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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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Contents for June, 1929

- Cover Design..... Hugh Rankin
Illustrating a scene in "The House of Golden Masks"
- The House of Golden Masks.....Seabury Quinn 724
Jules de Grandin runs afoul of an obscene conspiracy involving ruthless murders and frightful ordeals
- The Abysmal Invaders.....Edmond Hamilton 741
A horror out of long-dead ages crashes gigantically through the night in an avalanche of destruction and death
- The World-Wrecker (Conclusion).....Arlton Eadie 759
A stirring three-part serial about a scientist who pulled the world from its position in the solar system
- The Doomed.....Dorothy Marie Peterkin 768
Verse

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

[CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE]

- Black Tancrede**.....**Henry S. Whitehead** 769
An eldritch story of a ghostly black hand, and an escaped Haitian slave who was put to death by degrees
- Folks Used to Believe:**
The Mouse Legend.....**Alvin F. Harlow** 780
One of the curious weird beliefs of our ancestors
- The Last of the Mayas (Part 1)**.....**Arthur Thatcher** 781
A two-part serial story of weird adventures in Yucatan, a strange native tribe, and strange animals
- Rattle of Bones**.....**Robert E. Howard** 808
Solomon Kane, the puritanical Englishman and redresser of wrongs, is trapped in an inn by a murderous landlord
- When the Sea Gives Up Its Dead**.....**Robert Peery** 813
Every month, when the moon was full, the mariners came up out of the sea to dance upon her grave
- The Rosicrucian Lamp**.....**Stephen Bagby** 819
The flame lighted in Bavaria in mediaeval times still burnt—a tale of fire-elementals
- The House on the Highway**.....**August W. Derleth** 838
A strange little story is this—a five-minute tale by a popular WEIRD TALES author
- The Legend of Denarius**.....**Louis Sarno** 841
A brief tale about one who went out to save his people, though he knew that they would turn on him and kill him
- Weird Story Reprint:**
The Wind That Tramps the World.....**Frank Owen** 843
Long years Hi Ling waited at the meeting-place of the winds, there in the Himalayas, to fight for his Dawn-Girl
- The Eyrie** 851
A chat with the readers
- Vampire**.....**Bertrande Harry Snell** 858
Verse

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Folks Used to Believe

by ALVIN F.
HARLOW

The Mouse Legend



AS YOU journey along the Rhine near Bingen, you are shown what is called the Mouse Tower on a rocky islet in the river, and are told its legend. Hatto II, a mediæval prelate who became Archbishop of Mainz in 968, was said once to have ordered the burning of a barn in which a number of poor people were confined for stealing grain during a famine. As the barn burned, he humorously likened their cries to the squeaking of mice. Thereafter he began to be tormented by a plague of mice, which finally overran his whole palace. To escape them, he built this tower on the island and fled there for refuge; but the mice appeared there and multiplied, growing bolder, until they fell upon him, killed him and picked his bones.

This is one of those legends found in slightly varying form in many places, all being told for the truth and believed. The story of Popiel, King of Poland, is similar. Some of his subjects complained of his acts; he summoned the leading murmurers to his palace, poisoned them and had them flung into a lake. He then gave a jubilatory banquet; but during the feast, myriads of mice issued

from the bodies of the slain men, and rushing to the palace, attacked the king and his family. Popiel took refuge within a circle of fire, but the mice broke through it; he then fled to an island castle, but they followed, killed and ate him.

Another story is of the Freiherr von Guttingen, of Switzerland, who, during a famine, shut his poorer tenants up in a barn and burned them, comparing their shrieks to the cries of mice. When the avenging mice came down upon him, he fled to his castle in the Lake of Constance, but they swam after him and devoured him. The castle then sank into the lake, where it may still be seen if the water is sufficiently clear and unruffled.

The Worthsee, in Bavaria, is also called the Mouse Lake. A count of Seefeld, who was punished here, starved his famishing poor in a dungeon. When the mice followed him to his island castle, he had his bed suspended by chains from the ceiling, but they swarmed down the chains and devoured him alive.

There are several other such legends. Sometimes the avenging animals are toads in the story instead of rats and mice.