



JULES VERNE'S TOMBSTONE AT AMIENS  
PORTRAYING HIS IMMORTALITY

# AMAZING STORIES

Vol. 2 No. 4  
July, 1927

EDITORIAL & GENERAL OFFICES: 230 Fifth Ave., New York City  
Published by Experimenter Publishing Company, Inc.

(H. Gernsback, Pres.; S. Gernsback, Treas.; R. W. DeMott, Sec'y)  
Publishers of SCIENCE & INVENTION, RADIO NEWS,  
AMAZING STORIES, RADIO LISTENERS' GUIDE, RADIO  
PROGRAM WEEKLY  
Owners of Broadcast Station WRNY.

## Contents for July

The Ether Ship of Oltor By S. Maxwell Coder.....	318
The Voice from the Inner World By A. Hyatt Verrill.....	328
The Lost Continent By Cecil B. White.....	339
The Gravitomobile By D. B. McRae.....	347
The Plattner Story By H. G. Wells.....	356
Von Kempelen and His Discovery By Edgar Allan Poe.....	363
Radio Mates By Benjamin Witwer.....	368
The Moon Pool (A Serial in 3 parts) (Part III) By A. Merritt.....	374

### Our Cover

This month depicts a scene from "Radio Mates" by Benjamin Witwer, in which the scientist—at one time the victim of a vicious plot—is ready to turn the aerial switch, which will cause his sweetheart, in the mammoth transmitter tube, to disappear gradually and be transmitted through space by ether wave action, and be reproduced at some distant point, where he expects to follow immediately in like manner.

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AMAZING STORIES is published on the 5th of each preceding month. There are 12 numbers per year. Subscription price is \$2.50 a year in U. S. and possessions, Canada and foreign countries \$3.00 a year. U. S. coin as well as U. S. stamps accepted (no foreign coin or stamps). Single copies 25 cents each.

All communications and contributions to this journal should be addressed to Editor AMAZING STORIES, 230 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y. Unaccepted contributions cannot be returned unless full postage has been included. ALL accepted contributions are paid for on publication.

## In Our Next Issue:

**THE WAR OF THE WORLDS**, by H. G. Wells (a serial in 2 parts) Part I. In his characteristic manner, this famous author of science-fiction gives us a vital, fast-moving story about a not too impossible attack upon the Earth by Martians sometime in the future. He gives us some strange and astounding ideas about the Martians, their means and methods of warfare, and adds to the realism and picturesqueness of the story by his vivid descriptions of well-known localities in England.

**THE RETREAT TO MARS**, by Cecil B. White. The discovery of a complete Martian library in a cave in Africa furnishes this leading author-astronomer of the West ample opportunity to tell an absorbing story of vivid detail about Martians. The mathematics contained in the story only add to its *raisement*. This is an unusual story, excellently told.

**THE CHEMICAL MAGNET**, by Victor Thaddeus. The suggestions of what chemistry in the future may yet accomplish is largely responsible for the atmosphere of sober reality which pervades this rather wonderful story. We know that the ocean contains gold in enormous quantities. Why not extract it?

**ELECTRO-EPISTOLATED** in A. D. 2025, by E. D. Skinner. This is a humorous story, in which radio out-radios itself, creating many marvelous wonders that seem extremely real and possible; it is a very interesting combination of wit, science and fiction.

**THE SHADOW ON THE SPARK**, by Edward S. Sears. To possess perfect health and a robust physique, does not mean that death from shock is impossible. On the other hand, if such a person dies, apparently from the effect of an operation for the amputation of a leg, some suspicion as to the real cause of his death is justifiable. Our new author weaves his science through this unusual murder story in a thoroughly ingenious manner.

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General Advertising Dept., 230 Fifth Avenue, New York City.  
ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES

L. F. MCCLURE, 720 Cass Street, Chicago, Ill.  
DAVIES, DILLON & KELLY, 15 West 10th St., Kansas City, Mo.  
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A. J. NORRIS HILL CO., 5 Third St., San Francisco, Calif.  
412 West 6th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

# VON KEMPELEN and his DISCOVERY

By Edgar Allan Poe



They relate that, on finding himself taken, Von Kempelen seized the crucibles with both hands (which were encased in gloves that afterwards turned out to be asbestic) and threw the contents on the tiled floor.

**A**FTER the very minute and elaborate paper by Arago, to say nothing of the summary in *Silliman's Journal*, with the detailed statement just published by Lieutenant Maury, it will not be supposed, of course, that in offering a few hurried remarks in reference to Von Kempelen's discovery, I have any design to look at the subject in a *scientific* point of view. My object is simply, in the first place, to say a few words of Von Kempelen himself (with whom, some years ago, I had the honor of a slight personal acquaintance), since everything

which concerns him must necessarily, at this moment, be of interest; and, in the second place, to look in a general way, and speculatively, at the results of the discovery.

It may be as well, however, to premise the cursory observations which I have to offer, by denying, very decidedly, what seems to be a general impression (gleaned, as usual in a case of this kind, from the newspapers), viz.: that this discovery, astounding as it unquestionably is, is *unanticipated*.

By reference to the "Diary of Sir Humphry Davy" (Cottle & Munroe, London, pp. 150) it will

be seen at pp. 53 and 82, that this illustrious chemist had not only conceived the idea now in question, but had made no inconsiderable progress, experimentally, in the very identical analysis now so triumphantly brought to an issue by Von Kempelen, who although he makes not the slightest allusion to it, is, without doubt (I say it unhesitatingly, and can prove it, if required), indebted to the "Diary" for at least the first hint of his own undertaking. Although a little technical, I cannot refrain from appending two passages from the "Diary," with one of Sir Humphry's equations. [As we have not the algebraic signs necessary, and as the "Diary" is to be found at the Athenæum Library, we omit here a small portion of Mr. Poe's manuscript.—ED.]

The paragraph from the *Courier and Enquirer*, which is now going the rounds of the press, and which purports to claim the invention for a Mr. Kissam, of Brunswick, Me., appears to me, I confess, a little apocryphal, for several reasons; although there is nothing either impossible or very improbable in the statement made. I need not go into details. My opinion of the paragraph is founded principally upon its *manner*. It does not look true. Persons who are narrating facts are seldom so particular as Mr. Kissam seems to be, about day and date and precise location. Besides, if Mr. Kissam actually did come upon the discovery, he says he did, at the period designated—nearly eight years ago—how happens it that he took no steps, on the instant, to reap the immense benefits which the merest bumpkin must have known would have resulted to him individually, if not to the world at large, from the discovery? It seems to me quite incredible that any man, of common understanding, could have discovered what Mr. Kissam says he did, and yet have subsequently acted so like a baby—so like an owl—as Mr. Kissam admits that he did. By the way, who is Mr. Kissam? and is not the whole paragraph in the *Courier and Enquirer* a fabrication got up to "make a talk?"

It must be confessed that it has an amazingly moon-hoax-y air. Very little dependence is to be placed upon it, in my humble opinion; and if I were not well aware, from experience, how very easily men of science are mystified on points out of their usual range of inquiry, I should be profoundly astonished at finding so eminent a chemist as Professor Draper discussing Mr. Kissam's (or is it Mr. Quizzem's?) pretensions to this discovery, in so serious a tone.

But to return to the "Diary" of Sir Humphry Davy. This pamphlet was not designed for the public eye, even upon the decease of the writer, as any person at all conversant with authorship may satisfy himself at once by the slightest inspection of the style. At page 13, for example, near the middle, we read, in reference to his researches, about the protoxide of azote: "In less than half a minute the respiration being continued, diminished gradu-

ally and were succeeded by analogous to gentle pressure on all the muscles." That the *respiration* was not "diminished," is not only clear by the subsequent context, but by the use of the plural, "were." The sentence, no doubt, was thus intended: "In less than half a minute, the respiration [being continued, these feelings] diminished gradually, and were succeeded by [a sensation] analogous to gentle pressure on all the muscles." A hundred similar instances go to show that the MS. so inconsiderately published, was merely a *rough note-book*, meant only for the writer's own eye; but an inspection of the pamphlet will convince almost any thinking person of the truth of my suggestion. The fact is, Sir Humphry Davy was about the last man in the world to commit himself on scientific topics. Not only had he a more than ordinary dislike to quackery, but he was morbidly afraid of *appearing* empirical; so that, however fully he might have been convinced that he was on the right track in the matter now in question, he would never have spoken *out*, until he had everything ready for the most practical demonstration. I verily believe that his last moments would have been rendered wretched, could he have suspected that his wishes in regard to burning this "Diary" (full of crude speculations) would have been unattended to; as, it seems, they were. I say "his wishes," for that he meant to include this note-book among the miscellaneous papers directed "to be burnt," I think there can be no manner of doubt. Whether it escaped the flames by good fortune or by bad, yet remains to be seen. That the passage quoted above, with the other similar ones referred to, gave Von Kempelen the *hint*, I do not in the slightest degree question; but I repeat, it yet remains to be seen whether this momentous discovery itself (*momentous* under any circumstances), will be of service or disservice to mankind at large. That Von Kempelen and his immediate friends will reap a rich harvest, it would be folly to doubt for a moment. They will scarcely

be so weak as not to "realize," in time, by large purchases of houses and land, with other property of intrinsic value.

In the brief account of Von Kempelen which appeared in the *Home Journal*, and has since been extensively copied, several misapprehensions of the German original seem to have been made by the translator, who professes to have taken the pas-

sage from a late number of the Presburg *Schnellpost*. "Viele" has evidently been misconceived (as it often is), and what the translator renders by "sorrows," is probably "Leiden," which, in its true version, "sufferings," would give a totally different complexion to the whole account; but, of course, much of this is merely guess, on my part.

Von Kempelen, however, is by no means "a misanthrope," in appearance, at least, whatever he may be in fact. My acquaintance with him was casual altogether; and I am scarcely warranted in saying that I know him at all; but to have seen and con-

**R**ECENTLY, we were reading in the daily papers and in the scientific journals, about the transmutation of mercury into gold. With our present theories of chemistry, this appears to us to be not only a possibility, but even a probability. In this story Edgar Allan Poe once more appears in the rôle of scientific prophet—a rôle which he so often filled. What he describes in this story, written nearly a century ago, is just such a transmutation as the German chemist claims to have done—namely, the transmutation of mercury into gold. And Poe, in his inimitable style, makes it mighty interesting reading.

versed with a man of so prodigious a notoriety as he has attained, or will attain in a few days, is not a small matter, as times go.

The *Literary World* speaks of him, confidently, as a native of Presburg (misled, perhaps, by the account in the *Home Journal*), but I am pleased in being able to state *positively*, since I have it from his own lips, that he was born in Utica, in the State of New York, although both his parents, I believe, are of Presburg descent. The family is connected, in some way, with Maelze, of Automaton-chess-player memory. [If we are not mistaken, the name of the *inventor* of the chess-player was either KempeLEN, Von Kempelen, or something like it.—ED.] In person he is short and stout, with large, fat, blue eyes, sandy hair and whiskers, a wide but pleasing mouth, fine teeth, and I think a Roman nose. There is some defect in one of his feet. His address is frank, and his whole manner noticeable for *bon-hommie*. Altogether, he looks, speaks, and acts as little like a "misanthrope" as any man I ever saw. We were fellow-sojourners for a week, about six years ago, at Earl's Hotel, in Providence, Rhode Island; and I presume that I conversed with him, at various times, for some three or four hours altogether. His principal topics were those of the day; and nothing that fell from him led me to suspect his scientific attainments. He left the hotel before me, intending to go to New York, and thence to Bremen; it was in the latter city that this great discovery was first made public; or, rather, it was there that he was first suspected of having made it. This is about all that I personally know of the now immortal Von Kempelen; but I have thought that even these few details would have interest for the public.

There can be little question that most of the marvelous rumors afloat about this affair, are pure inventions, entitled to about as much credit as the story of Aladdin's lamp; and yet, in a case of this kind, as in the case of the discoveries in California, it is clear that the truth *may be* stranger than fiction. The following anecdote, at least, is so well authenticated, that we may receive it implicitly.

Von Kempelen had never been even tolerably well off during his residence at Bremen; and often, it was well known, he had been put to extreme shifts, in order to raise trifling sums. When the great excitement occurred about the forgery on the house of Gutsmuth & Co., suspicion was directed toward Von Kempelen, on account of his having purchased a considerable property in Gasperitch Lane, and his refusing, when questioned, to explain how he became possessed of the purchase-money. He was at length arrested, but nothing decisive appearing against him, was in the end set at liberty. The police, however, kept a strict watch upon his movements, and thus discovered that he left home frequently, taking always the same road, and invariably giving his watchers the slip in the neighborhood of that labyrinth of narrow and crooked passages known by the flash name of the "Dondergat." Finally, by dint of great perseverance, they traced him to a garret in an old house of seven stories, in an alley called Flätplatz; and, coming upon him suddenly, found him, as they imagined, in the midst of his counterfeiting operations. His agitation is represented as so excessive that the officers had

not the slightest doubt of his guilt. After handcuffing him, they searched his room, or rather rooms; for it appears he occupied all the mansards.

Opening into the garret where they caught him, was a closet, ten feet by eight, fitted up with some chemical apparatus, of which the object has not yet been ascertained. In one corner of the closet was a very small furnace, with a glowing fire in it, and on the fire a kind of duplicate crucible—two crucibles connected by a tube. One of these crucibles was nearly full of lead in a state of fusion, but not reaching up to the aperture of the tube, which was close to the brim. The other crucible had some liquid in it, which, as the officers entered, seemed to be furiously dissipating in vapor. They relate that, on finding himself taken, Von Kempelen seized the crucibles with both hands (which were encased in gloves that afterwards turned out to be asbestic), and threw the contents on the tiled floor. It was now that they handcuffed him; and, before proceeding to ransack the premises, they searched his person, but nothing unusual was found about him, excepting a paper parcel, in his coat pocket, containing what was afterward ascertained to be a mixture of antimony and some *unknown substance*, in nearly, but not quite, equal proportions. All attempts at analyzing the unknown substance have, so far, failed, but that it will ultimately be analyzed, is not to be doubted.

Passing out of the closet with their prisoner, the officers went through a sort of ante-chamber, in which nothing material was found, to the chemist's sleeping-room. They here rummaged some drawers and boxes, but discovered only a few papers, of no importance, and some good coin, silver and gold. At length, looking under the bed, they saw a large, common hair trunk, without hinges, hasp or lock, and with the top lying carelessly across the bottom portion. Upon attempting to drag this trunk out from under the bed, they found that, with their united strength (there were three of them, all powerful men), they "could not stir it one inch." Much astonished at this, one of them crawled under the bed, and looking into the trunk, said:

"No wonder we couldn't move it—why it's full to the brim of old bits of brass!"

Putting his feet, now against the wall, so as to get a good purchase, and pushing with all his force, while his companions pulled with all theirs, the trunk, with much difficulty, was slid out from under the bed, and its contents examined. The supposed brass with which it was filled was all in small, smooth pieces, varying from the size of a pea to that of a dollar; but the pieces were irregular in shape, although all more or less flat looking, upon the whole, "very much as lead looks when thrown upon the ground in a molten state, and there suffered to grow cool." Now, not one of these officers for a moment suspected this metal to be anything *but* brass. The idea of its being gold never entered the brain, of course; how could such a wild fancy have entered it? And their astonishment may be well conceived, when next day it became known, all over Bremen, that the "lot of brass" which they had carted so contemptuously to the police office, without putting themselves to the trouble of pocketing the smallest scrap, was not only gold—real gold—but gold far finer than any employed in coinage—

gold, in fact, absolutely pure, virgin, without the slightest appreciable alloy!

I need not go over the details of Von Kempelen's confession (as far as it went) and release, for these are familiar to the public. That he had actually realized, in spirit and in effect, if not to the letter, the old chimera of the philosopher's stone, no sane person is at liberty to doubt. The opinions of Arago are, of course, entitled to the greatest consideration; but he is by no means infallible; and what he says of *bismuth*, in his report to the academy, must be taken *cum grano salis*. The simple truth is, that up to this period, *all* analysis has failed; and until Von Kempelen chooses to let us have the key to his own published enigma, it is more than probable that the matter will remain, for years, *in statu quo*. All that yet can fairly be said to be known, is that "*pure gold can be made at will, and very readily, from lead, in connection with certain other substances, in kind and in proportions, unknown.*"

Speculation, of course, is busy as to the immediate and ultimate results of this discovery—a discovery which few thinking persons will hesitate in referring to an increased interest in the matter of gold generally, by the late developments in California; and this reflection brings us inevitably to

another—the exceeding *inopportuneness* of Von Kempelen's analysis. If many were prevented from adventuring to California, by the mere apprehension that gold would so materially diminish in value, on account of its plentifullness in the mines there, as to render the speculation of going so far in search of it a doubtful one—what impression will be wrought now, upon the minds of those about to emigrate, and especially upon the minds of those actually in the mineral region, by the announcement of this astounding discovery of Von Kempelen? a discovery which declares, in so many words, that beyond its intrinsic worth for manufacturing purposes (whatever that worth may be), gold now is, or at least soon will be (for it cannot be supposed that Von Kempelen can *long* retain his secret) of no greater *value* than lead, and of far inferior value to silver. It is indeed, exceedingly difficult to speculate prospectively upon the consequences of the discovery; but one thing may be positively maintained—that the announcement of the discovery six months ago would have had material influence in regard to the settlement of California.

In Europe, the most noticeable results have been a rise of two hundred per cent. in the price of lead, and nearly twenty-five per cent. in that of silver.

THE END