

Weird Tales

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Contents for November, 1926

- Cover Design E. M. Stevenson
Illustrating a scene from "The Peacock's Shadow"
- The Peacock's Shadow E. Hoffmann Price 580
A tale of devil-worship and the Adytum of Darkness—a mystery story of graphic action and exotic imagery
- The Star Shell (Part 1) George C. Wallis & B. Wallis 597
A four-part weird-scientific serial about a thrilling voyage to the planet Jupiter
- November A. Leslie 618
Verse
- The Parasitic Hand R. Anthony 619
A terrific life-and-death struggle between a living man and a hand that groped among his vitals

(Continued on Next Page)

(Continued from Preceding Page)

- The City of Spiders**.....**H. Warner Munn** 625
A complete novelette of shuddery horror and eery fascination that will remain long in your memory
- The Creature of Man**.....**Oscar Cook** 647
A Chinese tale about a cruel mandarin and the terrible deception that was practised by his majordomo
- The Ode to Pegasus****Maria Moravsky** 659
A dream-tale of the winged horse, and the yearnings of a boy to fly in the sky
- The Fiend of the Marsh**.....**R. E. Lewis & Martha M. Cockrill** 663
The haunted marsh-woods finally gave up the dread secret that had terrorized the community
- The Tenth Commandment****Victor Rousseau** 677
The third in a series of stories, each complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky, "The Surgeon of Souls"
- The Assault Upon Miracle Castle**.....**J. M. Hiatt** 684
Into one of the "holes in space," into another dimension, stepped a horde of Moorish warriors
- For Clytie****Binny Koras** 689
Verse
- Across Space (Conclusion)**.....**Edmond Hamilton** 690
A three-part weird-scientific serial—strange beings under Easter Island pull the planet Mars from its orbit
- The Dog-Eared God**.....**Frank Belknap Long, Jr.** 699
There were strange kings in the old forgotten days in Egypt, and they would not brook irreverent modern prying
- The Caves of Kooli-Kan**.....**Robert S. Carr** 704
Verse
- Weird Story Reprint**
No. 17. Ligeia**Edgar Allan Poe** 705
This is the story that Poe himself considered his supreme prose masterpiece
- The Eyrie** 715
A chat with the readers

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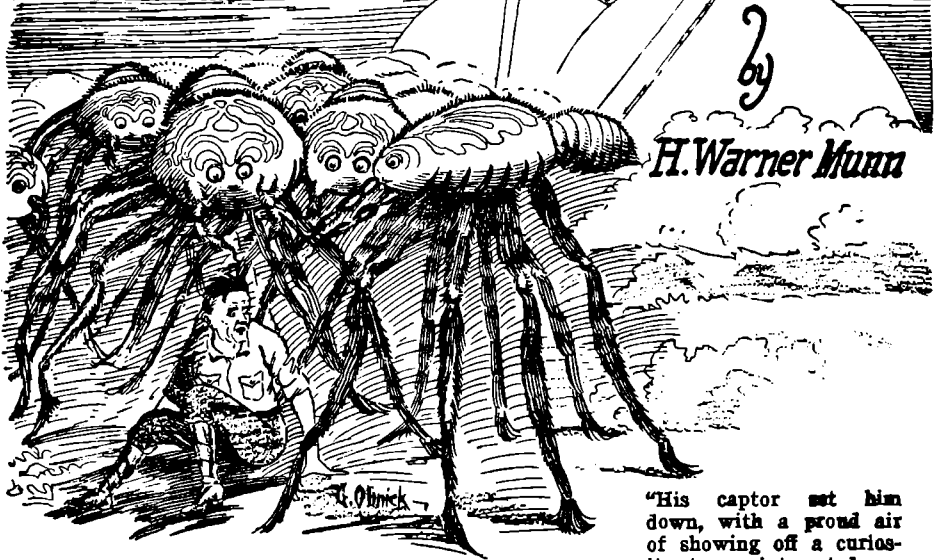
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The CITY of SPIDER



by
H. Warner Munn

"His captor set him down, with a proud air of showing off a curiosity to an interested audience."

IT WAS on the 12:30 train from Athol to Boston that I met the man with the beady eyes. I mention the eyes particularly, for they were the distinctive features; it is very odd that they are all that I can remember of his appearance. Vaguely I recall that he wore a gray suit, rather light for our changeable November weather, but even that is uncertain.

It was a cut-rate day, with a slash in prices for an excursion, and the coach was well filled. He got on at Gardner, with a small crowd that hustled him down the aisle and washed him beside me, so bewildered that without bothering to ask me if the other half of my seat was taken, he plumped himself down with a relieved sigh.

"Rather cool," I thought, and without knowing it I must have spoken aloud, for he nodded brightly with a quick little snap of his head, saying, "Yes, isn't it?"

W. T.—2

Amused at the natural mistake, I determined, since he was so friendly, to strike up an acquaintance to while away the tedium of a three-hours ride and incidentally perhaps to learn something that might be of value to me in a novel I am writing. Every man has in him one good story if it can only be dug out, but some are buried pretty deep.

I forget our first words, but we exhausted the subject of the weather rather thoroughly and were pleasantly drifting into a discussion of our fellow passengers, when I noticed a movement on his sleeve.

It was one of the common barnspiders that are so often seen festooning rafters with velvety soft hangings of dove-gray. Probably chilled by the cold wind outside, the warmth of the car had brought it out of its concealment to reconnoiter.

A spider gives me the creeps, now more than ever that I know why, but then as always I felt a surge of revul-

sion, struck it off his arm and crushed it with my foot.

He was smiling oddly when I looked up. "Do you know why you did that?" he said.

"Because I hate the things!" I answered. "Always did."

"I think the word you mean is 'dislike,'" he replied, "but I can truly say that I *hate* them, for I know more about them in one sense than any other living man on earth today. Shall I tell you why?"

"Do!" I said, smiled a secret smile within me, and prepared to take mental notes, for I scented a story at last.

I. INTO UNKNOWN COUNTRY.

"MY NAME is Jabez Pentreat," he began; "my mother was English and my father a Welsh miner. They moved to this country in 1887, two years before I was born, as work was scarce and living but a bare existence in the old country. Here they found it but little better, although with more ambition they might have become moderately well-to-do. When I was young, things were in a bad way for us, father worked spasmodically, while mother took in washings to tide us over hard times. We never had much money.

"I went to grade school until I was fourteen, and was then obliged to leave in order that I might bring in a few dollars by my bodily labor. Brains counted for nothing in the manufacturing town where I lived. It was one of father's favorite sayings that 'Book-larnin' never did nobody no good!' So you see I was up against it. Three years later I ran away from home.

"I found work in Boston in connection with a fruit-importing company, and learned something of the world, as represented by the harbors of South America.

"In one of those little coast towns I met a man who was to change my

life. You have heard of Sir Adlington Carewe?"

"The man who astounded the scientific world with his masterly monograph on *Possibilities of the Insect World?*" I asked.

"That was he," answered the man with the beady eyes. "To him I am indebted for all my knowledge. At his own expense, I finished school and entered college. At his desire, I concentrated upon botany, entomology and other kindred studies, for he hoped that I should take his place in the line of discoverers when he was gone.

"Well, I can say with pride that his pains were not wasted upon me, although he is not where he can appreciate the changes that time has wrought upon that crude roustabout that I was then.

"I understand that he is on the west coast of Africa at present, experimenting with the higher forms of apes.

"South America always fascinated me with its magnificent opportunities for studying insect life. It is a foreing-house for vegetation, and in its dank, steaming jungles, for thousands of square miles untouched by white feet, who knows what marvelous things may exist, all unknown to the outer world? I have found a few, but I have only skimmed the edges and never expect to learn much more, although I leave again in the spring.

"Have you ever paused to think of the swarming life that goes on day after day, beneath your feet, busy with its own affairs, as you with yours? Another world goes about its business of loves and hates, of living and dying, of little engineering works as important to them as a Brooklyn Bridge or a Panama Canal to us, although one step of your foot can destroy the work of days.

"There are grass-eaters and there are carnivores that prey upon them,

and others that in turn feed upon the slayers. There are cities in miniature, slaves and masters, workers, idlers, miners and aviators, and all this teeming life may be in your own back yard, unnoticed except when your wife complains because the ants persist in finding the sugar-bowl, and the flies 'just will get in somehow.'

"And remember, this life is alien to us. Although it is so similar to us in some ways, it is a world in itself, far from humans. One writer, I have read, remarks in a joking way that it may even be alien to this planet.

"Here is a thought that I would like to have you ponder. While all other insects have their appointed prey, each feeding upon one certain enemy, herbivore or plant and rarely touching other types of food (thus by the wise provisions of nature keeping down the swarming life that otherwise would overwhelm humanity), the spider feeds indiscriminately upon all!

"The spider! Dread ogre of the insect world! How he is feared! Not only by his prey, but also by man, against whom, by reason of his size, *and that alone*, he has but little power.

"And South America is the insect paradise. Nowhere else will you find such impenetrable morasses, such dank and steamy jungles, such unbelievable monstrosities, in both vegetable and animal kingdoms.

"But I digress. To my tale, then, and think your own thoughts. I ask for no comment or interruption.

"In search of a sable butterfly, with a coffin outlined in white upon each wing, of which only one collector has ever secured a specimen, I came at last to Ciudad Bolivar, which lies in Venezuela.

"In this town I obtained eight native Indians, who were invaluable at times and nuisances at others. We

searched in that mysterious mountain land of Guayana, entering where the Caroni River empties into the Orinoco. The Caroni's waters are combed by cataracts and rapids, but are well-known for fifty miles,—here the dense woods begin and man's knowledge ends, for excepting myself, I believe no white man has ever explored those forests.

"It is one of the mystery lands of Venezuela, the never-never lands where almost anything can happen and usually does. Usually a white in that section is rather a being to be taken care of, as white men are more valuable in a gift-producing way alive than dead; but there are tribes of nomadic Indians, head-hunters by choice, that roam the dismal forests, and to them the head of a white man, shrunk to the size of an orange, is their Kohinoor or Great Mogul! Not far away live the Maquitaes, a tribe of blonds, almost white, and at a greater distance, the Guaharibos, whose savagery has never allowed the head-waters of the Orinoco to be discovered.

"My Indians sometimes heard their drums growling to one another far away in the steamy tropic nights, but they came always from the north and south, never from the west toward which we were pressing. On the sixth day from the river, we heard them behind us, but still far away; and as we cooked our meals in the *tambo*, a rude shelter from the night dews, such as the rubber hunters farther south construct, sometimes we wondered why they were upon all sides but never before.

"On the ninth day we heard nothing but the ceaseless drip-drip-drip into the swampy ground and occasionally the roar of some dead forest giant crashing to earth, choked to death by parasitic vines that hid the tree from sight. That night the hunters came back empty-handed. We

had not seen any animal all day, not even the usual troop of monkeys that howled down curses at us, swinging along under the forest roof, dropping fruit skins and nuts upon us and warning all life for miles that strangers were at hand.

"We made hungry camp, for we traveled light and my men were disposed to grumble because we were in unknown country and no one knew what lay before us.

"The black butterfly was given up now, but I determined to press on three days more, and then to give it up as a bad job and go back, for I already had enough specimens to repay me for my trip.

"Before I curled up in my hammock, I shook it to dislodge any insects that might be in its folds, and out dropped a large spider, the size of my hand. I smashed it with my boot and at the same time saw another. As I struck that one, screams arose from my Indians and they dashed for the fire. One was literally covered with the vermin and dropped before he reached the light. In a moment we loaded the blaze with brush and had a bonfire that roared six-foot flames.

2. PRISONERS OF INSECTS

"**Y**ou can not imagine the scene that met our sight! The things covered the ground and trees all about us. A carpet of gray was moving and rustling continually back from the light, and as the flames shot higher we could see that the twigs and branches hung low with their weight. Now and then one would drop with a plop on the ground as the light struck and scuttle over the backs of others till it found a place to rest. My hammock was now filled with the crawling things as a saucer is heaped with berries, sickening gray creatures with jet-black eyes that

glistened hungrily, and all intently watching us.

"We could hear a kind of low clicking and chittering as they opened and closed their mandibles. It seemed as though they were talking to one another while they waited for us, in a curiously knowing way, and those pinpoint eyes watched and gloated most obscenely expectant.

"The body of the dead man was just outside the circle of light, and all night a swarming heap of spiders surged over and around it, while my Indians fed the fire for their lives, and race and caste were forgotten as we huddled, massed about the fire, sweat raining from us in the terrible heat.

"Morning came at last, and as the sky began to brighten, the gray horrors grew thinner until only a few stragglers still roamed near the clean-picked skeleton; and when the sun rose they too crept to hiding places, leaving only the white bones to tell the story of that frightful night.

"When all were gone, my Indians begged me to turn back. I refused, although my own inclinations pointed in that direction. I kept bold face and pointed out that by going west we would avoid the savages and leave this dreaded spot behind us. My head man looked grim, but said nothing. So on again! On into the jungle, fighting our way through thick tangled undergrowth, followed by dense clouds of mosquitoes and gnats, the only life we saw that day, besides ourselves.

"About noon, although we could not see the sun through the riot of vegetation, we found a small stream of clear water which abounded in small fish.

"We dined royally on fish and fruit, in the midst of a deathlike stillness. Not a leaf rustled, no birds sang, not a monkey or any other animal did we see that day, and in the

same breathless hush we made our tent and last *tambo* that evening, having covered perhaps fifteen miles during the day.

"Keeping in mind the former night, we selected a clear open space for the erecting of our shelters, brought in an immense quantity of wood and sat around the fire in that charmingly complete and unqualified democracy of man when a common danger threatens.

"Before long, just as the drums snarled faintly to the east, a little black and red creature scuttled out of the wood, hustled down to the water's edge and drank daintily. I recognized one of the most venomous of the arachnids, usually the size of a silver dollar, but this specimen was easily five inches across his scarlet-barred body. I determined to have it, and cautiously loosened my butterfly net from my pack. This breed is very timid, although its bite is so deadly, and I crept up on it with the utmost care.

"About five feet away, it saw me, and instead of darting away, it jumped in my direction. Out of pure fright, I crushed it flat, and the scenes of the night before were repeated almost identically, but now there were many of the new species mingled with the gray demons that had dragged down the bearer. It seemed as though there were concentric circles of varying types, arranged about a central point, and the nearer we approached the center, the more horrible and huge grew the individuals that composed each belt. I began to wonder what lay farther on!

"Again we shivered around a roaring fire, speaking only in low whispers. The natives believed that our besiegers were forest devils, enraged at us for intruding into their private fastnesses.

"Several times I feared for my life that night, for dark looks were cast

at me, and twice there were those who advised strongly that I should be flung out to the filthy things as a sacrifice. But they could not quite screw up their courage to that point, for they knew that I would not submit tamely, and they feared that the taste of blood might enrage the creatures into a rush which would wipe out the survivors.

"A sleepless night! A night of horror, beneath gloating, incredibly malignant eyes! A night that was a cross-section of eternity!

"**A**BOUT two hours before morning, I dozed off, being startled awake again almost instantly by yells of fright. Before me just outside the firelight crouched a gigantic monstrosity, hairy and tremendous. Its bloated abdomen was barred with black and silver, the head almost hidden from sight by a yellow mop of fur, from which projected jet-black mandibles, furiously vibrating as it watched us through red, vicious eyes.

"Behind those eyes, I sensed a personality, keenly intelligent. I found myself waiting for the frightful thing to speak and was horrified at the thought. You can not credit, I know, but I who *saw* am telling you the truth. I believed then, that fearful spider was as intelligent as you or I, in a more limited way, and I can assure you it is an absolute fact that the other hideous vermin acknowledged it as their superior!

"It stood at least a foot and a half high and I should judge that it would have tipped the scales at about twenty pounds. It walked about the fire at a safe distance, and carefully observed us twice from all angles. Then it moved off in a westerly direction and we saw the others draw back from in front of it respectfully, leaving a broad path, down which it passed, and they closed in solidly again.

"The same actions took place as on the preceding morning. Scatteringly they vanished with the dawn, leaving a few stragglers that seemed to regret the necessity that drove them off.

"There was no question now about what we should do. Rather than spend another such night, we would have braved a thousand savages. About 10 o'clock in the forenoon therefore we started back, but we had gone too far. Before we had gone a mile on our back-trail, we heard rustling in the bushes and crepitant pattering as of many raindrops, while sometimes we could see small gray bodies bounding along beside us.

"Still we pressed on. The march became a trot, and the trot a wild disorderly rout. We flung away our packs, our weapons, and our clothes in a mad dash for anywhere, but away! We mounted a small knoll and looked back. A sea of gray, black and red lapped around us, like an island almost level with the water, over which the waves threaten momentarily to break. Slowly from all sides they crept in, rising higher like the chill waters of death. We broke clubs from the trees and prepared to die.

"Then came that horror of the night, hustling on from the west, with five companions that matched it in size. The resistless torrent that was just lapping over the crest of the knoll stopped and receded. The six came closer, scrutinized us and started back down the bank, pausing about ten feet away as though we were expected to follow.

"We did! We all had the same thought at once, to kill the most hideous ones and then as many more as we could before we died. So we ran down the slope, and the man in front of me crashed his club through the largest of the six.

"Instantly we were covered from head to foot with crawling insects,

and as we rolled over and over, shrieking and howling with fear, feeling the spiders pop and squelch beneath our weight like ripe plums, an acrid nauseous stench arose.

"As we lay there, half dead with sick terror, I noticed that no more were on me, the masses had withdrawn, and one of the larger insects stood very close to my face, on each ebony mandible a drop of venom glistening. Perhaps it was our first visitor, but they all looked alike to me.

"I jumped up. The Indians lay on a red noisome carpet of crushed bodies and we were all covered with a pulpy mess. One by one they stood up, and we discovered that not one of us had been bitten. Then the hordes opened invitingly again a westward path, and we walked down it as prisoners. The prisoners of insects!

"But one stayed behind. He was the man who had destroyed the large spider. Apparently at a signal, the mass closed in about him, cutting him off from the rest of us. He tried to run to us, as they forced us down the trail, but in an instant he was a staggering bellowing heap of vermin, that tottered a few steps and went down. Before we were out of sight, his howls had become moans, and we knew what the end would be.

"So with one of the great, yellow-headed brutes in the lead, one at each side of us, and two bringing up the rear, we came again to the fatal *tambo* number 10 and passed westward, following the brook, the swarms surrounding us on all sides, as thickly packed as leaves.

3. THE SPIDER KING

"ABOUT a mile farther on, the brook emptied into a small river. This we followed down the right-hand bank, till the middle of the afternoon, when we struck a well defined path, hard beaten by much travel.

"The throng of gray spiders now began to disappear, having reached their farthest boundary, the five black and silver guards still remaining, and many of the red and sable fellows. But when a short time later, the path was barred by an immense crowd of frightful monsters, similar to those that guarded us, the small spiders also returned to their own zone.

"Just as dusk was falling, we marched out of the jungle into the open, and, surrounded by hundreds of silver-barred brutes, were forced down an incline into a valley. It was bare of vegetation, and in the center stood several stone buildings clustered about a larger and more pretentious edifice. These were windowless and doorless, being entered through a trap in the flat roof. They made me think of the nests of trap-door spiders.

"As we neared these buildings, a jaguar, or *tigre*, as the natives term it, came racing down the valley, and behind it poured a hideous mob that hid the ground from sight beneath a palpitant, undulating surface that made my skin crawl to watch. He staggered nearer as though he sought the protection of man, and I saw that his tongue hung out as he panted in the last throes of exhaustion. On the beast's back rode a large spider, which urged the poor animal on to death, and as they reached the nearest building, sank its poison into the beast's spine, and *El Tigre* dropped like a stone.

"Now we saw a forecast of our own fate. It was plain that we had been brought to this gathering place to be butchered. Meat on the hoof, less troublesome to bring than if it were dead!

"A wave of frightened animals dashed up, a chattering monkey or two, many hares, snakes that writhed in agony, half crippled by bites and dragged along by their captors, liz-

ards that hissed with mouths wide open. The lizards were the only ones that fought.

"Then from the western valley wall, another herd poured down, a great anaconda coiling beside a cluster of peccaries closely bunched together and squealing with terror, and behind all a swarm of hunters.

"Never before had I seen so many different breeds of spiders dwelling in amity with one another, and again I had the impression that these were intelligent, reasoning beings hunting together for the good of the many, and as far above the ordinary spider as the Anglo-Saxon is above the Australian Bushman.

"Now we were gathered in a cluster about the stone huts, hunters and hunted, a motley crew herded from all points of the compass over a twenty-mile radius, and the spiders set up a vast clacking of mandibles and emitted little hungry yearning cries.

"In answer, I heard thuds on the low roofs as the trap-doors fell back, and from each structure crawled a creature that dwarfed our captors into insignificance. It was a disgusting, heart-stopping sight, and our stomachs retched as we saw eight enormous spiders, each the size of a horse. But it was not their incredible size and filthiness, nor their bloated bodies which betokened an unthinkable age, that so horrified our souls! It was the look of an incredible, superhuman knowledge within their eyes, a knowledge not of this earth or era, a look as they saw us that might shine in the eyes of Lucifer, conscious of a kingdom or a world that had been gained, ruled and lost! And I knew that they looked upon us as an upstart race, born to serve, that had by a freakish accident turned the tables on our masters.

"This, I say, I read in their eyes, but my memory may be colored by the things I later *knew*.

"The monsters pounced down, selecting the choicest foods before them. One seized the carcass of a deer and bore it to the roof-top, mummbling down its juices, which would soon leave it a dry mummified husk of bones and hide. Another selected a large peccary or wild pig, and a third chose a savage lizard that killed three of the black and silver guards before it was stung into helplessness.

"A man was snatched from my side, shrieking as he was dragged to the roof-top and down into the building, his cries cut short by the shutting of the trap.

"Then one took me by the side and I gave myself up for dead. I have read of men that have been caught by lions, clawed and bitten, but feel no pain till long after they have been rescued. So it was with me. I felt neither pain nor fear as I was borne to the roof as a mouse is carried by a cat, but only regret that I might have done so many things that now I should never live to do.

"The creature dropped me upon the stone roof and inspected my clothing, which seemed to puzzle it. Then with a talon, it felt of my skin, whose whiteness I do not doubt was unfamiliar. Daintily and with exceeding care, it sank its hollow fangs into my arm and commenced the drinking of my blood. I felt no pain, only a haze before my eyes and a giddiness as I fainted.

"UP FROM an unfathomable abyss of sleep I swam, cleaving my way to consciousness with mighty strokes. I opened my eyes and saw that I still lived.

"I was lying on the roof with the eight horrors around me. The sun was set like a jewel, upon a mountain top, nearly at the day's close. The valley was a shambles, covered with spiders gruesomely feasting.

"One seemed to be communicating

with the others. He was the largest of all and appeared to be in power, so that later I dubbed him King. This was the one that had chosen me and had, curiously, not finished his meal.

"Now one at a time, each came up, placed its fangs upon my wounded arm and tasted of my blood. When all had done this, there was another silent colloquy, and finally at some mysterious signal, several of the guards in silver took me off the roof, half carrying, half dragging me to another building, into which I was dropped and the door closed down.

"The air inside was fresh and pure, ventilated through the cracks in the rude walls. A dim light that seeped in revealed that there were no furnishings in the room except a low dais in one corner, obviously built for one of the great spiders, and a runway that slanted from the floor to the roof door. The interior was swathed in webs, so thickly hung that it seemed a tapestry. I tore down part of this, to admit more light, but the sun sank below the mountains.

"I slept a dreamless sleep, upon the dais, getting what consolation I could from the thought that tomorrow was another day, and at any rate I was seeing things that had not been seen before.

4. INQUISITION

"I WOKE with a start. The light of morning poured down through the open trap, but as I was considering the advisability of climbing up the runway, a large body filled the opening and backed down like a cat descending a tree. Half-way down, the spider king reversed ends and came head first, sliding down the polished slide, worn smooth by many great bodies.

"I stood up, dizzy with the pain of my wounded arm, which had begun to fester overnight.

"The monster approached, took my arm in his mandibles and apparently observed that it was enormously swollen, for he shifted his hold and cleaned out the wound with a talon, afterward injecting something by means of his hollow mandibles. The pain lessened and in three days the swelling was gone and I was well on the road to recovery. After this natural antiseptic had commenced its work, my captor exuded a quantity of raw web material from one of his triple-jointed spinnerets, and placed the sticky mass upon my arm, where it dried and hardened.

"He then stared unblinking into my eyes for several minutes, and again I had the impression of a mighty intelligence in that loathsome carcass that wished to communicate with mine. Finding that I made no response, the king urged me toward the runway by shoves, and with his assistance I managed to reach the roof and looked around me.

"The day was fair. Not a living thing moved in the valley, except a few of the guards busy dragging away the skeleton of a sloth. None of my Indians were visible, but I guessed their fate. All had perished in the night, and I was the only survivor.

"The king carried me to water, his fangs gripped in my clothes, and I drank deeply, after which I was carried back to the hut, and dropped in like a sack of meal. About an hour later, the trap opened, and a live agouti dropped in, and the door fell.

"I wondered if I was supposed to eat the little rabbitlike animal, but I wasn't hungry enough for that, so I lay down upon the dais and nursed my throbbing arm, while my fellow prisoner hid under the runway and the morning dragged along to mid-day.

"The spider king appeared a second time and investigated my condi-

tion. When he saw that the wound was not so angrily inflamed, he eyed me gravely, with a sage air of pondering the case, for all the world like a little German doctor of my acquaintance. I almost expected to hear him say, 'Ach, dot is goot!'

"Again he assisted me to climb the polished slide, and upon the roof I found the other monsters. My captor set me down, with a proud air of showing off a curiosity to an interested audience, and squatted down where he could look into my eyes.

"I observed that the entire eight were males and wondered whether there were others in the buildings. If so they must be frightful indeed, for the female spider is usually larger and more ferocious than her mate, and often uses him as food when other dainties run low in the larder.

"Engrossed with such thoughts, I failed to notice at first that objects around me were growing hazy and vague in outline. It was as though gauze curtains were being lowered between me and the spiders. They dimmed until I strained my eyes to see them, then another curtain descended and the world went dark.

"IT SEEMED that inside my skull the brain began to itch (I can think of no better simile), as though a light tendril of cobweb had been laid across it. Cautiously searching, the feeler groped in the convolutions of my brain, an intangible finger tickling until my skin crawled and my hair rose. Occasionally it paused with a firm pressure, and at this I saw bright flecks in the dark and heard a crackling, like an electric current leaping a spark gap. Then suddenly, connections were established, my mind and the spider's were *en rapport* and my memory was probed and read like an open book by the spider king. I felt a great loss of

energy, as though my life forces were being sapped.

"Of what the king learned from me, I have a very slight knowledge. In the light of later discoveries, I suppose that he obtained very concise information about the outer world, but only fragments of scenes leaked to me through the gray fog that shrouded my brain.

"Once, I remember, I was reading in a picture-book, learning my alphabet under the guidance of an elder child. I had not seen or thought of that child before for years, but now her face with all its freckles was as clear before me as the book from which I read. Then the vision was wiped away and again the gray mist shut in. Next I was walking the crowded streets of a city. I recognized Times Square in New York, I paused to speak to a friend that approached me; the meeting had taken place long ago, but I wonder if you can understand this? While we were conversing, I entertained the most cannibalistic thoughts. Literally, I regretted that I had not sprung at his throat and devoured that man, and he was one of the best friends that a man has ever had. I could not conceive how I had missed such a wonderful opportunity. To roam for days in crowded cities, with wonderful food all about me and never to feast, when it could have been obtained so easily!

"Again the fog closed. I realized that those thoughts had been not mine, but the spider king's.

"I was reading in a library, reading of people. Other people walked by me, sat beside me, brought me books. Such a wealth of delicious food,—in the outer world! Come! I shall go there! Never again shall I look with jaded eye upon my neighbor. He is sweet, he is dainty, he is nutritious, there is a peculiar savor about him that no other animal

possesses! To the hunting grounds then, where there is meat enough for all!

"But what do I say and think? All is a lie! There are no people, no libraries, no books. There is nothing but a vast sea of clouds, of spiraling vapors, in which I float, a being smaller than the atom! There is a sound of many singing, a low and melancholy chant. If I can understand the words, I shall be free. Hush! Let me listen closer. Now the song is nearer, a wild unearthly chant, and now the voices strengthen and now the words are clear! And now I *see* a vast concourse of people, with skins the hue of brass, and they float from out the mists, while outstretched are pleading hands, hands of men, and chubby baby hands, beautiful well-kept hands of young and lovely women, and wrinkled, sallow hands of the very old! Hands that point me out, as I float lost in eddying vapors, hands that clench in anger, hands that plead and entreat in a language of their own, while their owners sing words quite different. All the universe seems a tangled knot of hands that twist and twine! Oh God! And all the voices sing in tones of dolor and of wo:

"All the suns are impotent to succor us,
In a vast dungeon barred with ever-
 shafting rain;
When a silent people of spiders infamous
Have come to weave their filaments
 upon our brain.

"But the knotted hands and fingers, as they squirm and tangle, command with many voices: 'Avenge us! Avenge us!! Vengeance!!!' And as I swear that I will, I break through the clinging mists and find myself upon the stone roof in the city of spiders!

"With a start, I realized that the last vision had been given to me *alone*. The spider king had no inkling of my command, or of my ac-

ceptance! How did I know this? I can not tell. I only knew with surety, that I possessed *one* secret from my jailers.

IT WAS dusk again. From the western wall began to pour the hunters, driving their prey to the slaughtering grounds. The king carried me to the hut, and dropped me in. The trap closed.

"I had spent almost six hours in a trance, and I wondered what these beings had learned in that time, besides the scraps that I had retained. I felt empty, not only physically, but mentally, as though all my cherished knowledge had been brutally stolen and nothing had been put in its place. But I ran over my memories, and I seemed normal. It was a wild and uncanny experience.

"Outside was a pandemonium of shrieks and howls. The roar of some gigantic animal boomed close to my hut and the wall trembled. The little agouti crept out from under the runway and cuddled its head in my lap. It was shivering in an agony of terror. I stroked it, and it shuddered violently but nudged closer.

"A strident clicking like locusts outside, and then again the eery wail of a jaguar. It was filled with plaintive amazement, as though the beast could not credit what was happening to him. Ah, strike with your heavy paws, *El Tigre*, fight on, oh mighty one! The master of the jungle at last has met *his* master, and *El Tigre* roams the forest nevermore!

"A long hiss, and I knew that another of the valiant lizards was taking toll amongst his butchers, but there were no more hisses, so the sequel was plain.

"The dull roar of combat died away, leaving only isolated squeaks as a herd of wild pigs was brought down, somewhere in the valley. And then nothing, for when a spider dines,

he does so quietly and without undue disturbance.

"A few minutes later, a large piece of meat was flung in. I did not inspect it too critically, but fell to at once. It was raw, of course, but I was ravenous, and a hungry man that has not eaten for nearly three days feels a surge of appetite for almost anything that seems fit for food. True, I had not killed the agouti, but I had been so feverish with my wound and the shock of my captivity that I had then no desire for food.

"I slept upon the dais, until a beam of moonlight struck through a chink and lay across my eyes. I began to worry about my chances for escape, until I could no longer rest. I went to the opening, and looked out. It was a beautiful moonlit night, the valley as far as I could see was bare. It brought a plan into my head and I tore down much of the clinging webs, until I had exposed the lower foundations of the hut. As I expected, the large boulders were filled in by small stones. I worried some of these loose, until I had opened a passageway large enough for a small man, but as I stooped to remove the last stone, the little agouti, seeing an opening to freedom, dashed past me and out upon the greensward. It had not gone ten feet from the hut, when a black and silver ghost was after it, and when it doubled to return, several more heaped themselves upon it.

"Very quietly, I replaced the stones and wedged them tight: there was no hope of escape at night for me. Well, one can always sleep if his nerves are iron, and finally I dozed off, a philosophic prisoner.

5. THE FARTHER VISION

EACH morning, the spider king carried me to water, and each night I was fed. How I grew to loathe raw meat, and how I yearned

for green food, milk and salt! Some nights I dreamed about salt, white mountains of it, which I walked over on snowshoes and slid down upon toboggans and skis, every once in a while reaching down and scooping up great handfuls of it which I swallowed with relish. Often I awoke, to find myself licking the palms of my hands to get what saline content I might out of the perspiration and dreaming it was salt. Even now, I season my food with salt to an extent that makes it impossible for anyone else to enjoy the meal but myself. I grew thin, but my wound healed rapidly and I had no more visions as wild as the first one.

"The day after my abortive attempt to escape, my mind was probed again. In all the lucid intervals I remember, the only scenes I saw were of people. Cities that swarmed like hives, villages of people, and little isolated houses and cottages. How easy to storm one of those cottages, so far from any neighbor! How easy for that horde to conquer a small village and, flushed with victory, to advance upon a city, with all the spiders in the country flocking to our standard! Perhaps even to wipe the continent clean of Man, leaving this valley and establishing a rule elsewhere!

"And the night after *that* unconscious revelation, I began to suspect. I had just come from an interview with the king. As I satisfied my hunger, I tried to imagine the reasons that led him to learn of the outer world and to give me in turn glimpses of the past. For I had learned strange things, which shall be revealed in their place. Why had he sampled my blood? Had they relished the flavor, so different from the natives, and were reserving me for an especial tidbit, *or as a guide to places where more of my kind might be found?*

"Now I come to a point where I

must take care not to strain your credulity to its limit, for I have things to tell that have made me a pariah in the scientific world. I am the butt for the most idiotic and asinine jokes, because I have told what I saw, bald narrative, with no fancy trimming of mine to make it more acceptable.

"And this is the story of Man's rise and fall. The story of the first reasoning being upon earth, the account of his inglorious servitude and the miraculous freak that saved you and me today from being hewers of wood and drawers of water to an insect!

"I put my separate visions into short accounts as each was given to me, for each vision holds within it a fact, as each nut a kernel, and if I made a connected story of the whole, it would be more incoherent than in the original form. There are blanks, but use your imagination to fill them; there may be faults of memory but there is much that tallies with the facts we know.

"Upon the third day of my imprisonment, the king held communion with me alone, the other spiders of his species remaining in their huts. Apparently having learned from me all that he wished to know or all that I could tell him, he opened a door for me to read the past.

"In all the scenes which follow, a word of explanation is necessary. I was granted to peep into the past, it is true, but there were bounds over which I might not trespass. Often the gray mists closed between me and some enthralling picture that I longed desperately to see more of. I participated, by proxy, in battles and was wounded, but never felt pain. I was present at scenes of the most frightful carnage, when the screams and groans of the dying and the howls of the victors must have pro-

duced a deafening din, but I heard no sounds.

"Is it that the mind can not hold the memory of pain? I think so. Hark back if you will, to the time when you suffered with a sprained ankle, a broken bone or a toothache. You remember that you suffered, but the pain in all its varying degrees you can not call back to say, 'At such a moment I felt *these* sensations.'

"But in regard to sounds, I believe that the sense of hearing in spiders is slight, and I doubt that these had ever possessed it at all.

"It seemed as though I was closeted within a small compartment. I watched a magic panorama that unreeled before my eyes, as a motion picture operator might observe the screen from his projection booth. Then the reel would end, the lights fade and all my world became a whirling fog.

"These, then, are the discoveries that I made and the facts that I learned from them, as I beheld the most marvelous drama that it has ever been given a man to witness.

"I stood by the shore of a stagnant lake, which was covered with a thick slimy growth that undulated with oily ripples, as though some great animal moved beneath it, for there was no wind. To my right, the ground was carpeted with a lush growth of coarse vegetation over which danced a maze of insects. I saw dragonflies whose gauzy wings would measure several feet from tip to tip, whirl in mimic battle. A procession of gigantic ants near-sightedly wove their tortuous path among the thick clumps of mushrooms that studded the fern-forest like varicolored jewels embedded in dark green plush.

"Above me a dome of clouds was spread, that marched from left to right, drizzling a fine mist as they passed. No sun or moon was visible,

but a soft lambent light shone through the clouds, diffused by the mist, so that the landscape was well illuminated.

"A multitude of living creatures swarmed in the skies, but as far as I could see there moved no mammalian life as we know it. A thing that I took for a vulture hovering high, dropped and became on closer inspection a huge wasp, that darted down into the ferns and rose with a kicking insect in its claws, darting swiftly across the lake. All life seemed to be represented by insects!

"It seemed as though I was called, although I heard no sound. I turned, to behold a like scene to that I had been watching. A stone pier projected out above the slimy liquid. From this platform a path wound into the shrubbery. This I expectantly watched, waiting for the one who had signaled to come in sight. Presently the ferns swayed and a huge bulk lumbered down to the pier.

"It was an immense spider, similar in size to the king, but it was a dull brown and hairless, its skin as thick and tough as sole-leather and oozing moisture. I was not surprized by the sight, for I had expected this, and I knew with the calm acceptance of the most amazing facts that we meet only in dreams, that I was also a spider, or at least looking through the eyes of one for a time.

"I understood, or rather my control understood (for this took place long, long ago), that I was to follow, and we two started along the path. Once we stopped to allow an army of ants, similar to driver ants, to cross our route. We were unseen by them, so that they passed on devouring everything that lay before them and leaving a wide swath of desolation, bare of any living thing. A short time after this, we came on a wide plain that hummed with activity. Spiders of all types were there, hust-

ling to and fro, herding beasts before them in small bands, toward a large stockade that was built of stone. One of these bands had stopped, and a hubbub was taking place. As we neared this commotion, I saw that these beasts were sometimes standing erect and sometimes upon all fours, and coming closer still, I beheld that their skins were white and that they were *men!*

"Men, I say, but not as men are now. Their faces were dull and stupid, their bodies were grossly fat, and like sheep they crowded together for mutual protection. A very few were thin and wiry, more energetic than the others and more daring. These few were leaving their own bands and were clustering about the scene of trouble, only to be forced back by a guard of small spiders like the black and silver fellows, but these guards were almost hairless, having only the yellow crest of fur that denoted their rank. There were many of the rulers, packed into a knot which disintegrated as I came up, and I saw that the center of the disturbance was a man.

"Quickly the situation was explained to me, and I gathered that the slave had killed a spider. At my order, he was seized; and we returned to the lake, followed by most of the spiders and all of the men.

"He was forced to walk out upon the stone pier, and as he did so the surface of the liquid began to eddy fiercely. He came nearer and the slime rose and lapped the surface of the pier. Then he turned to run back, but already the mucilaginous liquid had him thickly by the feet. Slowly it crawled up his knees, his thighs and chest, while his mouth gasped wide for air, or with a cry that I could not hear. Then the sticky slime retreated into the lake and with it went the slave.

"Thus were offenders against the

spider's law punished for an object lesson to the rest!

"The mob trooped back into the forest, and as I marched I pondered upon my surroundings. This was clearly a younger world than mine.

"An inner voice began to explain that this was a past unthinkably remote, a period of time when the equator and the temperate zones were still in a state of flux, when the equator was one roaring belt of volcanoes that belched lava and ashes into the hissing seas that rose in steam to obscure half the world in clouds. Countless eons would yet elapse before Atlantis and its sister-continent, Mu, would be raised from the oceans to breed a civilization upon each and then to sink again, the one beneath the blue waters of the Pacific and the other in the ocean which bears its name!

"But while the rest of the world was unfit for life, at the tropical polar countries the earth was cool enough to support vegetation in abundance, and where vegetation is, creatures will be found to live upon it.

"Here, as the different species commenced the race for supremacy, the insects forged ahead. The spiders, being the most intelligent and, save man, the most savage, had become the dominant reasoning beings of the globe. Man, arising later, was bred for food, and his spirit broken. But now and again one rose and struck back with the results I had seen.

"The voice died away, and as I marched I thought that it was something, after all, that a man dared to rebel. At any rate he was not fully conquered, and at this thought, it seemed as though I had learned my lesson from the episode, the misty clouds lowered and shrouded me in gray, and with a great roaring in my ears I passed from that era.

I stood upon a mountain that overlooked a dreadful chasm. A fierce gale was sweeping along the heights and there were no clouds in the sky. Around me were grouped several of the rulers, shivering in the wind, their hides but little protection against the cold. The air was no longer warm and sticky and I knew that we were seeking a warmer climate.

"To my left, at the foot of the mountain, there was a plain that was swarming with the beastmen, all converging toward the ravine, with a multitude of spiders herding them on.

"Thus far we had come unhindered on our march from the cooling pole, but a mountain range across our path had barred our progress until we had discovered a way to pass through. On the other side of the range dwelt a nation of men that had never known the spiders' rule, tall and slim and of noble aspect. A budding civilization that we obliterated from existence. This nation was formed of many small cities, built of stone and wood and walled in for protection against the beasts and other men, more savage than beasts as they are at this day. They probably had some commerce with one another, some trade, some slight banding together against a common foe, but we spiders learned little of their life, for we smashed that nation and fed upon its people. But I anticipate.

"There was fighting in the chasm. A small troop of brass-hued men armed with spears and slings were bitterly contesting the advance of our armies. The pass was glutted with bodies forced on by the pressure of the masses behind, who in turn were forced on by the spiders. Timid and weak as were our slaves, by their very numbers they were a power to reckon with, and though they feared the men that held the pass, they dreaded the

spiders more. Gradually they were winning through.

"From our height we could see that the brass-faced defenders were striking weaker blows. They were whittling away the head of the column still, but for every man that fell, two sprang into his place. There were dead in that crowd that had been slain at the beginning of the battle and were standing erect in the press, heads idiotically lolling from side to side, unable to fall!

"We moved along the mountain-side, keeping the fighting beneath us. The ravine began to widen and our enemy had a greater front to cover, giving our beastmen an advantage which they speedily took.

"Now came a hungry horde of spiders, swooping past me down the mountain, that flung themselves upon the weary defenders of the pass, and over their bodies the beastmen rushed in mad scramble from the monsters that crowded them on.

"My band followed down the mountain wall and came finally to the new land of promise. Beyond the entrance to the pass, a walled city stood, gates barred and parapets manned with warriors that pelted our masses with stones and sleeting flights of arrows.

"But while the clumsy slaves scattered on the plain, we spiders with grim resolve scaled the walls, which offered no barrier to our taloned limbs. The brass-hued men fought bravely, but we mastered them and the city was ours.

"About a mile away, another city was beleaguered, and as the spiders rose along the wall, smoke began to rise from the huts within, in ever-increasing abundance. The people in despair had fired their homes, in sad preference for the fiery death to the worse fate that awaited them. The grass-thatched roofs made a roaring

hell of the city and the spiders were driven back.

"Now farther upon the plain, another pillar of smoke began to rise, and then a third, until all the cities had followed the example set by their brave countrymen, and as a nation the brass-hued race perished in the ruins of their homes.

"So it was that sorrow crossed the mountains, and there was weeping and wailing in the land.

"I stood again before the spider king, through whose memory I had searched the past, as through mine he had explored the present. The blood began to circulate through my numbed limbs, prickling like a thousand needles. I felt as though I had traveled far.

"My guards carried me to the dungeon, dropped in a shoulder of venison and left me alone. I fell upon the raw meat, wolfing it down in great mouthfuls, and as I ravenously satisfied my hunger I tried to imagine the reasons that led the king to learn of the outer world and to give me, in turn, glimpses of the past.

"Clearly, this was his method of relating his people's history, but why trouble himself at all? Why not slay me as he had the natives? I could only decide that I was being reserved for a guide to the outer world! They had relished the taste of my blood!

"On pondering over the visions, I recognized the chant of the brass-hued people to be a quotation from one of the poems of Baudelaire, but in the age when those beings fought the spiders, unthinkable periods of time would yet elapse before men began to dream of rime. I eventually reached the conclusion that if I *had* seen a vision and made a promise, the impression that the pleading voices had desired to convey to me struck a chord in my subconscious mind that nearly equaled that eery

verse, so that in semi-stupor I fancied they chanted in the words of the French poet. I still believe that my theory is correct, but I wonder often what they really *did* say? The vision was so very real!

"I decided that each episode took place in the life of a different spider, and by the clearness of each vision, it would seem to indicate that the spider king recalled the incidents in his various reincarnations, or that lacking the written word to preserve history, this race had developed the ability of storing facts in their brain cells that were passed from one generation to another as physical attributes sometimes are with men.

"In all of these glimpses, I saw as a spider; I thought as a spider; I looked upon men as beasts of burden, created for the well-being of the spider people, an unclean miserable race, but necessary for our slaves.

"Thus they lifted themselves to a dangerous pinnacle, upon a foundation of sand, by depending so much upon a lower race of beings for their own existence. History is full of such errors. For look you! Your slave revolts or dies, with nothing to lose and all to gain, and if he succeeds—where are the rulers then? If he fails, progress has stopped or has been delayed, but it is the overlords that bear the expense, not the slaves. They can but die, and a dead or crippled slave is not of much value!

"Steadily after the smashing of this polar race, the breed deteriorated, civilization came to a halt for ages and began to retrogress. This was the true dark age for mankind, the faint dim remembrance of which has persisted in the myth of the Garden of Eden and the driving forth of Adam and Eve, a primeval people, into the wilderness. All that saved the world today from being ruled by spiders, is the unknown cataclysm that caused the first Ice Age, when

the world grew cold and the glaciers ground down from the North. The spiders died in the cold, being a tropical race, and only those that could adapt themselves to the changing conditions, growing warm coats of hair and becoming smaller and more lively, continued to exist.

"Perhaps you can imagine the antiquity of this period of change when you realize that all fossil spiders or those preserved in amber, that have yet been found, are the *same* size as those we know today!

"As they became smaller, some of the larger types persisted as freaks—still the rulers, but gradually losing their hold on man. Here then follows the story of the Great Migration.

6. BEFORE THE CAVEMEN

"I WAS allowed to rest a day, without seeing the king, and the next morning I was brought forth and commenced the last series of visions, the first scene apparently taking place many years after the taking of the city.

"A slash of purple light cleft the vapory haze and it rolled back before me, as a curtain rises at a play. I was on the roof of the central tower in the city, the sun beating down with but little warmth. It had lost a third of its former size and brilliance.

"The spider through whose eyes I looked, moved nearer to the edge and stood staring out over the city. The roofs were covered with snow, a bank of heavy clouds was gathering to the left of the observatory, and the scene was dismal in the extreme. The palm trees that originally had appeared at the taking of the city were gone and in their places were gnarled, stunted willows, whose bare limbs clattered like a skeleton's arms in the wind.

"Below, a procession was forming. A new breed of spiders had arisen. Half the size of the conquerors, they were covered thickly with hair. Their

faces, which were turned toward my tower as though in expectancy, portrayed the savageness of fiends. Scattered thinly amongst the multitude were larger spiders of the ancient type, either throwbacks or survivals of the original rulers.

"Here and there sat bands of men, lowbrowed, hairy and brutalized. To such had the human race retrogressed! There were beasts of burden (and these also were men) that tottered beneath their loads of coarse vegetation intended for their own sustenance on the march. For this was an emigration to seek a warmer climate, and the city was being deserted.

"Climbing up the sheer wall came a large spider, as large as myself, that stood beside me in silent communion of minds. I gathered the impression that all was ready and they waited only for me. I followed my friend into the street. My control shivered and I knew it was bitter cold. We took places at the head of the column and commenced the hegira. At the city gates we stopped and looked back for the last time.

"The clouds covered the sky, the city was drab and deserted; we must have been the last or nearly the last expedition to leave. A white flake floated by my eyes, the pinnacles of the tower were dull as lead: I swung into my stride, the slaves lurched on.

"Man and his Master were on the march! And over all the snow was gently falling.

"IT WAS night. Over my head the stars gleamed resplendent. Countless eons had passed, for the sky showed familiar forms. The pole star was the one we have always known, but in a former vision it had not been Polaris!

"I was some form of sentry, for I was walking a regular beat around a natural valley, accompanied by a troop of guards. All along my path

slept the great spiders, who still wielded the whip of power.

"In the valley were penned a savage tribe of men, short, hairy and bandy-legged, whose language was composed mainly of signs and horrid grimaces.

"I knew that our control was slipping, for it was against these that I guarded my comrades' sleep. The day before, the slaves had arisen and fled to the forests, many escaping from the horde of small spiders that rulers had perished in the fight, and had pursued them. Several of the we decided to move again.

"This was the last watch. Soon the horizon flushed ruddy with the rising sun and the business of the day began.

"From the thickets came all that were left of the gigantic spiders. We allowed the guard to release the slaves, and after they had gathered their possessions we traveled along the sandy shore. The spiders kept to the rear as the men shambled along, heads swinging from side to side as they peered viciously for signs of game in the sand. Ice floes drifted in the billows, grinding against the cliffs that we were nearing.

"Suddenly the men sniffed like dogs as they caught a scent, and we saw great tracks in the sand. They started off in a wide circle that finally led us to the foot of a tremendous glacier, where our game turned to face us. It was a hairy mammoth, his tusks curving like hoops, the points a little below the eyes.

"The men surged about him throwing spears and stones, and a multitude of small spiders swarmed over him until the great beast was a heap of vermin and his sides ran blood. Like a falling mountain he crashed to earth, raining spiders that leaped for safety, and we rulers, careful as usual of ourselves, advanced to the feast.

"As from a distance we watched the smaller spiders feasting, and the slaves resting near the glacier cliff on the thin strip of beach that separated them from the sea, suddenly a lump of ice dropped, splintering, from the sky, and following with quick descent came others! Then between us and the men roared an avalanche of ice boulders, raising a barrier unclimbable.

"We dashed, scattering, to the land, and behind us the beach was black with spiders, pouring a mighty river, racing for life before the advancing glacier, grinding the rocks to powder beneath it as a fissure rent it along a mile-long front!

"And as we looked back, we saw that long quiet torrent of ice in motion at last, for as a shot or a whoop is sufficient to start an avalanche of snow in menacing charge and men frown upon one who whistles or sings beneath a snowy slope of the Alps, so the titanic thud of the mammoth's fall, the earth-shaking crash of his sudden death, had startled the glacier into nervous leap. And now, separated from the parent body of ice, the mighty cliff towered toppling toward the sea and moved, ponderously staggering like a drunken world, crowding the slaves and pounding thinner the ribbon.

"The men panted, so far behind us as we gained the outside rim, that they were cut off. Madly they tore back and forth along the ever-narrowing beach, some swimming in the icy water, some falling upon their spears in superstitious dread of the devils of the sea, whose fins cut the waves as they feasted on the bodies of our slaves. Then the glacier moved inevitably on, entered the water, and the face thundered down with a splash that sent a wave lapping against our feet.

"Titanic icebergs floated in the tossing sea, monuments to the last of

our slaves, that marked the resting place of the remnants of the brass-hued race.

“No more slaves! No more civilization for the spiders! Hereafter we would hunt our own food, fight our own battles, build our own shelters, becoming more savage and more tiny with the years, until we were tolerated parasites in the palaces of men! Our destiny was that we should clear the filth and pests from the homes of an upstart, minor, inferior race of men, but still that time was far in the future.

“Then followed many snapshots of the past, so that I followed in quick glimpses the fate of that wandering, deteriorating band of spiders whose ancestors had conquered a world.

“Driven by the ever-advancing cold, they traveled south, deserted always by bands that stayed behind while the main body kept on. Always it was the smallest that lagged behind, the fiercest, the ugliest, the least intelligent! It is their progeny that spins the webs in forest, farm and field and in the end comes to inherit the proudest edifices of humanity.

“As the years were left behind us, our numbers decreased, until from millions we had become thousands, our rulers could be numbered by hundreds. From time to time we met other bands, some with slaves, but most without. Often we fought with these, for the years had made such differences in the species that we could no longer understand our fellow invaders. We saw brutal tribes of men, armed with stone hatchets and clubs, who gave us a wide berth. These were not the descendants of the polar race, but had evolved separately. We saw others, yet to evolve, and great apes, semi-arboreal, that were beginning to learn the possibilities that lay in the human thumb for grasping tools.

“But we passed on, our numbers dwindling ever, skirted volcanoes that thundered at us and slew many, fought through the terrible storms of that time, smashed by the pitiless hail, buried by avalanches, and at last found peace, those that were left of us, in the primeval jungles, where no glaciers could ever reach; and here we made a home. We built houses with the aid of savages that roamed where we had determined to settle, and fed upon their bodies afterward. We established the rings of different species of spiders about our central community and about a hundred of our rulers, all that remained to carry on the race.

“And here in the heart of the steaming forests we dwelt, no more of our progeny being born, for our age was great, but as our numbers decreased by natural deaths and the years gave us an infernal cunning our ambition rose to the point where we had almost decided to move again. But what lay outside our home? That was the question which gave us pause. Should we again brave the crunching glaciers and the bellowing volcanoes?

“But if the glaciers had fought the volcanoes and had been destroyed, then perhaps there were men again. Not the tough and unsavory savages that our hunters sometimes brought in, but large, fat and toothsome light-colored brutes that we could again rear in herds!

“And perhaps with the new food would be found others of our race, so that with their strength and our cunning, centuries in development, we should win to undreamed-of heights, as under our crafty leadership our smaller spiders, less intelligent than their forebears, conquered for us a world!

“At the next glimpse, there were only sixty or seventy of the rulers, the males predominating; and as the years went on, this little band became

less until at my last vision I opened the trap of my hut and only seven of my fellows were to be seen on their roofs, as we watched a herd of animals gathered for the evening feast, among them being brown naked men and a peculiar white-faced man, covered with a strange hide, the like of which I had never seen before, and whom I intended to dine upon!

"I, Jabez Pentreat, looked out through the eyes of the spider king and saw *myself* standing as I remembered I had stood, days before, as I had waited for the great spiders to pounce down from the roofs, and at this unbelievable sight, the curtain of gauze shut down and I realized I was at the end of the road! This is the only proof I have that my story is true.

7. THE CITY IN THE SMOKE

"THREE days later, being fully cured of my wound, I was again brought from the prison. The spiders were waiting. The valley was acrawl with vermin, whose dry rustling filled the air with whispers. Yellow-headed guards surrounded the huts, gray devils mingled with the scarlet-barred insects, huge black leaping tarantulas were present in great numbers, but in all that crowd I saw not a single insect whose bite is not poisonous to man.

"The spider king in his silent communication made it understood to me that my life depended upon my ability to guide them to the nearest community of whites, and I consented readily. Who would not have done the same? I intended to lead them to the river and take my chances of escape there, knowing that they were as careful as cats about entering water, for although the king had promised me my life, I had but little faith in the promise.

"So on the eighth day of my captivity we set out to the conquering of

an unsuspecting continent. I walked in the center of the huge rulers' formation. About us rustled an imposing troop of guards, and for miles on each side the forest was filled with our myrmidons, scattered far and wide.

"How I feasted on fruit, that day! As we passed the small brook at *tambo* number 10, I caught some small fish and ate them raw, and no epicure ever tasted anything more delicious than that meal was to me. The drums growled again that night, as I lay in the midst of the lightly sleeping horde, that quivered angrily at my slightest movement.

"It took me, urged on by the spiders, only seven days to cover the distance that I had taken ten to accomplish coming in.

"Toward night we began to hear the roar of the Caroni River as it struggled through a *raudal*, or rapid, on its way to the Orinoco.

"Suddenly, about a mile ahead, there burst out a pandemonium of frightful screams that I recognized as humans voicing inhuman terror. The great brutes scuttled on faster, so that I was hard put to keep my place. Clouds of smoke rolled up ahead of us from a campfire, and presently we broke out of the forest and saw the flames. A tribe of ugly natives were trapped by the river, where they had made camp in a clearing, building their fire on a sandy spot. Around them, the tall reedlike grass, shoulder-high to a tall man, waved and shuddered and bent low with the rush of the spider army.

"The men had been surrounded and held until the arrival of the king, and as we came up I recognized their paint and tribal marks to be those of the Guaharibo Indians, savage men who slay for the love of murder and who had roved from their home near the upper reaches of the Orinoco, searching for heads and loot.

"Many heads hung in the smoke, partly cured,—and several of them were *white!* At this sight, something turned to steel with me, and had it been possible to save them, I would not if I could.

"I said to the king, 'These are the first.' He understood my meaning if not my words, and gave the signal for the attack.

"A great wave of spiders broke over the savages, clicking their battle cry, leaping from one to another, darting through the smoke. Seized with the madness of slaughter, the spider king and his fellows, to whom this was a joy they had probably been long without, charged with the rest.

"In a second, I was forgotten and absolutely alone! Dazed by the marvel of it, I was yet not too blind to seize my opportunity. Quickly, yet with the utmost care, I crept toward the river where the log canoes were drawn up on the shore and pushed all off but one. Still the battle raged.

"As I put one foot inside the canoe, something gave me pause. Again I heard the despairing, pleading cries of the brass-faced people and saw those writhing hands that swore me to vengeance. Stealthily I crawled back to the fire, gathered an armful of resinous, light wood, and with a burning brand trailing behind me set the grass aflame as I ran to the canoe.

"I paddled upstream to where the forest joined the clearing and beached the canoe. The wind was blowing strongly downstream. With my torch, I lit stick after stick and hurled the flaming wood far out into the field. Then I drifted down and held my position in midstream and waited.

"The battle was almost to its inevitable end. The fire that I had first lit was burning stubbornly into

the teeth of the wind, and now, fanned to fury, a fifteen-foot wall of flame came down with a whirring roar to meet it!

"The fighting stopped. Man and spider, both were doomed, and from both sides the fire closed in. I yelled in joy, howling crazy, broken curses. Strange how much it looked like a great city in the smoke, with flaming, sputtering sheets of fire that lapped its phantom walls! From that whirlwind of sparks came a vast sound of frying! I heard a bursting mutter like gigantic kernels of corn popping in an enormous pan. A wave of sooty smoke, redolent of burned flesh, rolled out over the river and set me blind and coughing. As I wiped my streaming eyes, a horrid *thing* staggered from the flames, little spikes of fire shooting from its fat and bloated body! Although his hair was burned away and his mandibles were gone, I recognized the spider king. He lurched nearer and I saw that he was blind, just as his charred legs snapped with his weight and he subsided into the river.

"The water boiled and hissed when he struck it. Once he rose, lashing feebly, and I beheld that his body was swarming with little fish that rent and tore pieces of flesh away. These were the savage little piranhas, the miniature fresh-water sharks that give short shrift to anything that falls within a school of them. Again he came to the surface, the water frothed a bloody foam and then the last of the monster sank, in tatters, into the Caroni!

"Not many of the others escaped; after the fire had swept into the forest I saw that the ground was black with charred bodies, that lay in tumbled heaps around the skeletons of the Guaharibos. By easy stages, I made my way to civilization, bearing a stupendous tale to my friends.

"I told them my story and said in

substance, 'While you have been wasting your time for hundreds of years, searching back through the ages; with pick and shovel scrabbling in the dust of forgotten empires; with arduous sifting of myths and legends to find some small fact; with titanic efforts of geological, biological and philological research to bring the past nearer, the link that could tell you all you wish to know—is hunting flies in the rafters of your own houses! Apply yourselves therefore to the means of wresting this secret from it, for you can learn both of this and other lands more than by your explorations.'

"They laughed as I expected they would," he concluded bitterly.

AS HE finished, we were passing into Waltham and we began locating our luggage, for we had only a few more miles to travel. Then as the train neared Boston, he resumed at the original cause of our discussion upon the word "hate" of uncertain usage.

"So while you feel repulsion," he began, "and a sickened disgust at the sight of a spider, it is because the hereditary, subconscious memory *knows* that these creatures were once your lords in another existence and it commands you to obliterate this loathsome, alien life from another age. When you crushed that barn spider under your foot, you unconsciously took revenge for uncounted eras of oppression, that has made such a mark on the human brain that forever and ever most men will sicken at the sight of a spider.

"You are repelled without understanding the reason for your dislike, but I—I *hate* them, for I know *what* they are—a fact which no other man alive is certain of.

"All spiders that I come in contact with now, are attracted to me. I enter a room, for instance: there is

not the sign of a web about, my hostess would swear that the house is spotless, but if there is a spider it feels my presence somehow, and before I leave, I may find one perched upon my shoe, or near me, steadily gazing with its beady black eyes.

"I hate them, but I have not the fear, which you mistakenly call hatred. I am going to search for Carewe and *we* will search for that polar country where the brass-hued men lived, and may even find a frozen or fossil spider that will prove that I did not lie to my fellow scientists. But until that day, I tell my story to no more scoffers, nor should I have told you if I had not wished to see how a layman received the theory that all my contemporaries have rejected.

"What, Boston so soon?" he ejaculated as we pulled into the North Station. "I hope I have not bored you."

"Indeed, you have not, Mr. Pentreat," I answered, with a smile. "I wish you good fortune in your search." And I extended my hand.

"Thank you, I shall need it," he said gruffly, and wringing my hand, he stepped into the crowd and I saw my last of the man with the beady eyes.

I SHALL not include this in my novel, nor shall I change his version of affairs. It is an amazing theory at least, and if it were proved, it would cause havoc to cherished opinions, but if he goes to find his lost city in the North, he goes alone—for I read that Sir Adlington Carewe has disappeared into the jungles of Africa's West Coast, and as his experiments dealt with great apes and lunatics, I do not think he will be back.

Well, you have read the story. I give you fair warning that I don't believe it myself. His eyes were just a wee bit *too* bright!