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Illustrations by: Cartier, M. Isip, R. Isip, Kramer and Schneeman

All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

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JOSHUA

by R. CREIGHTON BUCK

● A little story about a man who bought an old clock—a very old clock—and tried to set it to read the local time—

Illustrated by F. Kramer

“Good morning, sir. Mighty bad storm we’re having.”

Professor Mackee jerked his head up out of the depths of his overcoat and bobbed at the red-faced constable. *He* didn’t seem cold; maybe a person *could* get used to it after ten or twenty years in this God-forsaken place. He shiv-

ered. What a ghastly thought! One year in Aunt Agatha's frozen mausoleum was enough. He'd be damned if he stayed through another Maine winter, in spite of her idiotic will! She'd drawn it up herself, and it was full of tart, biting sarcasm.

I bequeath to my nephew, Arthur Quincy Mackee, who, I am to understand, is teaching English at some school in Alabama, the balance of my estate on the proviso that he live for the remainder of his life in my house in Maine.

(Signed) AGATHA QUINCY.

So here he was, at the age of fifty-three, spending a cold winter north of the Mason-Dixon Line for the first time in ten years.

A sudden gust of snow-laden air swept around him. Mackee shivered again and thrust his scrawny neck even farther into his coat collar. It was a vain attempt, for the soggy flakes squirmed their way inside in spite of all his efforts.

The house was as bad as the climate. It had turned out to be a museum piece, full of Colonial relics; some were still able to walk. These, he'd learned, were Aunt Agatha's servants. They came with the house. A bevy of house-broken ghosts would have been preferable. After the warmth and informality of Alabama, the cold austerity of Maine was too much. Entirely too much.

At the corner, Mackee stopped and peered through the flying snow at the signpost. He tugged at his hat and made his way down the street toward a large sign, creaking in the wind, on which were carved the words:

ANTIQUES

Isaac Laquedem, Prop.

The door slammed behind him, setting the little bell tinkling madly. He

shook the snow from his coat and pulled out a handkerchief to wipe the mist from his bifocals. The dumpy proprietor bustled from the rear of the shop.

"Good morning, Mr. Mackee. It's about the clock that you've come? Well, here it is, just like I got it."

Proudly he pointed to a massive paneled box bearing a multitude of clock faces. Obviously a very old clock, for the carvings were worn and the markings on the dials were almost effaced.

Mackee bent forward to examine it more closely. In appearance it resembled the elaborate clocks built by the seventeenth or eighteenth-century artisans. Some of them, he remembered, made clocks that showed the day of the month as well as the time of day. Perhaps this was one of those. Cautiously he inquired the price.

"Well, for you it's cheap. Ninety-five dollars."

Mackee swallowed and pulled out his checkbook. The habits of fifteen years on a teacher's pay were hard to break. He filled in the amount and gave it to the antique dealer with instructions for the delivery of the clock.

"Don't worry, Mr. Mackee. I'll bring it up personal, tomorrow morning."

Mackee wrapped his coat around him tightly, wished that his spare shanks weren't so thinly covered, and left the shop. Leaning against the icy wind, he slowly made his way homeward.

SURPRISINGLY, the next morning was clear. Mackee rolled out of bed, damned the cold floor of the room, shiveringly pulled on his clothes, and went down to breakfast. With the steaming oatmeal inside him, his outlook on things changed and he eagerly fell to work, shifting antiques around in the room he

called the "museum" until he had a suitable place for the clock. By eleven o'clock the workmen had come and gone and he was admiring his new acquisition.

Closer examination convinced him that the clock was unusual in more ways than one. The carvings on the panels definitely did not date from the England or France of the seventeenth or eighteenth century. They resembled more the Turkish or Arabic inscriptions he'd seen on exhibit at the university. Odder yet was the string of characters that surmounted the central panel, above the three large clock faces. They were unmistakably old Hebrew!

Shrugging his shoulders, Mackee went to work to remove the layer of oily dust that clung to the surfaces. On the front panel, the three clock dials were arranged in a triangle. The top one was marked into twelve divisions, probably indicating hours. At a rough guess, the ornate brass hands pointed to a few minutes before eight. The other two dials were divided into seven and thirteen sectors.

Carefully he finished wiping away the encrusted grime that had covered the front panel and turned his attention to the side panels. They were replete with oriental imagery. The only figures he recognized were ibis-headed Thoth and winged Asshur.

Mackee walked around the clock again and stepped back to admire it. Queer! It didn't look the same. His eyes narrowed as he tried to catch the annoying difference. His puzzled gaze fell on the top dial and he gasped. The hands now pointed to eight fifteen! The clock was still running! He bent over and placed his ear against the case. Not a sound. Perplexed, he tried to find a way of opening the clock. Nowhere

could he find a single sign that the case was meant to be opened. This *was* queer! A mechanism that ran without a sound and with apparently no provision for rewinding! Sounded like perpetual motion. Well, that better wait until he could get some expert. *He* certainly was no mechanic.

Curious, Mackee pulled out his watch. Three minutes of twelve. The old clock was only about eight hours too fast. Might as well set it. He reached out, took hold of the long minute hand and tugged. With a protesting creak that sent shivers trotting along his spinal column, the hand moved. Slowly he forced it backward. The brass pointer responded sluggishly, as though it were moving in a viscid fluid. Perhaps he should've moved it forward to twelve instead of backward. Too late now. He found himself squinting at the dial in his efforts to see the markings. They seemed to be getting more and more difficult to distinguish. In sudden comprehension, he ran to the window. The sky had become overcast again. Overhead it was night black. Toward the east there was a faint lightness; almost, he thought, like the first light of dawn. Shrugging, he dismissed the matter as no business of his. He vaguely recalled some mention in the Sunday supplement of an eclipse that was to occur soon. Let the scientists worry about that. He snapped on the lights and finished setting the clock.

The door to the museum swung open to admit the peering head of Hepzibah, the housekeeper.

"Your dinner's ready, professor. Mighty dark day, isn't it? Reminds me of the winter of '91. For two whole days you couldn't see the sun. Most everybody was snowed in. Mighty cold winter."

"Thanks, Hepzibah. I'll be right out."

MACKEE GLARED at the closed door and thrust his hands into the deep pockets of his jacket. She seemed to relish cold weather. And if there was one thing he hated, that was it. Winter. *Br-r-r-r*. What was it Shakespeare said? "Blow, blow thou winter wind, thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude." Bet he never felt a cold Maine wind!

Mackee glanced outside once more, into the bewildering blackness, then switched on the radio.

"—tesy of the Blue Label Baking Powder Co. Ike and Mike will come to you tomorrow at the same time. This is James McLiesh, speaking for Blue Label Baking Powder Co., and bidding you all a *schlurp!*—

"Special news flash! The Newfoundland Observatory has just released a bulletin on the strange darkness that has so suddenly caused a 'blackout' of almost the entire Western Hemisphere. Here is the bulletin: 'At 12:01 today the sun was observed to stop, reverse direction and rapidly sink toward the eastern horizon, where it came to rest and resumed its normal motion. Three minutes later, at 12:04, the sun changed direction again and disappeared below the horizon. No explanation is as yet forthcoming.'

"This station will keep you informed with up-to-the-minute flashes. We now return you to the scheduled program."

The subdued music of an orchestra filled the room. Mackee stood in the center of the rug as an expression of shocked dismay played fitfully across his face.

"It's incredible! Positively unbelievable!"

He ran his fingers through his stringy

hair and then, with faltering steps, he returned to the clock. He hesitated for a moment, rubbed his unsteady hands together, and began to turn the hands of the clock forward. When they once more pointed to eight twenty he took a deep breath and slowly turned around.

The electric lights seemed pale in the warm sunlight that beat in through the windows!

His brain whirled with the implications of his discovery. He'd done Edison one better! He changed day into night! But how did it work? A vague recollection of a legend he'd once read foamed to the surface of his mind for a moment and then was gone. His brow furrowed as he concentrated. The library at Cauldwell University. He'd been classifying a collection of books donated to the library. One rather dusty book—what was that title? Suddenly the fragments dropped into place. A page of printing drifted into focus.

Then did the Lord spake unto the craftsmen of Gehalemot and command them to construct a great temple, and in this temple shall they place his gift, the ikon of Chronos that was the ordering of the earth and the heavens. And they shall know that by this gift may they control the seasons, even unto the motion of the sun itself. And lo, the people did and they were amazed. Thus did the Lord God Jehovah overthrow the idolatrous priests of the sun-worshippers.

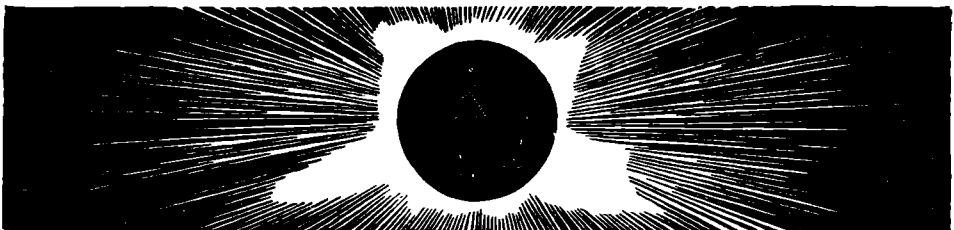
Perhaps that had not been a figurative parable! Perhaps it had been literally true! Of course, the clock must've been actually made by some scientist-priest such as the great legendary Kinar, the craftsman. A thousand different plans swirled through his brain. Edgar Perkins, fraternity brother, had been professor of physics at the university. Wire him to come up at once. He'll find out what makes it tick.

What might have happened if Agatha Quincy's house hadn't been drafty is hard to say. A prankish gust of icy wind whirled in a dervish dance and brushed lightly across the nape of Professor Mackee's moist neck. His long, bony nose wrinkled; he sniffed twice and then he sneezed! Not just once, but three separate and distinct sneezes! His face began to grow red, and the words he muttered might have shocked Hepzibah out of her respectability. For the first time in his life, Arthur Quincy Mackee had caught cold!

Visions of Alabama drifted through his mind. Alabama and cotton fields, and the sweet nostalgia of "Deep River" floating on the sultry air. Canna beds and hollyhocks. Warmth, summer.

Summer!

He ran toward the clock and then checked himself. The hands had been difficult to move. In order to change



winter into summer he'd have to turn the hands around nearly three hundred times! Entirely too slow. There ought to be some way to work it. Electricity? That was it! He'd buy an electric motor!

Mackee ran to the hallway, fumblingly pulled himself into his heaviest overcoat, yelled to Hepzibah to hold his dinner, and started off down the street.

NEXT DOOR, Miss Julia Parrish stared out of her window at the retreating figure of the usually sedate professor. Her curiosity aroused, she squashed her aquiline nose against the pane in order to see better. Suddenly the professor stopped and looked up at the sky. Julia followed his gaze but saw nothing. She shrugged her prim shoulders and turned back to her tatting. Most men were pixilated, anyway.

In a way, it was a good thing that Julia Parrish was slightly deaf. Otherwise the loud clap of thunder that followed might have startled her.

Maine Evening Post

Jan. 23—Professor Arthur Quincy Mackee died today as the result of being struck by lightning. The accident, called by the coroner an "act of God," occurred a few minutes after the strange phenomenon that caused darkness over the whole Western Hemisphere for a period of some ten minutes today. Witnesses of the accident said that the sky was clear at the time the bolt struck. Professor Mackee moved to this city a year ago after resigning from the faculty of the University of Alabama. He was a nephew of the late Miss Agatha—

Maine Evening Post

Feb. 6—The antique collection of the late Professor Mackee was sold at auction today. The bulk of the collection was bought by an antique dealer in the city, Mr. Isaac Laquedem.

A quaint old clock was purchased by a Mr. L. G. Jehova of Kansas City.

THE END.