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*In Stupefied Horror, They Saw  
Through the Microscope*

# The Jelly-Fish

By DAVID H. KELLER

“ALL space is relative. There is no such thing as size. The telescope and the microscope have produced a deadly leveling of great and small, far and near. The only little thing is sin, the only great thing is fear.”

For the hundredth time Professor Quierling repeated his statement, and for the hundredth time we listened to him in silence, afraid to enter into a controversy with him. It was not the fact that he knew more than we did that kept us quiet, but it was the haunting fear that filled us when we listened to him or watched him at his work.

Working at an unsolved problem, he seemed a soul detached, a spirit separated from its earthly home, a being, living only in the realm of thought. Motionless, his body sat catatonic; his eyes stared, unwinking, till his mind, satisfied, condescended to return to its bone-bound cell. Then, in magnificent condescension, he would talk in long, limpid language of the things that he had considered and the conclusions that he had deduced. We, chosen scientists, university graduates, hailed him as our master and hated him for admitting the mastery.

We hoped that some evil would befall him, and yet we realized that the success of the expedition depended upon his continued leadership. It was necessary for our future fame: we were struggling young men with all of life ahead of us, and if we

failed in our first effort, there would be no other opportunities granted us.

In a specially constructed yacht, a floating laboratory, we were south of Borneo, making a detailed study of the microscopic sea life. In deep-sea nets we gathered the tiny organisms, and then with microscope, photography, and the cinema we observed them for the future instruction of the human race. There were hundreds of species, thousands of varieties, each to be identified, classified, described, studied, and photographed. We gathered in the morning, studied till midnight and restlessly slept till morning. The only thing in which we agreed was ambition. Our solitary united emotion was a dreaded hatred of the professor.

He knew how we felt and enjoyed taunting us.

“I am your leader because I willed it,” he would whisper to us. “The will to attain with me is synonymous with the accomplishment of my desire. I believe in myself, and through this belief I succeed. There is nothing that a strong man can not do if he wills to do it and believes in his strength. Our ideas of space, size and time are but the fanciful dreams of children. I am fifty-nine inches tall, and, with my clothes, weigh one hundred and ten pounds. If I desired, I could make myself a colossus and swallow the earth as a child swallows a pill. If I willed it, I could fly through space like a comet or

hang suspended in the ether like a morning star. My will is greater than any physical force, because I believe in it: I have confidence in my own ability to do whatever I wish. So far, I have conducted myself like an average man because of my desire and not on account of my limitations. Man has a soul, and that ethereal force is greater than any law of nature that he ever thought of, or of any that God ever created. He is purely and totally supreme—if he so desires.”

It was after such a challenge to us, and the universe, that our chemist, Bullard, gathered courage to challenge his power. He stated his opinion sharply and to the point:

“I do not believe you.”

“What is that to me?” answered the professor.

“Simply this. You make a statement of certain powers that you have. I say that it is not true. Of what good is it to boast if you know that we think you a liar? Can you do these things? If you can, do them for us, and I for one will call you greater than God. Fail to do them, and I brand you as a boasting liar.”

The professor looked at the chemist, and we, breathlessly, waited for the blow to fall. But he only laughed.

“You want a sign? A proof? I have thought of just such a thing, and I would have proposed it myself had one of you not asked for it. The thing must be visible to you all, something that I can demonstrate, a thing unheard of, a thing thought by all men to be impossible, and yet I will do it. Listen to me.

“You have all seen the jelly-fish, called the Bishop’s Miter. When it is magnified three hundred times under the microscope, it looks like a small balloon with a large opening at one end. It propels its way through the water by the flagellate movement of its cilia. The walls are translucent and transparent. At the top there are two specialized groups

of nerve cells which we believe may serve as eyes. The opening at the bottom serves as a mouth. Smaller cells enter there and are absorbed. I describe it to refresh your memory, though all of you have seen it. I will secure one in a hanging drop under the microscope, and then we will attach the camera and cinema to it. We will project the picture on our screen. You will see the Miter move and live; you will observe the cilia move.

“While we have the actual specimen under observation, I will look at it through the microscope. Then I will demonstrate to you that I am not the idle boaster that you think I am. I will perform an experiment that will win for me the name of the greatest scientist that has ever lived.”

When he had told us the nature of it we were too much astonished to reply. It seemed evident that the man had become insane. He smiled at us as though we were children.

After waiting for an answer and seeing that we had none to give, he began to prepare the apparatus for the experiment. Finally all was to his satisfaction. After examining several drops of water from our specimen jar, he was able to imprison a Bishop’s Miter in the hanging drop under the microscope. He turned on the electricity, and we saw the jelly-fish move upon the screen.

The professor carefully adjusted the apparatus till the organism appeared with more than usual distinctness. We saw the little animal that he had so carefully described to us. We even saw the little projections, which we believed were rudimentary visual organs.

Then Professor Quierling told the cinema operator what he wanted done. He was to take a picture, starting from the time the professor disappeared down the brass tube of the microscope and continuing till he reappeared. No matter what hap-

pened, he was to go on taking pictures.

"It is all well enough," said our master, "for you children to see what is happening and to talk about it later, but who would believe you? We know that the camera can not lie. That is why it is important to take a consecutive picture of what occurs. Otherwise, you might think that I have been able to hypnotize you. Now, I will look down this tube. I see at the bottom in the hanging drop a transparent balloon. It is a pretty sight. Watch me carefully as I will myself to shrink. I will go on talking as long as I can, and you must listen carefully, because the smaller I am the less audible will be my voice.

"Now I am twelve inches high. I am standing near the microscope. I become still smaller and now I am only one inch tall and am standing on the eyepiece. No doubt, you can barely hear me. Now I am smaller yet and am ready to will myself through the glass of the eyepiece."

**T**HE room was silent. We looked, shivering, at the microscope, and the professor was gone. The chemist staggered over to the instrument, looked into it, and silently staggered back to his seat.

On the screen in front of us the inhabitants of the drop of water lived and moved and had their being. Largest of all was the transparent jelly-fish, which was moving restlessly as though seeking a way of escape. The only sound in the room was the whirl of the cinema and the harsh breathing of the chemist.

Then, on the screen, came a new figure, and we were able to identify the professor, swimming among the infusoria. Gaining his balance, he at last stood upright and waved his hand at us. It was easy to see his smile, that condescending smile that had so often driven us frantic. There

was no doubt from the expression on his face that he was highly pleased with his performance. None of us dared look at his fellow; not one of the audience thought for a second of taking his eyes off the silver screen. We were stunned, stupefied and filled with a wild terror, all the more horrible because of its silence.

The professor started to swim again and now approached the jelly-fish. He tapped the crystal walls; then, as though seized with a sudden impulse, he went to the bottom, jumped up through the mouth and entered the translucent ball of protoplasm. He peered at us through the transparent walls. His arms made a series of peculiar movements and once again he smiled at us.

"My God!" exclaimed the artist. "He is wigwagging to us in the army code. He said, 'I have done it, and now I will return to your world.'"

And, as though beginning to keep his promise, he started for the mouth of the jelly-fish; and then—and then—

*The mouth closed.*

The professor circled the glasslike ball, seeking a way of exit. Once he waved at us in a peculiar manner, and then suddenly he sought the wall and, with arms and legs, tried to break through. On his face was now the look of ghastly despair. The things on top of the jelly-fish began to glow—no doubt now that they were eyes, and bright ones.

Before us, the professor slowly disappeared into a globule of milky protoplasm. The jelly-fish not only had made him a prisoner, but had actually dissolved and digested him. With a shriek, the artist went over to the wall and turned on the electric lights. Trembling, the chemist looked down the tube of the microscope and told us that there was nothing in the hanging drop save the jelly-fish.