. Before I could move, it twisted, writhed, became horrible—while over the features a series of changes passed in a flash. I saw them change from human

to beast features, ugly, misshapen, grim with hanging lips and great teeth, then onto the floor rolled what had been a man. I swear it was the long thick body of a serpent, red-eyed, terrible, with great rough scales that gave out a grating noise on the floor.

I could not move. That vibrating agony of power held me as though I were bound. Before my eyes it danced in a whirl of gleaming points, violet, red and white.

Through the glare of them I saw that serpent, then as I started, a wild laugh, Carry's laugh as it might have been had he gone mad, sounded through the laboratory. The thing on the floor grew dim; its outline grew less distinct, a film of gray shrouded it, and the whole became vaguely transparent. It spread, moved, and in a sudden small cloud was gone.

I was alone with that force in the room and a thunder of thought reverberated in my head:

In the day that ye eat of the tree of knowledge ye shall surely die.

I sank upon a chair and covered my eyes to shut out those swirling lights. My face was wet with perspiration.

I am alone in the laboratory, yet I know that I am not alone. With me is that power, and in it I know Carry still lives. I feel him beside me and he urges me to go up, up—as we agreed I should into the higher realms of spirit life.

I must obey for the force drives me. Is it a mockery? Am I, too, being deceived by the imagined spirit of Carry—that I may be destroyed? I cannot tell, yet I must try the experiment as planned.

One thing comforts me. I feel my wife near and I am assured that she will be waiting. More than that, I am a man of will. I shall arrange things so that if possible my hand will act unconsciously to my will and write what I discover though I, Davis, the soul, am separate from it.

I fear the terrible end Carry knew. I cannot, will not become the ghastly thing I saw last. To avoid it I have tied myself in this chair before the table. A rope is securely fastened under my arms and about

the chair. So long as I have arms I cannot fall.

Should they vanish I have prepared live wires from the attachments we have, and however I fall from this chair I will strike them.

At least I shall be burned away before that awful end overtakes me. I am ready now and will go by self-hypnosis.

It is made easy by the presence of Carry—if it is Carry who helps me. In my hand is a pen. I hope it writes on as I think.

I am going now, going, going—going to sleep.

HERE there was a break in the report as I found it and read it in the empty laboratory that morning after Davis had summoned me.

A large blot spread over the lower part of the page and below it a few uncertain lines ran slantwise down the page.

I could make nothing of them. On the next page letters appeared again, faint shaken letters, misshapen and uneven, but legible. I read on. In giving the report to the world I have thought best to rewrite this latter part keeping to Davis's own words but copying for the sake of legibility.

What he wrote seems to me more startling, more strange and possibly more terrible than the discovery made by Carry.

Certainly it is less encouraging; yet in it are paragraphs of great hope, bits of inspired beauty, as though the writer sang of glorious things, sublime truths and marvelous places.

CONTINUATION OF REPORT

AS I stand beside my own body here I can see the heavy blot where my pen fell as I went to sleep. Looking into my own face is a strange experience and suggests something to me which I have always suspected but now feel sure must be true.

For years I have entertained the idea that a man's appearance is directly related to his soul. It seems to me clear now, for

I am an unbodied spirit and a new power is mine. I can observe my unfleshed self as easily and as truly as I see my body tied in the chair. We resemble each other only dimly, yet there is something in the transparent skin, the even features, and the calm of that face that is due to my soul and to nothing else.

The truth becomes more definite as I recall Carry's face. I see now that he looked in the flesh quite as the structure of his soul compelled, but where is he? I cannot see him, although I was sure that I should do so as soon as I was freed from my material person.

Another strange fact here deserves comment before I state my exact position in the realm of the super-conscious. I can control my body even though I am separate from it. The delicate psychic fibers with which I operate that hand are clear to me and there is something exalting in the sense of power; yet I am not happy. Too much of mystery still shrouds the activities of this night. Still pulsing like a flaming artery through me is that dread force that lights the laboratory with such a weird glow.

Worst of all the thoughts that I see pass in my own head like shadows of flame is the sudden realization that I am alone.

Where is the great world of spirit? I stand here free, unbodied—yet I am alone and the four walls of the laboratory hold me. I must go on and up, for rest is impossible while I am without the secret of space that will enable me to find my wife and Carry.

I am moving now, going slowly toward the farthest wall and I find that those invisible soul tendons which manipulate my writing hand stretch as I move. They will reach across all the space of the universe, and I am able to go where I will among the stars—conscious that my body awaits me, alive, under my control, and well.

A great feeling of exhilaration swells within me, and I pass through the wall easily. I am master of the fourth dimension.

Below me the sleeping city spreads an

infinite pattern of dark squares edged in long lines of gleaming lights. Above the star-filled sky smiles blue and calm. I am soaring into it.

Since writing that preceding sentence a long lapse of time has occurred. To me it seems eternal, though I know it was but a few seconds. I am now in a form of consciousness superior to man. Where I am, I do not know, nor by what means I came, save that my will aided by that ever burning vital force has brought me here.

I hesitate to describe it, fearful lest the utter incredibility of the truth strikes whoever reads and causes denial.

Above all things let me warn against negations. They are the tragic soul crises into which one goes to destruction as Carry went. He denied the soul, and I know now that he is gone. Wiped out by the great will—and even his spirit is extinct, a waste cinder floating somewhere in bottomless chaos.

As for myself, I am alive with a joy that thrills me madly. I shall succeed, and my gain will reward the world with truth.

I am a dancing, whirling, conscious flame, hotter than fire, more brilliant than light, beautiful beyond words—and I leap up from nothing to nothing like a great burning tongue that lives without fuel. Not even space or time contains me. They lie below me there in that petty universe where my unsouled body writes at my command.

All the rare colors of the rainbow, summer sunsets, and the light-refracting dew are thrown off by my dancing soul of heat, and gleam around me in an iridescent sheen.

Vague harmonies stir in the center of my columned fire, and I am stirred to infinite yearnings. Now I am going higher, higher—and I change again. The raging heat diminishes, my colors fade. Dear Heaven, am I going out? Am I to end in nothing, like a fuelless spark?

No! I am in a glory of extreme exalted life. I am the essence of music, singing great arias of pure melody.

I know not how to explain my being,

save to say that I am the very soul of harmony, and everywhere about me tumultuous chords in crashing volumes not audible to the human ear ring vibrant through the worlds and stir the stars to action. Fine fabricated melodies weave in and out among the thundrous bass and I am part of it—conscious and alive, like the very inspiration of the universal hymn.

I must resort to figurative speech, for no words live that can portray the vital essence of the music that is a spirit.

I am a moving sound, glittering with rare beauty, and about me stars of chords and planets of melody swing through a sea of motion like dancing agonies of ecstasy. This is the bliss of far-extended soul, and ahead of me I know God waits to reveal—Himself. The knowledge comes in notes like cosmic flute tones and I swirl on and on. Motion, always motion and energy, are the very deeps that guide even as they were with Carry—but how different! One thing is sure. All things center about movement, and all things that are conscious move. I am motion that expresses itself in pure unmaterial sound.

Were I in the compass of the universe we know, I could say that I had gone millions upon millions of miles during the time I described these two states of being, but I am outside time and space moving toward God. I am more definitely aware of Him now, and there is a swift leap of yearning that changes ever and again to movement.

Movement grows more and more important. It is the essence of all things. I have

left the realm of sound and am movement, energy—conscious and swirling. I am force itself.

A dreadful fear has crept into my mind as I sweep on. I have ceased to exist as a form at all and am mere motion tearing on and on while I swirl in a circle like a tornado. It is ghastly, for I am not certain of things now. Try as I may to attain the ecstasy of a few minutes ago, I fail. Despair grows in larger and larger blackness while I am diminishing. That is tragic, for I have become a mere vortex ring, a swirling circle of force that gyrates about a vacuum. I want to return to the laboratory where I know my hand still moves at the dictation of my will, but it may stop soon.

I feel that giant-will trying to tear me from my body. It strikes at my will in an attempt to paralyze me into destruction. I am mad with motion, and—Heaven help me, I am nearing that same dread feeling Carry knew. I am mere fire mist, consciousness, swimming in fire, and a fire that shivers with savage will, rage, and desire.

If you could imagine all the energy of the world, all the yearning of the human race, all the savagery of life from the beginning become strong, leaping, dancing sparks of anger-conscious fire, then you will know what has occurred to me. I swim in it desperately, and there is no rest—no salvation. I shall go down in it and be lost. My body will be there or—I am mad; it will follow Carry. I see it all now. I, too, am lost to all!

Oh, the supreme folly of man! We are

a race of dreaming fools. All the high imaginative forces we have aspired to master are our very mockeries. I thought I was attaining God, my wife, and the peace of freed spirit. Instead I am battling agonizingly for life in my body. Imagination has been the curse of my days. I laughed at the glory of human life. I aspired to conquer soul.

There was Carry who denied, and I saw that he was gone as though he had never been. In my supreme egotism I warned against negation. I am wiser now, for like Carry I have crossed the last great rim of life and am beyond it at the heart of God.

I am sinking, sinking to death of mind in this fire, and I pray only that my body fall upon the electric wires in the laboratory soon, that it too may vanish from the world.

Agonies are endured in a moment and still I fight against the accursed savagery of will that beats me down. Wait!

I am back in my body staring at the sheets of written words. I know, remembering Carry, that my eyes are not the blue orbs of Davis but ghastly fear-driven flames. Soon I shall go out and the vibrating agony that beats in this room so wildly will be avenged.

Before that time I have one word to write. Luckily I write instead of talk, for my words would be blundering and bestial.

I have been to the heart and I know the soul is a part of God.

My arms are growing shorter! Heaven have mercy—my skin is heavy, coarse and snakelike!

HERE the report ended in a spreading black smudge. I studied it closely and I found the top of three letters dimly visible above the blot, while the lower part of two others showed. The letters were: Q, H, Z, R, F.

I need add very little for the purpose of complete clarity. The laboratory was, as I stated at the beginning, empty when I arrived, and the door was locked, the key being on the inside. I burst open the door.

These later sheets lay on the table in a disordered pile, while a pen had fallen to the floor where I found it beneath the table.

Not a trace of either man was discoverable save their hats which hung in a small closet against one wall. Around a chair before the table wires were carefully arranged and I found by testing that they were alive with great voltages of electricity.

Upon the back of the chair a rope hung. It was tied in a circle passing between the round pieces in the chair back.

A minute charred fragment of something not organic lay beside the chair.

I have investigated thoroughly and am able to assert that since my two friends left their apartment on the evening of February third and entered the laboratory, they have not been seen nor heard of.

Personally I have accepted their report, weirdly improbable as it seems, for one thing more supports their combined testimony. I examined the laboratory furniture minutely as well as its walls, floor and ceiling. All of them looked as though they had been edged in a flame of unusual quality such as an unknown light might be, for all were marked with slight char that was in odd ripples evenly rhythmic, as though the flame had leaped and throbbed as it burned.

Davis rails at imagination rather forcefully in one brief sentence. From my knowledge of him it seems probable that he intended to imply that Carry was right in denying the existence of the soul, and that his own experience was a mystical prolongation of imagination in fields where art operates.

I may be mistaken, for it is equally true that he was incapable by temperament of disbelief in spiritual things. Perhaps his statement means something never to be understood unless some other inquirer repeats his experience with more success.

What value this report may be to science is not clear to me, for I am an artist and not scientific. I submit it with the hope that the lives of my friends may not have ended in vain.