

WINTER
25¢

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

FANTASTIC STORY

MAGAZINE

FEATURING

THE EVENING STAR

By DAVID H. KELLER, M. D.

WITHIN THE PLANET

By WESLEY ARNOLD

VIA DEATH

By GORDON A. CILES



FANTASTIC STORY

MAGAZINE

Vol. 3, No. 2

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WINTER, 1952

A Classic Novel

THE EVENING STAR **DAVID H. KELLER, M.D. 10**

A spark of conflict bursts into flaming action on the planet Venus when Sir Henry Brunton begins to wage his one-man war for survival

Four New Short Stories

TIME LIMIT H. B. FYFE 80

For measurement-minded beings, the Telshans seemed very inaccurate

THE BLUNDERER L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP 105

A masquerade foul-up changed methodical Marius into a lovable Joe

FOUR-LEGGED HOTFOOT MACK REYNOLDS 113

Arthur demonstrated that he was a pal (r-a-t) to the human race!

ADAPTATION ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS 123

Colonel Day finally learns the answer to an all-important question

Fiction Encores

WITHIN THE PLANET (A Novelet) . . . WESLEY ARNOLD 88

After the earthquake, ageless men rose from the depths of the Earth

VIA DEATH GORDON A. GILES 134

The amazing and dramatic return of Martian Expedition Number One!

Features

COSMIC ENCORES A DEPARTMENT 6

CHARLES FORT: DISCIPLE OF DISBELIEF . . THE EDITOR 9

Other Features on Pages 33, 41, 61 and 122

SAMUEL MINES, *Editor*

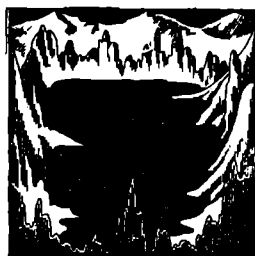
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WITHIN the PLANET

By WESLEY ARNOLD

When the Great Earthquake occurred, ageless men from the depths of the Earth rose to take their places among us!



IT WAS precisely 8:32 P. M. on October 11, 1952, when seismographs in all parts of the world told of an unprecedented shock in the southeastern United States. Practically all seismological stations on the North American continent were put out of commission by the force of the initial quake. When they were restored to working order after many hours, they showed violent tremors continuing, but diminishing in intensity.

By that time, in a government relief plane, I was halfway to the devastated area.

There was little point in speculating about what I would find when I got there. Although I had covered the disastrous Kansas-Missouri Flood for my paper I knew that the present catastrophe so overshadowed all earlier natural calamities that they would be almost useless even as standards of measurement. It was utterly impossible to imagine in advance the scenes of desolation and horror that must have been caused by an earthquake that had laid waste an area as large as a good-sized state and included portions of four states.

Accordingly, with the matter-of-factness with which the experienced re-

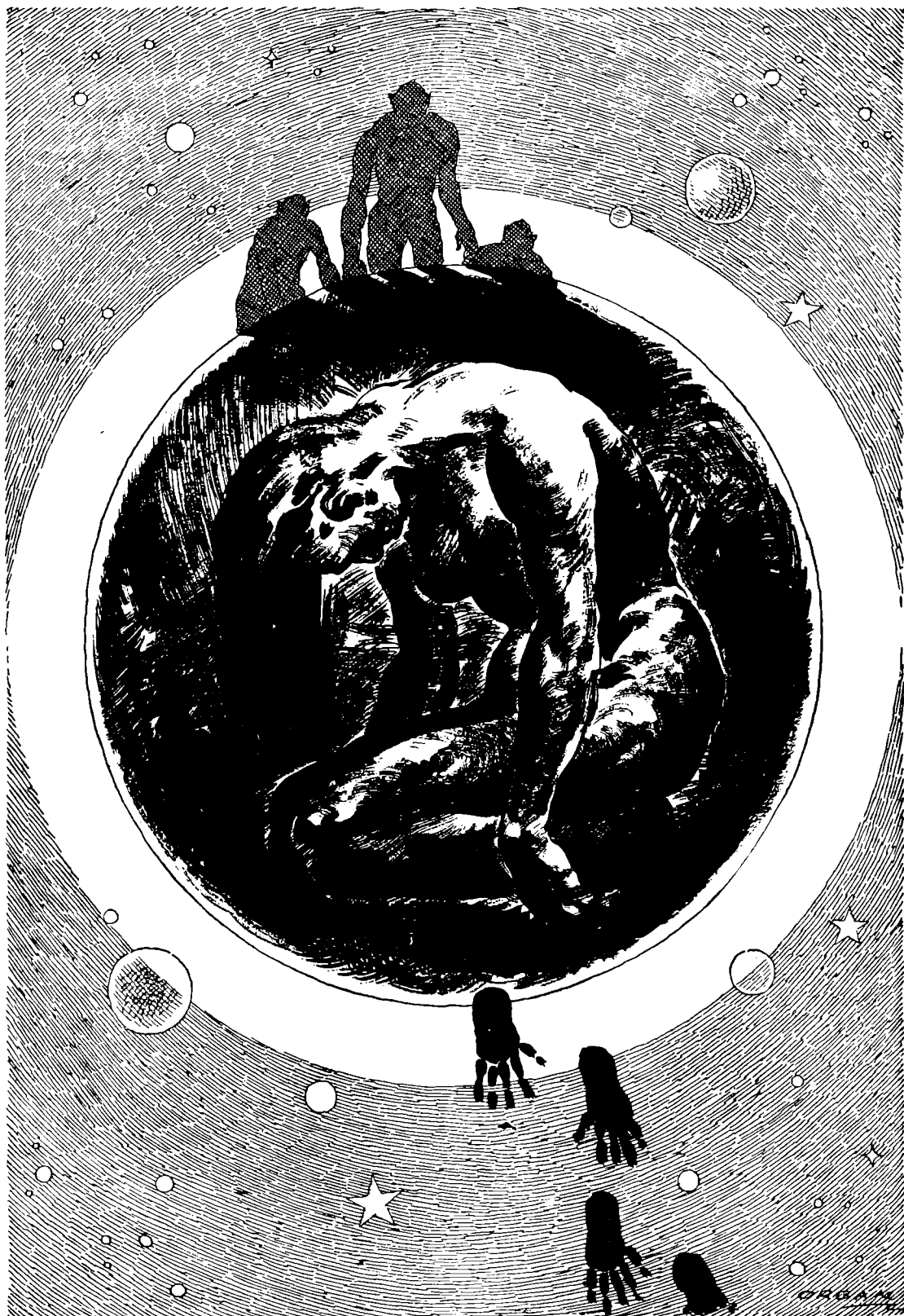
porter prepares to greet even the greatest of disasters, I settled myself for the journey, resolved to keep my mind clear of preconceived ideas and open to the impressions that would meet me at the scene of the disaster.

I was startled to hear the words, "Hello Jim!" spoken at my elbow. Looking up, I recognized the frail, little bespectacled man who was standing in the aisle beside me.

My acquaintance with Professor Ernest Burlingham had begun three years earlier when I sought an interview with him on his announcement of the completion of his *Electrical Theory of Matter*. I had shown so much interest in his work, and an understanding so much better than he expected from a mere reporter, that he had invited me to return to his home. The acquaintance ripened and during the next year I often visited the famous scientist, who instructed me with the interest of a godfather. I had not seen him for more than a year, now.

Ernest Burlingham was of a most deceptive appearance. Although he appeared weak, absent-minded and on the whole insignificant, I had reason to know that there were few men, if any, who could wield a more devastating power than he, or who could be more thoroughly aware of their surroundings.

"Scavenging again?" he asked, smiling. He had always smiled at the tendency of newspapers to play up sensa-



tional crimes and disasters while, in his judgment, they neglected the advances of science. I had long since decided that this was the one question upon which he refused to be open-minded, and had ceased to argue with him on it.

"The newspaper man and scientist seem bound for the same destination this time," I observed slyly.

"That is often the case," he countered, "but while the scientist goes to lend the aid of his knowledge to sufferers, the newspaper sends its representative to capitalize their plight."

To change the subject I asked him about his recent work. We found seats together, and I was quickly engrossed in his attempt to explain life and mind as phases of electrical activity. But, as his voice droned on, I found it increasingly difficult to keep my thoughts on the soul-stirring matters which he, with his kindly interest, was expounding to me. They kept reverting, instead, to the horror toward which our plane of mercy was speeding at more than 450 miles an hour. I heard my companion's voice going on and on. I was becoming drowsy and lost the thread of his talk. Then one statement of his penetrated through the fog in my brain—

"... this thing has interrupted my work, but when the opportunity is unique one must drop everything to seize it."

What, I wondered suddenly, was the explanation of Ernest Burlingham's presence in the relief plane? Its passengers included, outside of us, only some physicians, a couple of Red Cross officials, and Major-General Hugh Lombardi, who was to assume charge of troops now speeding from all directions toward the desolated district. In addition there was a quantity of medical supplies urgently needed by the earthquake sufferers. Burlingham was not a medical man, and I was at a loss to understand just what his function was to be.

Feeling that our relations were

friendly enough to permit it, I put the question to him, wording it so as not to offend his vanity.

He hesitated before replying. "I am going to investigate certain vague reports that have reached me. It is possible that my work will be the most important—from a scientific and not from a human viewpoint—that is to be done in connection with this catastrophe. We are going to see, of course, the greatest upheaval of the earth's surface that has occurred in historic times—possibly the greatest since the earth's crust finally solidified. Who knows what it may have revealed?"

With that, Burlingham withdrew into a shell of silence. I pondered in vain for an inkling of what he might have meant. Although I was unable to explain his words, I knew, because I knew him, that they had not been uttered lightly.

The next two hours I spent making the acquaintance of the medical men aboard, and forming contacts with the Red Cross officials for use as news sources. Then I became aware that we were approaching the devastated area. I took my place by a window to get as early a view as possible of the ravages of the earthquake.

FIRST news reports filtering out had indicated that the dead were numbered in tens of thousands and the homeless in millions. Fortunately, Indian Summer weather prevailed; but the threat of winter hung over the homeless survivors of the catastrophe. Relief measures, however, were undertaken promptly and with the efficiency characteristic of Americans in such emergencies. The airplane in which I was riding was one of the first to speed to the scene with men and supplies for relief work.

Flying low we saw first a large barn lying in ruins, then a concrete bridge torn loose from its moorings and fallen into the swollen stream below. Within ten minutes we were passing low over

scenes of complete destruction. Not a building remained standing; paved roads were buckled and cracked and resembled crumpled strips of cardboard; every bridge we sighted was down; ruin and desolation were everywhere. Along the side of what had been an important highway stretched lines of refugees; men, women and children straggling, with loads of household goods and valuables, toward the edge of the devastated area. In the line were automobiles and horse-drawn wagons loaded with goods, moving slowly over the soft ground, for the roadway itself was impassable. We saw them passing laboriously through ravines which formerly had been bridged, and making long detours to reach fords across streams. Above us was a stream of private and commercial planes transporting people and their belongings to safety. I became aware of Burlingham at my side.

"You are looking now at the worst part of the destruction," he said. "The worst effect of earthquakes is felt at a distance from the center of the disturbance, in a circular band, that is. Earthquakes originate, as you may know, at some point under the earth's surface, from one to 30 or more miles down. That point is called the centrum and the point on the earth's surface directly above is called the epicentrum. The force of the disturbance moves outward from the centrum in spherical waves, exerting its force downward as well as upward. As we go away from the epicentrum the waves of disturbance become more lateral in direction, and we observe a true undulation or wave in the earth's crust. Trees may be seen to incline until their branches touch the earth and then straighten up as the wave passes on."

"What happens at the centrum to cause the quake?" I asked.

"Probably the collapse of the roof of a huge cavern, or the buckling of a stratum under a severe strain."

The scenes below us were constantly

changing as we progressed, yet they remained curiously the same in that they told a story of complete destruction and horror. At length the pilot banked around and the plane headed eastward again. Twenty minutes later we came down to a smooth landing at the field outside Scottsboro, where temporary relief headquarters had been established on the edge of the zone.

The entire town, like many others, had been turned into a huge hospital center, barracks having been erected everywhere for the relief workers and officials. Leaving my belongings in a room assigned to me, I immediately set to work gathering the news. I worked uninterruptedly and was able to file eight columns for the final edition of the *Globe*, giving to the best of my ability a description of the scenes of destruction I had observed and, in the vivid stories of survivors, an account of the occurrence of the earthquake. I told of the feverish scenes of terror when, to the ugly tone of a clashing and rumbling from the earth's interior, homes and office buildings crumpled about the heads of their occupants.

Some of the stories told me by survivors of the shock were so fanciful that I disregarded them completely. Such was that of an old farmer whom I interviewed in a temporary hospital where he was lying with hardly an unbroken bone. His home was located near the center of the quake area, on a farm outside the town of Monroe. He told me how he had been walking along the main road leading from the town to his farm when the shock came. He had been flung from his feet, but hadn't exactly fallen; the ground came up and slapped him. When he awoke, he discovered that he was lying on the hillside a hundred feet from the road along which he had been walking. He was in great pain, but managed to raise himself on one arm and look about. He came to the conclusion then that he had been thrown through the air by the shock and that his life had been spared only because he

had fortunately been plunged into the branches of a tree which broke his fall to the ground.

The farmer, a simple man, told me shakily that he either had died or had been on the verge of death. When I asked him to explain, he related the following:

"I was unconscious most of the night, except for times when I came to. I was in great pain all over and it was a mercy when I could be unconscious. Finally I was sort o' numb and didn't hurt so much. I turned my head and looked down the hill and on the other side of the road, in the field, I saw—three demons. They was coming in my direction. I must have fainted, or died, or something. I didn't know any more till I felt hands touching me and saw a man bending over me. There was another man with him, and they carried me to an automobile and put me in it. That ride was terrible, when I was able to feel anything. I would have died on the way but after seeing those demons, I didn't want to die."

"What did the demons look like?" I asked.

"Not like the pictures," the farmer whispered. "They was more like big gorillas. They had long arms that came down to their feet. They didn't have any hair and they didn't have any eyes, just hollow places where their eyes should have been!"

I WAS not long in learning that the old farmer's story had gained considerable circulation. A similar experience had been claimed by a farmhand who escaped injury and who aided in carrying out of the area the maimed bodies of less fortunate neighbors.

The next day the story had become such a topic of interest that I mentioned it in telegraphing my dispatch, without, however, giving it any credence. I attributed the story to the nervous reaction of those who had come through the disasters, and quoted it to show the state of nerves of this com-

munity so staggered by terror and death.

That afternoon I went to General Lombardi's headquarters. In the ante-room I was surprised to see Ernest Burlingham, whom I had completely forgotten in the stress of work since our arrival together. He immediately called me aside.

"Jim, my boy," he said, "you must do something for me."

"Glad to, if I can."

"I must get into the interior of the quake area as soon as possible. I know how busy General Lombardi is and how buried in his rescue work, but it is absolutely essential that I get an airplane and pilot to take me to the vicinity of Monroe this afternoon. You had better come along, I think, because I can promise you something of interest. The question is, can you get the general to furnish a plane and pilot?"

I looked at Burlingham curiously. What could he have up his sleeve?

"Well," I said, "I'm going in to see General Lombardi now by appointment. I'll put your request to him and try to get it granted, but it's impossible for me to go with you. The big news is coming out of this town now."

"Suppose I could promise you even bigger news?" said Burlingham. "I do not say I can, but—suppose I could. Suppose I told you that if you come with me you will get the biggest story that any newspaper ever published?"

"In that case I'd go with you, of course. Can you promise me anything like that?"

"No. I promise nothing. But I firmly believe that if you accompany me to Monroe you will get such a story!"

"I'll see what I can do," I told him, and passed through the door into the general's private office. When I emerged after ten minutes he looked at me eagerly. I handed him a paper.

"This is an order putting a small plane and a pilot at your service for twenty-four hours," I told him.

"Splendid, Jim! Thank you a thou-

sand times over. You will come with me?"

I turned the problem over in my mind. My duty to my paper was to cover the news and not embark on a wild-goose chase. Nevertheless I had a great deal of respect for Burlingham's judgment. It might be, as he said, that big news was hidden in the interior. At any rate I could accompany him and probably be able to return at any time within the twenty-four hours, after having inspected the damage of the quake over its centrum. In the meantime my paper could depend on the news associations to keep it informed from relief headquarters. On the spur of the moment I made up my mind to accept Burlingham's offer.

"I'll be ready in half an hour," I said, "after getting off a dispatch to the *Globe* and letting them know my plans. Where shall I meet you?"

"You have less to do than I have," he smiled. "Take this order with you and have the plane in readiness to hop off in an hour from now. I will meet you at the flying field office."

WHEN he finally arrived, a few minutes after our scheduled time, everything was in readiness and I was chatting with Lieutenant Richard Williams, who was to pilot us. Burlingham, to my surprise, was carrying a large-bore repeating rifle. A burly laborer tagged at his heels with a huge coil of small but stout rope, which he placed on the floor of the plane at the scientist's direction.

"They may be necessary to my purpose," was the only reply he made to my inquiry about his strange equipment.

Fifteen minutes later we were over the ruined town of Monroe. Burlingham, who was watching the ground below closely, then directed the pilot to fly in a southerly direction, and then to veer to the west and return. He was perfectly silent until on the return trip I heard an exclamation of satisfaction

from him. He pointed out a fissure in the earth's surface, a great hole a hundred feet wide and five hundred feet long, which had evidently been opened up by the quake.

He indicated to Lieutenant Williams that the fissure was the objective of our trip and that he wished to land near it. The pilot accordingly circled lower, and soon brought the plane to the ground in a soft field several hundred yards away. Burlingham was out of the cabin almost before the plane came to a stop. He started at a rapid pace toward the edge of the hole, while I jumped out and followed, both because my curiosity had been roused to a high pitch and because I wished to see that no harm befell my strange friend.

I reached the brink simultaneously with the professor and we stood side by side looking down into the great crevice. It was certain from this closer view that the fissure had been opened up by the earthquake. The jagged walls gave evidence of having been torn forcibly apart. Huge broken rocks stuck out of the sides. The bottom of the abyss was lost in the blackness which seemed to fill it like an impenetrable liquid. I estimated, however, that I could follow the walls of the fearful hole down at least a thousand feet before the blackness enfolded them.

A succession of slight tremors, punctuating the steady vibration of the earth, had continued for two days since the main shock. At this moment a distinct quiver, running through the ground, forcibly impressed upon my mind the circumstances attending our discovery of this giant chasm.

I had almost forgotten those about me until I felt Burlingham's hand on my arm. Williams had come up also, and was peering into the hole with awe. At the professor's suggestion we lay down prone so that we could look our fill without the danger of being overcome by vertigo.

The walls of the hole, as I have stated, were not smooth and perpendicular,

but jagged and jutting, much as the edges of a cake that has been pulled in two. Although I was vastly impressed with this evidence of the earthquake's work, and very curious to know what a trip to the bottom of the fissure might reveal, I found it impossible to fix my gaze into the abyss for any length of time. Accordingly, I straightened up to a sitting posture a safe distance from the edge, so that I might recover my sense of equilibrium before attempting to stand. I noticed that Burlingham and Dick had already left my side and were walking along the brink of the hole some distance away. As I watched, the professor suddenly dropped to his knees, and I heard an exclamation of triumph from him. Our pilot also seemed quite interested in something on the ground, so I walked to where they were kneeling. They were examining an impression in the soft sandy earth.

I WILL not say that I was surprised at what I saw, for that is not the word. I was really stunned—but not surprised, because I had almost expected something strange. Since the time Burlingham had first suggested that we visit the earthquake's epicentrum, I had felt, in some curious way, that we were going in connection with the weird stories that had gained so much credence among the survivors. In other words, I felt that our trip had something to do with the "demons" the old farmer had claimed to have seen.

The scientist and Lieutenant Williams were looking at a footprint which even I realized at once was not that of man, ape, or any other animal I had ever known. I can best describe it by saying it looked to me like the print of a man's hand, the fingers slightly spread, but with a flat palm and a heel at least eight inches long. Or, to take it the other way, it might have been made by a flat-footed man with fingers instead of toes.

As I came up, Burlingham drew a pocket ruler and began measuring the

impression, and its various parts. Pausing to make a note of one of the dimensions, he asked me rather peremptorily to gather some large stones. I complied and by the time I returned with them he was through with his measuring. He placed the stones around and over the print to protect it, and then arose. There was a light in his eyes that I had never seen before, as he turned to us.

"That is the footprint of a creature that science has no records of," he said excitedly. "If possible, we must find an impression of its hands also. Look along the edge of this opening in the earth. The creature must have left a print in climbing over the top."

"There's another print over here," put in Williams. "I just noticed it."

The professor almost darted to the spot at the edge of the abyss that Williams indicated. "Ah! That is a hand, and here beside it is the foot." He bent over and examined the impressions for a moment and then again stood up.

"What sort of critter made them?" I asked.

"Well may you ask, my boy," he exclaimed. "The prints we have seen were made, I am convinced, by something the like of which had never been seen on the earth's surface until two days ago. And yet, although I have not seen the animal, I can give you a partial description of it, and something of its history. Let us move away from the brink of the hole and I will tell you what I have deduced. Then we must make our plans at once. I shall ask your advice.

"I can best begin," he continued, when we had moved away and seated ourselves on some rocks, "with the assertion that no animal known to us could have made the footprint we just saw. And yet the animal that did make the impression must have a resemblance to both man and the higher apes, and therefore must be an integral part of the scheme of life as it has evolved on the earth through millions of years. In other words, this creature of whose ex-

istence we have proof had a common origin with mankind. It must have branched off our lineal tree even before the line of the higher apes did, and yet I have reason to believe that this creature must more nearly resemble mankind than the apes.

"As you undoubtedly know, mankind's progress would have been impossible without the peculiar construction of our hands by which the thumb is able to oppose the four fingers, to pick up and hold things, to mold and construct things by the use of them. The apes have never fully learned this trick because of the construction of their hands. But this creature whose tracks we have seen has not only developed hands like ours, but its feet have the same power of grasping things that our hands have. For practical purposes, therefore, the creature may be said to have four hands. Think of what that means. It could construct a delicate watch with its feet, or with its hands. In fact both its fingers and toes are longer and more delicately molded than our fingers, so that it undoubtedly is a better workman."

I LOOKED up and caught a wink from Lieutenant Williams, but for my part I did not share his obvious disbelief. After all, *something* had made those curious impressions in the ground. Moreover it seemed probable now that the stories of monsters having been seen in the vicinity did not spring from mere hallucinations and that the creatures the scientist described might actually exist.

"But is it possible," I asked, "that these creatures have lived and developed somewhere underground?"

"It is not only possible, but obviously true," Burlingham declared. "From where else could they have come? I promised to give you something of the creature's history, and I will do so.

"To begin with, he probably lived on the earth's surface. It would be reckless for me to say how many millions of

years ago, but it was long before the development of anything like the present race of mankind. We have reason to know that cataclysmic upheavals of the earth were fairly common in those days, but the one which imprisoned these creatures in the bowels of the earth must have been greater than anything we have ever imagined. In some giant upheaval a huge portion of land must have sunk—possibly to a depth of twenty or thirty miles. The earth closed in over it, and a huge cavern was formed in the depths of the earth. We cannot even imagine the terror that must have gripped the animals engulfed thus in a subterranean prison. I think perhaps an entire tribe of these creatures, then in an early state of development, were swallowed up in the earth. They found themselves in utter darkness and their ears must have been assailed by the most terrible noises.

"Within a few days the noises ceased and they found that they were still alive, although entombed in utter night. They must have had a supply of food, or they would have starved before they learned their way about in their new world. You must remember, however, that they were primitive animals. They found water, probably in the form of a lake fed by springs and emptied by absorption in the earth. The disturbance must have carried down, along with these creatures, other forms of animal life and also vegetation that was then possibly in fruit. They began to discover that their world had not changed otherwise, but had simply sunk to a depth in the earth. Life is persistent, and somehow they managed to come through the first few months, and by that time they had made enough adjustments to their new environment to find life easier.

"One thing we must realize is that the air pressure in the vast cavern must have been much above what they were accustomed to. The pressure at the earth's surface is about 15 pounds to the square inch and if we were to go down in an open shaft it would double

about every two and three-quarters miles, so that five and a half miles down an open shaft, the pressure would be about 60 pounds per square inch. However, in this cavern unconnected with the earth's surface the pressure of the air would be determined by its density. It would depend upon the volume of the air entrapped and the size of the cavern. I think it is safe to assume that they suffered discomfort for a while from increased air pressure, but since this is a force exerted in every direction, they soon adjusted themselves to it. Vegetation must have undergone some alteration enabling it to exist in a changed form. And so, in toto, we have imagined an entirely new world in which the creatures made prisoners by the upheaval were able to exist and to develop on lines altered to suit their environment. This development, bearing a kinship to the evolution that was taking place above them, went on through the centuries. One important point is that these subterranean creatures, having no use for eyes or organs of sight, gradually lost these organs through atrophy. The skin probably overgrew their eyes in time.

"Then, after centuries, the earthquake which has brought us all here opened up an exit from their prison, which they had long regarded as their natural home, and gave them access to the earth's surface. What is to result from this, I cannot tell you. I think we may assume that these subterranean ape-men, who may be as far along the road of evolution as we are, will desire to remove themselves to our more spacious world. We three are on the spot to witness what follows and we have evidence that one, at least, and probably more, of the creatures has been close to the spot where we are seated at this moment."

I had been so absorbed in Burlingham's exposition that I had forgotten my surroundings, and as he stopped, with a wave of his hand toward the spot where he had examined the strange

footprints, it seemed to be that I had been transported from a dark and loathsome place back to the sunshine. Williams, I think, felt a similar impression, for I saw him looking around him as if to take to himself the pleasure and certainty of the bright sunlight. The scene we looked at was cheerful only by comparison, however, for ruin lay on every hand.

"Well, I don't wish to seem disrespectful," said Williams, "but I couldn't believe a thing like that and still think I was sane. It doesn't seem reasonable to me to believe anything of that kind could live miles underground."

Burlingham jumped to his feet nervously.

"Maybe this will convince you," he whispered excitedly. "Here comes one of the creatures toward us! Keep quiet!"

DICK and I sprang up and looked in the direction he indicated. Swinging toward us across the rough ground, with head bent low, was altogether the strangest animal I had ever seen. Although it was about the size of a gorilla, with huge chest and shoulders, and arms reaching almost to the ground, it still resembled a human being more than it did an ape. Its head was very much the shape of the human head except for the enormous size of its ears; but even at a considerable distance it could be seen that the creature had no eyes, but only slight indentations below the brow completely covered over by skin. It was entirely hairless, with a smooth, slate-colored skin, and it was naked except for a breech cloth. This strange creature was carrying swung across its shoulder the body of a dead or unconscious human.

I say that this creature was swinging along toward us, but I must stress the point that the very moment after I caught sight of it, it stopped short in its tracks. After standing indecisively for barely a moment, it dropped to the ground behind a hillock. Simultaneous-

ly, Williams also held his ground, and we three looked at the spot where the creature had hidden.

"There's no need for us to hide, since it has no eyes," Burlingham said, as much to himself as to us. "But how, in the name of seven times seven devils, did it know enough to hide from us? Never mind, we'll think of that later. Come over with me to where it is—but be careful not to make any noise. The wind is toward us, so it is not likely to smell us."

Stepping carefully we crept toward the rising ground behind which the creature had hidden. I admit that I went with trepidation, for the creature's tremendous physical power had been apparent in the short glimpse afforded us. Nevertheless there were three of us, and both Dick and I were in good physical condition. It was unlikely that the creature could overcome all of us in an encounter. Moreover the risk must be taken, for while I felt sure the body it was carrying was that of a victim of the earthquake and that it was already dead, we all felt instinctively that we must prevent the creature from vanishing into the depths with it.

We crept along until we had reached the crest of the ridge and could look down the far slope. To our utter astonishment it was completely bare of any form of life. I jumped up, feeling that I was going or had already gone, insane. At that moment I saw the creature rise up at the far edge of the small ridge and run toward a point between us and the edge of the crevice.

"Head it off," shouted Williams breaking into a run. I followed at his heels while Burlingham trailed along at the top of his speed—all of us shouting in the hope of frightening the creature. Apparently we succeeded to some extent at least, for it dropped the body it was carrying and headed directly for the abyss. A second later we saw it vanish over the brink at the exact spot where we had seen the prints left by its hands in climbing out. We followed

to the edge and saw the creature making its way easily down the almost perpendicular wall. As we continued to watch, it finally vanished into the black depths. Williams was the first to speak.

"I want to take back what I said before, sir," he said to Burlingham. "I'm darned if I know what to think now, but I guess the first thing for us to do is to see about the fellow over there."

IT WAS the body of a man dead two days. Williams and I dug out a shallow, temporary grave for it, and then joined Burlingham, who had taken a seat on the ground nearby.

"Now that we've seen this uncanny animal, what can we do about it?" I asked the scientist. "Do you think there's any chance of his coming back with reinforcements and doing some damage here?"

"Anything may happen," Burlingham replied solemnly. "I am stunned by what I have seen, although I realize that you and Lieutenant Williams do not fully understand the situation. I think it very likely that these creatures will appear on the surface in force within a short time. The first thing we must do is to summon aid, and I will request our pilot to return immediately to Scottsboro and ask General Lombardi to send reinforcements before night."

"Don't you think we could handle them?" asked Williams. "You know there's a machine-gun on the plane yonder. If necessary we could take to the air and strafe them from above."

"I would not care to risk it." Burlingham shook his head. "Not for myself, only, but I would not risk failure in the face of a danger that may threaten the whole countryside, and, for that matter, the whole nation. I can tell you now that our subterranean visitors will prove the most formidable opponents you have ever imagined. Every minute counts and I must repeat my request, Lieutenant, that you take off at once."

"You're the boss," replied Williams, "but it won't be necessary for me to

fly back to Scottsboro. I can get headquarters on the radio from the plane. What shall I say?"

"Tell General Lombardi that a grave peril faces the country and ask him to send all his available men. Suggest that he himself make a flight here so that he may realize the situation."

As Lieutenant Williams moved off, the scientist called him back and requested him, on his return, to bring the coil of rope and the rifle which were in the plane.

"Don't underestimate these creatures, Jim," he said, turning to me. "You can judge the thing's physical strength—it is easily double that of a man. Now it is my firm opinion that the monster represents a race of higher intelligence and reasoning power than man himself."

"Impossible!" I objected. "The creature was so brutal, so crude and misshapen that I can not possibly associate the idea of intelligence with it."

My friend smiled wryly. "It is sometimes possible to judge a man's intellectual power by his appearance, although not always. In this case, however, the criterion is useless, for you are attempting to judge this creature by the standards of a human being, which it is not. My conclusions are based on firmer ground."

"In the first place, the creature's head and brain cavity are fully the size of a man's. Since it is without the power of sight it follows that the brain cells which, in man's mind, are devoted to the purposes of sight, are made up for in its brain by other cells. That is, if the creature's brain is the same size as man's, its mental powers, disregarding that of the perception of light, must be greater. Whether these are merely an extension of the mental powers we recognize, or whether the creature has powers that we know nothing of, is speculative. I incline to the view that both of the possibilities I suggest are true. In the brief encounter we had with the individual of this subterranean

race it out-thought us at every step, and exhibited the most amazing mental processes. Let us go over what happened.

"When we first caught sight of it, the creature, I believe, was following its own spoor back to the crevice from which it had emerged. Its senses of smell and hearing, we may assume, are highly developed to compensate for the lack of sight. Now at the very moment we saw the creature, or barely a second afterward, it sensed us by some means, despite the fact that we were very quiet and that the wind was from it toward us. Possibly our mental agitation betrayed us by thought-waves which led it to know that sentient beings were in the neighborhood. The creature was doubtless as much surprised as we were at the sudden encounter, but it acted much more intelligently in the circumstances. We knew, or felt sure, that our visitor from the underworld had no eyes, yet we instinctively and quite naturally tried to hide from it. That was not intelligent, but an emotional reaction based on fear.

"On the other hand this creature, whose ancestors for a million years have lived in absolute darkness, and who presumably had no conception of the sense of sight, tried to hide from us. How could it have realized that we were able to *see*, or that there was such a thing as seeing? I believe the answer is that it had already evolved a conception of sight by pure reason, something that no man would be able to do. We have never been able to imagine anything that was not based in some way on our experience and to do so would require mental powers of an entirely different *nature* than we possess.

"This creature, as nearly as I can explain it, must have felt some reaction to the light of the upper world. Then he had had an opportunity, as we know, to examine the body of a man and to discover that it was very similar to his own. He must have speculated about the man's eyes. I assume that, putting two and two together, the creature de-

cided that the body's eyes were in some way connected with the light which it had sensed. But how did it make the unbelievable jump from this point to an abstract conception of the power of sight? It is so uncanny, that it stuns me."

HE CEASED speaking and stood up. I saw that Williams was returning from the plane and, in accordance with Burlingham's request, was bringing the load of rope, staggering under the weight. He dropped the large coil near us, and leaned the rifle against it.

"The general is coming out, himself, to see what it's all about," he announced cheerfully. "I think he suspects all of us being crazy but the last word was that he would be out later this afternoon, probably within an hour."

I looked to the west. Probably three hours of daylight remained. Burlingham had the same thought.

"That is a relief," he said, "for I do not doubt that we shall need the advice of General Lombardi himself about the situation. Meantime we must do what we can, and I propose to descend into the hole as far as the length of rope, about a thousand feet, and see what information I can gather."

Lieutenant Williams and I spoke up at once in protest. If it were necessary for anyone to go into the hole, it certainly should be one of us, and not he.

"Unfortunately, neither one of you would do," the scientist replied rather brusquely. "I do not know what may be discovered by a trip a thousand feet down in the hole, possibly nothing, but I prefer to have a look myself."

Silencing our protests, he began tying an end of the rope about his chest. I realized that nothing we could say would have any influence with him. Unless we were prepared to restrain him by force the best thing was to lend him what aid we could in carrying out his hare-brained scheme and getting it over as quickly as possible. Accordingly, I busied myself with fastening the rope

tightly under his arms. The professor's instructions were simple. He wished to be lowered into the abyss to the extent of the rope's length. Williams and I were merely to stand by until we got his signal to raise him. He would shout when he wished to be pulled up, or, if it proved impractical to communicate in that way, he would give the signal by firing the rifle which he carried strapped over his shoulder.

Our preparations were completed quickly and Burlingham calmly lowered himself over the edge and began his descent, while Williams and I kept the rope taut and gradually let it out as he went deeper. The wall of the hole was slightly inclined outward from where we were standing so that we were able to watch the scientist's progress for some time. Lower and lower he went, disappearing at times under an overhanging rock and then coming in sight several yards further down. Frequently he dislodged fragments of stone with his feet or hands and we could hear them rattle down the side of the wall until the sound finally died away. His descent was steady; his form steadily becoming more indistinct in the darkness until finally we were unable to see him. There was only the white rope stretching down and disappearing into the forbidding and ominous blackness. At length we came to the end of the coil. We retained about ten feet of rope, which we snubbed around the stump of a tree. Then we made ourselves comfortable at the edge of the abyss to await the signal that Burlingham was ready to be hoisted to the surface again.

I CONFESS that I waited with forebodings of disaster. I blamed myself now for not having restrained Burlingham by force from taking such an unnecessary risk. I might even have convinced him against making the attempt on the ground that his advice and leadership in this crisis were invaluable to humanity.

Williams felt as I did, and we had

almost persuaded ourselves that it was our duty to pull the scientist up immediately without waiting for his signal, when our ears caught the sound of an airplane's motor. The plane, flying low, circled overhead and then came gently to rest near where our own plane was standing. Two men, one of whom was Major General Lombardi, alighted and walked toward us.

Williams explained the situation to the general in a few words. He peered with interest into the abyss, his eyes following the rope down until it disappeared in the depths.

"This is the greatest nonsense I ever heard of," he said impatiently.

"You forget that we actually saw one of these creatures," I reminded him. "Moreover, if you will look I will show you the impressions of the thing's hands and feet."

I indicated the spot, some thirty feet away, where the pile of rocks protected the creature's footprint. General Lombardi stalked over to it. The general's pilot had joined up and, leaving him and Williams to guard the rope and listen for Professor Burlingham's signal, I followed General Lombardi and exposed the footprint. The general examined it with the same interest we had exhibited earlier, and I gave him a brief record of our encounter with the subterranean visitor, as well as a description of the animal and some of the professor's theories about it.

Suddenly we heard a warning cry from Williams. I turned my head and then clutched the general's arm with a complete lack of courtesy for his rank. Both of us sprang to our feet. There, less than thirty yards away from us, stood three creatures similar to the one we had seen. My heart jumped to my mouth, not so much in fear for myself as for Professor Burlingham, whose position, I realized, was now exceedingly precarious. The trio from the underworld made no movement for the moment, but simply stood in a group and appeared to confer. General Lom-

bardi touched my arm, and I turned and saw that he had his service revolver in his hand. I started to remonstrate, doubting that the revolver could inflict a mortal wound on the animals, but he halted me.

"Shout and try to frighten them away until we can pull up your companion," he said.

Immediately he pointed the revolver in the air and fired. Both of us shouted at the top of our lungs and Williams and the general chauffeur-pilot joined in.

The three underworld creatures seemed somewhat taken aback by this. They held their ground, however, and we could hear a chattering as they bent their heads closer together. Then without the slightest hesitation, they started at a rapid pace directly toward the general and me. The general fired one shot at them, but missed, I think, as we retreated toward the rope. Dick and his companion had already begun to haul the professor up. It was well that General Lombardi and I moved when we did, for the trio lumbered directly over the spot where we had been standing and disappeared rapidly, one at a time, over the edge. A few yards away, Williams and the soldier were pulling the professor to the surface as rapidly as possible without dragging him across the jagged rocks, and there was nothing I could do at the moment.

WITH a terrible feeling of helplessness, I dropped prone on my stomach to watch the progress of the creatures down the wall of the abyss. They were descending rapidly and smoothly in a perpendicular line about twenty feet from the rope which was bringing Burlingham to the surface, and they seemed to be paying no attention to it, presumably not knowing that it was there. I doubted, however, if it were possible for a human being to go so close to them without attracting their attention. Accordingly I was not surprised when I saw them stop their descent about four-hundred feet down. Dimly I could

see the form of the professor as he struggled to keep clear of the wall as he was drawn up. He was still some two hundred feet below the trio, and I could not tell whether he had observed them or not. The three creatures clung to the wall, motionless, as the scientist was drawn nearer them on his upward course.

When he was still a hundred feet away, I shouted at the top of my lungs, hoping to both frighten the creatures and distract their attention, and to inform the professor of their presence. The next moment I saw one of the creatures move over toward the professor's line of ascent. I called to Williams to pull faster, but I saw at the same time that it was impossible to haul Burlingham out of danger quickly enough. It appeared that the creature would grab him, and try to hold him. In that case it would develop into a tug of war, with the professor's life at stake and very likely to be snuffed out in the struggle even if we won. I jumped to my feet and gave what aid I could to prevent the creatures from winning. At my urging we began to haul in the rope faster, regardless of the fact that the man at the end was being dragged across sharp stones.

The expected jerk on the line did not come, but in a moment we heard the sharp report of a rifle, followed by a human shout from below. The shout came again and this time we understood it.

"Stop!" we heard Burlingham's voice.

Jumping back to the brink of the hole I looked down and saw the professor dangling at the end of the rope. Only two of the underground creatures were in sight, and they were moving rapidly downward. The immediate danger was past.

More slowly and cautiously we pulled the professor to the surface and helped him onto the solid ground again. He was cut and bruised and, as we could see, completely exhausted. We placed him on his back while General Lom-

bardi bent over to question him and the rest of us crowded around.

"What happened?" demanded the general when Professor Burlingham opened his eyes after a moment.

"There was little to be seen at the depth I was able to reach," began the professor breathlessly. "The opening extends much further, probably to a distance measured in miles. However, I observed unusual strata formations, and collected some samples of earth and rocks which were loose. Unfortunately, I lost them when I had to defend myself against attack."

"But that's not what I want to know about," the general exclaimed impatiently. "Bother the strata! What happened when you encountered those three animals?"

"They seem to have a regular path for traveling up and down the wall," the professor said, "and I was not very far away from it. Two of them waited while the other came over to investigate me. I can hardly say I am grateful to you for the way I was hauled up the wall. In addition to bruising me up it made it almost impossible for me to use the rifle which I had. However, I managed to get it ready and at length the creature was within reaching distance of me. I saw that it intended to grab me and while I hated to take its life, I dared not risk falling into its powerful grasp. Accordingly, I fired point blank at it from a distance of only a few feet. The bullet struck it in the head and killed it instantly. The others, I think, realized that their companion had been killed and probably did not understand the manner. At any rate, they immediately resumed their descent, without bothering about the body of their fellow, which had caught on a jutting rock a few feet below me. I tried to make you understand that I wished to possess myself of the body and bring it to the surface, but I was too weak, I suppose. Someone must go down for it so that we may have the specimen. It will be invaluable."

"Invaluable or not," General Lombardi said in a determined manner, "no one shall go into that hole tonight. Tomorrow it will be different, for we shall have a force of soldiers on hand."

BURLINGHAM started to protest, but the general silenced him with upraised hand.

"You seem to know more about these animals than anyone else," he went on, addressing the professor, who had raised himself to a sitting posture. "How many of them do you suppose there are?"

"It is impossible to do more than guess, but the number certainly must be in the tens of thousands. The race could not have any very permanent and secure existence otherwise."

Lombardi whistled. "Your reasoning seems sound at that," he admitted. "And all of them are liable to come pouring out of their hole, I suppose?"

"Possibly."

"I understand you consider them intelligent and formidable opponents—more than so many gorillas, for example?"

A smile flickered across the professor's face.

"I consider them, with reason, to be more intelligent than human beings," he declared.

"So I was told. We'll pass that point, in which I am unable to agree with you. Have you any idea how they may be armed and what their disposition and intentions may be? Are we to slaughter them as wild and dangerous animals when they appear? Or can we deal with them on any terms? Surely no man was ever faced by such a problem." The last sentence was uttered in a tone of despair.

"It is indeed a serious problem, General Lombardi," Burlingham said solemnly. "I wish I could give you authoritative advice, but it is impossible. My own idea is that it would be exceedingly dangerous to permit any large number of the creatures to be at large. If we

could negotiate with them, undoubtedly an arrangement of some sort could be made. But unfortunately there is no medium in which we can meet them. They can not even see us to learn from our attitudes that we are willing to be friendly. They are beings from a different world entirely, who have suddenly obtained access to our world. I think the result can only be a struggle for possession of our earth."

As the professor ceased, I hesitatingly advanced an idea that had occurred to me while he was speaking:

"Suppose the entire opening in the earth could be covered with wires charged with electricity at high voltage. That would forestall any wholesale slaughter, for they would quickly realize the danger of touching it. At the same time we might permit a few to come out, capture them, and use them as ambassadors to their fellows if we are able to establish a communication of ideas with them."

"I think the plan might work," admitted Burlingham.

"It could do no harm," the general decided. "At least the charged wires would serve as our first line of defense. I am going to return now to Scottsboro and I will order a detachment of the signal corps to start at once with the necessary equipment. Meantime I will send Colonel Durham by plane to take charge. I will instruct him to confer with you, Professor Burlingham, about any steps that are to be taken. I will also dispatch troops, including a machine-gun company, and they should arrive during the night. I will return tomorrow. In the meantime, of course, you can inform me of any developments by radio. You are my representative, Lieutenant Williams, until the arrival of Colonel Durham, who should be here within an hour. My only instructions for the present are that no one shall attempt to descend into this opening until tomorrow, when Colonel Durham will direct the recovery of the body which Professor Burlingham tells us

can be reached."

Having concluded, the general spun around on his heel briskly with a signal to his pilot and the pair walked to where their plane rested.

THE night was a busy one, a steady stream of soldiers pouring in on foot from Scottsboro. Colonel Durham had arrived before dark. He was a white-haired, very formal officer of the old school, and he was inclined to think that all three of our party were crazy and that General Lombardi had been affected by his contact with us. Nevertheless, he consulted with Professor Burlingham, obviously intending to carry out to the letter the instructions given him by the general. He was followed shortly by members of the Signal Corps of the Army, who were brought by plane and landed at our improvised field. At the professor's suggestion, they were put to work at once, making a protective fence around the point at which the subterranean creatures had been noticed to emerge. When this temporary fence was connected with two 440-volt storage batteries brought for the purpose we felt reasonably secure against a night attack. Arrangements were made to wire over the entire chasm the following day. A dynamo would then be put in operation and the whole system of wires could be charged to any tension which proved necessary.

That plan, however, was destined never to be carried out.

I went to sleep about midnight, and was awakened at the break of dawn by Burlingham. He was quite sore and stiff as a result of his narrow escape of the day before. Our surroundings had changed considerably overnight and there was now a considerable military force encamped around us. We sought out Colonel Durham, who was already up, and the Professor suggested that the body of the creature he had slain the previous day be brought to the surface immediately. He urged haste on the ground that an examination of

its body might furnish information that would prove valuable in case of an encounter with the creatures in force, and also because of the possibility that the body might be carried to the underground cavern by its fellows at any time.

Colonel Durham assented, revealing his curiosity and a desire to see the body. The professor volunteered to make the descent and tie a rope around the creature's body but Colonel Durham rightly refused to permit this. Lieutenant Williams, who had followed us, came up at this moment and offered to go down himself. His superior consented and ordered Williams to make the descent at once.

The arrangements were quickly completed. A squad of soldiers was routed out to stand by the rope, and soon Williams was being lowered into the abyss at the same point where the professor had made his perilous descent. In addition to the rope tied around his chest, he carried the end of another rope which was fed out to him from the surface. At length his shout told that he had sighted the body of the professor's victim. Considerable maneuvering followed before at last he indicated his success in reaching it.

The slight tremors which had continued ever since the initial shock had been equally noticeable that morning, and I had also noticed a very slight noise like a distant grinding.

As the soldiers handling the two ropes rested momentarily, I became aware that the force of the tremors was greater than it had been. The vibration had increased gradually and we had been so absorbed that we had not perceived it. It seemed to me that the noise was likewise increasing. I saw Professor Burlingham standing a few paces from me and moved over to call his attention to what I had noticed. Before I could traverse the distance I felt the ground rock under me alarmingly. The professor fell to his knees, as did one of the soldiers. At the same moment

the most horrible conglomeration of noises from the earth's interior assailed us.

"Haul up that man!" The sharp command was uttered by Colonel Durham.

With the ground rocking violently under them the soldiers began hauling in both ropes rapidly, like sailors heaving on a line.

IT WAS a moment of the greatest tenseness and anxiety. Another distinct and forcible shock appeared imminent. All of us were in an extremely precarious position, but our danger was nothing compared to that of Lieutenant Williams, who faced a certain and horrible death unless we could get him to the surface before we were all thrown from our feet. I felt certain that the shock would come within a minute, as both the trembling of the earth and the noises beneath us were increasing steadily.

One soldier, near whom I was standing, called to me for help. Then I saw what I had not noticed in my excitement, that he and one companion were drawing up one of the lines alone. There were eight men at the other line, and another would only have been in the way, but the two lone soldiers were having quite a struggle with their burden. It dawned upon me that Williams must have fastened the rope around the body of the underworld creature in time and that it too was being drawn to the surface. I jumped to their aid and the rope began to come in faster under our combined efforts. It was very heavy, confirming my guess that it was attached to the body Williams had risked his life to obtain.

I heard a cheer and saw the Lieutenant's head appear at the surface. He was helped to safety, and then Professor Burlingham, who had seen the efforts

of myself and my two companions, brought aid to us.

The creature's head appeared over the brink and then suddenly shot downward, as the rope, hurriedly and insecurely tied, slipped from its chest and came free in our hands. Those of us who had hold of the rope fell backwards, and at the same moment the earth seemed to rise up and strike us a mighty blow.

It was an hour later when I recovered consciousness, to find the professor bending over me.

I looked at the professor inquiringly and he swung his arm in a wide gesture. I looked, and it was a moment before I found my bearings. The great opening in the earth had completely disappeared.

"The first shock opened up a path to a different world," said Professor Burlingham softly, "and the second closed it forever. At least we have had the rare opportunity of a peep at an entirely different civilization and we have learned something from it. I hope that the demonstration that other beings, of intelligence surpassing ours, exist in the universe will give us a little humility."

"For myself, I will never deny the possibility of any conjecture, no matter how wild it seems," Williams said devoutly. I echoed his sentiment.

"As to those unhappy creatures of the nether world," concluded my eminent friend, "probably we shall never know how they have fared in this second quake. For my part I hope that their subterranean home has not been destroyed, as I fear it has, and that at some future date, when both we and they have grown in knowledge and wisdom, they may emerge to the surface and share our better world in peace and amity."