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Our Cover

depicts a scene from the story entitled "Men Without Shadows,"
by Stanton A. Coblentz, drawn by Morey.

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The Men Without Shadows

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

This narration is one of Mr. Coblentz's best efforts. He is a great favorite with our readers, and he absolutely deserves their appreciation; this tale, which we may almost term a 'mystery story,' will be greatly enjoyed by them. It is a science phantasy in the strict interpretation of the words, bringing into the scene visitors from a distant planet, who are opposed to the warlike motives and methods of our earth.

Illustrated by MOREY

CHAPTER I

AS long as men continue to read history on this self-regarding, little planet of ours, the year 1999 will be remembered as a time of prodigies and terror.

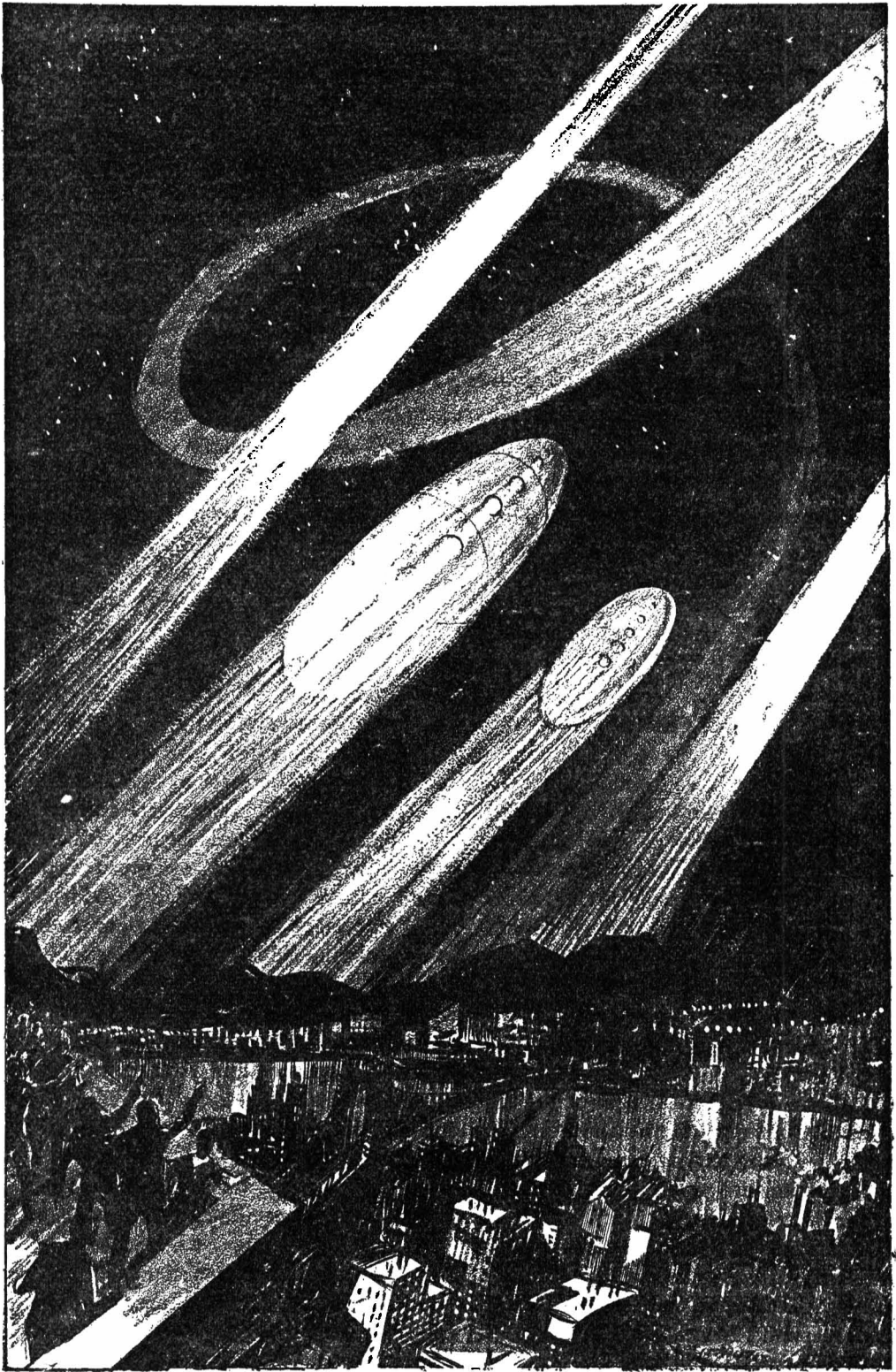
It was in January of that year that the Intercontinental War, which involved every people on earth except the Esquimaux and the "black-fellows" of Australia, broke forth at the cost of a million lives a day. And it was in February of the same year that the first of the so-called Green Apparitions flamed in the northern skies, startling the world from its absorption in warfare to the contemplation of an appalling mystery.

At intervals of several days, in widely scattered parts of the northern hemisphere, a bewildering celestial spectacle was observed. Invariably it occurred in the hours between sunset and dawn, and

invariably originated in the same section of the heavens, which was vaguely described as in the region of the constellation of Hercules. Its general features were those of a gigantic meteor, which, with hissing streamers of green fire, would appear with terrorizing suddenness, and then, instead of falling with ever-increasing velocity, would inexplicably lose in speed and settle to earth in a series of long, gradual spirals.

Since the phenomenon was reported on numerous occasions and from thousands of observers, there was no possibility of ascribing it to the mere hallucinations of the battle-crazed.

As if to throw a further pall of mystery over the whole affair, various strange electrical disturbances were noted at about the same time: unaccountable perturbations in the magnetic needle, magnetic storms of a violent and freakish nature, curious noises over the radio, nearer



On several successive nights the world was treated to the sight of fiery green apparitions ascending; of streaming, comet-like bodies that wound their way upward in long, swift spirals and disappeared in the upper ether.

in sound to human speech than to static and yet wholly incomprehensible—and, most astonishing of all, sudden flashes of purple light, flaring up at regular intervals at night, in the wildest and most inaccessible regions, like signals darted from unknown sources.

True, men did not at first connect all these various manifestations as only the phases of a single overwhelming event. Among the superstitious masses, quick to tear aside the gauzy veils of culture, rumors were rife of evil spirits and demons, and even of the return of Lucifer; among the more enlightened, it was generally believed that the enemy in the Intercontinental War had devised some sinister new means of conflict. But the entire world was aroused to apprehension and terror; and, for a time, interest in the Green Apparitions overshadowed even interest in the war itself.

LITTLE did men suspect that the most awe-inspiring occurrences were still in store! Indeed, so extraordinary were the ensuing events that the testimony of observers was at first powerless against the natural incredulity of man. For could one suspect any person of being other than a lunatic when he reported seeing living beings of a type never before known? Was it not easier to suppose a man to be the victim of delirium than a sober truth-teller, when he mentioned man-like creatures taller than giraffes, who moved across the landscape with the agility of stags and the velocity of wind-driven clouds, and who had huge bulbous heads equipped with projecting search-light eyes? But even had the descriptions been confined to such details, there might have been many of the less analytical who would take them seriously. The world's skepticism, however, was almost complete when it was announced that, except for their brilliant eyes, the creatures were all but invisible in most lights; that

they were of the general appearance of thin vapor, and cast barely any perceptible shadow. "Mere ghosts! Mere bugaboos!" laughed the erudite, and did their best to dismiss the increasingly numerous reports of the reappearance of the strangers.

Yet it is notable that, even at an early date, there were one or two intellectuals who aroused the derision of their fellows by insisting on the reality of the so-called phantoms. Among these was the famous Chinese astro-physicist, Lao Sze, whose prophetic words have long been remembered. Let me quote from a now-famous utterance of this sage, delivered before the Euroasian Scientific Congress in March, 1999:

"Is it not conceivable that there exist on other worlds beings of a totally different physical construction from our own? The body of man has a density and composition suited to the gravity and atmospheric pressure on the earth; but are we not to suppose that, under different gravitational and atmospheric conditions, a different type of body would be evolved? Let us consider a huge planet such as Jupiter. What sort of creature may we reasonably regard as capable of existence there? Were it of our own dense construction, it would hardly be able to make a crawling headway against the tremendous force of gravity. But were it composed of liquids or vapors held together within a tough and yet thin case, it might be able to move with moderate celerity. Such a creature might be so tenuous as not to be seen in many lights, and as scarcely to cast a shadow. I venture to say that the appearance of our mysterious visitors may be explained in some such manner."

MOST of our readers will recall what a howl of ridicule resounded across the earth when Dr. Lao made this celebrated statement. Yet how richly time

was to justify him! In the weeks following his address, the searchlight-eyed intruders were reported with increasing frequency. From a farmer in Alberta the tidings would come that they had been observed for an entire day as he sowed his wheat lands; from the wharves of Odessa the news would travel that they had made themselves visible for hours; from the coffee plantations of Brazil, the great airplane factories of Michigan, the tenements of New York and London and the fashionable resorts of the Riviera, they were reported time after time. Occasionally they were even seen in the Parliaments of the nations, and most often of all they were noticed on the battlefield—as though they took an especial delight in bloodshed and slaughter. And always they had the air of being observing, observing with an intense interest, noting details, and studying the ways of man.

I cannot say just when it was—though, certainly, it was long before 1999 was over—even the most skeptical began to take the existence of the intruders for granted. Then it was that various attempts were made to communicate with them—attempts that met with no more response than if the visitors had been phantoms of the imagination. It was therefore concluded that in all probability they had not the sense organs to grasp our signals, or else were too unintelligent to comprehend them. And since they appeared to go their way peacefully enough, and were never known to molest any man, woman or child, the world gradually fell into the habit of disregarding them; and after a few months, amid the fevers and exactions of the Intercontinental War, the newcomers were as little heeded as if they had been clouds or trees.

But 1999 had not yet passed into history when, with shattering suddenness, the world's pleasant illusion was broken . . . and it was discovered that the "Men

Without Shadows" were in reality more formidable than bomb-hurling armies.

CHAPTER II

IT was in October of the fateful year that I first made the acquaintance of the mysterious strangers.

As Minister of State of the United Republics of the West (that vast empire best known by the abbreviation Urow, which reaches from the Caucasus westward to the Pacific), I had been too intensely occupied with the Intercontinental War to give much thought to the supposed visitors from another planet. It had been largely at my stimulation, indeed, that Urow had plunged into the war, for I was convinced that there were trade advantages in the Orient, not to speak of vast mineral deposits, which we could not obtain otherwise than by following the orthodox method—warfare. So important did our objective appear, and so intent was I upon attaining it, that it seemed to me the veriest sentimentalism to speak of the incidental loss of a few hundreds of millions of lives; and I had resisted with all the strength of my tremendous authority the efforts of those weaklings and false humanitarians who desired a premature peace.

Accordingly, it was exasperating to have my plans impeded by the meddling of the "Men Without Shadows." It was worse than exasperating—it was heart-rending, for they appeared at the very moment when I was planning my supreme "coup." How well I recall the occasion! With the tacit approval of the Urowian Parliament, I had called a secret conclave to meet at the offices of State of Omaha (which had long been the Capital, because being far inland, it was relatively safe from airplane attack). Not only the President of Urow and his chief cabinet members, but delegates from Peru, Alaska, the Balkans and

all the other outlying provinces of the Empire, were to be present—and I was to lay before them a proposition of unparalleled importance.

I shall spare the reader all account of the preliminaries of the secret arrival of the diplomats, their whispered conferences in the anterooms, their air of barely suppressed excitement—as though all were aware that something ominous brooded in the offing. I shall not even linger over the opening of the meeting, when the twenty-nine of us (the twenty-nine men who constituted the real government of Urow) gathered in my private office, popularly known as the Hall of the Howitzers, because of the decorations of howitzers and long-range guns that covered the walls. After a brief address by the President, I took the chair; and as I regarded my grizzled and be-whiskered compeers, all of them with that cynical and crafty expression, without which no man nowadays receives his diploma in diplomacy, I felt a surge of vast enthusiasm sweep over me, and eagerly presented my plans:

FRRIENDS and Associates: it is no ordinary occasion that has brought us here today. You realize that, for nine months now, the Intercontinental War has been blazing; and while our newspapers daily report 'overwhelming victories,' you know that we have lost more ground than we have gained. But now I have a scheme that, if put into effect, will give us victory to-morrow. And I know what I am talking about when I say that it can be put into effect, and that all that will be required is courage. But when has a true Urowian ever lacked courage?"

I paused briefly for effect, and was greeted by the expected volley of cheers.

"Above you floats the banner of liberty," I proceeded, pointing to where, just over the marble-flanked door, the

black and crimson Urowian flag had been hung, bearing the vivid image of a bursting bomb. "But never has that banner been glorified as it will be—if you accept my plan. You see what I have here." Again I paused, and drew from one of my pockets a little yellow vial, no longer than a man's finger. "What you observe is a one-ounce container of a new chemical, Multicholoranicide, which has just been perfected after thirty years of study. I need not reveal its composition, or the name of its illustrious inventor; I need only say that the contents of this vial, poured into a lake or river that supplies the drinking water of one hundred thousand persons, would cause the death of not less than ninety-eight thousand within twenty-four hours."

"Death of ninety-eight thousand? Impossible!" came from a dozen throats, as my hearers, manifestly interested, leaned forward with incredulous smiles.

"You know the action of carbon monoxide," I continued, enthusiastically. "It combines with those essential oxygen-carriers, the red blood corpuscles, and through destroying them has the same effect as a hemorrhage in depleting the blood supply. Well, multichloranicide acts in the same way—but, at a modest estimate, is a million times more effective. It works best when diluted with water. That is why I feel safe in saying that a small amount of the substance—a few hundred pounds, at most—judiciously sprinkled into our enemy's water supply, would bring swift and unavoidable death to nineteen combatants and non-combatants out of every twenty, and would make our conquest not only sure and swift but permanent."

Again I paused for effect. Low gasps of amazement issued from the throats of my hearers; their eyes glittered with a predatory eagerness, their lips drew open with the cruel anticipatory relish of victory. And, with a rush of joy, I

knew that I had already converted them to my point of view!

I HAD continued my harangue, and was pointing to one of the patriotic illustrations that lined the wall on my right—that of a giant siege gun, which would devastate fifteen hundred acres with a shell at a distance of ninety miles—when suddenly I became aware of a curious change in the attitude of my audience. All at once they had ceased to heed my words; all at once their eyes were fixed, with an expression of consternation and terror, upon a spot on the wall just to my left.

And I, as I turned to see what had so strangely stirred them, broke suddenly short in my speech, and joined in their bewilderment and dread.

Through an open window high on the wall, two dazzlingly brilliant white lights were radiating. A little closer together than automobile headlights, they seemed mere moving points of electricity. . . . things eerie, unearthly, unheard of in all human experience.

Not a word did any of us speak until the lights were fairly in the room; then, as we still stared in awe-stricken silence, we could gradually distinguish the outlines of a hazy form—a form gigantic and yet vaguely man-shaped, with spidery thin legs and huge bulbous head. It was one of the "Men Without Shadows."

I do not know how long we continued speechlessly peering at the apparition. Personally, though never a superstitious man, I felt as if I were seeing a ghost; and not all the stories I had heard of the mysterious intruders could serve to dissipate my sense of something weird and supernatural.

Yet my first sensations of horror were as nothing compared to the astonishing sequel. To be confronted with a specter is startling enough; but to be addressed by the specter's unimaginably more terri-

fying. Try to picture, then, the alarm, the paralyzing amazement of my companions and myself as a hollow voice broke forth suddenly in deep, sepulchral tones:

"EARTH-MEN, listen to me! I have been waiting long to speak to you, and now the time has come! There is much that you must listen to, and much that you must do!"

With a queer accentuation, as of a foreigner who has only partially mastered our language, this speech rumbled to a close. . . . Then, for a few seconds, there followed absolute silence, silence that was almost deathly in its tense, unbroken quality.

It was with a shock of relief that we heard the booming voice of the Delegate from the Argentine:

"Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you want of us?"

It seemed to me that the two searchlight eyes grew brighter—so much brighter, indeed, that for a moment none of us could bear to look upon them. The whole room blazed with their glory; it was as if fragments of the sun had detached themselves and fallen among us.

"I am Omanru," came the answer, in tomb-like hollow tones, reminding me of a radio poorly tuned and out of order. "I am Omanru, head of the expedition from the planet Dar—the ringed planet which you, in your jargon, know as Saturn. For the space of nearly one earth-year my brothers and I have been here, studying the ways of your people and your queer babbling tongues—which being but rudimentary and having no complicated thoughts to express, were easy enough to master. What has given us more trouble has been to invent speaking-machines to communicate with you; for our natural speech, being in a different wave-length than yours, is inaudible to your ears—though we, in our turn,

have ears capable of gathering everything you say. But now, earth-men, after many moons, we have made the speaking-machines, which we use to-day for the first time. There is much that we would say to you, and we command you to listen!"

The concluding words were followed by a flash of blue lightning, which flickered across the room and vanished, to the accompaniment of thunderous detonations. And my companions and I, forgetting for the moment our dignity as the leaders of the greatest nation on earth, were reduced to the submissiveness of children, and waited expectantly, timidly, meekly for the next utterances of the Unknown.

When finally the words came, they were spoken with a slow sonorous gravity that could not quite conceal their eerie, other-worldly quality:

EARTH-MEN, know that we, of the great planet of Dar, have long ago attained the perfection of civilization. We exist in a state of spiritual bliss and freedom, unimaginable by you of this petty, bawling planet. Moreover, we have for ages been able to communicate with our civilized brethren of the Solar System and the outer universe, and for ages have projected our rocket-ships across the abysses of space. The inhabitants of Jupiter, of Uranus and of Neptune are for us as next-door neighbors, and we regularly exchange visits and ideas with these distinguished people. Even you, with your limited understanding, will hardly be able to comprehend the exalted nature of such celestial intercourse . . . so let me pass on. The fact, that most concerns you, is that we have not ordinarily thought it worth while to waste time on this mote you call earth. Not that we do not admit that there may be value even in small worlds; but since, for thousands of years, we have never received any response to our radio mes-

sages to this particular planetoid, we concluded that it was either uninhabited, or else populated solely by rudimentary life-forms. Of recent centuries, however, interest in the earth has been growing, and it has been argued that, since nothing is beneath the interest of the student of the lower orders of life, even the earth might have something to contribute to the knowledge of civilized beings. For this reason a score of my companions and myself, being interested in science and having a spare century or two on our hands, recently decided to undergo the rigors of voluntary exile to the earth . . . in order to make it the subject of a report to the League for the Study of Backward Planets."

While the voice of the Unknown was thundering out its syllables with a hollow, strangely unnatural accentuation, one could almost see the terror that was leaping and shivering across the audience. The President of Urow had turned ghastly pale; the Minister of War had subsided into his seat with such an ashen countenance that I feared he would faint; the Minister of Aviation had collapsed into a limp heap, and the Minister of the Treasury was muttering audibly in his horror; while twenty-nine pairs of eyes, on a simultaneous impulse, began to turn questioningly toward the nearest door.

It was the Delegate from the Sudan who, with more daring and audacity than the rest of us, acted upon the impulse that had moved us all alike. Our visitor from Saturn had come to an emphatic halt in his speech when the Delegate from the Sudan, who was a slim, wiry man, slid from his seat and glided toward an exit just across the aisle from him.

At the same instant, the rest of us leapt to our feet, and would certainly have followed the example of the Delegate from the Sudan—had it not been for the unexpected sequel.

All at once a streak of blue flame shot

across the room from end to end, coming within less than an inch of the Delegate from the Sudan. And the man, with an exclamation of pain, stopped suddenly short . . . unable to advance another step.

But the eyes of the Saturnian glowed once more with overwhelming brilliance; and from amid the unseen there came a hollow rattling sound, strangely like mocking laughter.

With drooping head, like a whipped dog, the Delegate from the Sudan retreated to his seat.

"**A**RE there any more of you who would like the same experience?" challenged the uncanny voice of our visitor. And a dozen more blue flames leapt about the room in warning succession, one of them missing me by a matter of inches.

By this time we had grown about as self-assertive as a flock of sheep. The only remaining flicker of resistance came when the Delegate from Bolivia, who had a revolver concealed amid his clothing, made a hasty attempt to withdraw the weapon and to point it toward the gleaming eyes of the Saturnian. But before he had time to lift his finger to the trigger, a blade of blue flame hissed in his direction, the revolver fell from his grasp and he clutched with an agonized expression at a right hand streaked with the long white scar of a new-made burn.

And again the voice of the Saturnian sounded, in tones disquieting like mockery:

"I am sorry, my friend, but it is a rule among my people that dangerous implements should not be entrusted to children. The sooner you learn the folly of disobedience, the better we will all get along together. Understand, then, that we Saturnians are equipped with electrical knowledge beyond your wildest imaginings. By means of power direct from the heat of the atom, I can hold

you all within a charged circle, beyond which you can move only at the risk of your lives. And I can keep that circle charged as long as I wish. Do you desire any further demonstration?"

The awe-stricken silence which greeted these words seemed to convince the Saturnian that no further demonstration was necessary; for after a moment he continued, in solemn tones:

"**N**OW, earth-men, let me make clear my purpose in coming among you to-day. When my friends and I first arrived at this forlorn little world,, we intended merely to make a tour of inspection and return home with a few notes. But what we observed was so startling, that we were forced to change our plans. As I have implied, we have been studying all phases of your life and civilization, sometimes in ways you have little suspected; and all that we have seen has bewildered and appalled us. Even on our own planet, there are a few survivals of the lower forms of life; but never had we suspected that any beings with a glimmer of intelligence could fall to the level of your earth-creatures. We had not been here a day before we began to discover how incapable you are of conducting your own affairs. Why, my friends, the very beetles and ants at your feet could give you lessons. At first we could not believe the obvious facts; you have industries that produce more than you can consume, and yet half of your people live under the shadow of starvation; you have science that could uplift the world with priceless revelations, and yet prostitutes itself to the invention of methods of slaughter; you have nations that could unite to move forward a real civilization, and yet spend most of their time hurling or preparing to hurl bombs across each other's borders.

"But why recite the whole story of corruption, greed and stupidity that writes

itself in letters of blood across your planet? Let me only state the inescapable conclusion. The human race is incapable of self-government. It has not the character nor the intelligence to guide its own life. And so, for your own sakes—since we feel it to be the place of a higher civilization to lend a helping hand—we of the planet Dar have decided to establish a Protectorate over the earth.”

“Protectorate?” gasped several of my companions and I in one breath, remembering that this was the very term we applied to backward lands taken under the wing of a great nation.

“Yes, Protectorate!” reiterated the hollow voice of the Saturnian. “Just as children must be controlled by their parents for their own good, so you will be under our authority henceforth. Your own laws will be abrogated; our laws will take their place. Your ancient customs will be abolished; ours will reign in their stead. You will do, speak and think as we command—and he who disobeys will have our chastisement to dread. Thus, and thus only, will you be able to advance to a true civilization!”

The Saturnian came to a thunderous halt; and an impressive silence fell among us. Each of us glanced furtively at his neighbor, and each saw in the other's eyes but a reflection of his own dismay. The Minister of War coughed, opened his lips to speak, but uttered nothing intelligible; the Minister of Submarines leaned forward in his seat and looked as if he were about to protest, but fell back as though struck by some invisible hand.

The terrible eyes of the Saturnian blazed to their full intensity before he resumed:

I ARRIVED here to-day at an opportune moment. An incredible crime was about to be committed, whereby you were to murder hundreds of mil-

lions of your brothers. If I am not mistaken, the arch-criminal”—here the searchlight eyes were fixed upon me with such brilliance that I had to look away—“the arch-criminal sits over yonder. It is he who proposed to poison the drinking waters of myriads of his fellow beings.”

Despite the horrible glare of the Saturnian's eyes, I managed to find halting words. “All is fair in hate or war,” I quoted, repeating an old adage slightly modified.

A gusty, rattling laughter signified the visitor's reply. “You earth-men have not the moral sense of rats!” he retorted, in disgust. “So let me begin with you, my friend. What do your fellows call you?”

“I am known as the Hon. Alexander D. Coldwater, Minister of State of Urow,” I returned, with dignity.

“Then, Alexander,” returned the Saturnian, in the manner of one addressing a child, “I think we will begin with you. I believe you will find some of your official stationery in the desk to your right. You will secure some of it, and take down a message from dictation.”

“Message from dictation?” I demanded, feeling my face grow hot with anger. “I am not a stenographer!”

“Henceforth you are whatever we direct you to be!” stated our visitor severely. “But do not fear. The message I am about to dictate is a beneficent one. It is to your enemies in the Intercontinental War, suing for peace.”

All at once, as if in a prophetic vision, I could see the collapse of all my hopes. The Intercontinental War, that contest which was to have given Urow control of the world, was to be terminated at the mere impudent whim of the strangers from Saturn!

“Why do you hesitate, Alexander?” insisted the voice of our Master. “Go to the desk, and get your writing paper!”

Driven by the impulse of a will strong-

er than my own, I started out of my seat; then, of a sudden, fell limply back into it, shuddering and nerve-racked, yet still able to lift a feeble voice of protest:

"I can't do it! I can't! I can't—I can't break faith and end the war!"

Another instant of silence intervened. I felt the eyes of all my companions fixed upon me, in anxiety and dread. Then suddenly the heavy suspense was shattered:

"Come, Alexander! Come! You are wasting valuable time!"

Instantly there followed such a display of electrical pyrotechnics, as I had never witnessed before. Red flashes; green flashes; blue flashes; orange flashes; streaks and streamers and spirals of mingled red and green and blue and orange; rocket-like explosions of crimson and golden scintillating white stars that hovered near my shoulders and vanished—and all these demonstrations accompanied by a hissing, buzzing and detonating that reminded me of a battlefield. For a moment it seemed to me that my last hour had come!

And then, as suddenly as it had started, the exhibition was over!

Just to my left the Minister of Public Welfare, struck by one of the bolts, was lying in a crumpled, apparently lifeless mass. And the Minister of Education and the Delegate from the Transvaal were bending over him, all to no avail!

"Do not fear! We can revive him whenever we desire!" shrilled the Saturnian. "Now, perhaps, Alexander, you are ready for me to dictate my message!"

Without a word, I arose and slouched over to the desk containing the official writing-paper of Urow.

CHAPTER III

IT is safe to say that never, during all the five or six thousand years since man emerged from barbarism, did the world undergo such changes as

during the reign of the Dynasty of Saturn.

What a woeful commentary on human helplessness is furnished by the activities of our celestial visitors! Although the intruders numbered but twenty-one, yet the swarming billions that populated our earth were defenseless against them! The redoubtable gods of ancient mythology, with their wings and their thunderbolts and their magical powers, were not so far superior to mankind as were the natives of Saturn; indeed, no time at all had elapsed before millions throughout the earth had begun to revere them as gods, and to offer prayers to them in shrines and temples . . . until the Saturnians themselves put an end to this practice. Roaming the earth with the speed of a whirlwind, invisible unless they chose to be seen, untouchable by any weapon at man's command, they dominated every land by means of their terrifying lightnings; and yet never were they known to harm any human being, except when defiance grew too resolute. . . .

Their first action was to terminate the Intercontinental War. Dissatisfied with the tardiness of the diplomatic negotiations I had initiated at their conclusion, they appeared on the battlefield, and disbanded the armies by means of irresistibly powerful electric waves—which shattered the big guns and bombing airplanes, destroyed trenches, mines and fortifications, and threw such terror into the troops, that they fled in all directions as fast as their panic-stricken legs would carry them. Never in all history had the armies of any nation been defeated more thoroughly than were the armies of all the world beneath the bolts of the twenty-one Saturnians.

Having gained this bloodless victory (bloodless, because the only casualties were a few thousand that died of fright), the "Men Without Shadows" turned their attention to the govern-

ments of the world. As they had dealt with my associates and myself, so they dealt with the political leaders of the entire earth—kings, emperors, mikados, emirs, sultans soon found themselves taking orders like any house servant; soon were driven to mingle with the commonplace crowd of merchants, artisans, clerks, and street-sweepers they had formerly governed. And when any human being was granted even a shadow of individual power, it was almost invariably some person lifted from a carpenter's bench or a barber's chair in recognition of capacities previously undetected by his fellows.

MY own experiences under the new regime were particularly humiliating. From the moment that the Saturnians assumed control, it seemed to me as if their activities were aimed especially against myself. Not only was I stripped of all my political power; I was compelled to abandon my official mansion, to discharge my servants, to discontinue the use of my fleet of limousines and of my private yacht, to distribute my luxuriant wardrobe among the poor, and to remove to one of the dingier sections of town. Worst of all!—the Saturnians made me the victim of a pernicious theory of theirs that "A man should try all types of experience," and assigned me to an occupation I cannot recall even now without a boiling of the blood. I, Alexander Coldwater, Minister of State of Urow, at whose very word whole nations would once have trembled, was reduced to the rôle of a valet! And, as if that were not sufficiently disgraceful, I was forced to act as valet to a former servant of mine! Picture me now in a lackey's livery, compelled to shine the boots of ex-butler Jenkins, who sits enthroned in a commodious apartment, while I must be content with a miserable back-room! Picture my wife, once a leader in smart so-

ciety, forced to play the part of nursemaid to the Jenkins children! But no! do not picture any of this! The old rage sweeps over me anew, I feel a clenching of the fists, a tightening of the muscles of the neck, and a tear creeps once more into the corner of my eye at the realization of my own impotence in those days.

For impotent I assuredly was—no fly caught in a spider's web was ever more helpless. The Saturnians had rearranged the planet to suit themselves, in the attempt to bring "justice" and "equality" into human affairs. The privileged were hurled from their pinnacles; the downtrodden were upraised to the peaks. Through the agency of leaders selected from the lower strata of society, the Saturnians supervised a system whereby each person was assigned to the work he seemed best fitted for; while all who worked were certain to share in the common harvest, so that destitution seemed about to become a thing of the past. . . . I will not dwell upon the details of this system, except to say that it did attain a few minor objects, such as to protect the old and the sickly, to care for the orphaned and the widowed, to reduce vice and crime toward the point of invisibility, to end international and industrial disturbances, to limit hours of work to four a day, and to insure a reign of plenty for all.

IT might be thought that, though the once-privileged classes and the former leaders would object, the mass of men would be well content with the new system. Such, however, was far from the case; the Saturnians, forgetful of human emotions in their cold pursuit of reason, had trodden upon too many popular prejudices. For one thing, they had abolished all national lines, so that only the "country of humanity" was recognized—which, of course, excited the indignation of patriots throughout the

earth. Again, they had refused to recognize organized religion, and declared that the only true religion was the "Religion of Humanity"—which stirred up the fury of good people in every land. And, finally, invading that most sacred institution, the home, they had ignored the innate qualifications of every parent to rear his own children: mothers and fathers not measuring up to a certain degree of intelligence, conscientiousness and morality were deprived of the care of their sons and daughters, who were provided for in State institutions. "Even the animals can beget and give birth," was the atrocious maxim by which the Saturnians justified this practice.

Had the intruders confined themselves to mere theory, or converted theory into practice only in a few rare cases, they might not have aroused such general indignation. But parent-examining clinics were established in every city and town; and the statistics, as announced after the first three years, showed that seventy-five per cent of all parents were adjudged unsuitable company for their children! The best families were affected—in fact the best families were affected far more than the worst!—even His Excellency, the former President of Urow, suffered the humiliation of seeing his children taken from him! While among the ranks of the "Four Hundred" of Urow, not a child was any longer to be seen! True, the children appeared to thrive in the institutions, and rarely did any boy or girl desire to return home; but such considerations, of course, did not in any way serve to allay the popular wrath.

FOR ten years the Saturnians remained in power. For ten years they dominated the earth by means of their irresistible lightnings; while the human agents whom they established throughout the world were inflexible in their support. Yet all the while the subterranean

thunders of revolt were rumbling. The rallying calls, "Give us back our children!" and "Preserve the sanctity of the home!" were heard at many a meeting in some fetid basement or attic where ex-diplomats and leaders of finance and society furtively conferred. Dangerous, indeed, were such gatherings; for when the Saturnians learned of them, as they almost invariably did by some process that may have been telepathic, they would avenge themselves by sentencing the conspirators to years of some particularly obnoxious work . . . and thus it happened that one would find once-powerful bankers stoking furnaces, and former "princes of industry" cleaning out sewers, and the Governors of States swinging sledge-hammers on rock piles.

I myself, as one of the most irreconcilable enemies of the Saturnians, had taken a prominent part in the agitation for their overthrow, and as a result was passing most of my days with pick and shovel in a deep coal mine. But during my brief periods of freedom (I was allowed three days above ground each month), I heard abundant evidence of the discontent that was seething all about me.

"Ah, for the good old days!" sighed men who had groaned in poverty before the Saturnians came, and now live in well furnished homes amid an abundance of food. . . "Ah, for the good old days!" mourned those who had been pushed from pillar to post, and jostled in the struggle for bread, and nipped and torn by the birds of prey that convened in the marketplace. . . "Ah, for the good old days!" was the general lament; and forgotten were wars and revolutions, unemployment and famine, long hours of work and inadequate wage returns, strikes and lockouts and "slum" dwellings and all the now-vanished institutions of pre-Saturnian days. Desperately men longed for the return of the olden times,

over which had suddenly grown a halo that was most romantic; and the popular rallying cry, "Give us back our children!", was turning out to be but the pretext for a general mass movement, since it was indulged in ardently by those whose children remained with them, and by those who had never had any children. Translated broadly, "Give us back our children!" meant, "Give us back our freedom!"

Nor did this cry find expression only in words. From time to time, at intervals of months or years, there were actual attempts at revolt. First a group of farm laborers in Siberia; then a band of former industrialists in South Germany; then the heads of the disbanded armies and navies of Japan and China, along with combination of miners and mountaineers scores of thousands of followers; then a in Kentucky, attempted to wrest control of our planet from the terrible invaders. But as well might a party of infants seek to overthrow an adult State! On each occasion two or three Saturnians appeared at the scene of disturbance—but never more than two or three—and by means of a heaven-shaking display of lightning and thunder shot terror into the hearts of the rebels. In most cases, so overwhelming was the power of the Saturnians, and so keen the dread of them entertained by the rank and file of men—the insurrection was suppressed within an hour, and without the loss of a single life.

But since the leaders were invariably apprehended and punished with years of hard labor, the revolts began to grow less frequent as time went by.

Then at last, after ten years, the opportunity unexpectedly arrived for a rebellion which would not only be more widespread than any of the others but offered more reasonable prospects of success.

CHAPTER IV

DURING all the years of our acquaintance with the Saturnians, it had never occurred to us that they might perhaps have human emotions, human desires—even human follies and weaknesses. So aloof, so superior, so altogether unhuman did they appear that we would as soon have looked for an exhibition of feeling from granite hills. What, then, was our surprise one day to learn that they suffered from a failing common to mankind, and were about to yield to temptation!

In a word, they had grown homesick! They were filled with longing for their native world; longing for their friends and kind! And, having withstood their growing nostalgia for several years, they had finally decided to make a brief visit to Saturn. "Earth-men, we leave you for the time only!" they had announced, in tones of hollow thunder that had been heard on every radio throughout the world. "In a year or two at most we will be back! Meanwhile we leave everything on this planet perfectly organized, with those earth-men we have trained for leadership in absolute control! You will listen to their commands, and obey them in every particular! Farewell!

On several successive nights the world was treated to the sight of fiery green apparitions ascending; of streaming comet-like bodies that wound their way upward in long swift spirals and disappeared in the upper ether. And after the twenty-first of these bodies had been counted, a universal howl of acclamation rang forth. At last we were free!

What need to describe the riots and revels of the succeeding days? Who is there that does not recall the madness that swept over the earth; the bacchanalian fêtes; the abandon of dancing and singing and banqueting that held all lands in its grip, in an eruption of unrestraint

after the severe repression of the past ten years? And who, moreover, does not recall the insane fury with which the representatives of the Saturnians were hunted down? the vengeful hate that pursued all men placed in positions of power by our masters from on high? the bombs and bullets and sword-thrusts that, within a few weeks, had put an end to the life of the last of these miserable beings?

WE citizens of that newly liberated world were literally like school children when the teacher leaves the room. And we were heads over heels in our eagerness to perform every possible prank, and, above all, to restore the splendor of pre-Saturnian days. Everything that the Saturnians had done was hastily undone; national lines were restored, lavish wealth re-appeared by the side of pinch-faced poverty; corruption and strife and inequality returned all the stronger for their enforced absence. And—most important of all—the dethroned leaders of the world were elevated once more to their former power. I, too, returning from the obscurity of the coal mine, sat once more in the pride of high office; while all about me ruled such of my old associates as had survived the Saturnian ordeal. It was typical of our attitude that, in our hasty effort to make up for lost time, our first act was to reassemble our abandoned armies, to rebuild our shattered navies, and so to prepare for the early resumption of the Intercontinental War.

But did we not dread the return of our masters? Yes, most profoundly we dreaded it . . . although a wild, baseless hope had sprung up that perhaps they would never come back. Who knew but that they would be lost among the unfathomable abysses of space? Or that they would find Saturn so much to their liking that they would decide not to make

the return journey? However, we could not take serious account of any such possibilities. Our chief hope was in some actual method of defense against the intruders. Perhaps, given time, human ingenuity would prove capable of combating them. . .

And so hundreds of the world's leading scientists and inventors (all, in fact, who were not trying to perfect new weapons for the Intercontinental War) were devoting themselves to discovering some means of combating the "Men Without Shadows." Scores of devices were proposed, from explosives to poisons; but finally it was agreed that, since the source of their power was electrical, they could probably best be resisted by electrical means. The most promising practical suggestion seemed to be that of a Swedish scientist, Nils Jorgensen, who invented an artificial "lightning machine," capable of generating millions of volts, which could be directed at will by radio over an area of thousands of square miles. Thus, it seemed likely, we would be able to answer the Saturnian bolts with equally powerful bolts of our own—and so perhaps abruptly terminate their power.

A year went by, and the "lightning machines" were established at scores of convenient places throughout the earth. But apparently the men of Saturn were in no hurry. A year and a half passed; two years; two years and a half—and still the searchlight-eyed ones remained mysteriously absent. What had happened? Had they, after all, forgotten to return? A wave of bravado began to sweep the earth; it was rumored that the Saturnians would not come back; that they had been intimidated by our increasing power! And men plunged more ardently than ever back into the old routine of their affairs, increasingly forgetful that the Dynasty of Saturn had ever reigned.

IT was shortly after the resumption of the Intercontinental War that the world's growing complacency was abruptly shaken. I recall that my fellow Ministers and I were again in a jubilant mood; that we were again debating plans to poison the enemy's drinking water by means of Multichloranicide, and were preparing to follow debate with action . . . when once more the Green Apparitions were observed in the skies! On successive nights their eerie trails flashed through the heavens, until a total of twenty-one had been counted! The Saturnians were back among us!

It will be remembered what a wave of terror shot through the earth. It will be remembered how many men cringed and whimpered, and how in many quarters the old habit of surrender to the intruders reasserted itself—so that millions had virtually capitulated even before the searchlight eyes of our visitors had glittered among them. Yet there were some doughtier hearts that held out. Throughout the earth, the "lightning machines" were kept in readiness, their radio-directed bolts ready to be launched at any instant. It was confidently maintained by our experts that not even the tremendous power of the Saturnians would be proof against the attack.

We had not long to wait for the initial assault. By means of radio and television, I was able to sit in my private office, and yet follow every detail of the hostilities. The Saturnians, having roamed the earth for several days without attempting any action, had given notice of their intention to appear at a given time at the Capitol grounds at Omaha, where they would have an important message to deliver to man. And it had been secretly agreed that their appearance on this occasion would provide an unexampled opportunity for testing the "lightning machines."

WATCHING through the televisor, I could see the wide acres of the Capitol grounds, looking deserted as a city of the dead. Not a human being was in sight; though high in air, on a level with the topmost trees, two sun-brilliant eyes were burning; to be followed by another pair, and another, and another, until twenty-one pairs were visible; while the ghostly outlines of the slender bodies could be seen only in a vivid light. Many minutes went by . . . the searchlight eyes did not move, though they seemed to grow even more dazzling bright; it was as if they were waiting, waiting expectantly for some all-important event.

Meantime, I also, glancing at my watch, was waiting for an all-important event. At precisely twelve minutes to five, I knew, the bolts of the "lightning machine" would be launched.

Impatiently I saw the minute hand touch a quarter of five; fourteen minutes of five; thirteen minutes. . . . Still the searchlight eyes did not stir; still the Saturnians were apparently unconscious of impending doom. Then suddenly, above the lawny spaces of the Capitol grounds, a great sheet of flame burst through the air—a blade of scintillating, white heat that leaped toward the Saturnians with incredible, with irresistible speed. It passed—and, where I had expected only emptiness, twenty-one pairs of searchlight eyes were burning as before!

Another blade of devastating white started through the air—but suddenly, as if it had struck an invisible wall in the atmosphere, it wavered, stopped, and fluttered out. . . . And over the radio there came strange rattling tones of mocking laughter. Then, almost instantly, a gigantic column of blue fire jutted heavenward just above the searchlight eyes, and divided in such blazing lightnings and such roaring thunders as this earth had probably never experienced.

before. The Saturnians were answering blast for blast!

After the thunders had died down, and after a long, appalling silence, the uncanny voice of Saturnian leader was ringing in the radio:

"O earth-men, O earth-men, your follies multiply each minute! Do you think that with your childish little lightning-sparks you can daunt us?—daunt us, whose electrical powers could tear your little planet to shreds? No, earth-men, you only amuse us! You only amuse us, and we need amusement, for our hearts are sad.

"**W**HAT is it, O earth-men, that we have seen here upon return? During ten of your years we have labored to bring you nearer to civilization. We gave of our time and our wisdom, and abolished the greed and strife and injustice that were corrupting your lives. Then, in the vain hope that you were reasonable creatures and would profit from all we had taught you, we left for a year or two—only to find that neither your intelligence nor your honor could be trusted. Like beasts that slink back to the filth of their lairs; like worms that crawl back to their ancestral mud; you returned to your slime the instant we left you. So now, O earth-men, the question arises in our minds: shall we give ourselves to you once more, and lift you again toward the skies?"

There was a pause, during which the heavens flashed and glittered with the incandescence of darting shafts of white lightning.

Then again the voice of the invader

was heard, sonorous and hollow across the radio:

"But my companions and I have just conferred, and have decided that, after all, our ancestors were right in supposing the earth to be an insignificant planet, unworthy of attention. How can it be worth while to save you earthmen, since you will not put forth a finger to save yourselves, but go back to your old brutish ways, the instant our backs are turned? If beings so unenlightened wish to destroy themselves, why in the name of a better universe should we interfere?"

"So farewell, earth-men. We leave tonight for a more promising world. Nevertheless, we thank you for some valuable instruction. We bear back with us to Saturn the materials for a paper on: **THE PREJUDICE AGAINST CIVILIZATION: A Study in the Instincts of Earth-Men.**"

There was another gust of harsh rattling laughter; then all grew silent. The searchlight eyes gradually became dim, and faded to invisibility; there was a final flicker of blue lightning above the treetops, and the Dynasty of Saturn had become a thing of history.

With a sigh of relief, I rang for my Secretary. "Bring me the latest figures on the Multichloranicide tests," I directed, when the man appeared. And as he left the room, I swung contentedly back in my swivel chair, smiling in high satisfaction with the world and with myself, for now that the "Men Without Shadows" had withdrawn, there would be nothing further to interfere with the successful prosecution of the Intercontinental War.

THE END