

# WONDER Stories Quarterly

PUBLICATION OFFICE:  
404 North Wesley Ave., Mt. Morris, Ill.

Published by  
**STELLAR PUBLISHING CORPORATION**  
H. GERNSBACK, Pres.  
I. S. MANHEIMER, Sec'y S. GERNSBACK, Treas.

Vol. 2  
No. 2

WINTER  
1931

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**THE SCARLET PLANET**  
By Don M. Lemon ..... 150  
Through the hostile civilization of this strange world three men moved on the strangest quest that the secret order had ever given.

**THE MAN OF BRONZE**  
By A. L. Fierst ..... 206  
The scientist revealed—at his best and at his worst . . . the conflict of nations behind the scenes . . . torture and triumph for some . . . disaster for others . . .

**THE MARK OF THE METEOR**  
By Ray Cummings ..... 220  
Three desperate humans fight off the death of suffocation and starvation in interplanetary space. Adrift . . . alone . . . they struggled on . . .

**PITHECANTHROPUS ISLAND**  
By I. R. Nathanson ..... 228  
Marooned, they faced death from every side . . . besieged they felt the merciless savagery of the ape-man . . . but then strategy took a part . . .

**THE MARTIAN NEMESIS**  
By George B. Beattie ..... 238  
Famed . . . honored everywhere, he thought he had escaped from the dreadful secret of his past. But the seeds from Mars grew and flowered . . . and at last the Nemesis came . . .

**THE HOUR THE CONQUEROR CAME**  
By Edsel Newton ..... 252  
Like a deluge the "multiple" poured down upon the unsuspecting city . . . while from the hills the cohorts of the Legion watched and waited . . .

**THREE WORLDS TO CONQUER**  
By D. D. Sharp ..... 262  
Pulled from the earth, they floated in space, satellites of water . . . a grim battle for preservation was being fought on this lifeless world . . .

## OUR COVER ILLUSTRATION

taken from Ray Cummings' thrilling story, "The Mark of the Meteor" we see the gigantic meteor just after it has plunged through the bow of the doomed space ship. Shooting vertically upward in a vain effort to change the course of the ship, the rocket exhausts flame furiously. Mars in the background gleams green and gold.

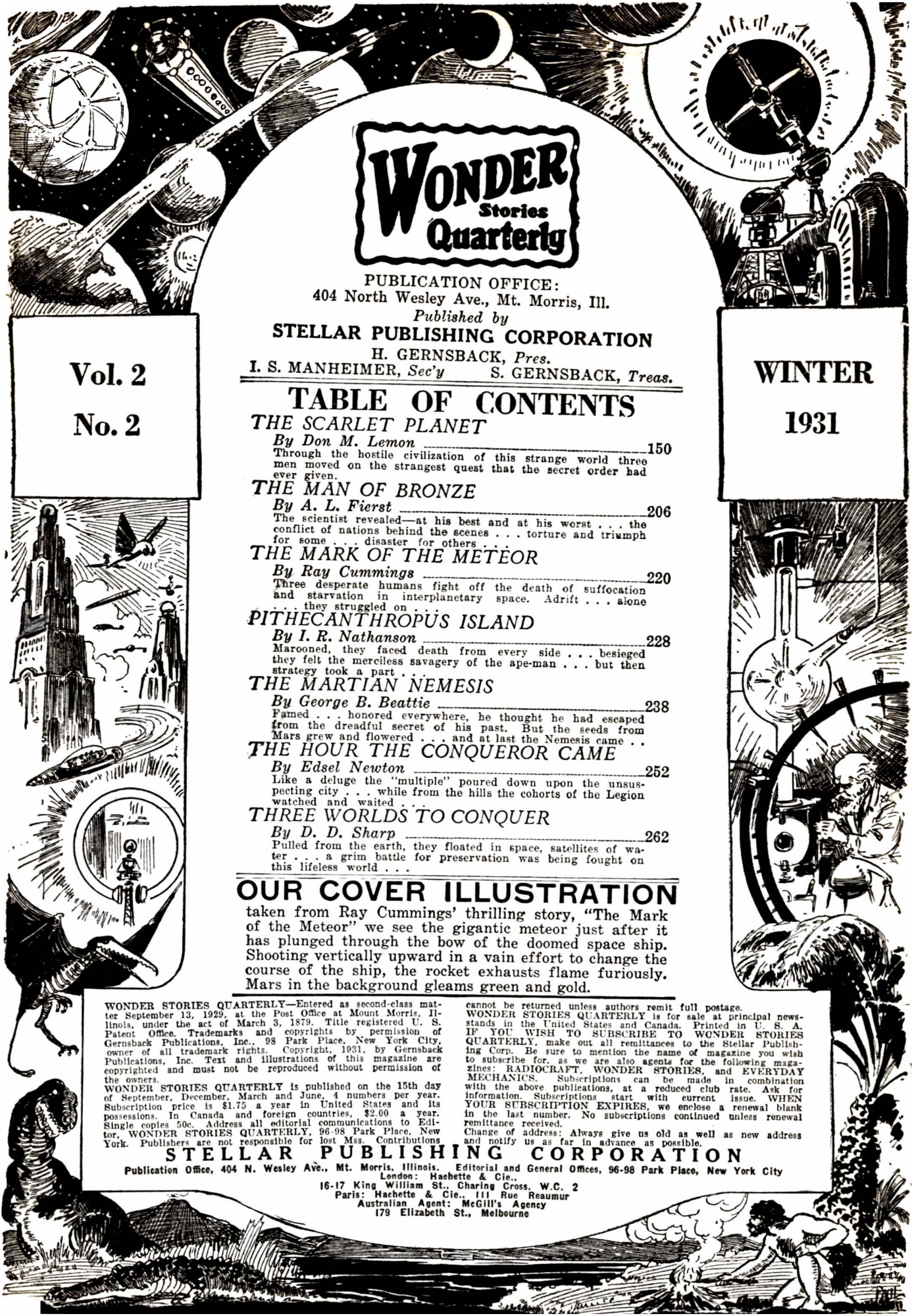
WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY—Entered as second-class matter September 13, 1929, at the Post Office at Mount Morris, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879. Title registered U. S. Patent Office. Trademarks and copyrights by permission of Gernsback Publications, Inc., 98 Park Place, New York City, owner of all trademark rights. Copyright, 1931, by Gernsback Publications, Inc. Text and illustrations of this magazine are copyrighted and must not be reproduced without permission of the owners.

WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY is published on the 15th day of September, December, March and June, 4 numbers per year. Subscription price is \$1.75 a year in United States and its possessions, in Canada and foreign countries, \$2.00 a year. Single copies 50c. Address all editorial communications to Editor, WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY, 96-98 Park Place, New York. Publishers are not responsible for lost Mss. Contributions

cannot be returned unless authors remit full postage. WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY is for sale at principal newsstands in the United States and Canada. Printed in U. S. A. IF YOU WISH TO SUBSCRIBE TO WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY, make out all remittances to the Stellar Publishing Corp. Be sure to mention the name of magazine you wish to subscribe for, as we are also agents for the following magazines: RADIOCRAFT, WONDER STORIES, and EVERYDAY MECHANICS. Subscriptions can be made in combination with the above publications, at a reduced club rate. Ask for information. Subscriptions start with current issue. WHEN YOUR SUBSCRIPTION EXPIRES, we enclose a renewal blank in the last number. No subscriptions continued unless renewal remittance received. Change of address: Always give us old as well as new address and notify us as far in advance as possible.

## STELLAR PUBLISHING CORPORATION

Publication Office, 404 N. Wesley Ave., Mt. Morris, Illinois. Editorial and General Offices, 96-98 Park Place, New York City  
16-17 King William St., Charing Cross, W.C. 2  
Paris: Hachette & Cie., 111 Rue Reaumur  
Australian Agent: McGill's Agency  
179 Elizabeth St., Melbourne





# The Martian Nemesis

by George B. Beattie



(Illustration by Marchioni)

As I watched, I noticed a circle of the monsters surrounded the rock, their pitchers opening and shutting spasmodically as they waded toward it.



THEY laid him to rest in the bare gaunt abbey of Westminster. To rest with the great—this greatest one of them all. The city was muffled. The women wept: the men whispered in low tones, and the children stopped in their play as the cortege passed solemnly by. Sir Stewart Knightlow was dead: Knightlow the magnetic, the man with the charmed life, and the tragic history.

Curious what an influence the name of Knightlow had exerted during the past couple of decades: man, woman and child had followed his exploits. The men had honored him for his achievements, the women had pitied him for the pathos of his private life, but to the children, he was the super-hero, the worshipful one: the speed king, holder of all the records on land and water, and in the air: the master adventurer, the only man who had trodden on the soil of Mars and returned to the earth alive.

And now he was dead, slain in a simple street accident, this greatest of all explorers, before whose star the adventures of Cortez and Columbus paled ineffectually. Knightlow dead? It seemed incredible, even as the funeral procession wound slowly by, and they laid his bones beneath the "dull cold marble."

In the privacy of his home, the dead man's lawyer fingered contemplatively a bulky package. He mumbled the direction: "To be opened only after my death. Stewart Knightlow, Bart.," appearing on the envelope, stroked his chin once or twice as if trying to gauge the contents of the document without opening the cover. Then suddenly, he ripped open the seals, and drew out many pages of closely written matter, headed in Sir Stewart's bold hand-writing, "My Life."

Seating himself in his most comfortable armchair, the old lawyer turned over the pages and read, at first with the semi-boredom of professional duty, then increasing interest and horror.

\* \* \*

So this was Mars! Our quantum-control space

ship had made a perfect landing, and we could see through our window-like lenses stretches of desert on either side of us, waterless and inhospitable. Above, the sky was clear and cloudless, like that of the "land of azure blue," as the Riviera is poetically called, but the firmament seemed higher, the light more intense, and the blue more vivid as it contrasted sharply with the bright red earth that extended as far as we could view, in a monotonous flat plain. The sun

beat down fiercely on the ruby desert, which seemed to glow red-hot in response, a very sea of fire. Awkroyd, the climatologist had been taking readings. He uttered a low whistle.

"What d'you think of this boys?" he asked excitedly lapsing into his native Irish brogue, "Faith, the astronomers are wrong entirely about timperature. Moind you, the barometric pressure is about right: it's about wan quarter that of the earth, just as Campbell supposed, an' the later investigations into the composition of the atmosphere aren't too wide of the mark, oither.

"The atmosphere's made up of 80 per cent oxygen, about foive per cent carbon dioxide, about foive per cent nitrogen, about foive per cent helium, and the remainder consists of rare gases such as argon and krypton, an' a lot I canot diagnose at all. But as for the timperature: Poynting put it at well below freezing point, an' my thermometer shows a hundred an' fifty two deg. Fahrenheit in the shade."

"That's easily accounted for," put in Ray Browne,

the naturalist, with that patronizing air I detested so, "here we are under the direct rays of the sun, in the middle of a dry desert beside which the Sahara is a children's playground. There's not a drop of water anywhere, nor will there be until the polar cap melts. Even then, the water will simply flow into the irrigation canals and be swallowed up by the thirsty plants that extend for miles on either side of their banks.

"To conduct the heat away from the land, we



GEO. B. BEATTIE

**B**EHIND the scenes of every scientific expedition there is a human drama which for its sheer interest may even outweigh at times the purpose of the expedition itself. But if, in a story, the human drama—the conflict of man against man—and the struggle of man against nature is so evenly balanced, then the story becomes superb reading. Of such a calibre is the present, from the pen of a rising star in the heavens of science fiction.

Man seeking to conquer strange worlds must put himself in the same position as a Martian on reaching the earth. Every plant, every living thing would be foreign to him. He might eat the poisonous fruits because they looked good, he would be stung by snakes, attacked by all manner of wild beasts. The more abundant the plant and animal life the greater the chance of his coming to grief and destruction.

In the most realistic fashion Mr. Beattie gives us not only the struggle of earthlings against the hostile Martian plant life but also a human story that will touch the most cold-blooded.

would need huge seas all round this desert. Wait till night, you'll find it cold enough then. Why even in a puny waste like Higher Mesopotamia, during the Arabic war, our water used to freeze solid in our water-bottles at night, and yet in the day, our chaps were dying with heat-stroke. The fellow who promised his sweetheart he would be true, till the sands of the desert ran cold, was making a safe bet. They go cold at Christmas every night."

### An Expedition Formed

**H**OW I hated the young pup's braggadocio, and his cheap cynicism. And this was the fellow Mary was going to marry, the man she had asked me to care for on this hazardous trip, this cynical upstart, this young know-all. I cursed the day he had ever come to our quiet little village. Before he came, Mary had been interested in my work, and I had hoped that one day she would be interested in *me*. True there was some difference in our ages, and I know I looked ten years older than I really was, for a decade spent in investigating radio-active elements had left its indelible mark.

At thirty-four I walked with a decided stoop, my face was lined and furrowed, my eyesight was beginning to fail, and, although I managed to conceal the defect, I knew myself that I was gradually becoming deaf. Many a day, I felt like throwing up the sponge, but always I seemed to be on the threshold of an epochal discovery, and Mary's sweet sympathy kept me going. After all, I owed all to her father, good old Squire Lowell: he had first noticed my keen interest in science when I was a boy at the village school, and had guided me through college and university, for I was an orphan, and without his generosity must have spent my life as a plough-boy or a grocer's assistant.

Later he had fitted me up a laboratory, and I had tried to justify his confidence in me by working night and day. But of late, I knew that I had worked not for duty, but for love. When I made some minor success, such as when I discovered how to separate the rare earths from actinium, Mary seemed so overjoyed that I felt I could hope. Some day I *must* bring off a coup, and then I would speak. In the meantime, I went on, working and hoping.

And then, *he* came. Perhaps five years my junior, he looked hardly more than twenty, pink-cheeked, well groomed, straight as a die, athletic and empty. In fact everything I was not. He could dance, I didn't. He played a good game of tennis: I had neither time nor inclination. He had a smart little runabout, with a shouty mascot on the radiator, and he talked with a cheap empty cynicism in a gay talking manner. Such was Ray Browne, the naturalist.

He came, he saw, he conquered. Mary's visits to the laboratory began to be less frequent, and when she came, she seemed to have left her mind in another place, (Ray Browne's runabout). At length the blow fell, the engagement was announced. I wished them luck, in the mechanical hypocritical manner that passes for politeness, and buried myself in my laboratory, work-

ing harder than ever. But the whole place seemed haunted with memories. I could not concentrate however hard I tried. I felt I must get away at all costs.

Then came the announcement of the projected Martian expedition. The German astronomer, Ostwald had spent his whole life investigating Mars, and following up the studies of Lowell and Schiaparelli. \* He had constructed a super-telescope by which he could not only detect the broad bands of vegetation growing on either side of the hundreds of canals, which bands are usually thought by the layman to be the canals themselves, but he was enabled to see the water flow down these canals as the ice at the poles melted, and he was able to note great changes in the vegetation following this irrigation.

But what interested me most was his declaration that by means of new instruments he had discovered that much of the surface of the planet was radio-active. Ostwald had learned all that was possible to know of Mars, without visiting the planet itself. For years he had studied Mars, talked Mars, dreamed Mars, and although at the age of sixty he had given up hope of ever visiting the planet himself, he fully believed that in time means would be devised for bridging the gulf between the two worlds.

Stock's wonderful adaptation of the quantum theory to practical engineering, and the building of the first quantum-control space flier, however, caused the old scientist once more to indulge in his life's dream of visiting the red planet in person. Funds were raised, and to make a long story short, a larger quantum-control vessel was constructed and the Ostwald Martian Expedition formed. How the public laughed at the cranks, as they called them: the more serious-minded members of the community tried to get legislative acts passed to prevent, as they put it, a group of lunatics from committing suicide.

To me, it was a heaven-sent opportunity. I could not stay in the little village, the wreck of all my hopes. Besides, all my life I had dabbled in the infinitely little, the atoms and electrons: here was an opportunity for adventure in the infinitely great, the boundless extent of space. I crossed to Coburg, presented my credentials to Herr Ostwald, and was engaged as radiologist to the expedition. But, somehow, I could not go away, without staying good-bye to Mary. I made my way to the little village once again, and on to the manor house, seeking an audience.

**I** WAS ushered into the morning room. Old Squire Lowell was there, cheery and rubicund. Young Browne was leaning nonchalantly on that quaint old fashioned harpsichord which was such a delight to Mary, tapping random notes idly, like the asinine dolt he was. As I entered, both men looked slightly strained, as though their conversation had been suddenly chopped off. I had caught the word "settlement" as I came down the hall. So that was it, the boulder was after Mary for her money and social position.

"Ah ha!" said Brown. "Enter the great elec-

\*The two astronomers who had brought the "Martian Canals" before the world.

tron hunter. What have you been doing with yourself, old scollop? Haven't seen you for ages and how's Mr. Nucleus, Mrs. Proton and all the little Electrons? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blithering idiot!" I thought to myself.

"Yes, Stewart, what have you been doing with yourself lately? We haven't seen you for weeks. Mary's been quite concerned for you," put in the Squire.

"Well, Squire, I've been to Germany. There's a golden opportunity for me on the Ostwald expedition. I've been appointed radiologist on the Martian expedition."

The squire brought his fist down with a wallop on the table. "The devil you have? Well of all the— well I'm blest—"

Browne struck a mock-heroic attitude, picked up my soft felt hat and placed it aslant on his head, then tucking his right hand into the folds of his jacket, he chortled "I go, 'tis a far far better thing than I have ever done."

At that moment Mary entered, her eyes blazing. "Ray, I'm ashamed of you. Mr. Knightlow is setting out on a voyage of unprecedented peril, and you sneer in that silly manner."

To do him credit, Browne colored up and looked decidedly silly for a moment or two, but he quickly recovered his usual sang-froid. Not so the Squire. He sat frowning for some time, chewing the end of his cigar as if weighing up the pros and cons of some mighty matter, and finally delivered himself:—"Mr. Browne, you're engaged to my daughter. You've got many things desirable in this world, personality, a comely frame, a flippant wit and a deuced taking way, but I'm beginning to think you lack one essential!"

"And what is that, oh Squire?"

"Well, it's what's commonly called 'guts,' my lad! You can sneer at Knightlow, but you haven't the guts to emulate him."

"I'm not such an ass, you mean, sir."

"Call it what you will, my lad," said the squire testily, "but unless you accompany the Ostwald expedition, the engagement's off. You say you are a naturalist. Very well, we'll be able to get you into the swim all right. Refuse and . . ."

"But father," put in Mary. "I love him. You are sending him to his death. I won't let him go. I'll marry him in spite of your refusal."

And then I almost liked Ray Browne. He turned to Mary. "Do you think I could take you on those terms. Your father thinks I am a coward. He has thrown down the gauntlet to me, and I must accept. I must prove myself. I must win my spurs!"

## CHAPTER II

### Radium!

**R**ELUCTANTLY Mary entrusted her lover to my care, and at the very last hour I made her the solemn promise that I would guard him and that he would be returned to her, all safe and sound.

But as the voyage progressed my dislike of

Browne increased. To his other despicable habits he had added one of calling me "Dad," which made me boil with rage, for truth to tell my greying hair and wrinkling face were matters about which I was particularly sensitive, but here we were at last, in the heart of the red desert.

How lonely it was. The barren emptiness was unbroken even by a solitary vulture or carrion crow. It was clearly no ideal camping ground, but Professor Ostwald and Awkroyd were intent upon their calculations, and were not a little annoyed by Browne's perpetual chatter, and his oft reiterated suggestions that we "shove off to more Christian quarters."

"What strikes me as most interesting," announced the professor when they had concluded their tests, "is the remarkably low nitrogen content of the atmosphere. We shall, no doubt, be able to breathe all right, quite comfortably, in fact; for although the oxygen content is four times that we are accustomed to from a percentage standpoint, the pressure is only one quarter. The carbon dioxide percentage is high, but equally as the pressure is low, we should not suffer on that account. The depressing effect of a low barometric pressure should, equally, be nullified by the great proportion of oxygen in the atmosphere. We may therefore safely land in the cool of the evening."

As the sun receded, we stole from the vessel. The somewhat lighter gravity affected our steps strangely at first, but we quickly mastered it, as we did the breathing of the rarefied air. But our reconnaissance yielded little, merely serving to confirm our first impressions of an arid inhospitable waste, totally without life, either animal or vegetable, and we were all quite glad to get back on board the space-ship, and spend the remainder of the evening discussing future movements.

We finally came to the conclusion that the best course was to cruise over this hemisphere, making maps and notes as we went, and then to attempt a landing in a more hospitable locality, if such presented itself. We cruised for several days, taking photographs of the light areas and dark patches, the wonderful canals with their broad bands of exotic vegetation: now at the ice-bound pole, now by the equator. Everywhere was desolate even in the vegetational bands, for the time of the polar cap melting was approaching, and the plants and trees were brown or leafless. No sign of human life appeared, although Ash the photographer claimed to have seen a curious quadruped scuttle across the dried bed of one of the canals.

At last we had every square mile of the hemisphere mapped out and photographed even to Herr Ostwald's satisfaction, and we decided again to land, this time in a narrow barren space between the two channels of a fine geminated canal that extended in this double formation right to the pole. We cruised very low over the canal and its vegetational belts, with the rotting trees and fast decaying leaves all matted with masses of tangled linas below us. Now and then we caught sight of Ash's quadrupeds, dart-

ing in and out of the dead forest. Curious creatures these, about the size of a terrier, with slug-like bodies on long thin stilts, one could hardly call them legs.

Landing, we each set about our own particular branch of the work. Browne, with an interest I had not thought him capable of spent his days foraging in the "maquis" of rotting vegetation, picking up a rhizome or bulb here and there to stuff in his satchel, or making a drawing or pressing of some more than ordinarily interesting leaf or stem. The animals proved to be quite harmless and timid to a degree: they appeared to exist on the decaying vegetable matter, and scuttled off when anyone approached into the heart of the scrub. But that there was a huge number of them could not be doubted.

Browne's researches puzzled him. "Nearly all these plants," he confessed to Ostwald "seem to me to require plenty of nitrogenous matter for their substance; yet the quantity of nitrogen in the air and the soil is negligible. True, the decaying matter does form a minor source of supply, but it seems altogether inadequate when we consider the probable immensity of some of the growths from the skeletonised leaves that lie about."

To which the old professor replied that we should know the answer to the riddle when the polar ice melted. We did, all too tragically!

While Browne examined his roots and shoots, I carefully examined the bright red earth, and the few boulders that cropped up in it. For a long time I could make nothing of either, but my heart pounded with excitement when I found that the red earth was a complete insulator for all radium emanations, and that below it, nay, within it specimens of every radio-active substance I had ever encountered on earth, and many new ones existed. I could hardly believe my own findings, and hastened along to Ostwald to apprise him of the news. The old professor however, was taking his siesta, and I was loath to disturb him, so I returned to my work.

AS I worked, I thought things out, and as I thought, I was tempted. All my life I had been poor. Here I had inexhaustible wealth for the picking. Why not keep the knowledge to myself? I was the only one who had the necessary technical accomplishment to wrest the Martian earth's secrets from it! I could refine a large quantity of the earth, and take it back to the vessel without anyone being any the wiser: with radium at over a hundred dollars a milligramme element, I should be the richest man on earth.

Perhaps Mary would look at me then. Besides, if I reported to Ostwald now, he would get all the credit, for I was but a link in the chain of the Ostwald Expedition, and I was sick to death of work, work, work, without recognition.

"Any luck, Knightlow?" I started at the sound. The professor was bending over me as I examined a fresh heap of the red earth. "Er . . . well, no, professor, the earth is practically inert!" I said masking a lie with a partial truth,

but I felt the color mount to my cheeks, and I feel to this day that the old German knew I was lying, although if he did, he appeared to take my statement at its face value. He walked silently away.

For days I worked, extracting radium and its isotope, mesothorium, encasing the precious grains in a safety envelope of the ray-insulating red earth, and placing them in my satchel. In a short while I had more radium stored away in the space-ship than there was in the whole of the world, but to every inquiry as to my work I gave a negative reply, and cultivated an air of disappointment as I examined heap after heap of earth, ostensibly without result.

But though I carried the matter with a high hand, my duplicity worried me: I grew restless at nights, and many a time resolved as I tossed, sleepless, that I would make a clean breast of the affair to Ostwald in the morning and hand over the priceless booty. But such resolves melted like snow before the rising sun each morning and I continued furtively to accumulate my treasure.

Meanwhile the polar snows were melting, and the vegetational region was permeated with a light mist, although the deserts remained as dry, and the sky as cloudless as ever. Once we ascended in the space ship, and soared over the canal. Its basin was a deep gorge, lined with withered hydrophytes and strange algae. A puny stream of water trickled feebly down the centre of the canyon, and as the sun beat down on it we saw the water boil vigorously, for of course under such a low barometric pressure, the boiling point was low in the scale, and the water boiled when it was merely warm.

The vapor produced the light haze we had seen, which was diffused rapidly in the rare atmosphere and spread wide over the vegetational belt.

The vegetable debris seemed to be awakening. Previously the only plants which had seemed to be alive at all, were Xerophytes of the most extreme type, much resembling our own cushion plants and spiny plants of the desert, and minute aromatic posies with grey hairy leaves, which the quadrupeds avoided like the plague, probably due to the strong perfume emanating from them.

Now new shoots of tender green were springing up in every direction, growing with a rapidity which to our earthly notions were incredible, or at any rate, uncanny. Browne was almost enthusiastic: he was as near excitement as his blasé temperament permitted, and when we had returned to our base, he spent his time on the fringe of the bush examining the strange shoots, and culling a specimen here and there.

"Why, man!" he said to me. "There's a wealth and diversity of vegetation here such as our most imaginative naturalists have never dreamed of. The most primitive types of palaeobotany rub shoulders with evolutionary types that are far ahead of anything we have produced by cultivation. What a treatise I can produce. Another month, and we shall have the most wonderful forest ever seen around us."

### The Trap!

THE days succeeded one another, and Browne's enthusiasm grew with the plants. He pushed further and further into the bush, but his hunger for knowledge seemed insatiable. His notebooks were full of closely written comments, and his satchel was already brimful of leaves, and cuttings, bulbs and stems, all carefully docketed and classified to the best of his ability.

The scrub was now well above waist high, and was so interlaced with vines and creepers as to be almost impenetrable already. Browne had been importuning Professor Ostwald for some time to allow an expedition to proceed through the bush to the canal itself, so that a more perfect study of the vegetation might be made, but the old German was very reluctant to consent.

He pointed out the dangers of such a course. It was ten miles from the fringe of the maquis to the water basin; we had no knowledge of how gigantic the vegetable growths might be on maturity, and judging by the interlacing of the creepers already, in another month the belt would be absolutely impenetrable; while as there was no suitable landing place for the spaceship at the canal gorge, escape by that means would be extremely hazardous if not impossible, and the party might be forced to remain marooned until the vegetation decayed;—the best part of the Martian year.\*

But at long length, Browne, with the assistance of Awkroyd and Ash, who were a couple of adventurous spirits, and were mightily bored with our present life of inaction, prevailed upon the old scientist to allow this expedition to proceed. At first it was intended to carry radio apparatus with them, but after the first day's progress through the scrub, the idea of carrying anything apart from tabloid foods and a light bivouac was abandoned, for it was with extreme difficulty that the three adventurers managed to hack their way through the tough vines, which seemed automatically to seal the way again as they passed through.

We had all lent a hand for the first day's progress, yet barely a couple of miles had been traversed, and as the professor, Bell, the pilot, Stock, the engineer, and myself, cut our way back again, lugging the wireless apparatus with us, we felt glad that we were not proceeding with the others.

The four of us contented ourselves in taking things easily, ascending some days to see how the adventurous three were getting along. As they proceeded, they found themselves in a thicket growing denser, higher and more luxuriant, and it was a full fortnight before they reached the canal basin. There they made themselves comfortable, and having furnished them with a further supply of food by dropping it from the air, we started to make things more amenable on the fringe of the bush. For some time Herr Ostwald had grumbled about living and sleeping in the space-flyer, so to placate the old man, Bell and myself set about constructing a habitation of sorts from the old wood and the huge leaves, which were now growing on the very

fringe of the thicket. A curious vine, not unlike Virginian creeper, had been throwing out tendrils in the direction of the space-ship for some time, and with a thought of the artistic, I trained the pretty vine over the improvised cottage, which gave the rough results of our labors a picturesque aspect. Ostwald was delighted with his new dormitory, and as the vine grew with astonishing rapidity, it had soon covered the whole exterior of the shed, much to the old man's delight, for he was greatly taken with pretty things. Our surroundings were daily growing more pleasant.

Some of the strange growths were already beginning to flower, and vivid colored petals were bursting through the galaxy of green. The belt too, was slowly increasing, proceeding it seemed, towards us, as new shoots would arise in the desert; and soon the space-flier was surrounded with a charming little garden of these pleasant young off-shoots springing up within a few yards of each other.

Stock, who had some pretensions to gardening ability, pottered about with these plants, attempting to train them in the way they should go. He was particularly interested in a nettle-like bush which gave promise of huge dimensions. Bell hadn't much sympathy with all this "messaging about" as he termed it. He was pre-eminently a man of action and was bored stiff.

I had now accumulated as much radium as I dared store away, and like Bell I was suffering somewhat from ennui; when one night, taking a stroll on the fringe of the forest by the feeble light of Mars' "waistcoat-pocket" moons, Phobos and Deimos, we saw something which dispelled all our thoughts of boredom.

FOR some time I had been noting a clump of peculiar plants, with a passive interest. That they belonged to the *Nepenthes* (pitcher plant) group, even I, ignorant though I was on matters relating to botany, could not doubt. But they were many times the size of any pitcher plant, I had ever seen. I had examined them that very morning, and been struck alike with the vivid variegated hues of the immense fused leaves that formed the "pitcher". They were ten feet or so from the ground; and the long trail of sirupy secretion which exuded from the pitcher slowly trickled down the stem and gradually seeped into the earth. Greatly daring I had gingerly tasted the secretion, and found it sweet like honey.

We had just reached this clump, and were perhaps a distance of twenty yards away, when we noted one of Ash's quadrupeds at the foot of the clump, licking the sweet secretion from the stem. We immediately stood motionless, for we had never had the opportunity of examining the behavior of the strange animals at such close quarters, and this one was obviously unaware of our presence as yet. Soon it began to ascend the stem of the plant, licking the sweet secretion greedily as it progressed, holding on to the smooth surface with sucker-like toes.

For minutes we watched as the creature slowly progressed towards the pitcher. Once or twice it turned round, as if half aware of our

\*The time of revolution of Mars is 686.98 days.



presence. But if it scented danger, the fascination of the honey-dew proved too great, for it continued climbing and sipping the nectar with obvious relish until it was balanced on the very edge of the bi-foliate pitcher. Then suddenly, and without a shred of warning, the pitcher opened like a butterfly's wings: blood red tentacles sprang from the centre and enfolded the luckless animal with the rapidity of a chameleon's tongue, and the leaves instantly closed with the booty inside.

The whole operation of the trap had been so nearly instantaneous that, had I witnessed it alone, I should have been persuaded that my senses had deceived me; but I could see from the horrified look on Bell's face, that he too had seen the horrible process.

"What've you make o' that?" he queried.

"Well," I said as lightly as I could, "I'm no botanist but it seems to me it's the solution of Browne's puzzle as to how plants requiring nitrogenous matter thrive here. Evidently Nature, cruel as ever, allows the animals to breed and feed on the decaying plants, and when the young plants attain maturity they complete the cycle by feeding on the animals, and so making up for the nitrogen shortage in the soil."

"Anyway, let's go back," he said with a shudder, "And talk the matter over with Stock, he's something of an amateur botanist."

### CHAPTER III

#### Tragedy!

WE encountered Stock half way between Oswald's shed and the vessel. We poured out our tale to him.

"Hum," he said, "They're not true *Nepenthes*: in the pitcher plants the insects walk up the stem picking up a sweet liquid that exudes from the leaves, but the pitcher is full of liquid into which they fall and are drowned. But, what worries me is that carnivorous plants are usually found only in marshy ground. Now, if such terrible traps can exist on the very fringe of the belt, what terrors are growing in the damp area by the canal itself, watered by the melting snows? We must get in touch with Browne and the others as quick as we can! I'm glad you fellows are back, though, the old man's got an awfully bad touch of fever."

"Fever?"

"Yes, mysterious kind of malady! Called me shortly after you'd gone. Complained of terrible itching. He's covered with a rash from head to toe, can't diagnose the disease though, and I can't get him comfortable. He was trimming that creeper: (the darn thing's nearly closing up the door now), when he first complained."

We hastened to the space-flyer, where Stock had conveyed Oswald. The old scientist was lying on the couch, twisting and turning almost like a patient in the throes of tetanus. He had torn his clothes to ribbons, and his flesh showed through livid red, with a fiery eruption which was already developing unsightly pustules: his face looked as though corrosive acid had been poured over it; a fluid poured from his sightless

eyes; and he raved in a delirium that was pitiable to hear.

We laved the livid flesh with alkaline water and covered the most affected parts with layers of bismuth, but all to no effect. The astronomer continued to get worse, and before the morning broke he had succumbed.

Sad at heart with the loss of our leader, and puzzled and alarmed at the manner of his death, I noticed in the light of the morning that Bell kept scratching the backs of his hands which seemed red and sore. As the day wore on the pilot developed the same symptoms as Oswald. Stock and I carried him out, and isolated him in an improvised tent, applying what palliatives we could, but Bell continued to get steadily worse.

We racked our brains, and what few reference books there were in the vessel, in an attempt to diagnose the fever, but could neither recall nor discover any known malady resembling the mysterious illness. So far neither Stock nor I showed the slightest symptoms of the infection, but we were now taking the greatest care to avoid contagion. We buried Oswald in the rich red earth, and wondered how long our comrade Bell would last out.

Suddenly Stock veered around. "I have it! It's that accursed creeper. The beastly thing must be a 'rhus' or 'sumach'. Even on the earth we have some specimens that play havoc with some people. The American poison ivy, *rhus toxicodendron*, for instance harbours a fixed oil in every part of it, stem, leaves, and hair, which is so virulent that even one thousandth of a milligramme placed on the skin, will produce violent pain and destruction of tissue.

"The slightest contact with a person's clothes or even the dust from the dried leaves produces most painful and terrible eruptions, which sometimes occur again and again even when all source of contagion has been destroyed. Now I think this is a similar vine, containing an even more powerful irritant. Poor Oswald was trimming the creeper and was *directly* affected. Bell was *indirectly* infected through touching the chief's clothing."

"That may be so, but how are *we* immune?"

"For the simple reason that susceptibility to the Rhus poison seems to be an individual matter. The American poison oak, or poison ivy seems to affect one individual, while another goes free. We are evidently immune, else we should have shown symptoms long ago, you especially, for it was you who worked on the creeper at the start."

"Yes, confounded idiot that I was!" I exclaimed bitterly.

"Never mind that," said Stock. "Let's do what we can for Bell although I don't think there's much hope!"

All day we tended the raving pilot, applying the remedies which Stock said were used for sumach poisoning. By nightfall he was sinking fast in spite of our frenzied endeavors, but unlike Oswald, he seemed to grow calmer as death approached, and finally sank into a peaceful stupor. Towards midnight, the dying man turn-



ed towards us, and quite lucidly asked one of us to bring his satchel from the space-flier: he knew he was dying and wished to straighten up some affair or other.

Stock went, and I talked with the fast-sinking Bell. Then, of a sudden, out of the night went up a horrible yell, that made my heart jump and my face drain of blood. It was Stock's voice and he was calling for help! Help against what?

I DASHED out into the night, but even as I did so Stock staggered towards me. "Don't come any further!" he panted, "I'm done for!" Disregarding his warning, I rushed to him, and assisted him into the circle of light of the tent. His face was distorted with pain; a livid weal stood out on his right cheek; but, most amazing of all, his clothes were covered with sharp quills about three inches in length while several of these stuck in his bare legs and arms, which were already turning black. I made to extract some of these, but he waved me off. "Too late old man, I'm gone in! Take care of yourself, never mind me.

"It's that damned nettle! You know, the big one with the vivid white flowers, the one I had made such a fuss over. I was passing within a yard or two of it, to get Bell's papers, when I felt something strike my cheek, followed by a searing pain: I couldn't help crying out. Then I was stabbed right and left on the arms and legs. I ran towards the tent, but it's too late, old man, the poison's done its work!"

"But a nettle?"

"Quite natural, old man," he gasped, the scientist even at the point of death, "nettles contain two poisons, formic acid which causes the pain, and a smaller quantity of a venom which resembles snake poison. Even on the Earth, there's an Indian nettle with stinging hairs on its surface, which become detached and float into the air, getting into the eyes, nose and throat of anyone coming near, and causing violent irritation and sometimes blindness, while a Javanese type produces convulsions. This Martian nettle is but a development of these prototypes."

I had been carefully extracting the spines, and making Stock as comfortable as I could. Bell had sunk into a coma again. I tried to cheer up Stock.

"It's no use, old man, I'm done! Half an hour at the most. Look after yourself! Don't stir from this tent until daylight, then get into the vessel as quickly as you can and get away. We're in a hotbed of savage plants. No use attempting to save the others: they're bound to be killed long ago by some diabolical *drosera*.

"I see the riddle of Mars clearly now. How there are man-made canals, and yet no evidence of inhabitants. They have all been wiped out with the vile vegetation their labors helped to create. But, I'm wasting precious minutes. Let me tell you how to operate the quantum motors!"

For the best part of an hour, Stock drilled me with every detail of the procedure, his recital

interrupted only by spasms of pain. Then suddenly his whole frame quivered violently, and he fell back, dead. I sat a long time as if petrified, and then stole over to Bell. Alas! he was dead also.

I felt hysterical: I would rather have rushed from the place but Stock's warning held me. It still wanted an hour or two of dawn. How I survived the horror of that time, I know not, but never was man more pleased to welcome the dawn than I that night. As soon as it was light, I paid the last tributes to my dead companions, and hastened to the space-boat, giving the lethal nettle a wide berth, although it looked the picture of innocence in the morning light.

I had little difficulty with the controls, for Stock's description had seared itself into my brain. I rose rapidly and soared at a low altitude over the belt. As I did so, a great arm of green seemed to reach from the heart of the forest and attempt to engulf the ship. I swerved, and was lucky to avoid the menace, which I noted had myriads of suckers on its inner surface, for all the world like the tentacle of an octopus.

I hastened on. Stock's advice burned into my mind. "Never mind the others, they must have been killed long ago." Yes, self-preservation that was it: besides, if Browne had perished? Mary? Yes, what was the use of risking my life on a hopeless quest? I soared higher and higher. Yes, I would leave the planet for good!

Then came a revulsion. I *must* find out whether the others had perished or no. I descended again, and made my way to the canal bank following its line carefully until I came to the encampment.

How the spot had changed, since I had last seen it! The water was higher and on either bank a marsh extended, and in this marsh I saw with horror, titanic *Nepenthes*, with long *pneumatophores* or prop roots, and devices to enable them to float, their huge pitchers waving hungrily in the air. As I watched, I noted that a circle of these monsters surrounded a rock or small island in the midst of the canal, their pitchers opening and shutting spasmodically as they waved towards it.

And on that rock, there was a speck: a man: my God! It was Ray Browne! He was holding his hands to Heaven, and stamping and raving, and laughing and cursing.

### The Return!

QUICK as thought, I released a stream of liquid air from the defense discharge tube, and the *Nepenthes* crumpled up. Ray saw me, and shouted. I cast him a rope, and he tied it about his middle; with a superhuman effort I hauled him aboard as he fainted clean away. Then I fumbled the controls automatically and drew away from the horrible place with an immense acceleration . . .

How long I flew through space without volition, I do not know: but I was recalled to myself by Brown who had slowly recovered, and managed to crawl towards the larder and bring food for the two of us.

How changed he was! Gone was the flippant look. His hair was white and his face was furrowed. "What of the others?" I asked.

He covered his face with his hands. "Killed. Eaten by those monstrous plants. I was the last. How I escaped is a miracle!" We consumed the remainder of our meal in silence. We were both worn out so, having set the auto-stats in operation to control progress and steering, we both lay down to catch what slumber we could.

I slept fitfully, but Brown, despite what he had been through, appeared to enjoy a deep rest. When I finally awoke he was still snoring peacefully, and when he at length aroused himself he seemed to be more his old irresponsible detestable self again. His attitude towards me, too, seemed to have suffered subtle change. Where before, he had appeared overwhelmingly grateful to me for saving him from a terrible fate, he now spoke of the incident as though he had done me a great honor by allowing me to rescue him, and all my old dislike of the man began to reassert itself. As the voyage proceeded, his perkiness increased, as did my hate of the fellow. He would persist in bringing Mary's name into the conversation, rubbing salt, as it were, into my raw wound. At times I almost wished, horrible though the thought was, that I had left him to the mercy of the *Nepenthes*. My nerves were getting the better of me, and his incessant prattle didn't improve my temper. The sooner we reached civilization, the better.

At length we reached the world's atmospheric belt. Now was the time for delicate action. Any fool could sail a space flyer through space, but it was an exceedingly ticklish job to make a neat or even a safe landing, and despite Stock's copious directions, I felt the need of a pilot badly.

I commenced to coast in an ever decreasing spiral, applying the wind-brakes at the same time, and we were really doing very well. My idea was to make a landing in the first reasonable spot available and then to make for the nearest port, rather than to attempt to reach England in the vessel itself.

We had reached a spot perhaps about ten miles above the surface, when all of a sudden we encountered something; an air pocket; a shifting gravity maelstrom, or something, and we were swept now up, now down with terrific force. I totally lost control for a few seconds, and when I regained it, the earth was rising towards us at a terrific rate.

I had merely time to straighten out when we hurtled along the surface throwing up a cloud of dust and careering along madly for some miles before I could bring the vessel to a stop.

"You're some pilot!" sneered Browne.

I said nothing, but bottled up my rage. We disembarked, and viewed our surroundings.

"Durned fine place this to land," groused Browne. It was certainly a desolate spot. A waterless desert as far as I could make out: just flat dull white earth, baked dry with the sun as far as we could see. How hot it was! The supply of water in the space-ship was nearly exhausted, there was certainly not more than a week's supply at the most.

"It's clear we can't stop here," said Browne jauntily. "I reckon the sooner we clear out again, the sooner we'll be dining at the old man-or house again."

"Easier said than done," I jerked out, irritated by his manner, "The controls are jammed, and the auxiliary motor's burned out."

"My God!" he ejaculated, "We're sunk!"

"Not exactly," I said. "We have three chances. Finding a copious supply of water before the week's out, being picked up by a passing airplane, or caravan, or repairing the space-boat. If none of these things happen, then we'll die of thirst."

"And all your fault too," he wailed, "Getting the darned thing out of control like that."

A glance at the damaged ship showed that its repair was beyond our resources, at any rate in the limited time. Our hopes then centred on the discovery of water, and a final pick-up. Of food we had sufficient for a long period in the tabloid supplies aboard. We rested in the ship during the heat of the day, but kept a keen look out for any passing plane or caravan. In the cool of the evening we trekked for miles leaving a spoor behind so that we could retrace our steps, but never a sign of water or vegetation could we find, though we searched the country far and wide with the powerful binoculars of the vessel.

Then we tried digging, but deep though we dug in the soft sandy earth, not a trace of the precious fluid could we find, and our exertions, and the powdery earth filling our throats made us more parched and thirsty than ever.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Last Struggle

AT the end of the third day, the water was low in the demijohn, and our hopes were at zero. Worn out, I lay down to dream of peaceful streams, and long cool summer drinks. I awoke to find Browne standing beside me. The demijohn with its scanty content of priceless liquor stood beside him, while in his hand, he dangled my satchel with its invaluable yet here, valueless contents. He laughed boisterously and long.

"So, my fine fellow," he sneered, "You thought to steal Mary, as you stole the radium, eh? And it took you all your time to save me from the man-eating plants? Wished you hadn't afterwards, didn't you? Then you could have become a world-force with your pilfered radium, married Mary, and settled down to accept the plaudits of the vulgar, with your clay-feet neatly tucked out of sight in a pair of expensive brogues. Eh?"

He took my breath away. The fellow had stolen my thoughts.

I caught hold of his arm, "By Jove! man, how do you know all this?"

His leer broadened, and he laughed again, insanelly. "Those who live in glass houses, er, shouldn't talk in their sleep."

So that was it! It was an old habit of mine



I knew. From boyhood anything troubling me deeply caused me to mutter in my sleep.

"Well," I said sulkily, "I do hate you, Browne. It was you who stole Mary from me, but I *did* save you, after all. If we get out of this, we'll halve the radium, and start fair. Let Mary choose between us of her own free will."

He laughed again in that mad unnerving way. "Quite generous, but I have other methods of division. Here's your radium", he tossed me the satchel, "For what it is worth! I'm quite content with this," and he fondled the demijohn, "and—Mary!"

I made a dart for the bottle, but he held me off. We struggled. He held on to the demi-john. He was weaker than I: I was gradually mastering him, overpowering him, when the tragedy occurred. He kicked out at me with his heavy boot, missed, and crashed his foot right into the bottle smashing it to pieces. For a moment I stood frozen, watching our lives ebbing away, as the thirsty soil lapped up the small pool of liquor, and then I went berserk.

All the months of hating this man: all the bottled up jealousy, all the repressed emotion surged into my brain and crystallised themselves into the one word "Kill."

I seized the spade we had been digging with, and brought it down on his head, again and again, in a very whirlwind of frenzy. I must have killed him with the first blow for he fell like a log, but my fury knew no bounds and only sheer exhaustion caused me to cease my rains of blows.

I fell exhausted. Then and then only, did the realization of what I had done, penetrate to my brain. But, I was glad! How I hated him! If he were alive, I'd kill him again. I laughed hysterically. He had only himself to blame. It was his life or mine. He would have left me to die without water. But I knew deep down in my heart, that these were excuses. I had killed Ray Browne, because I hated him!

All night I lay with eyes wide-open and parched mouth, staring at the broken vessel, and the corpse, alternately cursing and praying. At intervals I would look up at the firmament, and with a curious detachment admire the beautiful display of stars. Then my nerves would overcome me, and I would fall to sobbing like a child.

WITH dawn, my reason somewhat reasserted itself. I hauled Browne to the hole we had dug for water, and pushed him in. He had his satchel slung over his shoulder, and as the body fell the bag burst open, and his precious notes and specimens flew out scattering, about the sides of the improvised grave. I threw in the blood-stained shovel and the broken bottle, and scrambled the loose earth into the hiatus as best I could, smoothing the surface with meticulous care. How thirsty I was!

I shouldered my satchel and made my way to the space-ship, collecting the log and what other records I deemed important enough for preservation. Then I laid a long fuse to the space-ship, and blew her to atoms. Even as I did so, I

laughed at the futility of all this covering of my tracks, for here I was in the midst of a waterless desert, dying of thirst, with not one chance in a million of being rescued.

I laughed till my cracked lips bled: and then with a sudden resolve, I pushed on as fast as I could, laughing, cursing, and sobbing as I stumbled through the sandy soil.

The old lawyer paused in his reading. He stroked his brow with his hand; gulped down a glass of water nervously, poked up the fire, and then recommenced the narrative.

I really cannot understand it at all. These kind people tell me I have been very ill: that I must avoid any excitement, or I may bring about a relapse, yet they keep plying me with a ceaseless catalogue of queries, that seem awfully foolish to me. Not that I get excited at all about them, for they seem too stupid for anything.

They seem to think that I have been to some other world, Mars, I think they call it, and they want to know all about it. Did I find any inhabitants? What happened? How was the space-ship wrecked? And so on and so forth, but it's all Greek to me.

I rather like the bluff old Squire: he seems to welcome me almost like a son. And his sprightly daughter, Miss Lowell, she seems a nice girl, but sad, as though waiting for someone who's gone away: always waiting. She keeps asking me about "Ray," and when I think hard, and cannot remember, she seems so upset and the tears rise in her pretty eyes. I wish I could remember!

Another thing:—I went to the window the other day, and there was a large crowd outside. When the villagers saw me they took off their caps and threw them in the air, shouting and hurraing in a way which caused me to drop the curtain, and recede quickly into the privacy of the background. Then Miss Lowell came in this morning and smilingly handed me a paper. She pointed to a paragraph headed "Knighthood for Knightlow?" and I read:—

"It is rumored that in all probability Stewart Knightlow, the intrepid explorer, and sole survivor of the ill-fated Ostwald Martian expedition, will be knighted by His Majesty, when he has fully recovered. It will be recalled that Mr. Knightlow was picked up, by a miraculous stroke of luck by Mr. Philips, the famous United States airman, who was making an attempt on the Round-the-World record, right in the heart of the Sahara desert, in the midst of a sand-storm. It is greatly to be regretted that Mr. Knightlow seems to have lost his memory completely, although it is hoped that this aberration will be only temporary. As we explained, however, in our earlier editions, there seems little hope that any other members of the party can have survived, as the planes of all civilized nations have scoured the desert incessantly since Mr. Knightlow's rescue, and the only result has been the discovery of fragments of the space-ship. It is assumed that Mr. Knightlow escaped

by using a parachute before the ship, for some reason, exploded, but if, as is hoped, the gallant gentleman recovers his memory, we may learn much. From the records of the expedition which Mr. Knightlow had about him, it appears clear that Mars is both uninhabited and uninhabitable but Dr. Dakin, the celebrated scientist who has made an examination of the specimens of soil found in Mr. Knightlow's satchel states that these contain considerable quantities of radium and similar substances, and the satchel has consequently been placed for safety in the vaults of the Bank of England."

"Very interesting," I said politely, "but my dear young lady, I don't for the life of me, see how this affects me."

A shade crossed her face. "I thought perhaps this would help you to remember. *You are Stewart Knightlow.*"

"Stewart Knightlow," I repeated the name. Yes, it did seem familiar somehow, so did the mention of radium, but that was all. I tried hard to recall more, but the more I tried to recall, the more elusive seemed the facts. Miss Lowell sighed and brought me over a photograph of a man. He was a youngish chap in a rather loud check suit, and a perky air; and the portrait was signed "With love, Ray."

"Don't you remember Ray?" asked the girl.

"Never saw this chap in my life!" I said bluntly. She sighed again and put down the photograph sadly.

#### A Fabulous Treasure

SOMEHOW I felt sorry for her: she seemed to dote so on this young man. "Never mind," I said gently, "I'm sure to remember some day," and patted her shoulder tenderly.

Then the old squire came in and congratulated me boisterously. "You certainly deserve all the honors the Old Country can shower on you, my lad. Course, I always knew you had it in you. Bad job about the others, though! Still, the far flung battle-line an' all that you know! Martyrs in the name of progress! Ever thus, my boy: have a benedictine?"

And so on and so forth. It was all very embarrassing to me, particularly as I could not for the life of me remember a thing about my past life, or about the terrific adventures I was supposed to have taken part in. I was examined by the leading physicians and surgeons of the day: psycho-analysts had a go at me, but all to no purpose: as far as I was concerned, my life started when I awoke in the manor house with the charming Miss Lowell bending tenderly over me.

As time passed, I grew stronger in body and began to get about the countryside. Wherever I went admiring crowds would cheer. Even if I went to a neighboring town, somehow the citizens seem to have been apprised of my arrival, and I would find myself the cynosure of a delighted crowd. Children coming out of school would whoop with delight at the sight of me, and ragged urchins would nudge one another, and whisper in an awed voice, "That's 'im as 'as bin ter Mars an' back."

We were invited to functions, banquets and parties by the hundred, for the gentry soon found that I would not attend any of their entertainments without my host and hostess accompanying me. My photograph blazed forth from every shop window; I was the theme of a popular song; hats, drinks, soaps and matches were named after me; and even Mr. Tussaud called upon me for the purpose of securing my permission to display my effigy in his famous waxwork.

Then came the crowning glory, when His Majesty created me a baronet. The old-world pomp rather disconcerted me but the King himself put me at ease in a moment, with his tactful democratic manner, and complimented me with such sincerity on my achievements, that I felt mortally ashamed I could not remember anything about them. After that, the foreign powers vied with one another in bestowing their decorations while the municipalities showered the freedom of their cities upon me.

More interesting than all this ceremony, however, was the visit of Dr. Dakin with reference to the contents of my satchel. He informed me that inside the curious red clay balls he had found almost pure radium, which I gathered is an almost priceless substance. It is much sought after since it is invaluable for many purposes, particularly in therapeutics. Dr. Dakin informed me that he calculated there was more radium in the satchel than hitherto had been isolated in the whole world, he also stated that there were likely to be international complications as to the rights of ownership.

As the expedition was German, the German government had already been inquiring as to the satchel's content: it was more than likely, he thought, that an international commission would be convened to inquire into the whole matter, particularly as there was a world shortage of radio-active materials for prophylactic purposes.

On the other hand, advised the Doctor, there was also, in view of the fabulous value of the consignment, my own personal interest to be considered.

"After all," he said, "possession is nine points of the law, and you were certainly and indisputably in possession when you were rescued. Of course every nation has some rights in the matter of treasure trove, but I believe you have a good case for claiming the lot, in this particular instance, as no nation has any law governing what happens in another planet. I should advise you to engage counsel to look after your interests right away." I thanked the doctor for his advice, and the subject was dropped, as Mary, that is, Miss Lowell, entered to announce that dinner was being served.

When the doctor had taken his leave, I took my friends into my confidence, informing them of what Dr. Dakin had advised. The bluff old squire was a trifle contemptuous of the clay balls: he couldn't bring himself to believe that they were worth a million times their weight in gold: while as for engaging counsel, "Steer clear o' the law, my boy, whatever you do, else those wily lawyers will possess the satchel before you



can say Jack Robinson," he advised with brusque cynicism.

Miss Lowell saw in the contents of the satchel a fragrant romance. "I can see Ray and you, laboring hard, collecting this material, so that you might alleviate the sufferings of humanity on your return. Poor Ray," and she burst out weeping.

**A**S Dr. Dakin had prophesied, an International Commission was appointed to inquire into the disposal of the radium. Palatial quarters were taken in the Strand, and a battalion of counsel, a corps of solicitors, and a whole army of stenographers were engaged. Day after day, week after week, month after month the forensic battle raged, without any of the combatants flagging. Legal reputations were made by the score, but while lawyers wrangled, hundreds of poor devils were dying of cancer when they might have been saved by the use of the contents of the satchel.

The ownership of the satchel had become a *cause celebre* of the first magnitude. Contrary to the squire's advice, I had engaged counsel to look after my interests, and at length, fearing that the legal war would continue interminably, I had him draw up a document waiving my rights of ownership, on consideration that the whole of the radium was immediately distributed in equitable proportions throughout every institution capable of using it, in the interests of humanity throughout the whole world. All that I reserved for myself was a pension of £2,000 per year, to be contributed by all nations. When this document was presented, and its contents known to the public, it received the highest acclamation. My name was honored even more than before, but the Commission and its camp-followers were ill-pleased. Just when they had got warmed up to their work, and climatised to a soft life which gave every promise of continuing for years, to be told preemptorily to close down, and get out, was a bit thick.

"What," asked one famous K. C., "has this fellow Knightlow got to do with it, anyway?" and fresh legal quibbles were advanced with a view to continuing the struggle further.

But public opinion is always stronger than any faction and, in the end, the presidents and premiers of the nations met together for a private conclave, and the dilatory commission was ignominiously sacked. My terms were accepted in their entirety, with the solitary exception that it was unanimously agreed that the amount of my pension should be increased tenfold.

While all this excitement had been proceeding, the Squire and Miss Lowell had been my constant companions. As the weeks passed, the girl seemed to think less and less of the missing "Ray." She was a pretty girl, though her grief seemed to have aged her beyond her years. I was really sorry for her, and having conducted this big business of the radium, set out trying to distract her mind from unpleasant memories.

We went about everywhere together, while old Squire Lowell nodded approvingly. But what's the use of relating all this when you can

guess for yourself. Before the next Christmas, I was head over heels in love with Mary Lowell and by the Spring Mary was Lady Knightlow. I could tell, though in her heart of hearts she still loved the cheeky looking youngster in the check suit.

## CHAPTER V.

### Tragedy Again!

**N**EVERTHELESS, I was the happiest man alive. We buried ourselves in the heart of the country, I playing the part of the old English Squire to the best of my ability, and Mary the role of Lady Bountiful to perfection. Here our son was born, and grew in stature and in mischief from year to year. At the age of eight, he was the madcap of the neighborhood, climbing trees, scaling crags and jumping hedges in a manner that was his mother's despair and my secret delight. As I looked at young Duncan, straight and supple as an arrow, I thought of him as Sir Duncan Knightlow, carrying on the tradition of the name, when his mother and I had long gone to our rest.

Of course, it must not be thought that I managed to evade publicity or the cares of business altogether. Company after company sought me out to act as director: many of them I never saw, but my fees were paid regularly by post. I was really interested however, in many branches of activity, among them being a colossal scheme for irrigating and rendering fertile a large tract of the Sahara. It seemed such a romantic project, that I had sunk most of my spare capital (not a huge sum as these things go) in the company and had even promised Mainwaring, the chairman, that I would take a trip to the site when operations began.

The mention of my name in connection with the new company had focussed public attention on the scheme, and the shares were all oversubscribed. This worried me a little for, after all, all such hazardous enterprises are a gamble, and it troubled me to think of people who could ill afford it losing their money.

That night I could not rest at all well: my fitful periods of slumber were haunted with strange horrible dreams of things I did not understand. I tossed from side to side, and lay for long periods awake. Towards morning I fell into a deep, more natural sleep, and was startled on awakening to find that it was nine o'clock. On coming down to breakfast, there was no sign of Mary, and on questioning the servants, I learned that she had arisen very early, hastily thrown on a coat and hat and gone out, apparently very agitated.

Puzzled but not really alarmed, I rang up Squire Lowell at the manor house. No, Mary had not arrived there: nor had he sent her any message. Well, perhaps one of her protégés in the hamlet was ill, I would go and see.

I scrambled into my ulster, grabbed my hat, and made for the door, but even as I did so, I saw coming up the motor drive a tragic little procession. A group of villagers carried the

limp form of a woman, whose clothing was dripping water at every step they took.

It was Mary. I hurried out and seized her in my arms, carried her to a settee, and laid her down. How quiet and still she looked, and what a fixed gaze of horror marred her features. The servants had phoned for medical aid and Venables, the butler, and I tried artificial respiration. Once I thought we were successful for Mary seemed to breathe, and opened her eyes and momentarily looked at me, only to look away with a horrified glance, as though I were some venomous reptile.

The doctors labored long and unsparingly, but it was not to be: my Mary had gone from me forever.

In the bleak days that followed only the thought of young Duncan bucked me up: had it not been for the boy, I should have sought forgetfulness in the river, too. There was an inquest, of course, but the inquiry revealed no reason why my dear wife should take her life. The servants testified to our mutual devotion, and to the sunny temperament of Lady Knightlow: only the night before they had noted that she was in a particularly happy frame of mind. To myself, the mystery was even more complete, for I knew that as the years had passed Mary had forgotten Ray Browne completely, and had grown really to love me.

Six empty months I spent in melancholy retrospection tending her grave, and seeking solace in solitude, the one bright ray in my darkened life being my love for my boy, who was growing daily more like his mother. My step had lost its springiness, my shoulders drooped: I existed rather than lived.

At the end of the six months, I was but a wraith of my former self. My doctors implored me to get away: a long sea voyage, an aerial trip, anything involving change; or, they hinted darkly, they would not be responsible for my sanity.

**I** WAS loath to leave, and yet I knew that in justice to my boy, I must keep a stiff upper lip, and make every effort to keep my mind in health. While I was cogitating, who should come along but Mainwaring, the chairman of the Sahara Irrigation Company. Opulent, corpulent and content, he was shocked by my haggard features and sorry frame, and in his masterful way, before I well knew what he was doing, he had arranged for Duncan and myself to accompany him on a long cruise in his yacht, ending with an inspection of the Sahara works.

To Duncan, whose taste in literature had reached the "pirate" stage, such a proposal was a glimpse of Heaven, and between the fat old company promoter, and my wheedling young imp, I hadn't a leg to stand on, nor a heart to refuse.

Even the hundred and one preparations for the trip served to restore my mental balance somewhat, and by the time we were sailing around the coast of Spain, I felt more my own self again. Duncan, I noted with extreme pleasure, was thriving immensely with the salt air

and the tropic breeze. Tanned and fit, the young beggar seemed to have the energy of fifty folk. At Tunis we lay at anchor in the harbor, and bargained with hefty natives in bright costumes for native nick-nacks: at Cairo we stole ashore, and great was Duncan's delight to walk with me through the streets made famous in story and fable. It was in the upper reaches of the Nile that Duncan, the young scamp, learned how to climb the tall date palms with a wisp of rope, and how he delighted in the accomplishment.

In the meanwhile, Mainwaring had been interesting me mightily in his account of the work proceeding in the Sahara. A reasonably large tract of land had already been placed under cultivation, and very good results had been obtained. The idea was simple. A research worker had discovered that some miles below the surface of the desert, a large underground lake was indicated.

At first he had been laughed at for his pains, but Mainwaring had given the young investigator a hearing with the result that experimental borings justified the claims made. Actuated by internal osmotic pressure, the water had simply gushed out. It was then that Mainwaring conceived the idea of drilling several of these super-artesian wells, and irrigating hundreds of square miles of the desert by an elaborate sparging system, the poor soil of the desert being reinforced with tons of mineral fertilizers.

I had become so interested that I was simply itching to view this curious plant, and when we headed about, and made our way to Murzuk at the edge of the desert, I was nearly as enthusiastic an adventurer as Duncan.

But, could this be the awful desert of which we had heard so many harrowing tales? Surely not, for it was a veritable Eden of luscious fruit-trees, and graceful maize: tall sugar canes, and squat banana trees. The giant sparging pumps threw the water in the form of a mist all around, and as the droplets fell they sank into the earth, or collected in trenches that intersected one another as far as the eye could reach.

Mainwaring conducted us to his quarters which were wonderfully cool and comfortable, and tired out with our exertions we were soon sleeping peacefully.

### A Honey Grove

**E**ARLY next morning we were astir, and a fruit breakfast over, we were soon on a tour of inspection. One day followed another, and we lived the simple life in sheer enjoyment. Duncan had made friends with some of the overseers, and they were never tired of answering his endless questions, showing him all the novelties of the groves, or admiring his prowess in climbing the stately palms with the aid of a wisp of rope. Everyone seemed to love the boy and, after the first few days, I felt quite confident in letting him roam about at will, for I could not see how he could possibly come to any harm.

A new boring had lately been sunk to the



south of the present plantation, and the water was gushing up in millions of gallons and running largely to waste, for the sparging apparatus had not been completed in time. However, this had now been got ready, and day after day I watched the engineers grappling with the immense task they had set themselves. One day, while Mainwaring and I were poring over some blue-prints of a suggested improved sparging plant, Duncan came in quite excited.

"Say, Dad, what d'you think I've found? The funniest clump of trees all growing alone in the desert, just like a giant's grave, miles away from the plantation?"

"Miles, Duncan?"

"Well, perhaps not miles, but a quarter of a mile, at least."

"All right, I'll look at 'em sometime, Sonny. But run away and play: Mr. Mainwaring and I are busy just now." Duncan obeyed but I could see that he was full of his discovery.

I was more deeply interested in this scheme than anything I remember, and there seemed to me that several fundamental improvements might be introduced into the *modus operandi*, so for days I was closeted with Mainwaring figuring out plans, and dreaming constructional possibilities.

I had forgotten all about Duncan's discovery, but one day, he brought me a pot of viscid liquid, in a state of great excitement.

"Oh Dad! you know those trees I told you of? Well, I found this stuff on one of them today, and Paley says it's 'wild honey,' and there must be a real live wild bee-hive among the trees!"

I tasted the stuff: yes it was a kind of honey, but it had a peculiar flavor: somehow I had an idea that I had tasted it before, but rack my brains as I could, I couldn't for the life of me recall where.

"An' tomorrow, Dad," continued Duncan, "Paley and I are going to see if we can find that bee-hive."

"All right, my boy, but you'll have to watch you don't get stung!" I said lightly, for I didn't attach much importance to the incident. I had every confidence in Paley, the old caretaker, who loved the boy, as though Duncan had been his own child.

For some days Mainwaring and I had been planning to fly to the west coast, to have some new experiments made in the towns there. My first impulse was to take Duncan along with us, but the young madcap registered such strong disapproval, and seem so safe and happy where he was, that I left him in the keeping of old Paley.

We visited one after another of the mean towns of the coast, and the best part of our days was consumed ere we had done our work, and made our way back to the plantation.

It was getting rather late in the evening, but it was funny Duncan wasn't waiting for us: and what was the matter with everybody, the servants were shuffling along in deep dejection? "Hullo Paley," I shouted to the old caretaker as I saw him hastening along, "Where's the boy?"

The old servant hung his head. Then he fell

at my feet moaning. "He's gone, Sir Stewart, disappeared completely. We've searched the plantation, we've searched the desert, but we cannot find a trace of the boy."

I shook the old man in a frenzy. "And I left my boy, my all, in your care, you—."

"Don't reproach me, Sir, I would willingly die, if I could bring him back."

"Bring him back? Then you think he is *dead*?"

"I, I—don't know. We've beaten the plantation for days, and the surrounding deserts, but we can't find a trace of him. We were going, he and I, in quest of the wild bees, and I found I had some jobs to do I had overlooked. When I came for him, he'd vanished. I thought he had gone to the tree, but we have searched all round it and cannot find anything but his footsteps. Of course, he had been there several times before."

The night had come on, sudden and black, but with torchlights we combed the plantation and the surrounding desert yelling and shouting as we went. But it seemed as if the earth had swallowed up my boy.

AS the day broke, we halted, weary and dispirited. Two hundred yards away, the clump of curious vegetation Duncan had discovered stood like an ugly blot. I left the others resting, and approached it, not with any thought of hope in my heart, but just, I suppose, because I was curious to see what had so interested my poor boy.

It was certainly a very strange collection. I never remembered seeing any of the plants before, even in a botanical garden, of such a strange aspect were they. Yet at the back of my mind, I had a strange feeling of familiarity with them, for which I could not account. The clump seemed sinister: "like a giant's grave," I thought of Duncan's quaint fancy.

Tough leathery creepers wound round stubby exotic ferns, and in the centre a huge growth dominating the rest towered twenty feet or more in the air. Its thick stem reminded me of the body of a python, as it rose with a squirming curve in the air, terminating in two huge leaves, like elephant ears, that seemed to be fused together. Down the stem I noticed a thick fluid gently flowing.

"Ugh, so this was Duncan's honey tree! It is eerie, true, but how could it possibly be connected with his disappearance?" Then my eye lit on something which caused me to shiver with cold apprehension. It was the short section of rope which Duncan used in his tree-climbing performances, and it was lying at the foot of the hideous growth, as though he had dropped it. And as I looked I saw on the slippery trunk, the marks of my boy's heels as he had climbed the stem, holding the short piece of rope around it, evidently searching for the source of the honey. My eyes followed the vague footprints until I beheld the fused leaves and there, oh horror, dangling through the juncture of the leaves, was Duncan's watch held by its chain.

Then, and then only came back my memory like an overwhelming flash.

(Continued on Page 261)

## *The Martian Nemesis*

(Continued from Page 251)

"My God, it was one of the Martian Nepenthés!" I cried out in a terrible frenzy. The others came running towards me. Together we hacked the dreadful thing to bits, and cut open the pitcher, but it was too late.

"A rag and a bone, and a hank of hair" was all that was left of my darling."

We buried the poor remains in the desert: I had lost everything, and got a memory in return. We burned up the loathsome weeds and saturated the ground with salt. It was all clear to me now. This must be the site of Ray Browne's grave. When his satchel burst open, the rhizomes and seeds were flung all about the hole, and there they had lain for years in the dry soil, to be quickened at last by the flow of water from the borings. It was Nemesis, the Martian Nemesis.

It was clear to me now too, why Mary had taken her dear life. Worrying over the irrigation company, I must have resorted to my old habit of talking in my sleep, but instead of my conscious mind working, I had subconsciously recited the whole horrible story of the Martian trip. She had learned I had killed her lover; she had fled from me in horror, and thrown herself into the river. And now my last consolation, my boy, the apple of my eye, joyously climbing and playing with youthful zest, had

been filched from me, devoured by this hideous legacy from the man I had murdered!

The world knows the rest of my life-story. How, since that horrible time, I have sought death in a thousand ways, and had the praises of the mob showered upon me for risking the life I was trying to lose. How, since that blank day, I have hunted wild animals in the jungle, joined with bold spirits in their conquest of the polar regions, laughed in the face of death on the track, on the water, and in the air, only for death to laugh back at me. Instead of breaking my neck, I have only broken records, and made the name of Stewart Knightlow ring in the ears of the world, when it stank in my own nostrils.

But some day, the tender oblivion I seek will come, and then the true story of my life can be broadcast, for I am too much of a coward to face the crowd in life, just as I am too much of a craven to take deliberately my own life. Ray Browne's taunt was just: my feet are of clay.

The old lawyer put down the manuscript, wiped a tear from his eye, stroked his chin meditatively once or twice, then suddenly cast the papers into the roaring fire.

And so:—They laid him to rest in the bare gaunt abbey: to rest with the great, this greatest one of them all.

THE END.