

FAMOUS fantastic MYSTERIES

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Full Length Feature

THE WHITE WOLF Franklin Gregory 12

What irresistible, unnameable evil drew Sara Camp-d'Avesnes to a strangely familiar hovel in Philadelphia's reeking slums? And what connection had her odd disappearances with the horror that shocked the Pennsylvania countryside?

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Novelette

THE GREEN SPLOTCHES T. S. Stribling 76

Helplessly, prisoners of their own terror, they waited for whatever unearthly doom would descend upon them. . . . For scientists and savages alike sensed the strange menace utterly new to mankind, forecast in the frightful manifestation

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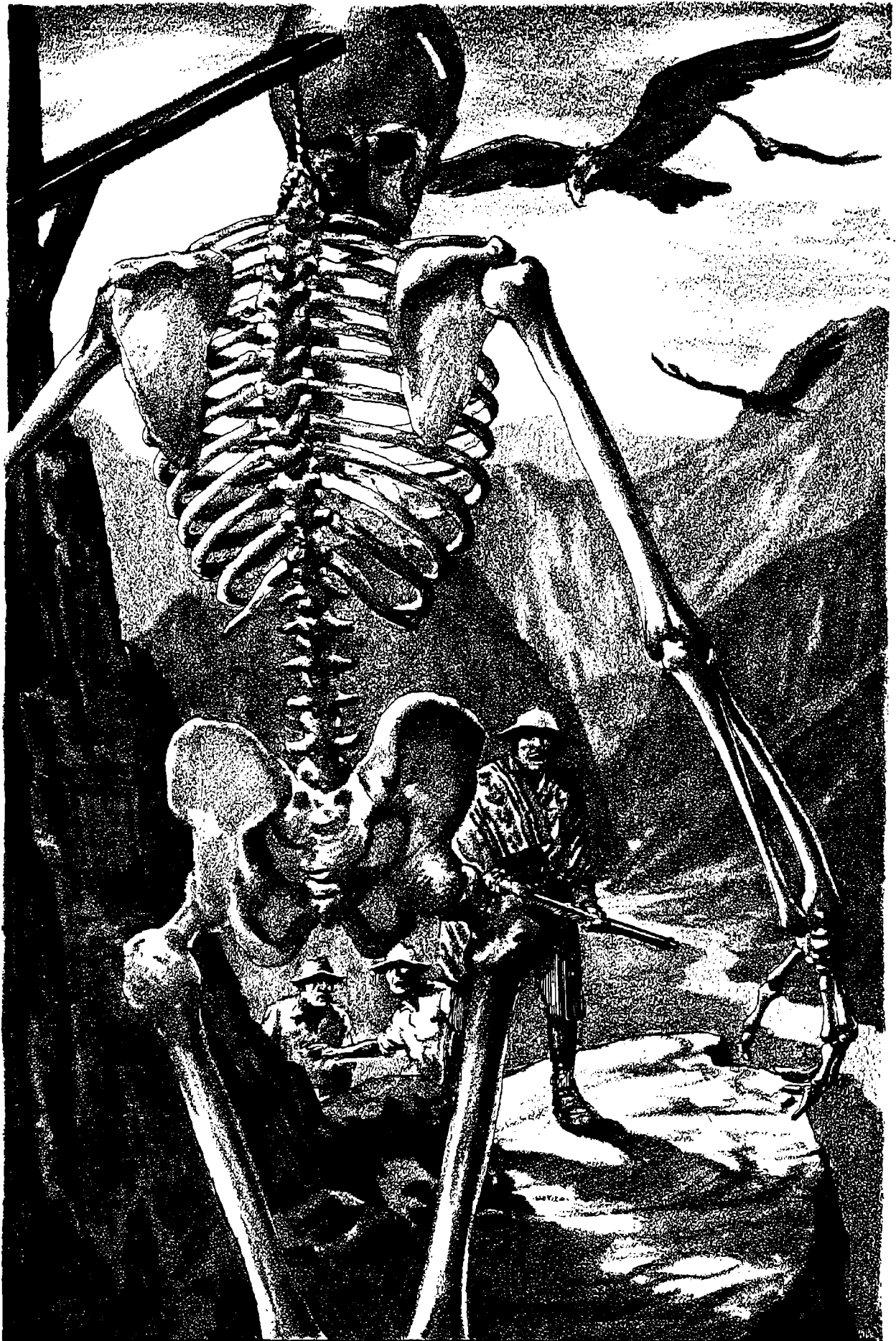
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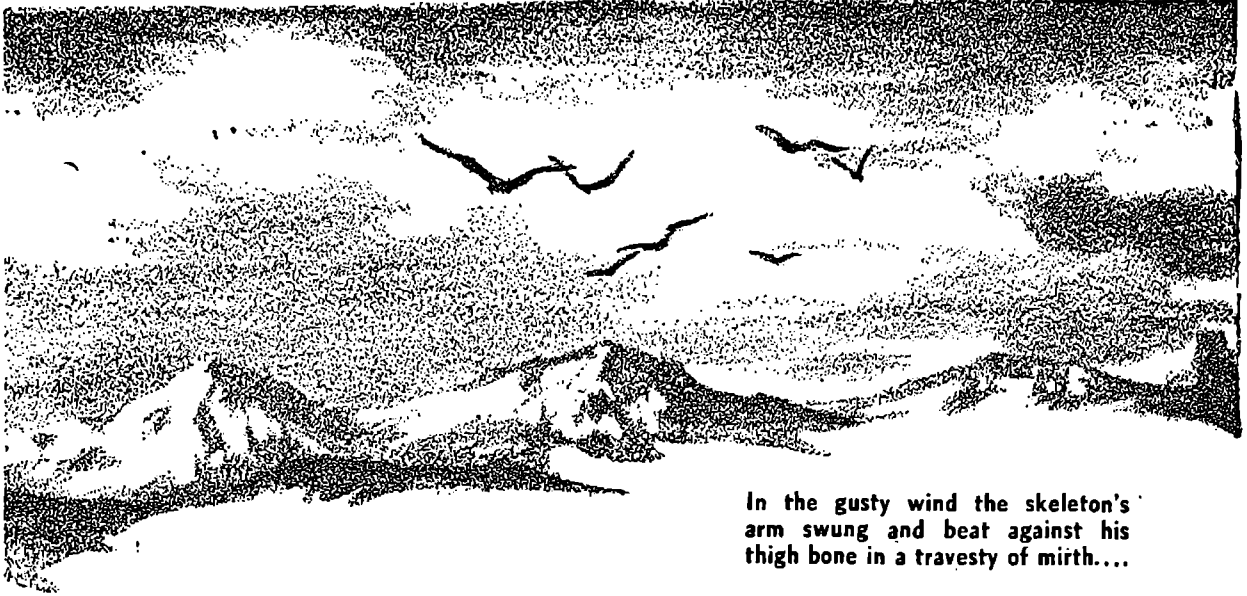
THE NEXT ISSUE
WILL BE ON SALE JULY 18.

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The Green Splotches

By T. S. Stribling

TRANSCRIBED FROM THE FIELD NOTES OF JAMES B. STANDIFER, SECRETARY DeLONG GEOGRAPHICAL EXPEDITION TO THE RIO INFIERNILLO, PERU, WITH INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY J. B. S.

SECRETARY'S NOTE

THE strange not to say sinister record of the De Long Geographical Expedition to the department of Ayacucho, Peru, is here given to the public in order that a wider discussion of the facts herein set forth may lead to some solution of the enigmas with which this narrative is laden.

These field notes have been privately circulated among the members of the DeLong Geographical Society, and the addenda to this account written by our president, Gilbert H. DeLong, have proved highly gratifying to the writer. No doubt this effort at publicity will bring forward other and equally interesting hypotheses.

It is hardly necessary to warn readers who

devote themselves exclusively to fiction that this record is not for them.

Fiction deals in probabilities; geographical societies, unfortunately, are confined to facts. Fiction is a record of imaginary events, which, nevertheless, adheres to and explains human experience. Facts continually step outside of experience and offer riddles and monstrosities.

Thus, in a way, fiction is much truer than fact. Fiction is generalized truth; it is an international legal tender accredited everywhere; fact is a very special truth, which passes current only with the most discerning—or with none.

Therefore the writer wishes heartily to commend the great American scramble after fiction. It shows our enlightened public wishes

to get at the real universal truths of life without wasting precious moments on all such improbabilities as science, history, archeology, biography, invention and exploration.

To the last of this censored list these field notes unfortunately belong.

In conclusion the writer wishes to admit that he favors the Incan theory in explaining this narrative, and the reader is warned that this prejudice may color these notes. However, it has not been the writer's intention to do violence, through any twisting of fact, to the Bolshevik theory of Prof. Demetrios Z. Demetrioovich, the Rumanian *attaché* to the expedition, or to the Jovian hypothesis of our esteemed president, the Hon. Gilbert H. DeLong, than whom, be it said, no man is more tolerant of the views of others.—JAMES B. STANDIFER, Sec. DeL. Geo. Exp., Sept. 17, 1919.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

The writer met the DeLong Geographical Expedition at Colon in June, 1919, on their way to New York. His curiosity was strongly aroused by the fact that every member of the party, even to the twenty-four-year-old secretary of the expedition, Mr. James B. Standifer, was completely white-headed and seemed to be suffering from some nervous complaint in the nature of a shell shock.

At that time the writer was correspondent for the Associated Press and he naturally saw a "story" in the returning scientists. After some effort and persuasion, he obtained Mr. Standifer's field notes and photographs. The photographs were practically worthless on account of the deterioration of the films. And a single glance through the notes showed him that they were not practicable "A.P." material. After much consideration and many discussions with Mr. Standifer, the writer decided that the only possible form in which this strange memoranda could be placed before the public was in the guise of fiction.

Unfortunately this disguise is neither deep nor cleverly done. The crude outline of the actual occurrences destroys all approach to plot. Many of the incidents are irrelevant, but the only condition upon which Mr. Standifer would agree to this publication at all was that his record be given *in extenso*, "for the benefit," he stated, "of future and more studious generations."

In fact, throughout the writer's association with him, Mr. Standifer seemed of a sour, not to say misanthropic, disposition. His sarcasm, which he hurls at the American fiction-reading public in his prefatory note, is based entirely, the writer believes, on the fact that Standifer wrote a book of travel called "Reindeer in Iceland," which he published at his own ex-

pense and which entirely failed to sell. That, no doubt, is enough to acidulate the sweetest disposition, but in a way it goes to prove that Mr. Standifer's notes on the Peruvian expedition are a painstaking and literal setting forth of genuine experiences, for a perusal of "Reindeer in Iceland," which the writer purchased from Mr. Standifer for fifty-three cents, shows its author has absolutely no imagination whatever.

It is hardly worth while to add that the explanatory note appended to this narrative by that distinguished scholar and author, the Right Honorable Gilbert H. DeLong, has not been touched by this pen.—T.S., Sept. 27, 1919.

Chapter One

SEÑOR IGNACIO RAMADA, prefect of the department of Ayacucho, tapped his red lips under his mustache to discourage an overpowering yawn. It was mid *siesta*, high noon. He had been routed out of profound slumber by his *cholo*-boy—and presented with a long impressive document with a red seal. Now he stood in the *Salle des Armes* of the governor's mansion, holding in his hand the letter of introduction of the *presidente* of the Lima Sociedad de Geografico, very much impressed even amid his sleepiness by the red seal of the *sociedad* and by the creaking new equipment of his callers.

"How, *señores*, can I assist in such a glorious undertaking?" he inquired in Spanish.

"We need guides," explained Prof. Demetrioovich, who was the linguist of the party.

"Where does your journey carry you, *caballeros*?" inquired the official, cracking the parchment in his hand.

"To the region beyond the Mantaro, called the Valley of the Rio Infiernillo."

Señor Ramada came out of his sleepiness with a sort of start.

"No!"

"Yes."

The prefect looked at his guests.

"*Señores*, no one goes there."

Pethwick, the engineer, smiled.

"If the region were quite well known, Señor Ramada, it would hold little attraction for a geographical exploration party."

"Well—that's true," agreed the prefect after a moment's thought, "but it will be quite difficult to get a guide for that place; in fact—" here he swept his visitors with a charming smile—"the better a man knows that region, the farther he keeps away from it. Seriously, gentlemen, why not explore some more hospitable locality, where one can find a comfortable inn at night and procure relays of llamas when necessary for your baggage?"

Pethwick smiled friendly.

"We did think of exploring the suburbs of Lima, but the street service was so bad—"

"Do you read novels?" inquired Standifer, the young secretary of the expedition.

"Why—yes," admitted the prefect, taken aback: "I am fond of Cisneros, Lavelle, Arestegui—"

The secretary pressed his lips together, nodded disdainfully and without further remark looked away through the entrance into the diamond-like brilliance of tropical sunshine in mountainous regions.

The prefect stared. "*Señor*," he said rather sharply, "if you do not approve my literary taste—"

Pethwick stepped to the little Spaniard's side and whispered quickly:

"Overlook it, *señor*, overlook it. Literature is a tender point with him. He has lost one hundred and fifty-four dollars and forty-seven cents on an unprofitable literary venture. In fact, he is a young author."

He nodded confidentially at the prefect.

The official, with Latin delicacy, nodded back and patted Pethwick's arm to show that all was again well. Pethwick then said aloud—

"So we shall have to try to find our own way into the Valle de Rio Infernillo?"

Ramada looked worried. Presently he slapped his hand on a mahogany sword cabinet that glowed warmly in the subdued light of the *salle*.

"*Señores!*" he cried, rattling the letter of introduction with his left hand. "It shall never be said that the prefect of the department of Ayacucho did not exert plenary powers to aid in disclosing to the world the enormous riches of his province and his native land!"

"So we may expect something?" inquired M. Demetrich.

"I have the power to force some one to go with you," announced Ramada dramatically.

"Who?" asked Standifer, looking around.

"Naturally my authority does not extend over freemen," conditioned the prefect.

"Your slaves?" inquired the secretary.

"Sir," announced the prefect. "wherever the Peruvian banner waves, Freedom smiles!"

"What at?" inquired the literal secretary.

As the governor was about to take new offense the old Rumanian hastily inquired—

"Who do we get, Señor Ramada?"

"*Señores*, a garroting has been widely and I believe successfully advertised to take place on the fifth of August. If I may say it, *caballeros*, my political career depends in great measure on meeting fully and completely the thrills offered by my prospectuses. The executions will be followed by a bullfight. It was, gentlemen, if I may say it, it was to be the

turning-point of my political career, upon the prestige of which I meant to make my race for the presidency of our republic.

"Gentlemen, a time comes in the life of every statesman when he can sacrifice his country to his personal ambition, or his personal ambition to his country. That moment has now come in the life of Gonzales Pizarro Ramada. Gentlemen, I make it. Gentlemen, I am going to remit the extreme penalty placed by the *cortes* upon a murderer and a highwayman and permit them to go with you, gentlemen, as guides into the Valle de Río Infernillo."

Pethwick, who had been smiling with immense enjoyment at this rodomontade straightened his face.

"A murderer and a highwayman!"

"Charming fellows," assured the prefect. "I often walk down to the *carcel* and converse with them, I and the padre. Such *chic!* Such original ideas on the confiscation of money—really very entertaining!"

The expedition looked at the eulogist a moment.

"Give us a minute to talk this over, Señor Ramada?" requested M. Demetrich.

The prefect made the accentuated bow of a politician, adding that the republic would be proud to furnish chains and handcuffs to guarantee that her sons did their duty in the discharge of a patriotic function.

The three gentlemen of the DeLong Geographical Expedition spent an anxious five minutes in debate.

Presently Pethwick called—

"Señor Ramada, are you absolutely sure that we can not procure guides who are less-questionable for this journey?"

"Gentlemen, to be frank," said the prefect, who had also been studying over the matter, "I doubt very much whether either Cesare Ruano or Pablo Pasca would be willing to accompany you under those terms. I can not force them. The law prohibits any unusual or cruel infliction of the death penalty and to send them to the valley of the Rio Infernillo would fall under that prohibition."

The four men stood meditating in the *Salle des Armes*. Professor Demetrich stirred.

"Let's go—have a talk with them," he suggested.

CONTRARY to Ramada's fears, Cesare Ruano, the man-killer, and Pablo Pasco, the road-agent, proved willing to escort the party to the Rio Infernillo. So on the following day the expedition set forth with the legs of the convicts chained under their mules' bellies.

Ayacucho turned out *en masse* to watch

the departure of so distinguished a cavalcade, and it might as well be admitted at once that none of the adventurers made so brave a showing or saluted the villagers with more graceful bows than did Cesare Ruano or Pablo Pasca. In fact, they divided the plaudits of the crowd about equally with the prefect, who kept murmuring to Pethwick—

"Not a bad stroke, Señor Pethwick, not a bad stroke."

The legs of the convicts were chained, naturally, to prevent any sudden leave-taking, but the plan held disadvantages. When one of the llama-packs became loosened, either the scientists had to hungle the job themselves or take the leg-cuffs off their prisoners and allow them to dismount and do it for them. This entailed endless unchaining and chaining, which quickly grew monotonous and at length was abandoned after the geographers had exacted a solemn pledge of the two cutthroats not to run away. That much of the contract the guides kept to the letter. They never did run away, although the company lost them.

M. Demetrioovich retained the manacles on the horn of his saddle, where, he told Pethwick, he hoped their jingle would have good moral effect.

Oddly enough both the convicts were entirely innocent of the charges preferred against them, upon which they were convicted and so nearly executed.

Pablo Pasca told the whole circumstance to Pethwick. He, Pablo, did meet an old man one freezing July night in a mountain pass on the road to Ayacucho. They stopped and held some converse, and Pablo had borrowed from him two hundred and forty-seven sols. Then what did this ingrate of a creditor do but beat his head against a tree, break an arm, go before a *magistrado* and charge Pasca with highway robbery.

Pablo's black eyes flashed as he related the incident. He had been amazed at such calumny, which he could not disprove. The jury believed the old wretch and sentenced Pablo to the garrote.

However, the One Who Ruled the Earth knew the truth, and Pasca prayed every night that he should not have his spinal cord snapped on such an unjust charge. So the One Who Ruled sent this society of fine gentlemen and scholars to fraternize with Pablo and to lift him to an exalted station. So he, Pablo supposed now all the neighbors saw that his oath, as strange as it sounded, was true to the last jot and tittle. The padre in his visits to the *carcel* had taught Pablo a little verse which he should never forget—"Seest thou a man diligent in his profession—he shall sit before kings."

Cesare Ruano did not go so much into detail as did his fellow guide and friend, but he told Pethwick that the crime for which he was sentenced to the garrote was trivial and with a shrug of his shoulders he let it go at that.

The trivial affair, however, had left a number of marks on Ruano's person, all of which the Ayacucho police had tabulated. A copy of this table was given M. Demetrioovich in order that he might advertize for Cesare in case he should desert.

Pethwick read the inventory. It ran:

Cesare Ruano, a *cholo*, 27 years, reddish yellow, height 5 ft. 7 in., weight 84 kilos (189 lbs.), muscular, broad face, prominent cheekbones, straight nose with wide nostrils, very white teeth, handsome. Scars: from right eyebrow through the right cheek to lobe of ear; from left side of neck to middle of chestbone; horizontal scar from nipple to nipple; rifle or pistol wound in right leg, two inches above knee; three buckshot in back, one in left buttock; little toe on left foot missing. Disposition: uncommunicative, but of pleasant address and cheerful until irritated. A very handy man. Note: In case of arrest, officers are advised to shoot before accosting Ruano.

On the first few nights the travelers found lodgings at little mountain inns, whose red-peaked roofs of tiles were pulled down like caps over tiny eye-like windows. The tunnel-like entrance to such a hostelry always looked like a black mouth squared in horror at something it saw across the mountains.

This was much the same expression that the proprietor and guests wore when they learned the travelers were bound for the Rio Infernillo.

Pablo Pasca always broke the news of their destination in rather dramatic style to the gamblers and hangers-on with which these centers of mountain life were crowded.

"Señores," he would harangue, "you see before you a man sentenced to death; but because no garrote could affect his throat, so hard has it become from drinking gin, the prefect decided to send him on a journey to the Rio Infernillo! Let us drink to our good fortune!"

This announcement usually brought roars of applause and laughter. Once a roisterer shouted—

"But your companions; what caused them to be sent?"

And Pablo answered them with a droll gesture—

"One is a murderer; the rest are Americans!"

It made a great hit. The crowd invited Pablo to share its brandy.

HOWEVER, after these introductions the landlord would presently stop laughing and after some questions invariably warned the scientists against their "mad undertaking." On two such occasions the proprietor became so earnest and excited that he begged the *señores* to walk out with him up the mountain-side to see for themselves the terrors that confronted them.

Pethwick never forgot his first glimpse of the mystery that colored his thoughts and dreams for the remainder of his life.

The night was clear but moonless. The party climbed uncertainly in darkness up a scarp of boulders and spurs of primitive rock. The landlord picked his way toward a clump of calisaya trees silhouetted against the sky. The chill air was shot with the fragrance of mountain violets. The climbers lent each other hands until the landlord reached a protruding root and then everybody scrambled up.

Pethwick dropped down breathless at the foot of the tree, his heart beating heavily, for he was unaccustomed to the altitude. At first he was faintly amused at his host's promise of a portent, but this amusement vanished presently amid the solemnity of night and the mountains.

The very stars above him wore the strange aspect of the Southern constellations. Against their glimmer the Andes heaved mighty shoulders. Peak beyond peak, they stood in cold blackness, made more chill and mysterious by the pallor of snow fields.

The whole group shivered in silence for several minutes. At last M. Demetrioivich asked with a shake in his Spanish—

"Well, *amigo*, what is there to see?"

"Wait," begged the landlord.

At that moment a star shot far out against the blackness.

"*Alla!*" gasped the Peruvian.

Pethwick shivered and grinned. He had brought them up to see a shooting star.

"But wait!" begged the host, sensing the engineer's mirth.

Almost at once from where the star seemed to strike arose a faint glowing haze as indefinite as the Milky Way. It must have been miles distant. In front of it two or three massifs were outlined and others, farther away, were dimly truncated by its radiance.

The *huesped* drew a long breath.

"Now there lies the Rio Infernillo," he chattered. "It is a land from which no man returns alive. I have known many men to go, *señores*, thinking surely there must be great treasure where so much danger lay—and there may be, *señores*. No man can say. Every man has his opinion about the matter. I will tell frankly what mine is—"

He paused, evidently waiting for some one to urge his opinion.

Instead, Standifer spoke up—

"My opinion is it's a meteor and a phosphorescent display which sometimes follows."

The landlord laughed through the darkness with immense scorn of such a puerile opinion.

"What is yours?" inquired Pethwick.

"*Señores*," defined the tavern-keeper solemnly, "that stream is called the Rio Infernillo for a very good reason. For there every night comes the devil to dig gold to corrupt the priests and—and, of course, the Protestants, too," he added charitably. "But he can never do it, *señores*. Let him dig till he scoops down the mountains and reaches his own country, which is the source of the Rio Infernillo—he will never do it!"

"Has anyone ever seen where he has dug?" asked Pethwick, amused again.

"*Sí, señor.*"

"In the valley?"

"*Precisamente, señor.*"

"I thought you said no one ever went over there and got back alive," observed Pethwick carelessly.

A slight pause; then the landlord explained.

"This man only lived a few minutes after he fell into my door. I saw him. His hair was white. He was burned. I heard his last words. No one else heard him."

This was uttered with such solemnity that Pethwick never knew whether it was an account of some weird tragedy of the mountains or whether it was cut out of whole cloth.

That night after Pethwick had gone to bed in the upper story of the hostelry, while the laughing and drinking flowed steadily below, it occurred to him that it was odd, after all, that the landlord should have led them on such a clamber to see a shooting star and a haze—and the two phenomena should have occurred so promptly.

* * *

On the following night another landlord led them out on the same mission and showed them the same set of wonders. His explanation was even more fantastic than the first.

Before the party retired that second night, Pethwick asked of M. Demetrioivich—

"Professor, what is the probability that two meteors should perform the same evolutions in the same quarter of the sky and apparently strike in about the same place on two nights in succession?"

"I'd thought of that problem," returned the savant, yawning. "In fact, I have set down some tentative figures on the subject." Here

he referred to a little note-book. "It is roughly one chance in two million."

"Small," observed Pethwick.

"That was for the stars alone. For two stars to fall in the same region, each time followed by a phosphorescence, diminishes the probability to one chance in eight trillion."

Pethwick whistled softly.

"In fact, it was not a meteorite we saw," concluded the professor, crawling into bed.

Chapter Two

PABLO PASCA shouted something from perhaps a hundred yards up the trail. He was hidden from the string of toiling riders by a fold in the precipice. Pethwick looked ahead and saw two vultures launch themselves out over the abyss. One swung back down the face of the mountain and passed within forty feet of the party, its feathers whistling, its bald, whitish head turning for a look at the intruders and its odor momentarily tainting the cold wind.

A moment later the engineer saw the two guides had dismounted and their mules were snorting and jerking on the very edge of the precipice. The men themselves were staring at something and Pasca seemed almost as panic-stricken as the animals. The unquietness spread rapidly down the string of baggage-carriers.

Pethwick slid off his mount and hurried forward, slipping inside the llamas and mules. He came out by the side of Pablo to a queer, not to say gruesome sight.

In the air circled eight or ten vultures. They had been frightened from a row of skeletons, which evidently were articulated on wires and iron rods and stood before the travelers in the awkward postures such objects assume. Among the things Pethwick recognized the whitened frames of a snake, condor, sheep, vicuna, puma, monkey and at the end, standing upright, the bones of a man.

The specimens were accurately spaced around the end of the trail. The skulls grinned fixedly at the DeLong Geographical Expedition. In the gusty wind the arm of the man swung and beat against his thigh bone in a grotesque travesty of mirth.

Something touched Pethwick from behind. He turned with a shudder and saw Standifer. The secretary of the expedition looked at the assemblage for a moment, then drew out his note-book and pen, gave the pen a fillip to start a flow of ink and methodically jotted down the list before him. When he had finished he glanced up inquiringly as he rescrewed the top on his writing instrument.

"Don't suppose anyone is moving a museum, eh, Pethwick?"

"No," said the engineer, studying the figures.

"You don't think so?" surprised.

"Certainly not!"

"Huh!" Standifer drew forth his book again. "Makes a sort of little mystery of it, doesn't it?"

And he jotted this fact down.

Prof. Demetrioivich joined his companions as the secretary made his observation on the probable source of the objects before them.

"Standifer's hypothesis is not as bad as it sounds, Pethwick," observed the savant.

"You don't mean these really belong to some scientist?" cried the engineer.

"I think their arrangement proves it."

The engineer looked at the professor curiously.

"These skeletons are arranged in the order of their evolutionary development."

A glance showed this to be the case and it rather surprised Pethwick.

"Does that hold any significance?"

M. Demetrioivich walked over to the frame of the puma and shook it slightly as he inspected it.

"It would suggest a scientist arranged these specimens. A savage or a rustic would have been more likely to have strung them out according to size, or else he would have mixed them higgledy-piggledy, and the probability that he would have hit on their evolutionary order would have been remote indeed." The professor gave the puma's bones another shake. "Besides that, this articulation is very cleverly done—too cleverly for unpractised hands."

"But why should a scientist leave his specimens out like this?" demanded the engineer in amazement.

"To begin with, this seems to be the end of the trail—the shipping-point, so to speak, and for the further reason that water boils at a very low temperature at this altitude."

As the professor's fingers had touched some particles of flesh still adhering to the puma's vertebrae, he stepped across into a little patch of snow, stooped and washed his hands in it.

His two companions stared at him.

"Water boiling at a low temperature—altitude—what's that got to do with it?" interrogated the engineer.

The scientist smiled.

"I thought you would see that. If boiling water is too cool to clean the bones properly, here are some very trustworthy assistants above us."

M. Demetrioivich indicated the vultures still circling overhead.

The secretary, who had been scribbling rap-

idly during the last part of this discourse, now crossed out a few lines on a former page with the remark—

"Well, there is no mystery to it after all."

"But look here," exclaimed Pethwick. "We're scooped!"

"What do you mean—scooped?" asked the old Rumanian.

"Somebody has beaten us to this field. There are rival explorers in these mountains."

"Tut, tut," chided the old man. "You should say, my dear Pethwick, we have 'colleagues' instead of 'rivals.' I am charmed to believe they are here. We must get in touch with them and try to be of assistance to them."

The kindly old scientist stared away among the great bluish peaks, speculating on where his "colleagues" could be.

"But look here," objected Standifer in alarm: "there will be another secretary with that expedition, grabbing all this literary material—"

"Lads, lads," reproached the old savant. "you have yet to learn the opulence of nature. She is inexhaustible. This party, another party, fifty parties toiling at the same time could never fathom all the marvels that lie under the sweep of our gaze. Why, gentlemen, for example, in Bucharest I and a colleague worked for three years on the relation of the olfactory system of catarrhine monkeys with that of human beings. Our effort was to approximate in what epoch the sense of smell became of secondary importance to humanity. This, of course, would mark a great change in the mode of living among men.

"As I say, we spent three years on the two nervous systems and yet our discoveries were most dissimilar. Now, what are a few white nerve-threads to all this wilderness of snow and boulders? Your fears are quite baseless."

HIS two companions laughed, half ashamed of their jealousy, and then inspected the scene before them, which up till now had been lost in the grizzly detail of the skeletons.

The mountainside on which they stood dropped away in an enormous declivity fully a mile and a half deep and led into a vast and sinister valley that stretched toward the northeast until its folds and twists were lost among the flashing peaks.

The extraordinary part of the scene was that instead of spreading the vivid green of the tropics below the tree-line this great depression looked black and burned. The ensemble recalled to Pethwick certain remarkable erosions he had seen in the West of the United States. Only here, the features were slashed out with a gigantism that dwarfed our Western canyons and buttes.

And there was another striking difference. In the North American West the Grand Canyon, the Yosemite, glow with a solemn beauty. This chasm looked like the raw and terrible wound of fire. Its blackened and twisted acclivities might have been the scars of some terrible torment.

A river lay through the center of this cicatrix and although later it proved nearly half a mile wide it was reduced to a mere rivulet amid such cyclopean setting. It twisted in and out, now lost to view, now shimmering in the distance, everywhere taking the color of its surroundings and looking for the world like one of those dull, spreading adders winding through the valley, poison from fang to sting.

Pethwick now fully understood why the Indians had given the peculiar name to the river. It was a sobriquet any human being would have bestowed upon it at first glimpse. It required no guide to tell Pethwick he was looking down upon the Rio Infernillo.

"This is the place, *señor*," said Pablo Pasca. "Do we start back from here?"

Pethwick looked at him in surprise. "We'll spend the next sixty days in this valley."

"I mean Cesare and myself, *señor*," explained the Zambo in hangdog fashion.

"You and Cesare!"

"We have showed you the Valley of the Rio Infernillo—that was all we promised, *señor*," pursued Pablo doggedly.

Ruano glanced around. "Speak for yourself, Pablo!"

"You are not going on into this den of Satan, are you?" cried Pablo to the murderer. "Past these—these—" He nodded at the skeletons.

Ruano grinned, showing two rows of big white teeth, "I'll go help make some more skeletons," he said carelessly.

Pethwick began to explain away Pasca's fears.

"Those are nothing but the specimens of a scientific expedition, Pablo."

"Do scientific expeditions collect skeletons?" shuddered the thief.

"Yes."

"Will you do that?"

"Very probably."

"And leave them for the birds to pick?"

"If we don't boil them." Pethwick grew more amused as the fears of the guide mounted.

"*Mio Dios!* What for?"

"To study them," laughed the engineer.

Pablo turned a grayish yellow.

"And you kill men, and let the buzzards pick their bones—to study them!" aspirated the half-breed. "Will you kill me—and Ruano?"

"Certainly not!" ejaculated Pethwick, quite shocked. "What a silly idea!"

"But the other gang did, *señor*," cried the Zambo, nodding at the skeleton of the man at the end of the line, "and no doubt, *señor*, they told their guide that all was well, that everything was as it should be, until one fine day—pang!"

"And here he stands, grinning at me, slapping his knees to see another big fool go spraddling down the scarp."

At such a hideous suspicion all three scientists began a shocked denial.

What did Pablo take them for—ghouls? They were civilized men, scientists, professors, engineers, authors.

"Then why did you choose for guides two men condemned to death unless it was to kill them and stay within the law?"

They reassured the robber so earnestly that he was half convinced, when unfortunately an extra gust of wind set the skeleton clapping his knee again.

The gruesome mirth set Pablo almost in a frenzy.

"*Ehue!* Yes! But how did the other party get their man? He came from somewhere! No doubt they found a dead man in this devil's country! Oh, yes; dead men are frequent in this place where men never go! They didn't kill their guide to study his bones. Oh, no! Not at all! Ha! No! He dropped dead. Very reasonable! Ho!"

With a yell he dropped his mule's rein and leaped for the mouth of the trail.

BUT Cesare Ruano was quicker than the thief. The murderer made one leap, caught the flying Zambo by the shoulder and brought him in a huddle on the stones.

The robber shrieked, screamed, began a chattering prayer.

"Oh, Holy Mary! Blessed Virgin! Receive my soul! I am to be killed! Blessed Queen, save me!"

The words seemed to arouse some sort of anger in Cesare, for the big fellow shook Pablo till his teeth rattled.

"Shut up squeaking, you rabbit! Can't you tell when a man is about to murder you? These are gentlemen! You will stay with this party, coward, and do the work! You will help me! I will not leave them and neither will you. *Sabe?*"

As he accented this "*Sabe?*" with a violent shake, Pablo's head nodded vigorously whether he wanted it to or not.

Oddly enough this trouncing seemed to reassure Pasca more than all the arguments of the scientists.

"You are a shrewd man, Cesare," he gasped

as soon as he was allowed to speak. "Are you sure they won't hurt us?"

Ruano laughed again, with a flash of teeth.

"They can't hurt me. I could mash these little men with my thumb. Who are you afraid of. Pablo—the old, gray man who can hardly walk?"

"Why, no," admitted the thief, looking at M. Demetrioivich.

"Or of that bean-pole boy, whose head is so weak he can not remember the simplest thing without writing it in a book?"

"Nor him either," agreed Pablo with a glance at Standifer.

"Or the engineer who can not lift a hand without gasping for breath?"

"Anyway," argued Pasca, half convinced, "how did those other geographers manage to kill their guide? Perhaps they shot him when he was asleep."

"They were not geographers," snapped Ruano: "at least they were not like these men."

"How do you know?"

"Could another such a party be in the mountains and all the country not hear of it? Even in prison we heard the great American scientists were going to the Rio Infiernillo. Then take these men—would they tie all these bones together if they wanted to pack them on llamas to Ayacucho? You know they would not. They would take them apart and put them in sacks until they reached America."

"Why, that's a fact," agreed Pasca, staring at the skeletons with new interest. "Certainly no llama would carry one of those things." He stared a moment longer and added: "But perhaps those other scientists were also fools and did not think of that."

"Then they would not have had wit enough to kill their guide. It takes some wit to kill a man. Pablo, I assure you."

Naturally the geographers had been listening to this very candid opinion of their party. Now M. Demetrioivich inquired, not without a certain respect in his voice:

"Señor Ruano, I may be wrong in my judgment. How do you think those skeletons came here?"

"Señor," returned the convict respectfully, "this is the Rio Infiernillo. I think the devil put them here to scare men away, so they can not look into hell while they are alive. Because if they had a look, *señor*, it would be so horrible they would change their lives, become good men and go to heaven—and so the devil would lose patronage."

Standifer, who was chagrined with Ruano's description of himself, grunted out the word "barbarous." Pethwick shouted with laughter.

With a blush Standifer drew out his note-

book. As he did so, he remarked to Cesare:

"These entries are made, not because I lack intelligence, as you seem to think, but because I am the official secretary of this expedition; besides I am an author. I wrote a book called 'Reindeer in Iceland.'"

A fit of coughing seized Pethwick.

"I meant nothing by what I said, Señor Standifer," explained Ruano, "except to hearten this rabbit. Think nothing of it." He turned to the crowd as a whole. "We will never get the mules and llamas past the skeletons, so we will have to remove the skeletons past the mules and llamas."

This plan recommended itself to the whole party and everybody set to work. The men lugged the things past the trembling animals and finally lined them up behind the cavalcade. They placed the human frame at the head of the troop, just as they had found it.

As Pethwick rode away he looked back at it. There it stood representing the summit of creation, the masterpiece of life. It rattled its phalanges against its femur and grinned a long-toothed grin at the vast joke of existence—an evolutionary climb of a hundred million years, a day or two of sunshine, a night or two of sleep, a little stirring, and a little looking around, and—*poof!* back it was where it had started a hundred million years ago. No wonder skeletons grin.

ON THE forward journey it transpired that Cesare Ruano had obtained a sort of moral ascendancy over the whole party.

He certainly had set the crowd straight about the skeletons. They had tried for an hour to decide where they came from and in half a dozen words Cesare proved to them they knew nothing about the matter whatsoever.

Another thing that gave Cesare prestige was his abrupt quelling of Pasca's desertion. Without Cesare the Zambos would have escaped. None of the scientists would have acted in time to stop his headlong flight.

Civilization had the unfortunate effect of slowing up men's mental operations in emergencies. Indeed, civilization places such a premium on foresight that a civilized man lacks ability to live from instant to instant. The ordinary American lives usually in next month or next year, but he is rarely at home in the "now" and "here."

This quality of concentration on the future is a splendid thing for developing inventions, building great businesses, painting great pictures, writing novels and philosophies, but it works badly indeed for guarding convicts, who invariably bolt in the present tense.

Cesare used his new authority to possess himself of a rifle.

"We don't know just who shot that skeleton," he explained very simply to M. Demetrioovich, "and we don't know how many more skeletons the fellow may want. I prefer to keep mine. . . . Now I have observed that you *señores* never glance about when you travel, but look straight into your mules' ears and think of many great things, no doubt. But this fellow could collect your skeletons very easily. So I will take a rifle and ride before and shoot whoever it is before he shoots us."

Ruano chose Standifer's rifle for this task. The secretary was glad of it, for the weapon had been chafing his leg ever since the party left Ayacucho.

The immediate declivity leading into the valley of the Rio Infiernillo was a field of boulders ranging in size from a man's head to a house. Far below them the tree-line was marked by some small trees that had been tortured by the wind into the grotesque shapes worked out by the Japanese in their dwarf trees. Here and there patches of snow disguised their precarious footing into white pitfalls.

The mules crept downward, exploring every step of the way with their little hoofs, then easing their weight forward. It made a very swaying, chafing ride. Pethwick's pommel worked against his stomach until he felt he had been sitting down a week, wrong side first.

After an endless jostle it seemed to the engineer that he was not descending in the slightest, but was being shaken back and forth, sticking in one place amid the cyclopean scenery. When he looked back, the endless boulder-field slanted toward the sky; when he looked down, it seemed as far as ever into the black and sinister valley where the river wound like an adder.

He looked to reaching the tree-line with a hope it would bring him relief from the monotony. It did not. His saddle chafed, his mule sagged and swayed. His fellow scientists did as he was doing, squirmed about on the torturing saddle-horns. The sameness drove his mind in on itself. He began as Cesare had said, "to stare into his mule's ears and think."

He wondered about the skeletons. He wondered what "trivial" thing Cesare had done to get sentenced to the garrote. He wondered what that shooting star and the phosphorescent mist could have been. Then he wondered about the skeletons again . . . about Cesare . . .

A rifle-shot that sounded like a mere snap in the thin mountain air disturbed his reflections. He looked up and saw a faint wisp of vapor float out of the .30-30 in Cesare's hands. The engineer glanced about anxiously to see if the murderer had shot any of his compan-

ions. They were all on their mules and all looking at each other and at him. Everyone in the crowd had felt instinctively that the desperado had fired at some person—possibly at one of his own party.

"Who is it?" cried Standifer.

"A man down yonder!" Pablo pointed.

"I don't know whether it was a man or not!" cried Ruano, jumping from his slow mule and setting off down the declivity at a hazardous run.

"Ruano!" shouted M. Demetrioovich in horror. "Did you shoot at a human being like that? Drop that rifle, you bloodthirsty fellow! Drop it!"

Extraordinary to say, Cesare did drop his gun and as it struck the stones it fired again. The man plunged on downward at full tilt. It was an amazing flight. He took the boulders like a goat. The party stopped their mounts and sat watching the dash.

"Did you say it was a man?" asked the secretary shakily of Pablo.

"As sure as I am sitting here." At that moment, the flying Ruano swung in behind a huge boulder.

"He was behind that!" cried Pablo sharply. Then he lifted his voice. "Did you get him, Cesare?" he shouted. "Was there any money on him?"

But almost immediately Pethwick glimpsed the murderer again, in fact, saw him twice—or he may have caught a flash of two figures, one chasing the other.

* * *

Suddenly Pablo began yelling as if on a fox-course.

A shock of horror went through Pethwick. He knew too well what the convict would do if he caught the man. Nobody could waylay Cesare Ruano, even to look at him in safety.

"Here, let's get down there!" cried the engineer in urgent tones. "Lord, we ought not to have given that brute a gun!"

"Maybe he hit him!" surmised Pablo in cheerful excitement.

"He's chasing him this minute somewhere behind those boulders!" declared Standifer nervously.

M. Demetrioovich dismounted and from between two boulders recovered Standifer's rifle as they passed it.

Pethwick had screwed up his nerves for some dreadful sight behind the boulder, but there was nothing there. Nothing except a splotch of green liquid on the stones.

Smaller goutts of this green fluid led off down the boulder-field, making from one large boulder to another as if some dripping thing

had tried to keep a covert between itself and the party of riders.

Pethwick dismounted and followed this trail perhaps a hundred yards, until it ceased. Then he stood looking about him in the cold sunshine. He could not hear the slightest sound. The blackened valley and the Infernal River lay far below him. High above him, at the end of the trail, the vultures wheeled against the sky.

Chapter Three

FROM his headlong pursuit down the mountain-side Cesare Ruano never returned.

What became of him none of his companions ever discovered. He dropped out of their lives as suddenly and completely as if he had dissolved into air.

A dozen possibilities besieged their brains. Perhaps he fell over a cliff. Or was drowned in the river. Or he may have deserted the expedition. Perhaps he was still wandering about, lost or crazed. Perhaps the man he pursued turned and killed him.

All these were pure conjectures, for they had not a clue upon which to base a rational hypothesis. The only hope for a suggestion, the green splotches on the boulders, proved to be hopeless riddles themselves.

The men picked up several of the smaller boulders and when camp was pitched Prof. Demetrioovich made a chemical analysis of the stain. Its coloring-matter was derived from chlorophyll. If Ruano's shot had penetrated the stomach of some ruminating animal, it was barely possible for such a stain to have resulted—but it was improbable. This stain was free from cellular vegetal structure. In the mixture was no trace of the corpuscles or serum of blood.

On the afternoon of the second day following the incident, the men sat at the dinner-table discussing the matter.

In the tent beside the rude dining-table were cots and another table holding specimens, mineral, floral and some insects. Two or three books were scattered on the cots and duffle-bags jammed the tent corners.

Looking out through the flaps of their tent, the diners could see the eastern peaks and cliffs of the Infernal Valley turning orange under the sunset.

M. Demetrioovich was talking.

"I consider the chlorophyll an added proof that there is another scientific expedition in this valley."

"What is your reasoning?" inquired Pethwick.

"Chlorophyll is a substance none but a chemist could, or rather would, procure. It serves no commercial purpose. Therefore it must be used experimentally."

"Why would a chemist want to experiment in this forsaken place?"

Standifer put in a question—

"Then you think Cesare shot a hole in a canister of chlorophyll solution?"

"When a man has a choice of improbabilities, all he can do is to choose the least improbable," explained M. Demetrioovich friendly.

"I wonder what Cesare would say about it?" speculated Pethwick.

"The green trail also suggests my theory," proceeded Prof. Demetrioovich. "When Ruano shot the man behind the boulder, his victim evidently did not know that his can of solution had been punctured, for he sat hidden for perhaps a minute while his container leaked a large pool just behind the rock. When Cesare charged, the fellow fled, losing small quantities as the liquid splashed out. At last the man observed the puncture and turned the can over, and there the trail ended."

M. Demetrioovich pushed his coffee cup toward Pablo without interrupting his deductions.

"I should say Cesare's bullet entered the can about an inch below the level of the liquid. That would explain why a continuous trail did not mark the fugitive."

"But why should one scientist be ambushing civilized men in a heaven-forsaken place like this!" cried Standifer in slightly supercilious tones. "And why should he carry a canister of chlorophyll around with him?"

Pethwick tapped the table with his fingers.

"It's unfair to demand the fellow's occupation, race, color and previous condition of servitude," he objected. Then, after a moment: "I wish we could find Ruano—"

M. Demetrioovich stirred his coffee and looked into it without drinking, a Latin habit he had formed in the Rumanian cafés.

"If I may be so bold, señores," put in Pablo Pasca, "a scientist—a lone scientist would go crazy in a place like this."

This remark, while as improbable as the other guesses, nevertheless spread its suggestion of tragedy over the situation.

"Nobody knows the action of chlorophyll exactly," brooded M. Demetrioovich. "Somehow it crystallizes the energy in sunlight. If some man had developed a method to bottle the sun's energy directly, he would probably pursue his investigations in the tropics—"

"And he might desire secrecy," added Pethwick, "so much so that he would even—"

"You mean he would murder Cesare?" finished Standifer.

"A certain type of scientific mind might do that, gentlemen," agreed M. Demetrioovich gravely.

"What sort, professor?"

"There are only a few countries in the world capable of producing a chemist who could experiment with chlorophyll and sunlight—"

The diners looked at the old scientist expectantly.

"Of course, I know only one country whose national creed is ruthlessness, only one whose chemists would kill an Indian on the bare possibility that the Indian might divulge his secret process—or his political affiliations."

"You mean he could be a German royalist?" queried Pethwick.

"If the Germans could synthesize the sun's energy and thus transform it directly into food, they would certainly be in a position to bid again for world dominion," stated M. Demetrioovich positively. "It would annul a blockade of the seas. It would render unnecessary millions of men working in the fields and put them on the battlefield."

"But that's fantastic, professor!" cried Pethwick. "That's getting outside of probability."

"The green splotches themselves are outside of probability, Mr. Pethwick," stated the old savant gravely, "but they are here nevertheless."

"The moon is rising," observed Standifer casually.

The secretary's silly and trivial breaks in the conversation irritated Pethwick. He turned and said—

"Well, that doesn't bother me, does it you?"

"Oh, no," said Standifer, taking the rather tart remark in good faith. "I like to watch the moon rise. If I may say, all my best literary ideas are evolved under the moonlight."

"Trot on out and see if you can't think up something good," suggested the engineer.

Standifer caught this sarcasm, flushed slightly but did get up and walk out through the tent entrance. A moment later the two men followed him, leaving the things to Pablo.

THE rising moon centered their attention with the first glint of its disk between two peaks far down the valley. The last bronze of twilight lingered in the west. The men shivered with the chill of the coming night.

Despite Pethwick's jibe at the poetical in-

fluence of the moon as expressed by the secretary, still the engineer felt it himself.

"It looks whiter, more silvery in this latitude," he observed after a continued silence.

"That mist about it looks like the veil of a bride," mused the author.

"May do it," said the engineer, who despised similes, "but it looks more like a mist around the moon."

"What's the matter with you anyway, Pethwick?" snapped Standifer, wheeling around. "Just because you lack the gift of poetical expression is no reason you should make an ass of yourself and bray every time I utter a well-turned phrase!"

"Was that what you were doing?" inquired the older man.

"It was, and if—"

Standifer broke off suddenly and stared, then in amazement gasped—

"For Heaven's sake!"

"What is it?" Both the older men followed his gaze.

Standifer was staring into the fading sky utterly bewildered.

Pethwick shook him.

"What is it?"

The secretary pointed skyward.

They followed his finger and saw against the dull west the delicate silver crescent of a new moon.

It required half an instant for the incoherence of their two observations to burst upon them. The next impulse, all three turned.

The full moon they had seen rising in the east had disappeared. The mist, a phosphorescent mist, still hung about the peaks; indeed, it seemed to settle on the distant crags and cliffs and glow faintly in the gathering darkness. It defined a sort of spectral mountain-scape. Then, before their astounded gaze, it faded into darkness.

A scratching sound caused Pethwick to shiver. It was Pablo Pasca striking a match inside the tent.

* * *

After his observation of what for want of a better name will have to be called the pseudo-moon, a curious mental apathy fell over Pethwick. Not that he failed to think of the extraordinary series of events that had befallen the expedition. He did think of them all the time. But he thought weakly, hopelessly. He picked up the problem in his brain without the slightest hope of finding the solution. He exhausted himself on the enigma, and yet he could not let it go.

He tried to forget it and center himself

on his work. But little mysteries cropped out in his every day toil. His principal duty with the expedition was map-making, the determination of the altitudes of the various observed peaks, and a mapping of the outcrops of the black micas, limonites, serpentine, pitchblendes, obsidians and hornblendes. It was these dark-colored stones, he found, that gave the great chasm its look of incineration.

And this is what he did not understand. Here and there he found places where streams of lava sprang, apparently, out of the solid escarpment of the cliffs.

Now the whole Peruvian sierras are volcanic and these lava pockets did not surprise Pethwick. The inexplicable part was that no volcanic vent connected these little fumaroles with the interior of the mountain. They seemed to have been burned from the outside. They looked as if some object of intense heat had branded the mountainside.

Ordinarily Pethwick's mind would have sprung like a terrier at such a problem; now, through sheer brain-fag, he jotted the descriptions without comment. In this dull, soulless way he made the following extraordinary entry into his journal one morning:

This morning, close to one of those burned pockets, or fumaroles, which I have before described, I found a roasted rabbit. The little animal was some twelve feet from the fumarole, sitting upright on its haunches—and roasted. It looked as if its curiosity had been aroused, and it had been cooked instantly. As decomposition had not set in, it could not have been dead for more than a week.

I wonder if this is a tab on the date of these fumaroles? If so, they must have been burned a few days ago, instead of being of geologic antiquity, as I at first assumed. If recent, they must be of artificial origin. Since they roast a rabbit before frightening it, they must occur with the abruptness of an explosion. Can these splotches be connected with the evil mystery surrounding this expedition? I can not say. I have no theory whatever.

That evening at dinner Pethwick showed this entry to M. Demetrioivich. The old Rumanian read it, and his only comment was a nod and a brief—"Yes, I had discovered they were of recent origin myself."

Presently he suggested a game of chess to take their minds off the matter before they retired.

"You look strained, Pethwick," said the old man.

The engineer laughed briefly.

"I am strained. I'm jumpy every minute of the day and night."

The old savant considered his friend with concern.

"Wouldn't you better get out of here for a while, Herbert?"

"What's the use? I could think of nothing else."

"You would feel out of danger."

"I don't feel in danger."

"Yes, you do—all mystery connotes danger. It suggests it to us. That is why mystery is so stimulating and fascinating."

"Do you think we are in danger?"

"I am sure the man who killed Cesare would not hesitate over us."

Standifer, who was seated at the table, began to smile in a superior manner at their fears.

Owing to the engineer's nervous condition this irritated Pethwick acutely. However, he said nothing about it, but remarked to M. Demetrioovich—

"Tomorrow I am through with my work right around here."

"Then you'll take a rest, as I suggest."

"No, I'll take a pack, walk straight down this valley and find out what is making these fumaroles—and what became of Cesare."

At that moment, in the gathering blue of night, the eastern sky was lighted by the glare of the pseudo-moon. Its pallor poured in through the tent-flaps and the shadows of the men's legs streaked the floor.

The mystery brought both the older men to the outside. They stared at the illumination in silence. The light was as noiseless as the aurora.

As they watched it, Pethwick heard Standifer laughing inside the tent.

The secretary's idiocy almost snapped the engineer's control. He wanted to knock his empty head. At last the phenomenon died away and left its usual glimmer on the surrounding heights. In a few minutes this vanished and it was full night.

WHEN the men reentered the tent Standifer still smiled as if he enjoyed some immunity from their mystification and nervousness.

"Well, what's the joke?" asked Pethwick at last.

"The way you fellows go up in the air about this thing."

"You, I suppose, are on solid ground!" exploded Pethwick.

The author said nothing but continued his idiotic smile.

"I admit there are points here and there I don't understand," continued Pethwick after a moment. "No doubt we fail to understand it as thoroughly as you do."

"You do," agreed Standifer with such matter-of-factness the engineer was really surprised.

"What in the devil have you found out?" he asked irritably.

"Oh, the facts, the facts," said Standifer nonchalantly. "I'm a writer, you know, a trained observer; I dive to the bottom of things."

Pethwick stared, then laughed in a chattering fashion—

"Y-yes, I see you diving to the bottom of this—"

The old professor, who had been studying the secretary, quietly interrupted—

"What do you know, James?"

The literary light hesitated a moment, then drew a handful of glittering metal out of his pocket and plunked it down on the table.

"I know all about it," he said and grinned in spite of himself.

The men stared. Pablo Pasca paused in his journeys to and from the kitchen tent to stare at the boy and the gold.

"Know all about what?" cut in Pethwick jumpily. "The gold or the mystery?"

"Both."

Suddenly Pablo cried—

"I told you, *señores*, wealth lies where danger is so great!"

"Have you found a gold mine?" asked M. Demetrioovich.

"No, I sold one of my books."

"Who to—when—where—my Lord; who was the sucker?" Pethwick's questions almost exploded out of him.

"I had no idea my book had such a reputation," beamed the author.

"Youngster, if you'll just cut the literary twaddle—" quavered Pethwick, on edge.

"Well, I had a hunch there must be some very simple explanation for all this skull and cross-bone stuff you fellows were trying to pull. You know that doesn't go in real life. It's only fiction, that resort of the mentally muddled—"

"Standifer! Spill it—if you know anything!"

"Go on, tell it in your own way, Mr. Standifer," encouraged M. Demetrioovich. "You were saying 'mentally muddled.'"

"Sure—yes—well, nothing to it, you know. This life is very simple, once you get the key."

"Lord—doesn't that sound like 'Reindeer in Iceland!'" ground out the engineer.

"What was the light we saw just then, Mr. Standifer?" inquired the savant, who saw that the secretary would never get anywhere unaided.

"A new sort of portable furnace, sir, that extracts and reduces ores on the spot."

"Who runs it?"

"Indians."

"Have you seen any of them?"

"Saw one not three hours ago. Sold him a copy of 'Reindeers in Iceland.'"

Pethwick interrupted the catechism.

"Gave you that much gold for a copy of 'Reindeer in Iceland'—for the whole edition of 'Reindeer in Iceland!'"

"Did you inquire about Cesare?" proceeded M. Demetrioovich.

"Yes, he's working for them."

"Did you think to ask about the chlorophyll?"

"That's used in a secret process of extracting gold."

"You say the men engaged in such a method of mining are *Indians*?"

"The man I saw was an Indian."

"Did you talk to him in English, Spanish, Quicha? What language?"

The secretary hesitated.

"Well—in English, but I had to explain the language to him. I think he knew it once but had forgot."

"A lot of South Americans are educated in the States," observed Pethwick, who by now was listening intently.

"Tell us what happened, Mr. Standifer," requested the old Rumanian.

"WELL, today I was about twelve miles down the valley. I had sat down to eat my lunch when I saw an Indian behind a rock staring at me as if his eyes would pop out of his head. I don't mind admitting it gave me a turn, after the way things have been happening around here. On second glance I thought it was Cesare. I was about to yell when the fellow himself yelled at me—

"Hey, Cesare, is that you?"

"Well, it nearly bowled me over. But I got a grip on my nerves and shouted back, 'No, I'm not Cesare!' And I was about to ask who the fellow was when he took it right out of my mouth and shouted to me, 'Who are you?'"

"I told him my name and address, that I was an author and secretary of the DeLong Geographical Expedition; then I asked him to come out and let's have a talk.

"The fellow came out all right, walking up to me, looking hard at me. He was an ordinary Indian with a big head and had on clothes about like Cesare's. In fact, you know it is hard to tell Indians apart. As he came up he asked me the very question I had in mind—

"Do you know Cesare?"

"I said, 'Yes; where is he?'"

"He stood looking at me and shook his head.

"I said, 'You don't know,' and he touched his mouth and laughed. Then I guessed that he didn't understand English very well, so I began explaining the language to him.

"He would point at something and say, 'Is that a bird? Is that a stone? Is that a river?' In each case he got it right, but there was always a hesitation, of about a second, perhaps, as if he were thinking, like this: 'Is that a—river?'"

Both the older men were staring intently at the boy as if they were trying to read something behind his words. Pethwick nodded impatiently.

"I am sure," continued Standifer, "the fellow once knew English and it was coming back to him."

"Undoubtedly," from Pethwick.

"Then he saw the corner of my book in my haversack, for I—I sometimes carry my book around to read when I'm lonely, and he said, 'What is that—' 'Reindeer in Iceland?'"

"That joggled me so, I said, 'Yes; how the deuce did you know that?'"

"Well, at that he almost laughed himself to death and finally he said just about what was in my mind, 'That has a wider reputation than you imagine.' and he added, 'What is it for?'"

"What is what for?" says I.

"Reindeer in Iceland," says he.

"To read," says I. 'It contains facts,' says I. 'It's not like the rotten fiction you pick up.' And with that my whole spiel that I used to put up to the farmers in New York State when I sold my book from door to door came back to me. I thought what a lark it would be to try to sell a copy to an Indian in the Rio Infernillo. 'If I do that,' I thought to myself, 'I'll be the star book-agent of both the Americas.'

So I began:

"It's not like the rotten fiction you buy," says I. "This volume gives you the truth about reindeer in Iceland; it tells you their food, their strength, their endurance, their value in all the different moneys of the world: It states where are the greatest herds. What reindeer hides are used for. How their meat, milk and cheese taste. How to prepare puddings from their blood. How the bulls fight. Their calls; their love-calls, danger-calls, hunger-calls. How their age may be calculated by the tines on their horns and the rings on their teeth and the set of their tails. In fact, sir," said I, 'with this little volume in your pocket, it will be impossible for any man, no matter how dishonest he is, to palm off on you an old, decrepit reindeer under the

specious representation that he or she is young, agile and tender.

"The price of this invaluable compendium puts it within easy reach of one and all. It will prove of enormous practical and educational value to each and any. It makes little difference whether you mean to rear these graceful, docile animals or not; you need this volume, for as a means of intellectual culture it is unsurpassed. It contains facts, nothing but facts. You need it. Do you want it? Are you progressive? Its price is the only small thing about it—only fifty-four cents. Let me put you down."

"With that, so strong is the force of habit. I whipped out an old envelope to take his order on.

"What is fifty-four cents?" he asked. "Have I got fifty-four cents?"

"Just what I was wondering," says I. "Turn your pockets wrong side out and I'll see."

"He turned 'em and spilled a lot of metals on the ground. I saw these pieces of gold and told him they would do. I told him I would give him all five of my volumes, for that is the number I brought on this trip, and I'm sorry now I didn't bring more.

"He just pushed the gold over to me without blinking an eye and we traded. I told him where we camped and he said tomorrow he would call and get the other four volumes. And, gentlemen, that is all I know."

AT THE end of this tale, Standifer leaned back, smiling with pleasure at his sale. The two men sat studying him. At last Pethwick asked—

"You say he knew the title of your book?"

"Yes."

"Was the title showing?"

"No, just a little corner stuck out of the knapsack."

Pethwick considered another moment.

"You first thought it was Cesare?"

"Yes."

"Did he have a scar on the side of his face?"

"No, I would have noticed that sure. Still, his face was painted very thickly."

"You are sure it wasn't Cesare?"

"Absolutely sure."

Here M. Demetrioovich took up what might be called the cross-examination.

"You say he didn't understand English at first—could he read the book you sold him?"

"No, that was the odd part. I had to tell him what the letters were and how they made words; how words made sentences. But he caught on the moment I showed him anything and never forgot at all. I tried him."

M. Demetrioovich paused.

"You are sure it was an Indian?"

"Yes."

"But he didn't know the value of gold?"

"Well, I don't know about that," began Standifer.

"Didn't you say he gave you all that money for five dinky little books!" stormed Pethwick.

"Yes, but that doesn't say he doesn't understand—"

"A gold-miner," interrupted M. Demetrioovich, "who is so highly scientific as to employ chlorophyll in a secret process of extracting gold and yet who—doesn't know the value of gold!"

The secretary caressed his glittering pile happily, yawned and slipped it back into his pocket.

"Anyway, I wish I had a cartload of those books down here."

Pethwick sat on his stool clutching his knee to his breast, glaring at the author. Finally he gave a nervous laugh—

"I'm glad you've cleared up the mystery, Standifer."

"Yes; so am I," returned the secretary genially. "I was getting worried about it myself."

"I shouldn't think it would worry you, Standifer." Pethwick gave another shuddery laugh.

"I'm not going to worry," agreed the secretary heartily.

The engineer sat moistening his dry lips with his tongue while little shivers played through him.

"By the way," he asked after a moment, "did you think to inquire about those skeletons? Is that—cleared up, too?"

"Yes, I did. He said he put them up there to keep the animals away. He said you never knew what sort of animals were about and he didn't want any in till he was ready. He said he put one of every species he could find because each animal was afraid of the skeleton of its own dead."

M. Demetrioovich sat gazing at the boy. A grayness seemed to be drawing over the old man.

"That's a fact," he nodded. "I'd never thought of it before—each animal is afraid of its dead. No skeleton shocks a human being except the skeleton of a man. I suppose it is true of the rest."

"Anyway, it's all cleared up now, Standifer," repeated the engineer with his chattering laugh. "It is as you say, Standifer; there are no mysteries outside of fiction."

He began laughing, shaking violently. His cachinnations grew louder and wilder. M. Demetrioovich jumped out of his seat, hurried

over to his medicine-chest, fixed up a glass of something and with a trembling hand presented it to the engineer. Pethwick drank some and then the old man took a deep swallow himself.

"What's the matter?" asked the secretary, lifting a happy head.

"It's the reaction," shivered the engineer less violently. "You cleared up the mystery—so suddenly—Go on to sleep."

The boy dropped back to his pillow and was off instantly after his long walk.

The two older men sat staring at each other across the little table, their nerves calming somewhat under the influence of the sedative.

"Is it a lie," whispered Pethwick after a long thought, "to cover the discovery of gold?"

M. Demetrioovich shook his head.

"That boy hasn't enough imagination to concoct a fragment of his fantastic tale. The thing happened."

"Then, in God's name, what is Cesare going to do to us tomorrow?"

"Cesare would never have given away all that gold," decided the old savant slowly.

"Unless—he means to recoup it all tomorrow."

M. Demetrioovich shook his head.

"Cesare might have put on the paint—he could never have thought up such an elaborate mental disguise. That is far beyond him."

The two men brooded. At last the savant hazarded:

"It may be possible that the Bolsheviki have quit using gold. I believe there is a plan to use time-checks down in their socialistic program."

The engineer jumped another speculation, "The old Incans—sun-worshippers, who sacrifice living men to their deity—"

The two scientists sat in silence. From the ice-fields high above the chasm of the Rio Infernillo came a great sighing wind. It breathed in on them out of the blackness; its cold breath chilled their necks, their hands, their wrists; it breathed on their ankles and spread under their trousers, chilling their knees and loins.

The men shivered.

Chapter Four

PETHWICK awoke out of some sort of nightmare about Incan sun-worshippers. He could hear the groans of victims about to be sacrificed and even after he had shuddered awake his sense of impending calamity persisted. He lifted himself on an

elbow and stared about the tent. The sun shining straight into his face, no doubt, had caused his fantasy about the sun-worshippers.

He got to a sitting posture, yawning and blinking his eyes. Outside the day was perfectly still. A bird chirped querulously. In the corral he could hear the llamas snuffling. Then he heard repeated the groan that had disturbed him in his sleep. It came from the secretary's cot.

The engineer glanced across, then came fully awake. Instead of the young author, Pethwick saw an old, white-haired man lying in the cot with the back of his head showing past the blankets. The engineer stared at this thing blankly. A suspicion that Demetrioovich and Standifer had changed cots passed through his mind, but a glance showed him the old savant still asleep on his proper bed.

The engineer got up, stepped across and leaned over this uncanny changeling. It took him a full half-minute to recognize, in a drawn face and white hair of the sleeper, the boy Standifer.

A shock went over the engineer. He put his hand on the author's shoulder.

"Standifer!" he shouted. "Standifer!"

As Standifer did not move, Pethwick called to the professor with an edge of horror in his voice.

The old savant sprang up nervously.

"What is it?"

"Here, look at this boy!"

The scientist stared from his cot, rubbed his eyes and peered.

"Is—is that Standifer?"

"Yes."

"What's happened to him?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, professor."

The scientist jabbed feet into slippers and came across the tent. He shook the sleeper gently at first, but gradually increased his energy till the cot squeaked and the strange white head bobbed on the pneumatic pillow.

"Standifer! Standifer!"

But the youth lay inert.

He stripped the covers and the underclothes off the young man. Standifer lay before them naked in the cold morning air; his undeveloped physique looked bluish; then, on the groin of his right leg, Pethwick noticed an inflamed splotch that looked like a severe burn.

M. Demetrioovich turned to his medicine-chest and handed Pethwick an ammonia bottle to hold under the boy's nose while he loaded a hypodermic with strychnin solution. A moment later he discharged it into the patient's arm.

A shudder ran through Standifer at the

powerful stimulant. His breathing became better and after a bit he opened his eyes. He looked drowsily at the two faces bending over him and after a minute whispered—

"What's matter?"

"How do you feel?"

"Sleepy. Is it time to get up?"

"Do you ache—hurt?"

The secretary closed his eyes, evidently to take stock of his feelings.

"My head aches. My—my leg burns."

He reached down and touched the inflamed spot.

As the strychnin took firmer hold the boy became alert enough to show surprise at his own state. He eased his sore leg to the floor and sat up on the edge of the cot. Both his companions began a series of questions.

Standifer had no idea what was the matter with him. He had not bruised either his head or his leg. Nothing had happened to him through the night, that he recalled, nor on the preceding day. After a bit, he remembered the sale of his books and drew from under his pillow the gold which he had received.

A thought crossed Pethwick's mind that Pablo Pasca had crept in during the night and had assaulted the sleeper. Demetrioivich took the bag and inspected it. He poured the yellow metal into his palm and examined it, smelled of it gingerly. Pethwick watched him with some curiosity.

"How did you bring this home yesterday afternoon, James?" the old man asked the young man.

The secretary thought.

"In my pocket."

"In your right trousers pocket?"

Standifer made a movement to place his right and left sides and said—

"Yes."

"Put on your trousers."

The youth did so, working his sore leg carefully inside.

"Put that gold in your pocket. Does it fall directly over the burn?"

Standifer cringed and got the metal out as quickly as possible.

"I should say so."

M. Demetrioivich nodded.

"And you slept with the gold under your pillow last night for safekeeping?"

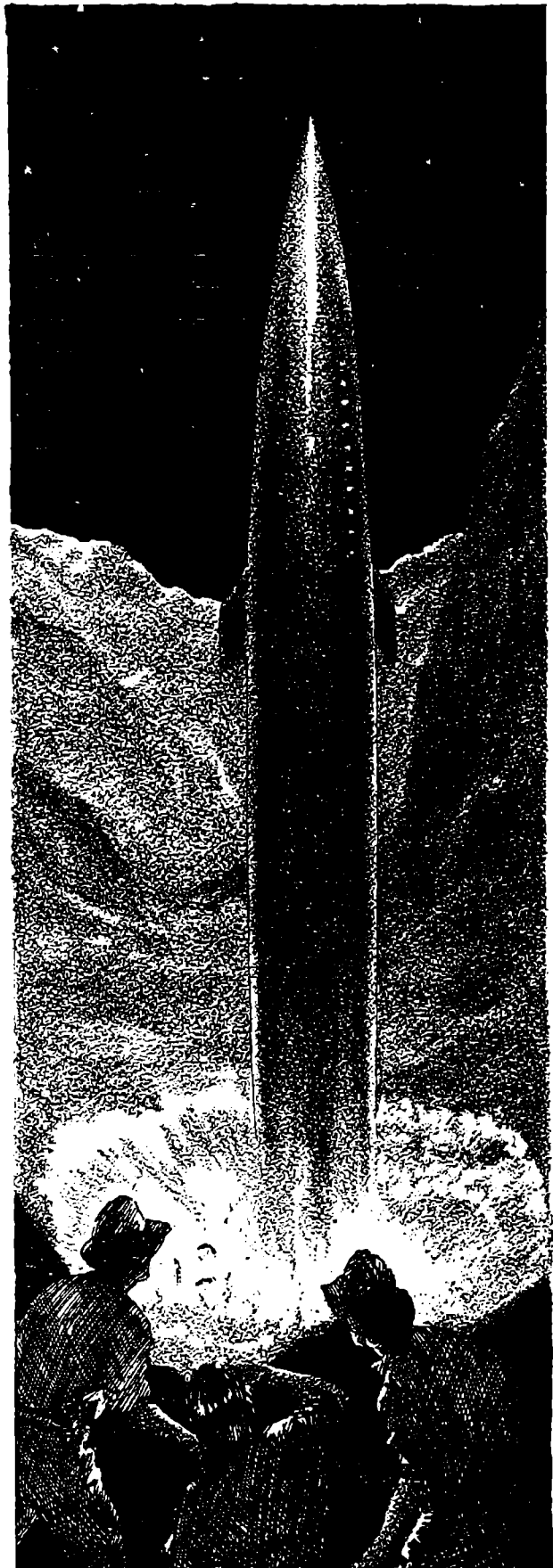
"Yes."

"Then that is what did it," diagnosed the scientist.

"But how can gold—"

"The stuff must be poisoned somehow. I'll see if I can find how."

The savant moved to the table containing his chemicals and test-tubes.



Quite suddenly from where the stern of the dirigible nested on the ground there broke out a light of insufferable brilliancy.

TO PETHWICK the idea of poisoned gold sounded more like the extravagances of the Middle Ages than a reality occurring in the twentieth century. The engineer stood beside the table and watched the professor pursue his reactions for vegetable and mineral poisons. Standifer limped to the engineer's side. In the silver bowl of an alcohol lamp, the boy caught a reflection of himself. He leaned down and looked at the tiny image curiously. At length he asked—

"Pethwick, is there anything the matter with my hair?"

Then Pethwick realized that the boy did not know his hair was white. And he found, to his surprise, that he hated to tell Standifer. He continued watching the experiment as if he did not hear.

Standifer took up the lamp and by holding its bowl close he got a fair view of his head. He gave a faint gasp and looked about for a mirror. At that instant M. Demetrio- vich took the only mirror on the table to condense a vapor floating out of a tube. The old man began talking quickly to the engineer.

"Pethwick, this is the cleverist destructive stroke that the Bolshevists have ever invented."

"What is it?"

"I still don't know, but they have poisoned this gold. They could probably do the same thing to silver. It makes the circulation of money deadly. It will perhaps cause the precious metals to be discarded as media of circulation."

The engineer looked incredulous.

"It's a fact. Do you recall how the report of ground glass in candies cut down the consumption of confectionery? If a large body of men should persistently poison every metal coin that passes through their hands—who would handle coins? Why, gentlemen," he continued as the enormity of the affair grew on him, "this will upset our whole commercial system. It will demonetize gold. No wonder that scoundrel offered our secretary so much gold for a book or two! He wanted to test his wares."

The old man's hand trembled as he poured a blue liquid from one test tube to another.

"I am constrained to believe that in this Valley of the Infernal River we are confronted with the greatest malignant genius mankind has ever produced."

"Why should he want to demonetize gold?" interrupted Pethwick.

"It will force mankind to adopt a new standard of value and to use an artificial medium of exchange—'labor-hour checks,' perhaps, whose very installation will do more

to socialize the world than any other single innovation."

The two friends stood watching him anxiously. "You can't find what they do it with?"

"Not a trace so far. It seems to defy analysis."

"Notice," observed Pethwick, "your electro- scope is discharged."

M. Demetrio- vich glanced at the gold-leaf electroscope and saw that its tissue leaves were wilted.

Suddenly Standifer interrupted:

"Pethwick, is my hair white? Did that stuff turn my hair white?" He seized the mirror. "Look! Look!" he cried out of nervous shock and a profound wounded vanity.

The engineer turned with genuine sympathy for the author, but in turning he saw a man standing in the entrance, watching the excitement with a slight smile.

The engineer paused abruptly, staring.

The stranger was a medium-sized Indian with an abnormally developed head and a thickly painted face. He wore the usual shirt and trousers of a *cholo* and for some reason gave Pethwick a strong impression of Cesare Ruano. Why he resembled Cesare, Pethwick could not state, even after he had inspected him closely. To judge from the Indian's faintly ironic expression, he must have been observing the scientists for several minutes.

M. Demetrio- vich first regained his self-possession.

"Are you the man who gave my boy this gold?" he asked sharply, indicating the metal with which he was experimenting.

The painted man looked at the heap.

"I gave a boy some gold for some books," he admitted.

"Well, that's the gold all right," snapped Pethwick.

"Did you know the gold you gave him was poisoned?" proceeded the savant severely.

"Poisoned? How was it poisoned?"

"That is for you to tell us."

"I don't know in the least. What effect did it have?"

The man's tones were completely casual, without sign of fear, regret or chagrin at the charge.

"It burned a place on his leg, and last night he slept with it under his head. You see what it did, for yourself."

The stranger looked at Standifer in astonishment and presently ejaculated—

"Is that the same boy?"

"You see you nearly killed him," stated the scientist grimly.

"It was quite accidental; I don't quite

understand it myself. Let me look at his trouble."

He walked over with more curiosity than regret in his manner.

Pethwick watched the fellow with a sharp and extraordinary dislike. It was so sharp that it drove out of his mind the amazing fact of finding this sort of person in such a desolate valley.

Standifer exhibited the burn. The stranger looked at it, touched the spot here and there and finally said, more with the air of an instructor lecturing his inferiors than with that of an Indian talking to white men:

"This is the effect of a metal which I carried with the gold. A metal—I don't know what you call it in your language—possibly you may never have heard of it. Here is some."

He reached in his pocket and drew out a piece of silvery metal as large as a double eagle and dropped it on the table before M. Demetrioivich.

The old savant looked at the metal.

"It's radium," he said in a puzzled voice. "It's the largest piece of radium I ever saw—it's the only piece of pure metallic radium I ever saw. It—it's worth quite a fortune—and owned by an Indian!"

Here M. Demetrioivich breached his invariably good manners by staring blankly at his guest.

"So you are acquainted with it?" observed the stranger with interest.

"Not in its metallic form. I have extracted its bromide myself. And I've seen radium burns before. I might have known it was a radium burn, but I never dreamed of that metal."

"But that was gold that burned me," complained Standifer.

"That's true," agreed M. Demetrioivich, "but, you see, the radiations of radium have the power of settling on any object and producing all the effects of radium itself. This gentleman carried those lumps of gold in his pockets along with about two million dollars' worth of radium." The old savant laughed briefly at the eeriness of the situation. "The gold became charged with radium, burned your leg and whitened your hair. It also affected my electrostat."

THE three men turned to the stranger, who apparently carried fortunes of various metals jingling loose in his pocket.

"Sir," began the savant, "we must apologize to you for our unjust suspicions."

"Do you mean your suspicions were incorrect?" queried the red man.

"I mean," said the old savant with dignity,

for this was no way to take an apology, "that we were morally culpable in attributing to you criminal motives without waiting for conclusive evidence."

The stranger smiled at this long sentence.

"I can understand your idea without your speaking each word of it. But the idea itself is very strange." He stroked his chin and some paint rubbed off on his fingers, showing a lighter yellowish skin beneath. Then he laughed. "If you should apologize for every incorrect idea you maintain, gentlemen, I should think your lives would be one long apology."

The superciliousness, the careless disdain in the observation, accentuated Pethwick's antipathy to the man.

At that moment the fellow asked—

"Do all your species live in cloth shelters such as these?"

Standifer, who seemed more kindly disposed toward the stranger than the others, explained that tents were temporary and that houses were permanent.

The newcomer continued his smiling scrutiny of everything and at last asked—

"Can't you gentlemen even communicate with each other without using words and sentences?"

He paused, then, as if to simplify what he had said, went on:

"Suppose you, Mr.—Pethwick, desired to communicate with Mr.—" he made a gesture toward the scientist and added—"Mr.—Demetrioivich, would you be forced to articulate every word in the sentence?"

"How did you come to know my name?" asked the engineer, surprised. "Have we met before?"

The stranger laughed heartily. "I am sure we have not. I see you desire my name. Well, I have a number. In my country the citizens are numbered. I am sure when your own countries become densely populated, you too will adopt a numerical nomenclature."

"What is your number?" asked Standifer, quite astounded at this, as indeed were his companions.

"1753-12,657,109-654-3."

The secretary laughed.

"It sounds like a cross between a combination lock and a football game. Where do you come from, Mr.—Mr. Three?"

The painted man nodded down the valley casually.

"The name of my country is One, or First," he smiled. "Of course that is a very ancient and unscientific name, but notation must begin somewhere, and it usually begins at home. Now I dare say each one of you live in a country called One—no, I see I am wrong."

Then he repeated in a lower tone, "America—Rumania—Peru—very pretty names but unscientific."

By this time Mr. Three's remarkable feat of calling the men's names and then calling the countries of their birth drove it in on the explorers that they had encountered an amazing man indeed.

"Do you read our thoughts before we speak?" cried Standifer.

Mr. Three nodded easily.

"Certainly; without that all study of the lower animals would be a mere cataloging of actions and habits."

Pethwick wondered if the fellow meant a very delicate insult to begin talking about the study of "lower animals" so promptly when the conversation naturally turned on himself and his companions. He said nothing, but Mr. Three smiled.

But M. Demetrioivich was utterly charmed with the vistas of investigation the man's suggestion opened to him.

"Why, that would be wonderful, would it not!" he cried.

"Certainly, without mind-reading comparative psychology is impossible."

"We have professional mind-readers," cried M. Demetrioivich with enthusiasm. "I wonder why the psychologists have never thought to have one try to read the minds—say of the higher simians!"

Mr. Three seemed to find all this conversation funny, for he laughed again. But his words were quite serious.

"Besides, this 'mentage,' as we call mind-reading, enables one to converse with every other creature, just as I am talking to you. I take your language forms right out of your own minds and use them. If the creature has no language at all, you still receive its impressions."

BY THIS time even Pethwick, who disliked the fellow almost to the point of hatred, realized that the stranger was wonderful indeed. The engineer decided Mr. Three came from some unknown country, which, he reluctantly admitted to himself, seemed to be more highly cultured than England or America. So, by accepting these facts, Pethwick, in a way, prepared himself not to be surprised at anything.

"Do all your countrymen understand 'mentage' or mind-language?" inquired the engineer.

"It is our national mode of communication. I observe you move your hands when you talk—gestures, you call it. In One, we speak a word now and then to accent our thoughts—verbal gestures. Some of our population, we

are nervous, sometimes speak several words, or even complete sentences. Often it is an affectation, unless, of course," he added politely as if to exempt his companions, "their minds are not strong enough to converse without words."

"On the other hand, a few well-placed words make speeches, and especially orations, very impressive. Still, some of our greatest orators never utter a sound. But I consider this too much repression, in fact rather an academic thing to do. What you would call a—a—a highbrow. Thank you, Mr. Standifer, for thinking me the term."

"It would be a great saving of time," mused Pethwick.

"Yes, indeed; in One, a person can present a whole thought, or a whole series of thoughts, in a single flash of the brain, if the thinker's brain is sufficiently strong. It is almost instantaneous."

Standifer smiled blissfully.

"Think of instantaneous sermons! Let's get to that place!"

Pethwick and the professor did not share in Standifer's badinage but sat amazed at this being whose name was a number. The engineer realized the futility of all the questions he could ask. Turn the idea about. Suppose Mr. Three should ask Pethwick to explain American civilization in a casual talk. It would be impossible. So, it was impossible for Mr. Three to give Pethwick much idea of the land of One.

M. Demetrioivich took up the questioning.

"Have you been using radium for a long time in One, Mr. Three?"

"For centuries. We are in the midst of the Radium Age. It was developed of the Aluminum Age. All this arose out of a prehistoric Steel Age, a very heavy clumsy metal, I have heard archeologists say."

"You don't mean your mechanical appliances are made of radium?"

"No, radium is our source of power. It has changed our mechanics from molecular energy, such as steam and gasoline. With the aid of radium, we soon developed the enormous force that lies concentrated in the atom. This gives my countrymen unlimited power. It can be derived for any sort of matter, because all matter is composed of atoms and our force is generated through the destruction of atoms."

All this time Mr. Three's voice was growing weaker and weaker until finally he said—

"You will have to excuse me from further conversation, gentlemen; my throat is not accustomed to much talking."

He tapped it with an apologetic smile. As he did so, he glanced about and his eyes lit on the chessboard and men which Pethwick

and M. Demetrioovich had been using on the previous evening.

"What is that?"

"A game."

"Who plays it? Ah, M. Demetrioovich and Mr. Pethwick. I would not object to a party if you feel disposed."

"Professor and I will try a consultation game against you," suggested Pethwick, moving a stool over to the table.

"I don't understand the game, but if you will just think how the pieces are moved," requested the mind-reader, "I dare say I will soon learn."

The engineer framed the demonstration in his mind and Mr. Three nodded.

"I see. It seems to be a sort of rudimentary stage of a game we call 'cube' in First. However, 'cube' is an entirely mental game, although younger children are given material boards and pieces to assist them in focusing their attention.

"'Cube' has eight boards such as this, superimposed upon one another. Each board has thirty-two pieces on it, thus giving two hundred and fifty-six pieces in all, each player controlling one hundred and twenty-eight. All the major pieces can move up or down, forward or backward, but the pawns can only advance, or go higher. As no real boards are used, the whole play must be kept in mind. Since each player knows what combinations are in the other man's mind, the game becomes a contest of intricacy, that is, until one player grows confused, makes an incoherent move and is checkmated. It is a very pleasant amusement for persons who have nothing more serious to think about."

"I have seen mental chess-players in America," observed Standifer. "But they use only one board. I suppose eight would complicate it. I don't play myself."

The chess-players made no answer to this remark, but set up the men. Mr. Three defeated the scientists' combined skill in a game of ten moves.

AS THIS extraordinary party was brought to a conclusion, Pablo Pasca entered the tent with breakfast on a tray. When the thief saw the guest, he almost dropped the food, but after a moment came on in and placed the dishes on the table. As he did so, he looked meaningfully at Pethwick, nodded faintly and retired.

The engineer excused himself and followed the Indian.

He found Pablo in the kitchen tent, shaken out of his ordinary stoicism.

"Do you know who he is, *señor*?" he asked in a low voice.

"His name is Three," said Pethwick, involuntarily guarding his own tone.

"No, I mean, do you know that he is the man who murdered Cesare Ruano?" asked the thief earnestly.

The engineer nodded.

"I'd thought of that. How do you know?"

"How! *Mio Dios*—everything the man has on is Cesare's. Cesare's clothes! Cesare's shoes! On his finger is Cesare's ring—the ring Cesare was saving to be garroted in!"

"I thought somehow he resembled Cesare," nodded Pethwick, "and I knew it was not his face."

"*Ciertamente*, not Cesare, but his murderer," aspirated Pablo excitedly. "I saw this fellow behind this very boulder! This same fellow!"

Pethwick nodded in the sunlight, unaware that Pablo expected him to do anything. Indeed, the engineer was glad he had come out of the tent. Mr. Three's intelligence was oppressive. So now he stood breathing deeply, as if from some struggle. The cliffs, the sunshine, the river, the savor of the kitchen, almost made him doubt the existence in his tent of such a personage as Mr. Three from the land of One. Where in Heaven's name was that land? Did there flourish over behind the Andes somewhere an unknown race of extraordinary arts and sciences who called themselves the First?

And there recurred to him his fancy that if such a nation existed, it must be an offshoot of the old Incan race. Perhaps fugitives flying before the old *conquistadores* found a haven in some spot and there had built up the most advanced civilization upon the face of the earth. The thought was utterly fantastic, and yet it was the only explanation of Mr. Three sitting there in the tent.

"Well?" said Pablo interrogatively.

The engineer came out of his reverie.

"Is that all you wanted to tell me?"

"All. Isn't that enough?"

"Oh, yes."

"Aren't you going to do anything?" demanded Pablo. "He is an Indian. I thought when Indians killed anyone the white men garroted them. *Owk!* Like that!" He pinched his throat and made a disagreeable sound.

"What am I to do?" inquired Pethwick.

"Blessed Virgin! Does not the white man's law work in the Valle de Rio Inferniello? I knock an old man on the head and barely save my neck. This *cholo* kills my good *camarado*, wears his clothes, steals the very ring Cesare meant to be garroted in, and what happens to him? Why, he sits at the table with white men and plays! *Ehue!* A fine justice!"

The engineer hardly knew how to answer this. He stood looking at Pablo rather blankly.

He felt sure an attempt to arrest Mr. Three would prove perilous indeed. On the other hand, Pablo's attitude demanded that Pethwick should act.

Isolated like this, Pethwick was the lone representative of the great Anglo-Saxon convention of justice. It is a strange convention that polices every clime and every tongue. Red, brown, black and yellow men refrain from violence because the white man says—

"Thou shalt not kill!"

Wherever a single unit of the white race is placed, that law inheres in him. Men of all colors come to him and say—

"Murder has been done; now what will you do?"

And he must act.

He must deal out that strange Anglo-Saxon convention called justice, or he must die in the attempt.

That is what the white race means; it is what civilization means. It is not any one white man who has this power of judging and punishing; it is any white man. They are the knight-errants of the earth. Each one must fight, sit in judgment and administer to the best of his ability and conscience, so help him God.

It is the most amazing hegemony on the face of the earth, when one comes to think of it—and the most universally accepted.

Now Pablo was asking Pethwick an account of his stewardship.

Certainly the engineer did not think of the problem in just those terms. He was not conscious of his racial instinct. He thought, in rather loose American fashion, that since Pablo had put it up to him like this he would have to do something.

The Zambo began again. "Look at what I did. I only knocked an old man on the head—"

Pethwick interrupted him with a gesture.

"Pablo, get those handcuffs you and Cesare used to wear and bring 'em to the tent."

"*Si, señor,*" hissed the half-breed gratefully.

Pethwick turned back toward the tent with thorough distaste for his commission. As he entered, Mr. Three glanced up with quizzical eyes and it suddenly flashed on the engineer with a sense of embarrassment that the man from One already knew what was in his thoughts.

THIS was soon proved. Mr. Three nodded his large head smilingly.

"Yes," he said. "Pablo is quite right. Here is the ring."

He held up a hand and displayed an old silver ring engraved in the form of a snake.

M. Demetrioivich glanced up at this extraordinary monologue.

"Then you did kill Cesare Ruano?" exclaimed the engineer.

Mr. Three paused a moment, then answered:

"Yes, I did. There is no use going through a long catechism. I may also add, I knew the efflorescence of radium would have some effect on the boy Standifer, but I did not know what."

The old savant stared at the man from One.

"Be careful what you say, Mr. Three. Your confession will place you in jeopardy of the law."

"Then you maintain laws in this country," observed Mr. Three. "What will be the nature of the instruction you will give me?"

"No instruction at all," said Pethwick; "punishment."

"A very antiquated custom. I should think any one could see that criminals need instruction."

At that moment Pablo Pasca appeared in the entrance with the manacles.

"This is hardly the time to enter into an abstract discussion of punishment. Mr. Three," observed Pethwick brusquely. He held the manacles a moment a little self-consciously, then said. "You may consider yourself under arrest."

To Pethwick's surprise, the man from One offered no resistance but peaceably allowed himself to be chained to the chair in which he sat.

He watched the procedure with a faintly amused expression and even leaned over to observe how the anklets were adjusted to his legs.

A certain air of politeness about the Incan at last constrained Pethwick to say—

"You understand, Mr. Three, we are forced to do this—it is the law."

"And you rather dislike me anyway, do you not, Mr. Pethwick?" added Mr. Three genially.

The engineer flushed but kept his eyes steadily on Mr. Three's.

"I dislike you, but I dislike to do this more."

After the shackling the captors stood undecidedly. So they had captured the murderer of Cesare Ruano.

"We'll have to carry him before a magistrate," pondered M. Demetrioivich. "It is very annoying."

"M. Demetrioivich," said Mr. Three, still smiling in his chains. "you have studied physiology?"

"Yes."

"And perhaps vivisection?"

"Certainly."

"Then why all this disturbance about killing a lower animal for scientific ends?"

The old Rumanian looked at Mr. Three steadfastly. "I can not accept your point, Mr.

Three. We are all human beings together, even if Cesare Ruano did not have the culture—"

The rather pointless proceedings were interrupted by a burst of snorting and braying from the corral. Pethwick hurried outside, for the pack-animals were really of more importance than the prisoner. The engineer got out just in time to see Pablo go at full speed toward the enclosure. The Indian had a repeating rifle and no doubt feared the attack of a puma or a jaguar.

On Pethwick's heels came both M. Demetrio-ovich and the white-haired secretary. The valley was strewn with boulders big and little and the men had difficulty in running over broken ground. From afar off Pethwick saw that the down-river side of the corral had been knocked down, and all the llamas and mules came storming out, flying down toward the camp as if the fiends pursued them.

Pablo fired his rifle in the air in an effort to turn them. As he did so, the Zambo reeled as if he had received a mighty but invisible blow. Mules and llamas plunged straight past their staggering master and for a moment Pethwick was afraid they would run him down.

Next moment the engineer heard the secretary and the professor shouting at the top of their voices. He looked around and saw the comb of his tent on fire.

Thought of his prisoner, likely to burn up, sent Pethwick sprinting breathless back toward the tent. As the flames rushed over the oiled canvas Pethwick jerked up the ground-pins of the rear wall and shoved under.

Mr. Three still sat in the chair with arms and legs bound to the posts. He slumped queerly. His hat dropped down on his shirt. Half suffocated, the engineer grabbed up chair, manacles, man and all and rushed into the open.

Once outside, he dropped his burden and began to slap at the fire on his own clothes. The other men began to put out the fire on Mr. Three's garments. At their strokes the garments collapsed.

Inside Cesare Ruano's clothes was an empty human skin cut off at the neck. M. Demetrio-ovich drew it out of the burning rags. It had a cicatrice across its breast from nipple to nipple. It had bullet wounds in legs and buttocks. It tallied exactly with the police description of the marks on the skin of Cesare Ruano.

With colorless faces the men stood studying this ghastly relic of the murderer in the brilliant sunshine.

The pack-animals were just disappearing down the river valley. A few remaining shreds of cloth burned where their tent once stood.

About them the sinister landscape lay empty.

Chapter Five

PROF. Demetrio-ovich held up the gruesome relic.

"Gentlemen," he stated in his matter-of-fact voice, "somebody—something has been stalking us masked in this."

"But why masked?" Standifer's voice was tangled with horror.

"He was stalking us in a human skin, exactly as a hunter stalks a deer in a deer robe," returned M. Demetrio-ovich.

"Then wasn't he a human being?" gasped the secretary.

"It was certainly the devil!" chattered Pablo Pasca with a putty face. "The prefect told us not to come here."

"He knows he is a human being," accented Pethwick irritably, "but he doubts if we are. Did you notice his manner? Did you observe the supercilious, egotistical, conceited air of everything he did or said? He put us down as Darwin's connecting link. We are animals to him. He puts on one of our skins to hunt us down in. Otherwise, he was afraid we would go scampering off from him like rabbits."

"Then he is a fool if he thought white men are animals," declared Pablo angrily.

"Well, he's not exactly a fool either," admitted Pethwick grudgingly, "but every single thing he said was a knock at us. I never heard—" The engineer's angry voice trailed off into an angry silence.

The party stood puzzling over the extraordinary tactics of the man from One. As they buffeted the problem about in their brains, a rabbit dashed almost under their feet bound down the valley. They paid no attention to it.

"I'll give you my guess," offered Pethwick. "I still believe we have encountered one of the ancient Incans. In Prescott's account of them, you notice the highest arts of civilization mingled with the grossest barbarities. A custom of wearing an enemy's skin may have grown up among them, just as our North American Indians used to take scalps. No doubt this fellow was spying on our number. I expect him to return soon with a band and attempt our capture."

"What a curious fate for the DeLong Geographical Expedition," mused the white-haired young secretary.

"Still," objected M. Demetrio-ovich, "it might be a Bolshevik method of spreading terror through the world."

"So, professor, you don't believe after all he put on Cesare's skin to stalk us?" queried Standifer.

"James, I don't know what to think," admitted the savant.

"The whole thing fits in better with my Incan theory," pressed the engineer. "The half-civilized Indians around here, like Pablo and Cesare, could very easily be afraid of some highly developed branch of the Incans, especially if those Incans were seeking victims to sacrifice to the sun. Under such circumstances, it might be necessary to slip on the hide of a half-breed in order to get near the others."

"It would also explain why that man ambushed our party when we entered the valley," added the secretary.

"Thanks, Standifer, for helping me out," said Pethwick. "It would also show why the peons around here call this the Rio Infiernillo and give it such a wide berth."

M. Demetrioovich pulled his chin.

"Your theory seems to hang together right now," he admitted. "If you are on the right track, we will have a marvel to report—if we ever get back."

"Then, too," went on Pethwick, encouraged, "since the prefect warned us against the valley, it suggests to me there has been something sinister here for years—long before Bolshevism became a power."

"These are queer theories," laughed Standifer, "one going to the extremely ancient and the other to the extremely modern."

During the latter part of this discussion, an atok, a sort of huge native rodent, slithered down the valley past the scientists, dodging from one boulder to another. Now a Peruvian fox whisked past.

These unusual animals passing within a few minutes proved sufficient to draw Pethwick's attention from the subject under discussion. The engineer looked up the stony stretch and a surprising sight filled his eyes.

The whole valley worked with glimpses of flying animals. Rats, hares, civets, what not, darted from covert to covert. Along the edge of the river slunk a panther, making catlike rushes between hiding-places. The shrill whistle of three frightened deer sounded down the valley.

It seemed as if a wave of fear were depopulating the whole Rio Infiernillo. All the engineer could see was innumerable furtive dodgings. From the dull surface of the river arose a loon, screaming, and it boomed down stream with fear-struck speed. Only one animal fled in the open, a huge black bear with a white muzzle, the ucumari. He was king in the Andes, as the grizzly reigns in the Rockies. He lunged down the middle of the cañon, taking the whole Infernal Valley for his course. He was afraid of nothing in the Sierras—except what was behind him.

The scientists hurried out from in front of the brute and let him lunge by unchallenged. They stared up the burnt valley marveling at this exodus of animals.

Presently, far away against the blackish stones, Pethwick descried what seemed to be yellow fleas hopping among the boulders.

"That must be what made our pack animals break loose!" cried the engineer.

"Wonder what they are?" from the author.

"I say it's the devil making a drive," answered Pablo, crossing himself with fervor.

The animals kept darting past. The distant fleas grew into bugs, then into some sort of animals and at last were defined against the charnel gulch as human beings.

"Jumping Jehosaphat!" cried Standifer. "They are those Incans you were talking about, Pethwick. Scores of 'em! They've come for us!"

The secretary stepped around behind a large boulder that hid everything except his head.

Others of the expedition followed suit, hardly knowing what to believe.

The approaching party were yellow men. Each one carried something in his hand that flashed like metal. They leaped from boulder to boulder in their chase with an amazing activity. The very vicunas themselves that skittered along the craggy sides of the valley did not exhibit a greater agility.

Pablo Pasca, notwithstanding his belief that all this was a great drive of the devil, nevertheless became excited at the passing game. As one speckled deer came shimmering down through the diamond-like sunshine, Pablo determined to beat Satan out of one carcass, so he leveled his rifle for a shot. The author saw it and put his fingers to his ears to dull the report.

At that moment a voice quite close to the party broke the silence with:

"Don't shoot. There must be no holes in the skins."

The word "skins" brought the party around with a start. They were nervous on the topic. The secretary, however, still stood with his fingers in his ears, watching the deer.

On the top of a large boulder, still wearing his look of condescension and amusement, sat the recent prisoner of the expedition, Mr. Three. Since he had flung off Cesare's clothes and skin, the weird creature was without apparel and sat naked in the cold vivid sunshine, his body of a clear yellowish complexion and his large head still painted a coppery red.

IT WAS the most grotesque combination Pethwick could have imagined, but Mr. Three maintained a perfect composure, dig-

nity—and condescension. His painted face had the faintly amused expression of a man watching the antics of, say, some pet goats.

The fellow's body suggested to Pethwick a ripe pear or yellow peach. His hands and feet were disagreeably small—sure sign of ancient and aristocratic blood. He must have slipped right through the manacles the moment his captors had turned their backs. In one hand he held a small metallic rod.

Pethwick stared at the remarkable transformation and finally blurted out—

"Did you break loose from the handcuffs and set fire to our tent?"

"The fire was quite accidental," assured the man from One. "I did it with this focusing-rod when I got rid of your quaint old manacles."

"Focusing-rod," caught up Standifer, for, notwithstanding all he had suffered at the hands of Mr. Three, the pride of a flattered author and the remarkable sale of his books left him with a kindly feeling for the fellow.

"Yes, focusing-rod."

"What does it focus?"

"Wireless power."

"We have transmission of wireless power in America," observed the professor, "but that is certainly the most compact terminal I ever saw."

Mr. Three glanced at the rod in his hand.

"Oh, yes, this is one of the primitive instruments. I fancy this came into use among thinking creatures along with fire, the keystone of the arch and the old-fashioned seventy-two-mile gun. They were important additions to human knowledge, but their discoverers and the dates of their discovery are lost in prehistoric eras."

For a moment Mr. Three sat pensive in the sunshine, his mind dwelling on that misty time in the land of One when some unrecorded genius found out how to focus wireless power with a little metal rod. No doubt to this mysterious man the principle of the rod appeared so simple that any rational creature would know it.

Presently he came out of his reverie and waved his focusing-bar down the valley.

"You men," he directed, "will follow the rest of the quarry down the river—everything must go!"

For a moment the scientists stared at him, not understanding.

"What is it?" inquired Standifer.

"Follow the quarry down the valley and be quick about it," snapped the yellow man.

An indignant flush swept over Pethwick.

"You must have gone crazy, Three. We'll do as we please."

"Why should we go?" inquired M. Demetrich with his academic suavity.

Mr. Three tapped impatiently with his rod on the boulder.

"So our commander can select specimens to carry to One," he explained briefly.

"Oh, I see," cried Pethwick, somewhat mollified. "He wants us to help him select the animals, as we are naturalists."

For once in their intercourse Mr. Three showed genuine surprise. He sprang to his feet and stared at them.

"You help him select! You!" The gnome broke into the most insulting of laughter. "You bunch of idiots, he is going to select one of you as a specimen to carry to One!" Here he threw off his brief tolerance of opposition and shouted, "Forward, march! I don't want to have to use force!"

For a moment the men stood almost paralyzed with amazement. Mr. Three evidently read their mental state, for he put a hand over his mouth to conceal his grin and maintain his air of grim authority.

Pethwick first organized active resistance. Pablo Pasca still stood with his rifle at ready. Pethwick whispered sharply to the Indian—"Get him!"

Almost by reflex action, the Zambo swung his rifle on Mr. Three and fired.

At the same moment Pablo staggered backward as if he had received a powerful blow out of the air. His rifle clattered to the stones. At the same instant Pethwick felt a sensation like a strong electric shock. Standifer grunted and clapped a hand to his already wounded leg.

At this act of war the party of scientists threw themselves flat behind boulders. Pethwick adjusted his rifle with hands shaking from his shock and then peered around his shelter for a glimpse of Mr. Three. He saw the yellow man still standing on the boulder. The engineer eased his rifle around unsteadily. The bead of the gun wavered about the big painted head. With a determined effort the engineer settled it on his target. He was just squeezing the trigger when tingling knots rushed through his arms, legs and body, stiffening them, flashing fire in his brain, beating him with a thousand prickly hammers. It was an electric shock. He flattened under it, squirming and twisting.

The moment his thoughts of opposition vanished in pain the shock ceased.

All three white men and the Indian lay motionless. The only sound Pethwick could hear was an occasional groan from Standifer and the faint patter of passing animals.

A ray of sardonic amusement fluttered through the engineer's dizzy brain—the De-Long Geographical Expedition as a curious species of lower animals.

Sudden hearty laughter from the nearby boulder told the engineer that Mr. Three had caught the jest and was enjoying it. Pethwick flushed angrily.

AFTER this convincing contest with the focusing-rod the expedition abandoned resistance and surrendered themselves as prisoners of war, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say prisoners of science.

Although Pablo had shot at Mr. Three, that strange being regarded it no more than if a cat had scratched at him. Instead of being angry, he really tried to comfort the men. He told them only one of their number would be taken as a specimen to the land of One: the person chosen would be retained alive and, if he proved tractable, he would undoubtedly be allowed to run at large within certain limits and might be taught simple tricks wherewith to amuse the visitors at the zoo; such as playing a simple game of chess on one board.

This may or may not have been a sarcastic fling at the feeble game of chess which Pethwick and M. Demetrioivich had just played; at any rate the thought of playing endless games of chess through the bars of a zoological cage filled the engineer with nausea. No doubt on one side of him would be a monkey begging for peanuts and on the other a surly orang. For Pethwick did not doubt the specimen selected would be classed among the simians.

As they walked along the engineer thought up a new line of defense. He began to threaten Mr. Three with the American Army and Navy. He told the yellow man this expedition was American and their capture would be no small affair. They were a famous scientific body. They would be missed. Their abduction would mean a war between the land of One and the whole League of Nations.

At this Mr. Three interrupted incredulously—

"Do you creatures really compose a scientific body?"

Pethwick was so cut by the remark that he stopped talking and walked along in silence.

The professor plied his captor with many questions. He discovered that the men from One had a portable furnace and were extracting radium from outcrops of pitchblende in the valley. The mysterious burned places which Pethwick had noted in his journal were spots where the furnace had been operated. The strange lights which the expedition had seen on several occasions were the men moving the furnace from one place to another. Mr. Three explained that they always moved the furnace at night; it was difficult to do this

during the day because the sun's rays created an etheric storm.

The yellow man's conversation entertained the white men notwithstanding their uncertainty late. Pablo Pasca, however, trembled on the verge of collapse. He knew he was in the hands of the imps of satan. Now and then Pethwick heard him groan.

"Oh, Mother of Heaven! Oh, if I could get back to the garrotel Poor Cesare Ruano, in torment without his skin—or the ring he meant to be garroted in!"

Animals still rushed past the party and behind them came the yellow beaters, scaring up the game.

It was useless for anything to hide from these terrible men with their focusing-rods. Evidently they could sense an animal's fright and locate it as an ordinary man can locate a sound. As soon as they found something in a covert, a slight electric shock sent it headlong after the other animals.

For the first time in his life Pethwick felt some kinship for the lower animals. He too was in the *battue*, one with the foxes and rabbits that fluttered past him. For ages man had slaughtered the lower animals exactly as the men from One were doing now.

And just as man had annihilated the bison, the penguin, the dodo, so no doubt this new and more powerful race from One would exterminate man and his cities, his works of art and his sciences. The vision of a charnel world painted itself on his depressed imagination—a wiping out of existing races and a re-peopleing by these yellow Incans. Compared to such a conflict the late world war would be trivial.

* * *

Amid this day-dream of Armageddon, the engineer heard M. Demetrioivich ejaculate to himself—

"So it is a German Bolshevik undertaking after all. There's a Zeppelin!"

Pethwick looked up suddenly. The prisoners had rounded a turn in the valley. Not more than three hundred yards distant rose an enormous structure in the shape of a Zeppelin. It required a second glance to observe this fact, as the huge creation stood on its end instead of lying horizontal as do the ordinary flying-ships.

Instead of being made of cloth, this Zeppelin had a skin of white metal, no doubt aluminum. Indeed, for the first time a dirigible had been constructed that had the stanchness and air-worthiness that deserved the name ship. This was no mere bubble of varnished cloth.

It was enormous. It arose between seven hundred and seven hundred and fifty feet high, an amazing skyscraper of silver whose fulgor was enhanced by the dark and melancholy background of the Infernal Valley.

The immense vessel rested on its stern, which tapered down to perhaps forty feet in diameter. It was shored up with long metal rods anchored in the earth. The rods, some hundred feet long, were inserted in the airship just where its great barrel began to taper to its stern.

Five hundred feet up the side of the cylinder Pethwick noticed the controlling planes, which looked exceedingly small for the vast bulk they were designed to pilot. When the engineer pointed these out to the professor, M. Demetrioovich seemed surprised.

"Do you realise, Pethwick, what their small size indicates? The speed of this ship through the air must be prodigious if these tiny controls grip the air with sufficient leverage to direct this monster."

Then the old scientist went on to commend the novel idea of landing the dirigible on her stern. It did away with wide maneuvering to gain altitude. This aluminum dirigible could drop into a hole slightly larger than her own

diameter and launch herself out of it straight at the sky. It was an admirable stroke.

Workmen dotted the vessel's sides, scrubbing the bright skin as assiduously as a crew painting a man-of-war. Pethwick could distinguish this scrubbing force up for two or three hundred feet.

The organization of the crew seemed cast along military lines. Small squads of men or soldiers marched in exact ranks and files over the valley to gather up the animals stunned by the focusing-rods.

At first Pethwick had not observed these animals, but a more careful look showed him a number of specimens that had been struck down as they passed the ship. The big-headed yellow men were collecting these in cages, evidently for exhibition purposes when they returned to the extraordinary land from which they came. The slaughter had not been wasteful. Only one member of each species of animal had been taken.

The yellow men worked at top speed and were plainly under the continual barked orders of soldiery, but oddly enough not a sound was heard. The whole control was mental. The silence gave Pethwick the strange impression that he was looking at a gigantic cinema.

A MOVEMENT behind the white men caused them to look around. A file of yellow soldiers was moving toward the dirigible, coming from the direction of their burned camp up the valley. These men bore the mounted skeletons which the DeLong Geographical Expedition had observed when they first entered the strange valley of the Rio Infernillo.

The removal of these objects suggested to Pethwick that the men from One and their superdirigible would soon sail from the valley. A great curiosity to see the departure seized the engineer. He looked for the big driving propellers which he thought must draw the ship, but he could see none.

At that moment four soldiers with a large metal cage approached the DeLong Geographical party. At the same time, on one of the upper rounds of the airship, some seventy-five feet above the base, appeared a yellow man with a peculiar scintillating star fixed to his big yellow head. This personage looked directly toward the explorers but said nothing.

When he looked Mr. Three drew himself up and saluted in military fashion.

Then evidently for the benefit of his captors, Mr. Three answered aloud the mental questions which his superior must have put to him. Here are the words of the one-sided conversation:

"Yes, sir."

"No, sir."

"Ordinary ruby-blooded animals, sir, with intelligence somewhat higher than monkeys, sir."

"They complicate their simple thoughts exactly as monkeys do, sir—by chattering."

"They are absolutely insensible to all mental vibrations, sir, more completely so than the four-legged animals."

"I would suggest you take all five. They will prove very amusing, sir, in the national zoo. Their attempts to deceive each other and to deceive even me, sir, are as good as a farce. I believe you will find them much more humorous than chimpanzees or the ordinary monkeys, sir."

"Sorry you can't. In that case I suggest we take the brown one. His color is the nearest human. Then, too, he has the best physique. None of them have any minds to speak of."

"Very well, sir."

Here Mr. Three saluted stiffly and directed the four workmen with the cage toward Pablo Pasca.

As the laborers lowered their cage and started for the half-breed Pablo's eyes almost started from his head. He whirled to run but seemed to realize the hopelessness of trying to escape from the amazing agility of the

men from One. Next moment he whipped out a knife and dashed into the midst of his assailants, slashing and stabbing like one possessed.

But the soldiers of One had feline agility. They dodged, whipped under his blows like game-cocks. One leaped straight over the heads of his comrades and landed headlong on the Zambo. It was an unfortunate leap. Pablo's blade caught him in the shoulder and a dark liquid squirted out.

In the instant of withdrawing the blade, the yellow men seized the half-breed's arms and legs. They went down with the Zambo in a struggling pile. Pablo kicked, bit, twisted his knife with a wrist movement, trying to cut something. But the yellow men worked swiftly and methodically.

"Quick!" commanded Mr. Three. "We must start in four minutes!" Then, in answer to some question the yellow soldiers thought to him, "I can't use my focusing-rod. It might destroy what little mind he has."

A moment later the little yellow men got to their feet with the ex-thief hanging between them by his legs and arms. The poor fellow turned an agonized face to Pethwick.

"Señor! Señor!" he screamed. "Save me! Save poor Pablo! Oh, Holy Mary! Sacred Mother! Señor, Señor Pethwick!"

His voice rose to a screech. Blood trickled from his nostrils. His face was white from fear.

Pethwick stared with wide eyes at the struggle. The injustice of this capture for scientific purposes thundered at the American's heart. Pethwick was a white man, of that race which deals justice among weaker men and carries out its judgments with its life.

At Pablo's shriek of despair something seemed to snap in Pethwick's head. He hesitated a second, then lunged into the victorious yellow men.

He never reached them. A wave of flame seemed to lap around him. Then came blackness.

WHEN Pethwick revived, there were no more yellow men in sight. The great shining dirigible stood entirely closed and apparently lifeless. The sun was setting and its rays filled the great charnel valley with a bloody light. The dirigible looked like an enormous red waterstand. In a few minutes the lower half of the great ship was purple in shadow while the upper half turned a deeper red. The silence was absolute. The three white men stood staring at the strange scene.

Quite suddenly from where the stern of the dirigible nestled on the ground there broke

out a light of insufferable brilliancy. A luminous gas seemed to boil out in whirls of furious brightness. It spread everywhere, and in its radiance the great ship stood out once more in brilliant silver from stem to stern.

In that fulgor Pethwick saw the restraining rods cast off, and the dirigible from the land of One mounted straight into the green heart of the evening sky.

The moment it struck full sunlight at a height of five hundred yards it seemed caught in some tremendously strong wind, for it moved eastward at a velocity that increased by prodigious bounds. Within half a minute its light was reduced from the terrific glare of a furnace to a glow of a headlight, and then to a radiance like that of a shooting star against the darkening eastern sky.

As the watchers followed it with their eyes a strange thing happened. That white light turned violet, then indigo, green, yellow, orange and red, and so faded out.

In the Valley de Rio Infernillo lingered a phosphorescent mist that told of the First men's passing.

"Gentlemen," quavered M. Demetrioivich, "I believe we have on us the residual emanations of radium. It will likely kill us. Let

us go down to the river, now, and wash it off."

The three men set out, stumbling through the darkness.

They waded into the black waters of the Infernal River and began scrubbing each other furiously, trying to rid themselves of this dangerous luminosity. High above them it still shimmered from cliff and crag. Presently this faded out and there reigned complete darkness and complete silence.

* * *

On the following morning, when the DeLong Geographical Expedition was about to start back for civilization, they saw on the scene of the conflict between Pablo and the yellow soldiers, where the half-breed had stabbed his captors, a number of dark-green stains. On analysis this green also proved to be chlorophyll.

A COMMUNICATION FROM GILBERT H. DELONG, PRESIDENT OF THE DELONG GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, TO THE TRUSTEES OF THE NOBEL PRIZE FOUNDATION, STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN.

FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

Sirs: It is my privilege to bring to your attention the extraordinary journal of the DeLong Geographical Expedition into the unmapped region of Peru, in the department of Ayacucho, known as the Valle de Rio Infiernillo.

Enclosed with this journal is M. Demetrio-vich's able presentation of the theory that the dirigible observed in that valley was operated by the Bolshevist government of either Austria or Russia.

Also enclosed is the monograph of Mr. Herbert M. Pethwick, C.E., who presents a most interesting speculation tending to prove that the strange aircraft was a development made independently of the known civilized world by an offshoot of the ancient Incan race, depatriated by the Spaniards in 1533 A.D.

To my mind, both of these hypotheses, although brilliantly maintained, fail to take into consideration two highly significant facts which are set forth but not greatly stressed in the record of the expedition as kept by Mr. James B. Standifer, Sec.

These two facts are, first, the serial number which served as a name for the man from One, and the other fact, that in both cases where a man from One was wounded he bled what for want of a better term must be called chlorophyllaceous blood.

From few other writers than Mr. Standifer would I accept so bizarre a statement of fact, but his power of exact and minute observation is so well attested by his well-known work, "Reindeer in Iceland," that I dare not question his strict adherence to truth.

The phenomena set forth in the journal happened. That is beyond cavil. The problem for the scientific world is their interpretation.

In handling this problem, I shall not only assume that the journal is accurate, but I shall further assume that the being known in the record as Mr. Three told the precise truth.

I have every confidence in Mr. Three's probity for several reasons. First, he has no motive for prevarication. Second, a man who habitually communicates with his fellows by telepathy would not be accustomed to falsehood, since falsehood is physically impossible when a man's mind lies before his companions like an open book. Third, to a man habitually accustomed to truth, lying is a difficult and uncongenial labor. In brief, lying is like any other art: it requires practise to do it well.

In regard to the serial number, both of the above mentioned writers apparently fail to see the enormous problem it poses. As for the chlorophyllaceous blood, our authors pass it with a vague surmise that somehow it is used in extracting gold, when the whole

THE GREEN SPLOTCHES

object of the expedition, according to Mr. Three, was not gold but radium.

Because my esteemed colleagues neglect these two critical points, their whole theories, as ably and ingeniously defended as they are, to my mind collapse into mere sophisms.

In the brief analysis herewith presented I shall touch on a number of points, among which the questions evoked by the serial number and the chlorophyll blood will be noticed in their proper places.

First, then, Mr. Three himself states that the object of the expedition was the extraction of radium from the pitchblende in the Infernal Valley. The use the men from One made of this radium was demonstrated at the departure of the dirigible, for that vessel must have been propelled by the emanations of radium. According to the description of Mr. Standifer, the ship used no screw propellers or tractors, but a powerful emanation of radium from under its stern shot the great metal cylinder upward as power propels a sky rocket.

That radium would possess such power is well known. It has been calculated that two pounds of radium would possess sufficient force to swing the earth out of its orbit.

With such power the airship would be capable of enormous speed. A high speed was guessed by M. Demetrioivich when he observed the small controlling-plane. However, the vastness of this speed was demonstrated by Mr. Standifer in the last paragraph of his account, by his curious observation that the light from the airship, as seen against the evening sky, turned violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, red and then was lost. In other words it ran through the whole spectrum from the most rapid to the lowest vibrations per second and then vanished.

What is the meaning of this significant detail?

Allow me to recall an analogy in sound. The tone of a bell on a train departing at high speed becomes lower in pitch. This is because the air vibrations reach the ear at longer intervals.

Apply that to the change of light observed on the airship. Then the vessel must have been withdrawing at such a speed that it lowered the "pitch" of light vibrations from white to red and finally cancelled its light in blackness.

The only conclusion to be drawn from this is that at the time of the light's extinction, the mysterious cylinder was hurtling through space at the speed of light itself; that is to say, at a speed of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles per second.

FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

Observe that I say, "space," not air. Why? In the first place such a speed in air would fuse any metal. But there is another and a better reason.

It requires the average human eye one-twentieth of a second to perceive a color change. If Mr. Standifer had observed these color changes at the highest possible nerve rate, the operation would have required seven-twentieths of a second. Let us assume it required half a second. During that interval the cylinder would have traversed, at the speed of light, ninety-three thousand miles in a straight line. That is more than eleven times the diameter of this globe. Therefore it was far outside of our atmosphere. Also it proves the mysterious vessel was not bound for Austria or Russia. It was leaving the earth.

How was this velocity attained? I submit by the reaction of radium upon sunlight.

As every schoolboy knows, the drift of a comet's tail is caused by the pressure of light. As soon as this airship arose to the height of about five hundred yards in sunlight, it began to drift eastward with a rapidly increasing velocity. In other words, the metal skin of the ship, which Mr. Pethwick took for aluminum, was probably a much lighter metal—a metal so light that it was capable of being buffeted along in the surf of sunlight. Now if the ship were propelled merely on the barbs of sunbeams, it would have attained the velocity of light. But the velocity of radium emanations is one-fifteenth that of light. So by running down the light current, and allowing the radium to react against the sunbeams, a speed of one and one-fifteenth the velocity of light might be generated; that is one hundred and ninety-eight thousand miles per second.

Such speed would admit of inter-planetary travel.

However, it is probable the men from One could accelerate the radiation from radium by electrical or chemical means. They may have learned to boil the metal as men boil water. In such case the pressure of its radiation would be vastly increased, and with it the possible speed of the ship. This gives an unknown and problematical power of transition far beyond the velocity of light. At such rate a journey even to one of the fixed stars would be within the realm of possibility.

WE MAY therefore with prudence hypothesize that the mysterious ether ship observed in the valley of the Rio Infernillo was an interstellar voyager stopping by the earth as a coaling-port to refuel with radium.

However, as it is improbable that the ether ship was going beyond the confines of

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our solar system, a speculation as to what planet the men from One were bound may be reached by noting the day and the hour the ship sailed from the earth.

As our earth swings around the ecliptic, it would be possible for interplanetary mariners to obtain a favorable current of sunlight in any direction. No doubt the navigator of the ether ship was bound for one of the planets in opposition to the sun at the time of the ship's departure. That is to say the yellow men were sailing for either Neptune or Jupiter.

That the men were returning to some planet much larger than the earth is suggested by their small size and extraordinary agility. No doubt these men found the gravitation of the earth slight compared with the attraction to which they were accustomed. This fact gave them extraordinary vigor.

Now let us consider the serial number that formed Mr. Three's name. It was 1753-12-657,109-654-3. This gives rise to a most interesting speculation.

The probable number of units contained in a series, when any serial number is given, is computed by multiplying together the component parts of the serial number.

For instance, if one has two series of twelve each, the whole number of objects would be twenty-four. If one had six major series of two sub-series of twelve each, the total number of units would be 144.

Applying this idea to Mr. Three's serial number, one would find the total probable population of Jupiter, or the land of One, by multiplying the component parts of his number together. This reached the enormous product of 14,514,894,498,356. That is to say, fourteen and one half quadrillions.

This utterly quashes the Incan hypothesis. There is not room in South America for fourteen and a half quadrillion people—there is not room on the globe for such a number. That, in fact, is the probable population of either Neptune or Jupiter. For sake of simplicity we will assume it is Jupiter.

No wonder, then, with such an inconceivable population, the inhabitants of Jupiter are militarized. No wonder they suggested Bolshevism to M. Demetrioovich.

With such masses of life, all other species of animal are probably extinct. This would explain why the Jovians were so eager to capture specimens of living animals. They desired specimens of fauna as well as radium.

The last point in the record, the chlorophyllaceous blood, has been to me the most difficult to find any analogy for in our terrestrial experience.

FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

Chlorophyll is the coloring matter in plants. It possesses the power of utilizing energy directly from sunlight. There is no reason to doubt that in the veins of the Jovians it still retains that peculiar power.

With such an extraordinary fluid in his veins, it might be possible for a Jovian to stand in the sunshine and to obtain from it energy and strength, just as a human being obtains energy and strength by eating vegetables that have stood in the sunshine.

In fact, the first method is no more amazing than the second. If, indeed, there be a difference, undoubtedly our human method is the more fantastic. The idea of obtaining energy from sunshine, not by standing in it, as anyone would suppose, but by eating something else that has stood in it, is grotesque to the verge of madness.

Let us pursue that thought. No doubt in a concourse of fourteen and a half quadrillion inhabitants space would be so dear that there would be no vacant or tillable land. Therefore on Jupiter every man must absorb whatever sunshine he received. There would be no such thing as eating.

This accounts for the amazement of Mr. Three at seeing Standifer eat his lunch.

To put the same idea in another form—the crew of the ether ship were flora, not fauna.

This accounts for the yellow, pear-like texture of their skins. No doubt the young Jovians are green in color. It would also explain why Mr. Three was entirely without anger when attacked and without pity for Pablo's pleadings, or for Standifer when he was burned, or for Ruano when he was murdered.

Anger, pity, love and hatred are the emotional traits of the mammalia. They have been developed through epochs of maternal protection. It is not developed in plants.

Mr. Three was a plant.

It would also explain why Mr. Three took only one animal of each species, instead of a male and a female.

Sex is perhaps unknown on Jupiter. Mr. Three was perhaps expecting his animals to bud or sprout.

THE LAST question to be broached is, How is it possible for plant life to possess mobility?

I wish to recall to the inquirer that here on our own globe the spores of the algae and other plants of that order have the power of swimming freely in the sea. Still, they are plants—plants just as mobile as fishes. They become stationary only at a later stage of their development.

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Now, if for some reason these algae spores could retain their mobility, the result would be a walking, swimming or crawling plant.

The line between animal and plant life has never been clearly drawn. It seems mere fortuity that the first forebear of animal life swam about and caught its sustenance by enveloping it in its gelatinous droplet, rather than by adhering to a reef and drawing its energy directly from the sun.

If that far-off protozoa had clung to the reef, the reader of this paragraph might have been a sycamore or a tamarind—he would not have been a man.

Now Mr. Three's forefather evidently crawled out of the sea into the sunshine but found nothing to envelop; therefore he followed the lip of the Jovian tide up and down, drawing his energy from the sun's rays. The result was a walking vegetable—in short, Mr. Three.

However, gentlemen of the Nobel Prize Foundation, it is not to press the views of the writer that this note was written, but to offer for your consideration as candidates for the fifty thousand dollar Nobel Prize for the year 1920 the names of:

Demetrios Z. Demetrioovich, Herbert M. Pethwick and James B. Standifer.

One of the five prizes for 1920 will be awarded to the man or group of men who have done the greatest service for the advancement of human knowledge during the year.

These men, by their observations taken at the peril of their lives, have blazed new avenues for the use of radium. Their journal suggests the feasibility of the universal use of telepathy, a development now confined to a few adepts and belittled by the unthinking. Their discoveries reveal the possibilities of interplanetary travel and the vast commercial emoluments such a trade would possess. Their journal suggests to the ambitious soul of man a step beyond world citizenship, and that is stellar citizenship. It is a great step and will profoundly modify human thought.

In the past, gentlemen, epoch-making discoveries have been too often rewarded by Bridewell or Bedlam; it is gratifying to know that we have reached a stage of civilization where the benefactors of their race receive instead honor and emolument.

GILBERT H. DE LONG.

New York City,
May, 1920.

NOTE BY TRANSCRIBER: It may interest the reader to know that the Nobel Prize was awarded to Dr. Gilbert H. DeLong for the series of brilliant inductions set forth above.

—T.S. ■ ■ ■