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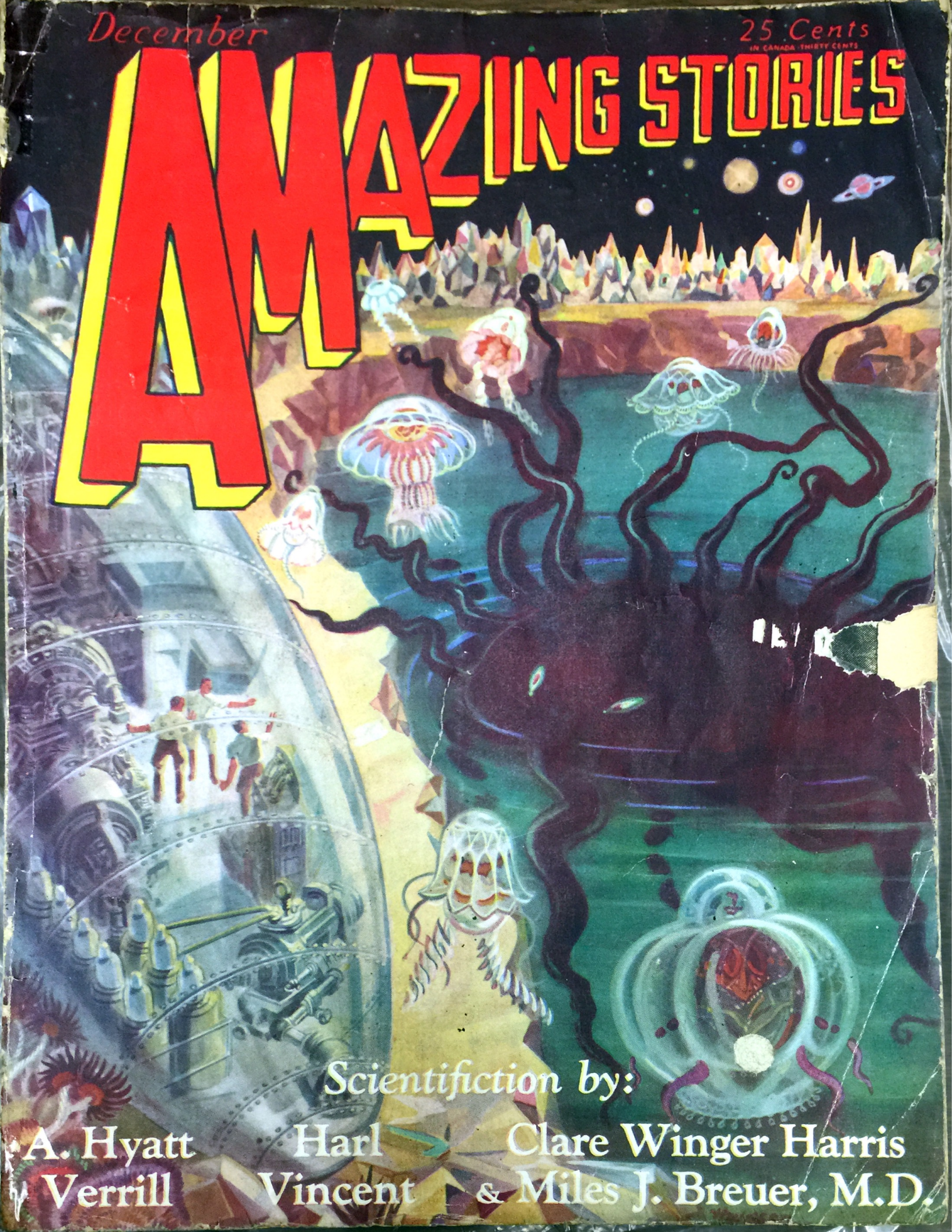
AMAZING STORIES



Scientifiction by:

A. Hyatt Verrill

Harl Vincent

Clare Winger Harris & Miles J. Breuer, M.D.

JULES VERNE'S TOMBSTONE AT AMIENS PORTRAYING HIS IMMORTALITY

AMAZING STORIES

December, 1929
Vol. 4, No. 9

In Our Next Issue:

BEYOND THE GREEN PRISM, by A. Hyatt Verrill. (A serial in 2 parts.) Part 1. Few stories have elicited warmer praise from our readers than "Into the Green Prism," and the author has nobly answered the call for a sequel in which, incidentally, all scientific "flaws" are taken care of —so the author says. As all good sequels should do, this one far excels the original story.

AIR LINES, by David H. Keller, M.D. It is to be expected by this time that Dr. Keller will inject an original twist and surprise element in a story that deals with any subject. Aviation is no exception to this rule. And yet the future that this well-known author predicts for air travel is not beyond the realm of possibility.

WHEN THE ATOMS FAILED, by J. W. Campbell, Jr. Although Mr. Campbell is a new author and an extremely young man as authors go, he gives us an interplanetary story of excellent merit, in which a goodly amount of interesting science is ingeniously interwoven to make a romance of startling plausibility. We predict a great following for this author in the field of literature and particularly scientific fiction.

THE SWORD AND THE ATOPEN, by Taylor H. Greenfield. The opening of this story will carry a strong appeal to victims of that most miserable of our minor troubles—hay fever. It is a tale dealing with the subject of chemistry—a subject which is rarely treated, probably because it requires more definite knowledge, which must be obtained by actual study, than do most subjects.

THE FOURTH DIMENSIONAL SPACE PENETRATOR, by Julian Kendig, Jr. Here is another unusual tale dealing with that most baffling of subjects—the fourth dimension. This time the author employs the planetary atom in a most interesting manner, for aid in building the yarn. We can assure you ten minutes of fascinating reading.

And several other stories, for which purpose we have added 16 more pages to the magazine.

In Our December Issue:

Our Cover

this month depicts a scene from the story entitled "A Baby on Neptune," by Clare Winger Harris and Miles J. Breuer, M.D., in which the monster of the sea on Neptune is about to destroy the son of Neptune's chief scientist. The earth men are shown in their space ship recording this happening on their film—which is later instrumental in helping them interfere with the monster's plans.

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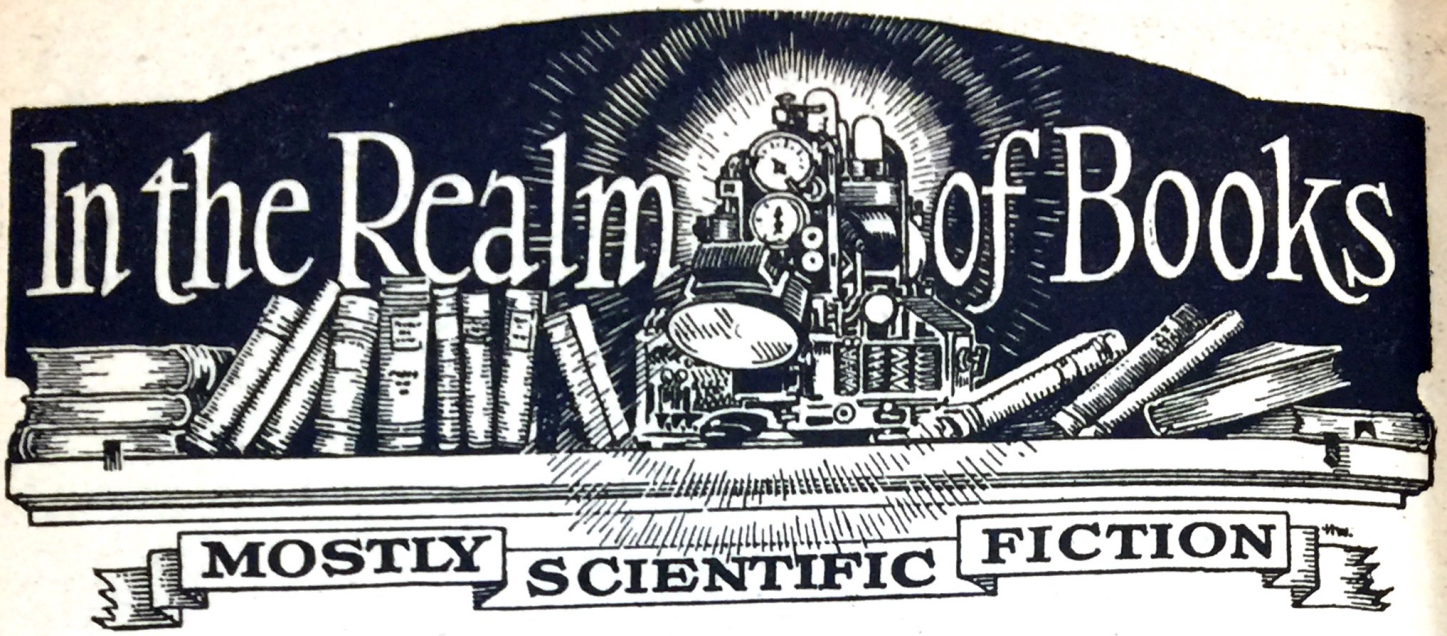


World Domination

"The Earth Tube," by Gawain Edwards. *Published by D. Appleton & Co., N. Y.,* $2.00.

THIS book draws a vivid picture of the struggle for world domination between the Caucasian and the yellow races, with Asia coming out second best.

It starts with the discovery of seismographic disturbances and earthquakes repeated at regular intervals. Dr. Scott, assisted by King Henderson and by his daughter, Anna, figures out scientifically that the Asians have constructed a tunnel clear through the center of the earth and even predicts the exact location of the mouth of the tunnel on the western hemisphere. Their statements are greeted with contempt and unbelief, but even Dr. Angell, the secretary of war, a typical incompetent politician, is finally convinced. The western end of the tunnel is discovered to be located near Buenos Ayres, and it is found that the metal used by the Asians for construction purposes is indestructible. It is further discovered that an enormous earth traversing car is the cause of the numerous earthquakes. This car, traveling by gravity, is used to transport men and machines to the Western hemisphere, and finally the Asians begin their conquest of the Americans.

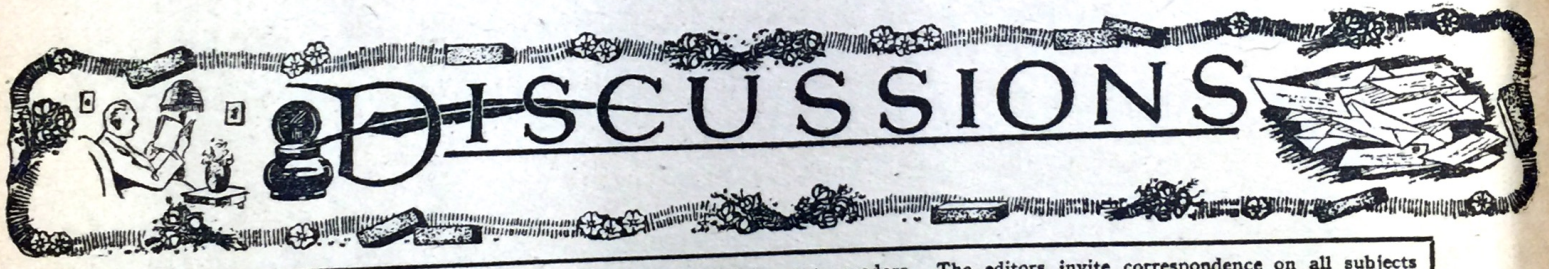
Their tanks, constructed of "Undulal," which is indestructible, are invincible and the victorious march of the Asians cannot be stopped. All means to stop the advance fail, and as a last resort, King Henderson invades the Western stronghold of the Asians and discovers the secret of Undulal, which can only be destroyed by liquid air. He is taken captive, and condemned to death, but is shown all the secrets and marvels of the Asian cities. He is also transported with the earth car to the Eastern stronghold and then returned to the Western hemisphere. He has met an American girl, who, destined for the harem of the Asian king, finally helps him to escape, by taking a daring chance.

By the use of liquid air the advance of the Asians is finally stopped. In the meantime the Asians have built airplanes from which they dump enormous quantities of gold, thereby upsetting the enormous treasury balance of the Americans, but by the discontinuing of gold as an economic base, the scheme of the Asians is frustrated. The Western stronghold of the Asians is destroyed including the Earth tube, and after a series of tremendous earthquakes peace reigns once more upon earth.

This book can safely be recommended to all lovers of scientific fiction.

It is vividly and plausibly written, and it is to be hoped that Mr. Edwards will not stop with this book.

—C. A. BRANDT.



In this department we shall discuss, every month, topics of interest to readers. The editors invite correspondence on all subjects directly or indirectly related to the stories appearing in this magazine. In case a special personal answer is required, a nominal fee of 25c to cover time and postage is required.

A SEQUEL TO "THE SKYLARK OF SPACE" DESIRED—ALSO ONE TO "THE MOON STROLLERS"

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I am enclosing with this letter the Reader's Vote of Preference and the coupon for "The Vanguard of Venus." If this story proves to be as good as the "Skylark of Space," then it is sure to be ranked as one of the best stories of the year. I, like Mr. Bradford and Mr. McElroy, wish that Mr. Smith would give us a sequel to the "Skylark of Space." Perhaps, you could even persuade Mr. Ullrich to give us still another sequel to "The Moon Strollers." These, however, were not the only good stories in the magazine. I would recommend the "Radio Telescope," "The Gas-Weed," "The Beast-Men of Ceres" and its sequel, "The Cry From the Ether" and innumerable others, to a person who wished to read only the best stories of the magazine.

Now as to reprints. I have often wondered if all the readers of AMAZING STORIES have read "The Treasures of Tantalus." This story ranks on a par with the "Skylark of Space" and "Station X." I am sure that a number of readers will agree with my proposal.

By the way, what has become of the estimable Baron Münchhausen and the inventive Mr. Hicks, or who has sat by the side of Alier as he received the messages of the Baron?

Now, a word of criticism. Why not change the name of AMAZING STORIES to Scientifiction Stories. The cover is perfectly all right—the fault being the title. I was attracted to the magazine by the cover. I picked it up, looked at the title and—put it back on the rack. Yet, some impulse told me to give it the "once-over." I did, and bought it. In it was the last chapter of "The Treasures of Tantalus" and I had to write to the publishers to get the preceding chapters. This story made me a scientifiction fan.

Thomas Sherred,
4303 Chatsworth Rd., Detroit, Mich.

(We doubt if we shall get any more items concerning the travels of Baron Münchhausen. There was a real person of that name and it has got into the English language as a synonym for a wild romancer. The name is spelled with two h's in the original with an umlaut over the u, but in English these are dispensed with. We shall hope to get more from Mr. Hicks however, yet some of the more seriously disposed of our readers objected to the gentleman—we think very unjustly. The magazines you mention in the last sentences of your letter are not published by us, and we have no connection with them.—EDITOR.)

(*Continued on page* 864)

The monstrous thing dropped swiftly, like a descending parachute, towards me

VAMPIRES *of the* DESERT

Illustrated by WESSO

By A. Hyatt Verrill

Author of: "Into the Green Prism," "Death from the Skies," etc.

¶ *After a rainfall, a good part of the arid deserts of Chile, Peru and Bolivia are covered with abundant vegetation. Only recently there was a temporary change in the climate of Peru. This involved a great deal of rain, which definitely threatened the guano industry of the celebrated bird islands off the coast. Suppose another change occurred in the ocean currents to give even greater rainfall in these regions. Is it beyond the realm of possibility to say that the almost fossil seeds of prehistoric plants might come to life again? At any rate, it is a clever idea, ingeniously built up into a scientifiction story of Verrill's highest order.*

WHEN I sailed for Peru, to accept a position as field paleontologist for the International Petroleum Company at their oil fields near Talara, I little dreamed what amazing experiences and astounding adventures were in store for me.

The life of a paleontologist is not, as a rule, an exciting or adventurous one. In fact, there is scarcely a branch of scientific field work that promises so little in the way of adventure, peril or thrills. Fossils, interesting as they may be to the trained scientist who studies them, are not what one might call dangerous game. Neither are they elusive, shy nor suspicious of human beings. And, aside from the ordinary and to-be-expected hardships of camp life and field work, hunting fossils is perhaps the safest and tamest of professions. And as I was to hunt and study the smallest and most abundant of fossils—namely, diatoms and foraminifera—for the presence of certain species of these minute fossil animals is known to have a very direct bearing upon petroleum deposits, and as my hunting ground was in the open desert where there were neither wild animals nor wild men, and as my entire field of activities was within sight and sound of the busy oil refineries, the wells, the pump-houses and the well ordered "camp" or town, the possibility of any excitement, any danger or anything unusual never occurred to me. And had anyone suggested such eventualities, I most assuredly would have laughed them to scorn. Yet, so strange is fate and so whimsical her moods, and so little do we know of the future that, within a few months after my arrival at Talara, I was to have some of the most astounding, even incredible experiences that ever came into the life of any man. Indeed, were it not that the facts are well known, and that meagre reports of the remarkable occurrences have already been published in the press, I should hesitate to write of them for fear of being classed as a romancer and as writing fiction in the guise of fact. But I feel that, as precisely the same things may—in fact, probably will—recur again somewhere—even if not in Peru—and as many human lives, perhaps entire communities, may be destroyed by such recurrences, the public should be acquainted with all the facts and details of the visitation, and thus should be prepared for its repetition.

But before beginning my story, I wish to disclaim the undue credit that has been accorded me for solving the baffling mystery of those terrible times and for saving the lives of hundreds — probably thousands—of my fellow men and fellow women. Any man with scientific training, a knowledge of zoology and with an interest in the unusual forms of animal and plant life could have done more than I did. It merely chanced that I was on the spot, that my scientific interests had been aroused before the happenings occurred and that I had always taken a deep interest in the botany of the tropics. Never before had this fad been of any real value to me or to anyone else. In the first place I never had visited the tropics and in the second place I made paleontology my life work and confined my studies to invertebrate paleontology at that. Yet I cannot help feeling that my amateurish interest in plant life must have been inspired by the Divinity and for the sole purpose which it later and so fortunately fulfilled.

One thing more I must mention, for it had a very great bearing upon the affair and enabled me to make deductions and to understand matters that otherwise would have been impossible to understand. During my post-graduate course at Yale I was greatly interested in the deep-sea researches of the United States Fish Commission under the direction of Professor Verrill, who was my instructor.

Largely, this was due to the fact that—as is well known—the ocean's beds are composed mainly of foraminiferous ooze, the accumulated billions of skeletal remains of foraminifera, and that many living species—closely akin to the fossil form—are obtained from great depths. But I soon found, when on the "Albatross" in company with the Professor and his assistants, that one branch of science—or more especially one branch of any one department of science—hinges upon another. Thus to study diatoms intelligently, I was compelled to make a fairly intensive study of other and higher forms of marine life. Such, for example, were the ascidians, or sea cucumbers; the corals and sea-anemones, the sponges, and such forms of life as the hydroids and bryozoans as well as jelly-fish. And had I not thus acquired a fairly comprehensive and accurate knowledge of the life histories and habits of these harmless and interesting marine creatures, I never would have been able to make head or tail of the affair during that nightmarish time at Talara.

Talara, as I have hinted, is situated on that barren, treeless, waterless strip of South America's coastal desert that stretches from the vicinity of Guayaquil in Peru southward to central Chile. It is not, however, a flat or level desert. Rather it consists of desert sandhills rising to rocky hills, equally bare and sterile, and forming an incorporate part of the desert, and which become higher and more numerous as they approach the Andes, into which they merge. In fact, the sand of the desert proper is nothing more or less than the accumulated detritus of these hills, decomposed and washed down through countless ages. Originally—or at least at some remote period—the entire area was beneath the sea. Hence the presence of fossils of marine organisms. And it was to study these remains, which millions of years ago were beneath the waters of the Pacific, that I was employed by the International Petroleum Company; for, strange as it may appear, some of the largest of the world's known oil deposits are in this desert country of Peru.

FOR countless centuries this desert has been rainless; in fact, it is a desert merely because of lack of rainfall, and as the sand is impregnated with nitrates, phosphates and potash, it is fertile and capable of producing large crops of agricultural products when watered or irrigated. Possibly my readers may think that this somewhat lengthy dissertation upon the Peruvian desert is quite unnecessary to my story, but let me assure them that it is most essential, and I request that those who may read this story of the incredible occurrences at Talara will read this portion very carefully. Otherwise it will be practically impossible to secure an intelligent idea of the happenings and their causes and to realize that they were neither miraculous, supernatural nor at all beyond the realms of cause and effect in nature.

Also, I must try the patience of my readers still further by briefly sketching the causes for the rainless, desert condition of this coast. The Humboldt Current, flowing northward from the Antarctic, tempers the normal temperatures of the tropical coasts of the equatorial and subequatorial regions of the west coast of South America and at the same time acts as a condenser for moisture-laden atmosphere that otherwise would reach the coast. Added to this is the fact that the warm, moisture-filled air from the vast Amazonian jungles is condensed by the cold Andean heights, and its moisture is thus deposited as rain or snow before it passes westward over the Andes.

At Talara, however, the Humboldt Current does not actually wash the coastline. A small, warm water current, known as the *Niño* or child, flows southward from the Bay of Panama and forces its way between the Humboldt Current and the shore. And the relative size and volume of these two currents vary considerably according to the force and direction of the prevailing winds and because of other causes—very possible seismic disturbances of the sea bed. From the earliest times, as proved by my studies of fossils and by the observations of more eminent scientists, these currents have varied. Often the variation is slight and temporary, but at other times it has been of long duration and very marked. Even a slight variation in either current has a decided effect upon the climate of the Peruvian coastal land. The temperature alters materially, mist and even light rains fall, and with miraculous suddenness vegetation springs up from the bare desert and barren hillsides. Usually the change continues for only a few days or weeks, but in the past ages such changes of currents, climate and the resultant vegetable and animal life obviously—as proved by fossil remains—endured for many years.

In fact, one of the first and most interesting discoveries I made was that the desert soil—to a depth of twenty-five feet or more—was in many spots composed of alternate layers or strata of sand, some clear and some containing a large percentage of plant seeds. It was thus evident that alternating periods of dryness and dampness had occurred from the most remote times, and while the proportionate number of strata and their relative depths varied somewhat, there was abundant evidence to show that from the most ancient times there had existed regularly defined and periodic eras of rainfall and lack of rainfall, with the accompanying abundance of vegetation and lack of vegetation. The lower layers of seeds were fossil, but the upper ones were comparatively recent and with so slight a layer of sand superimposed upon them that a heavy rain would unquestionably enable them to germinate and sprout. That this was the case, was in fact proved when in 1924-5, after a comparatively short period of rainy weather, the hills and deserts about Talara—and as far south as Antofogasta, Chile, became covered with a rank semi-jungle as high as a man's waist. Moreover, nearly all of the plants that then appeared were strange to the inhabitants and totally distinct from any found elsewhere in South America. And in examining the seeds which I discovered, I found that—with few exceptions—they were of species, genera and even families entirely new to me.

It was this discovery that again aroused my long-dormant interest in tropical plant life and I was about to try my hand at growing some of the more unusual seeds, when Nature saved me the trouble. A severe earthquake shook the entire west coast of South America, causing a vast amount of damage in southern Chile, raising Juan Fernandez Island several hundred feet above its former level and upraising the sea bed between that island and the coastline for at least two hundred feet. As a result, the greater portion of the Humboldt Current was deflected to the west into the Pacific, the warm Niño current increased in size and volume, and heavy rains at once commenced to fall along the coasts of Peru and Chile. Irreparable damage was caused in many localities. Estates, fields, villages and even large towns were swept away by floods that came pouring down the ancient dry river beds from the mountains. Buildings of sun-dried

adobe, well adapted to the formerly rainless climate, melted and were reduced to mud, and in a few weeks such cities as Piura, Trujillo and others were utterly obliterated.

In Chile the nitrate beds were completely destroyed, many large and prosperous communities were rendered uninhabitable, and even Lima, Peru's capital—being built largely of adobe—suffered losses totaling millions of dollars. Fortunately the capital's more modern buildings and residences were of concrete and remained unaffected, and for similar reasons Talara suffered little. The native shacks and the old churches and government edifices crumbled and vanished, but the majority of the buildings at the port, as well as the mining camps of Negritos and Lobitos, being of wood, concrete or corrugated iron construction, suffered none at all. Neither did the torrential rains cause any appreciable damage to the petroleum industry.

The sand, being washed away, allowed some of the derricks to topple and fall, many pipe-lines were broken and similar small damages resulted, but on the whole the rains appeared more of a blessing than a curse in the district. The climate, although warmer, was less oppressive; the bare desert and hills became almost instantly covered with tender green, and hollows that became filled with water were the resort of flocks of wild geese and ducks that afforded great sport for the employes of the company.

FINDING that my paleontological work was seriously—though I hoped only temporarily—interrupted by the rain and the disruption of some of my favorite localities for study, I had an abundance of spare time which I devoted to examining with the greatest interest the plants that had sprung up from the seeds I had discovered. Also, being a keen sportsman, I spent considerable time hunting, both about the pools I have mentioned and in the embryonic jungle that—within two weeks—had become waist-high and almost impenetrably dense. To my surprise and delight I discovered that with very few exceptions the growth was composed of plants which hitherto had been known only in a fossil state. There were many forms of tree-ferns, of the horse-tails, of giant lycopodiums and of odd aberrant leguminous plants that—as nearly as I could judge—were the ancestors of our common beans, peas, etc. At first I was greatly amazed to find these supposedly-extinct and fossil forms thus growing in abundance, but a short investigation and a little logical reasoning soon convinced me that it was a perfectly normal and easily explicable condition. From the most remote geological times the country had been periodically wet and dry as I have said. Hence plants that for a few years or centuries grew in the district, would have had no time to alter or evolve to higher forms before a rainless period occurred. Thus the earliest types of plant life that had existed in the district had been perpetuated with no great changes from the far-distant geological periods.

Probably on no other spot on earth could such a condition have occurred, and I decided to take advantage of the unique opportunity to write a monograph on the subject, to describe the habits and appearances of the plants, and to secure accurate photographs as well as to preserve specimens for the benefit of science.

It was while doing this that I came upon a small group of most peculiar shrubs. I say shrubs, though they were not shrubs in the true sense of the word. They were rather more like attenuated and branched tubers, like gigantic, slender and distorted sweet-potatoes growing above ground. The stalks were fleshy but fibrous and very tough. There were no leaves, and the growth, as well as the branching habit, was by means of joints or articulations, one tough olive-colored section budding from another and increasing in size and length until it, too, developed additional joints. When I first found the things, they were quite small—the largest barely a foot in height—but they grew with truly amazing rapidity. In a few days they were as high as my waist and all my interests became centered upon them. I found no others, although every natural surrounding and condition seemed identical with other localities, but, I reasoned, this was not surprising, as the same conditions that had led to the perpetuation of long-extinct species would at the same time have acted to localize each form.

The more I examined the odd growths, the more they puzzled me. In many respects they could not be classified among any of the various botanical genera, families or orders. I prepared sections and examined them under the microscope. I tried all means of identification—but in vain. Oddly enough, they bore many resemblances to the algæ or marine plants, and especially to those natural-history puzzles, the bryozoans and hydroids which seem to form connecting links between the animal and vegetable kingdoms. But who ever heard of a bryozoan or a hydroid growing on land? Still, I reasoned, in the remote periods of the earth's existence there may have been such, for there are land algæ as there are also marine arachnids or spiders. Why not land bryozoans and hydroids?

It was a fascinating thought, but until my strange growths saw fit to flower or seed I could not determine what they were. Hence my elation can be judged—at least by any scientist—when I discovered signs of the plants budding as if about to flower. At this time they were six feet or so in height with main stems as thick as a man's body and most remarkable appearing things. The buds—if buds they were—broke through the outer bark or skin at the terminal joints of the branches, and at the same time I noticed a distinct swelling or enlargement of these joints.

I can best compare the effect to the flowering of cacti. As the buds increased in size—with remarkable rapidity—they gave promise of being even more interesting and stranger than the plants themselves, and also of developing into blooms of great beauty.

There were indications of long delicate petals of brilliant colors, and it was obvious that the flowers would be of truly gigantic size. But my expectations had fallen far short of the reality, when, on visiting the spot one morning, I found one of the buds had partly opened. I had never seen anything like it or even resembling it. It was not by any means fully developed, and I judged from its appearance that it was a night-blooming plant, and that in order to see the flower in its full glory I would be obliged to visit the spot after dark. However, it was sufficiently open for me to obtain a good idea of its character, and I examined it with the most intense interest. It appeared semi-transparent, was very fleshy, or I might even say gelatinous, and was coated with a shining, moist, and apparently sticky substance. At the stem or base, for there was no true stem, it was a dark intense purple and bulbous in form. Beyond this purple area was a border or fringe of pure white membranous

growth, and beyond this were the innumerable long and multicolored petals—or so I judged them—that were folded or coiled together like the partly opened petals of a gigantic chrysanthemum flower.

In size the strange bloom was nearly four feet in length by three feet in diameter. It had no appreciable odor, and though I was greatly tempted to do so, I forebore touching it for fear of injuring it and preventing it from expanding to its full perfection. Yet, strange as it may seem, there was something about it, despite its beauty of form, its colors and its translucent gelatinous appearance, that was repellant. It was no doubt on account of its bizarre appearance, for I have noted that the human mind naturally recoils from or at least is suspicious of any unusual or strange form of some well-known natural object. Even human freaks have this effect upon the majority of persons, and the flower and the weird growth that bore it were sufficiently unusual and strange to create a vague dislike and even distrust in even my scientific mind.

However, I determined to visit the things after nightfall, and turned my attention to hunting. I returned to my quarters in time for breakfast with a fine bag of ducks and snipe. The rains had now ceased for several days, but the newly formed streams still flowed across the former deserts, and there was sufficient moisture in the soaked earth to keep vegetation going for some time. I mention this, because the cessation of the rains had a very direct bearing upon subsequent events.

It was while I was eating my breakfast that I had a phone call from Lobitos asking me to come over as soon as possible as a new field was being prospected and they wished me to make microscopic examinations of the samples from the test-holes. I was rather disappointed at thus being summoned away, when I had counted upon witnessing the full development of my strange plants, but I comforted myself with the thought that there would be many more flowers, and that I should not be long absent. So, packing my field outfit, I ordered the car and started for Lobitos. The work, I found, would take me much longer than I had expected, and I wondered if I would be able to return before all the remarkable flowers had blossomed and faded. Little did I dream how soon or in what a remarkable manner I should again meet with those puzzling, amazing productions of the unusual plants I had found.

IT was on the second day of my stay at Lobitos that news of the murders at Negritos reached us. Two Indian or rather Cholo laborers had been found dead in front of their barracks. Apparently they had been garroted or strangled to death, but there was no clue to the murderer and no known incentive for the crime. Both men had been—as for that matter were all the Peruvian Cholos—quiet, peaceful, hard-working and very inoffensive fellows. Their companions declared that neither had been in a brawl, a discussion, or an argument during the preceding evening or night; no one had heard loud or angry words, and as both bodies still had their week's wages upon them, robbery was discarded as a possible motive for the crime.

But Negritos was terribly stirred up over the tragedy. For years the place had been a model of law and order. There had not been a murder, a robbery, a burglary nor any serious offense committed for fully ten years and the only arrests had been for drunkenness, gambling or petty thefts among the natives and for trespass. And as Negritos and Lobitos were "dry" camps, even drunkenness was very rare. Hence two murders, occurring on one night, and without any known reason, created a great sensation. Moreover, there seemed little doubt that the crimes were committed by some stranger.

The Peruvian Indian or Cholo is not a particularly brave or desperate character. He abhors bloodshed or violence in any form, and neither I nor any of the officials could imagine a docile Cholo deliberately attacking and successfully strangling two men. And why, it was asked, had there been no outcry? It seemed inconceivable that the two men could have been killed so quickly that they could not have cried out. And why did the second victim remain quietly waiting, while his companion was being killed? In fact, the more we discussed it, the more mysterious it became.

"In my opinion," declared Sturgis, the chief engineer, who had had a tremendous amount of experience with the natives, "it's the work of a Chilean or a Colombian. Likely as not those two Cholos had worked somewhere where there'd been Chilenos or Colombians, and had got into some sort of trouble with them—maybe won too much at gambling, or it might have been over a woman. Then this bird drops in here, recognizes the fellows, and evens scores. The only thing that bothers me is why they weren't knifed—that's the Chileno method as a rule—and why they weren't robbed—no such a criminal ever lets a chance of pocketing a few dollars get by him."

"Hmm, in all probability the murderer didn't have time," suggested Henshaw. "He may have been scared off. But how the devil could one man strangle two others?"

"Maybe they weren't strangled," I put in. "I'll bet no one has made an examination to learn if they weren't knocked over the heads first. You see knifing a man isn't always a safe and quiet method of putting him out of the way—he's liable to yell. And it would have been as hard for a man to knife two Cholos without their giving a cry as it would have been to strangle two of them. In my opinion they were knocked senseless and then garroted. And doesn't it seem more like the work of an East Indian or an Oriental than a South American? Aren't there some coolies—Hindus—working up at Porvenir on the railway? And how about those Chinese and Japs at Talara? I'll bet it was one of those fellows."

"Maybe you're right," agreed Sturgis. "I hadn't thought of the Hindus or Chinese. But anyhow, Stevens will round 'em up whoever 'twas; he was chief of police in Manila and he's no slouch, even if this camp has got so darned law-abiding that he's grown fat and lazy."

At this moment the telephone rang, and Henshaw, who answered, turned to me. "You're wanted at Negritos, Barry," he said. "Stevens wants you to help him on this murder case. Says he needs a microscopist and asks if you're not a doctor of sorts—Doctor Samuels is off on leave, and that interne Rogers refuses to conduct a post-mortem unless he has a competent man—biologist or M.D. or anatomist or some kind of an 'ist'—along with him."

I was surprised, of course. But after all it was not surprising. I was the only microscopist available, and I had at one time taken a course in anatomy with the idea of becoming a surgeon. But I was not sorry to leave Lobitos. It was an unpleasant spot at best, and I was wishing I might have a chance to examine my remarkable flowers. Still I could not leave at once, I had to complete my work at Lobitos, for that, after all, was my real

job, and taking the 'phone I told Stevens I would go over to Negritos the next morning early. He swore and raved a bit—he was a testy old chap—but I pointed out that I was employed to conduct paleontological studies and not police-court investigations, and that I was answerable only to the New York office. In fact, I grew a bit peeved myself and added as a clincher that I was coming only to oblige him and out of curiosity, and that unless I were requested politely and not ordered, I wouldn't go at all. This quieted him. He apologized, begged me to hurry, and rang off.

Poor old Major Stevens! I was fated never to hear his voice again, never to see his ruddy face grow apoplectically purple as he sputtered, fumed and swore. And I and all the others were fated to have the shock of our lives before another twenty-four hours had passed.

I was aroused from a deep sleep by the furious ringing of the 'phone, and lifting the receiver heard an agitated, excited voice. "For God's sake, get back here!" it cried. "This is Merivale speaking. It's terrible—three more men murdered here last night—two women killed at Talara and—when we went to call Major Stevens we found him dead—strangled like the others. We need every white man we can get—there's a fiend incarnate here somewhere. We must find him and stop this thing. And, Barry, bring Henshaw with you."

I was aghast. What did it mean? Seven, no, eight murders within two days—and Major Stevens among them. It seemed incredible. What was the motive? Who was the murderer? How could he have committed the crimes without detection, when, as I felt sure, the camps had been patrolled and policed after those first two deaths? Of course, the motive for killing Major Stevens was plain. The murderer feared him and took this means of getting him out of the way. But the others—the Cholos. Only on the theory of a homicidal maniac could I explain it. Henshaw and Sturgis were as shocked and horrified as I was, and both agreed that some crazed native must be at the bottom of the killings, unless, as Sturgis suggested, some Oriental had run amuck. But when we reached Negritos in record time, and learned more of the details of the crime, we were at an utter loss.

MERIVALE was in charge, and though he was a competent enough young chap, and an excellent executive, he was so flabbergasted and upset over the Major's death that he didn't know which way to turn. In fact, he could scarcely give an intelligible account of the events that had occurred, and I found McGovern, the boss driller, far more lucid. He had been a little of everything in his day and at one time had been a New York policeman with a beat in one of the toughest sections of Manhattan's lower East Side.

Major Stevens, knowing of his police record, and cognizant of McGovern's ability to handle men, had sworn him in as a deputy, and had placed him in charge of policing the camp. He was a huge, burly fellow; red-haired, freckle-faced, and was personally acquainted with every man, woman and child in the district. He had known the two Cholos killed on the first night, and he assured me, as he said he had assured the Major, that both were the most industrious and law-abiding of natives.

"Sure, Pablo an' Gonzalez was hard-working, dacint lads," he declared. "Didn't I have thim worrkin' over to thoity-two week afore last. Niver the gamblin' nor drinkin' sort, sor, an' peaceful as lambs. Now who the divvil, I'm askin' ye, would have raison for bumpin' of thim two lads off? An' they wasn't robbed, neither. No, sor, 'tis not robbery nor a row nor nothin' of that kind that caused it. 'Twas some extr'o'd'nary motive, as ye might say, an' ye'll have to find the motive afore ye find the murderer, if ye ask me. Who do I think it might be? B'gorra, how should I know? And then these others last night. Yes, sor, the camp was lit bright as day and the gang of us patrollin' the place. Sure, there was fourteen on us all gumshoin' about, an' meself wit' three boys on duty fernist the Cholos' quarters. An' niver a sound of a foight nor a cry nor nothin'. Thin with the comin' av day-loight come a scream from Block Wan, an' another yell from Block Foive, an' wimmen a-runnin' an' me an' the boys beatin' it to find what the trouble was an' all, an' there they be—the three of thim, deader'n busted drills, an' never a mark onto 'em savin' of the red marks about their necks. B'gorra, no, I'm mistook. Wan of thim had marks on his chest an' another on his face like they'd been shot wit' rock salt, if ye know what I mean. An' then off I goes to tell the Major—God rest his soul—and to find him dead by the same token. 'Tis downright unnat'ral, sor. Damned uncanny. An' I don't mind admittin' it's got me goat, sor."

"What about the women killed at Talara?" I asked.

But McGovern had no definite information about them. They had, so it was reported, been found dead, obviously killed, on the desert just outside the town, and as they had been alive and well at a late hour the preceding evening, and had started for their homes on the hillside beyond the cemetery, about eleven, it was certain they had been murdered sometime between that hour and daybreak.

"I'll be damned if I see how a man could kill three Cholos and the Major up here and two women at Talara at the same time," cried Henshaw. "McGovern and his men didn't see a soul on the street or on the road, there was no car out and it's a sure bet the murderer didn't travel by airplane. And everyone swears those three men in Blocks One and Five were not dead at midnight. And there's the Major—he was all right at two o'clock this morning."

"I don't consider that part of the affair as remarkable as the other facts," I told him. "A man could walk to Talara in a couple of hours. But why should the fiend kill five men here and two women there? How did he manage it without being seen or heard by McGovern or his men, and why didn't any one of the five—or rather, eight—cry out? And how did he kill them? I tell you, Henshaw, there's something deep in this that we haven't thought of yet. In my opinion the murdered people have been killed by some means we haven't suspected—that strangling is just a bluff—it's some terrible poison or something of that sort—perhaps administered hours before the men die."

"How about that knocking them on the head theory of yours?" asked Henshaw.

"That might be it if it was not for the Major," I said. "I can't imagine anyone sneaking up on him."

"It would have been easy enough," declared Henshaw. "He was sitting close to his open door and very likely fell asleep. If I were in your place I'd get on with the post-mortems and see if you can find any signs of any injuries or of poisons. But I don't envy you your job."

"It's not mine," I informed him, "and if you don't

look out, I'll call you in to help. We've all got to get into this. I'm going to do all I can and Merivale wants me to take charge as senior here. I wish to Heaven old Doctor Daniels were here. Young Rogers is a good doctor—good enough for his routine or hospital work, but he's never made a post-mortem in his life and I know very little about such things. However, I suppose Rogers can find out if there are injuries and if there was poison given. I'm merely going to be present and make microscopic examinations of the stomach contents and blood."

But the results of the post-mortems left us as much in the dark as ever—in fact more puzzled than ever. The Cholos all seemed to have been victims of pernicious anæmia, or to have bled to death, although there were no wounds that would have accounted for any considerable loss of blood. The marks upon their faces and chests that McGovern had mentioned were punctures, but seemed barely to penetrate the skin, and there were no blood stains of any considerable extent upon the men's garments. In two cases there were severe contusions on the heads, but these might have been caused by falling upon the stones. The third man, however, had a small puncture in his jugular vein, and the left eye was injured and appeared as though the eyeball had been pierced and the liquid had run out. Yet there was no blood upon the fellow's clothes. We did not make a post-mortem upon the Major, but externally there were no marks upon his body that seemed adequate to have caused death, aside from the red line about the throat that was present on all the bodies. And, unlike the Cholos, he appeared to have lost little, if any, blood. We got into telephonic communication with the resident doctor at Talara who reported that the dead women bore no marks of violence aside from numerous small punctures on the breasts and back, which marks he compared to the marks that might have been caused by bird-shot fired from a distance, yet there were no shot in the wounds. Neither did my microscopic examination of the stomach contents, the tissues or the blood reveal the presence of recognizable poison, and Rogers' chemical tests showed no toxic reactions.

Of course all this took time, and it was late in the afternoon when the disagreeable work had been completed. All ordinary work had come to a complete standstill. No one could put his mind on work; the executives and bosses were all too much engrossed with the succession of mysterious tragedies to carry on, and the Cholos had a glorious loaf, apparently quite unmoved and undisturbed by the uncanny fate of their friends and companions. And naturally the camps were in a tremendous state of excitement and nervous tension. The women were frightened almost out of their wits, no children were allowed out of doors, and even in broad daylight everybody acted as if they expected to be struck down by some invisible hand at any moment.

The men too seemed to be filled with superstitious dread. The mere fact that men were murdered—even had there been three times as many—would not have troubled the hard-boiled rough-necks who made up the working force of white men. Most of them had led wild lives. They had been in many a mining camp where human life was held cheap and murders were everyday matters, and the majority of them had been in the World War. A score of men—either natives or white—killed in a riot, a strike, a quarrel or a drunken brawl would not have caused them a moment's thought. But the mysterious manner of the eight deaths, the inexplicable reason for the murders, and the fact that there seemed no clues to the murderer filled these tough, case-hardened old-timers with the fear of the supernatural. Indeed, more than one openly expressed his opinion that the men had not been killed by anything human, that some old Incan devil or evil spirit had had a hand in the tragedies, and that the only safe course was for everyone to clear out and stay out.

Of course, the intelligent population scoffed at such ideas. We knew well enough that murders had been committed, and we felt confident that whoever had so far eluded us would be captured if he attempted to repeat his crimes. And we arranged such a complete cordon of guards, sentries and police about the camp—that we felt positive that if the murdered put in an appearance that night he would never escape us.

LOOKING back upon it now, I can realize how really silly and amateurish our plans were. On the previous evening the murderer had committed his fiendish crimes despite the brilliant illumination of electric lights and the presence of a large force of men, and had escaped unseen. And yet we thought that by darkening the streets, by hiding in the shadows, and by giving orders that no inhabitant was to be on the streets after eleven, that we could apprehend a murderer who had shown such devilish ingenuity in eluding everyone hitherto.

It was a dark, starless night, and only enough lights had been left burning to enable us to see moving figures, should they appear upon the streets.

Fully fifty men were on duty in the camp, and I had also posted a dozen men outside the limits of the camp where they could watch the surrounding desert. These men were carefully hidden, some in the dense shadows of the oil-derricks, others behind piles of pipe, and still others back of rocks or other objects. It seemed to us at the time that it would be utterly impossible for any living creature to approach the camp undetected or to make a way through the streets unseen by the armed watchers. Of course there was the chance that the maniac or fiend or whoever he was would not appear, that he had satiated his lust for killing, or that, knowing we were awaiting him, he would keep away until the excitement and watchfulness had died down, or perhaps forever. But we reasoned that he must be a maniac or a drug-fiend and that in such case he would continue his attacks and, moreover, would not reason that he was courting disaster by reappearing.

Nothing had occurred up to midnight. I had gone the rounds several times, all the men reported on duty, thoroughly wide awake, and not a sign of anyone other than the patrols had been seen. One o'clock, two o'clock passed, and then suddenly—echoing horribly through the darkness—came a frenzied scream of deadly terror. Instantly, with chills running up and down my back, I dashed in the direction of the cry, and I heard the racing footsteps of half a dozen of my men behind me. But we had not gone fifty yards before we were met by a flying figure rushing madly towards us from the desert. It was McGovern, and never have I seen mad terror and fear so depicted as upon the big Irishman's face. His eyes rolled, his mouth twisted and slobbered, his teeth chattered and his bulky muscular frame shook and trembled like that of a frightened child. He was almost bereft of his senses. He actually clung to me, and he babbled and mumbled incoherently. With the utmost difficulty we

finally got him to talk intelligibly. And the tale he told was incredible.

He had been sitting, he declared—interlarding his story with many ejaculations and frequently crossing himself—upon a pile of lumber in the shadow of a newly-erected derrick about one hundred feet beyond the barracks known as Block Seven. He insisted he had been wide awake, that he had felt no fear, and that he had continually turned and peered in all directions. No human being, he declared positively, could have approached him unseen, and yet, suddenly and without sound or warning, something soft, cool and damp had been thrown over his head, almost smothering him; a muscular arm had encircled his neck, fingers had gripped his throat, and he had felt blinded, choked, strangling. Terrified almost to madness, using all his tremendous strength, he had struggled, fought, tried to tear the throttling arm loose, to throw off the smothering thing that had dropped—like a wet blanket as he described it—over his head. For a time it had seemed as if his struggles had no effect. He turned, twisted, tried to reach his adversary's body, but in vain. Then, whether by accident or design he was not certain, he had flung himself down, had rolled in a pool of thick crude oil, and instantly the strangling hand released its grip, the covering over his head had been jerked away, and leaping up, screaming at the top of his lungs, McGovern had turned and raced towards the camp.

Scarcely waiting to hear the end of his amazing tale we dashed forward to the spot where the Irishman had been attacked. But there was no sign of a living thing in the vicinity. In fact, we would have doubted the Irishman's story, would have thought he had dozed off and had dreamed the whole thing, had it not been for the oil smeared over him, the marks where he had struggled from the pool, and the distinct red imprint upon his neck.

For an hour or more we searched the desert, every possible hiding place in it, and were on the point of giving up when a shout from Jackson brought us on the run. He was standing beside a pile of rusty scrap-iron, his eyes staring, and pointing towards a huddled form lying in the shadow. I flashed my electric torch and sprang back with an involuntary cry of shock and amazement. There, limp and lifeless, his rifle still across the knees, was the dead body of Henderson, one of the patrol.

"Mother of God!" cried McGovern who, still shaking and trembling, had kept close by my side. "The divvil got the poor b'y. Glory be, sor, will ye now be after sayin' 'tis anny human sowl as does be doin' the killin's?"

We stared at one another with blank, frightened faces. It was uncanny, incredible. Whoever the murderer might be, he was possessed of almost supernatural powers, it seemed. Silently, unseen, unheard, unsuspected, he had stolen upon Henderson, had killed him before the poor fellow could utter a sound. And death must have been instantaneous; for otherwise, had there been any struggle, the rifle would not have remained across Henderson's knees. The only explanation was that Henderson, unlike McGovern, had been attacked while he slept. And this, I felt sure, proved that Henderson had been killed before McGovern had been attacked, for otherwise he would have been awakened by the big Irishman's frenzied shrieks.

But the amazing, the baffling events of that night were not yet at an end. When, bearing Henderson's body, we returned to the camp, Merivale and Rogers met us with two of the patrol, and at my first glance at their faces I knew that some tragedy had occurred.

"My God, Barry!" exclaimed Rogers. "The watchman at the hospital has been murdered! He couldn't have been dead five minutes when I found him—and, you may think me crazy or not—I caught a glimpse of the fiend that killed him. I'm not mad, I don't drink, and I was wide awake, but I swear as I am alive this minute that I saw a dim shadowy form rise from his body and vanish—yes, absolutely vanish in thin air, before my eyes."

"Nonsense!" I ejaculated, striving to steady my voice, for the manifest terror of the two was a bit contagious. "If you saw the man, who was he? What was he like?"

"Man!" cried Rogers. "It wasn't a man. It was a—a—thing—a—a—ghost!"

"Blessed Mary, protect us!" exclaimed McGovern, crossing himself devoutly and pressing close to my side as he glanced furtively into the shadows as if expecting some terrible demon to materialize. "Didn't Oi say 'twas no human sowl that was afther murderin' the b'ys. An' 'twas no man born of woman as fought wit' me, sor."

I forced a laugh. "You were dreaming, Rogers," I declared. "You *imagined* you saw something. None of us believes in ghosts or supernatural things."

"He was *not* dreaming," put in Merivale. "I ran up when Rogers yelled and I saw it, too. And it wasn't anything human."

I GASPED. I could not doubt the statements of two men. The watchman had been killed; both insisted they had seen a thing, some phantasmal object that had vanished. What *did* it mean? What could the thing—the death-dealing phantom—be? But I did not and do not believe in ghosts nor in anything supernatural. Everything, I have always argued, is explicable by natural causes, and recovering from my first vague feelings of dread and the tingling of my nerves at the uncanniness of the men's stories, I attacked the matter from a common sense point of view.

"Perhaps you both *did* see something," I agreed. "But if you did, it was no ghost. Even if we believed in ghosts—and *I* do not, and I don't believe either of you do—no one ever heard of a ghost injuring anyone. And the being who has committed these crimes has muscular strength, is flesh and blood. McGovern here was attacked by him, and he can tell you, when he gets over his mad superstitious terror, that it was no ghostly, spiritual, wraith-like thing that he fought with. If it appeared to vanish, it was merely because it slipped out of sight in the darkness. But of course there is a remote—a very remote possibility that it is *not* a human being. It may be some strange bird of prey, although I have no faith in such a theory. No bird, nor for that matter any animal, strangles men to death. In my own opinion it is some demented Oriental—perhaps a member of the East Indian Thugg clan. The manner in which a cloth is thrown over the victim's head, and the strangling, are both strikingly like the methods of the Thuggs. I believe that what you two saw was the cloth or blanket or poncho that the fellow uses. In all probability, he is nude or nearly so, and therefore almost invisible in the darkness. But the cloth he uses may be light-colored. As he escaped after murdering the watchman, this cloth showed for an instant before he gathered it up. That would have given the effect you describe, Rogers. And coming as you did from light into darkness, your eyes

would have failed to see his form, and moreover, your eyes being attracted by and focused upon the cloth, you would have failed to see his body. Anyhow, we now know the fellow's method. He smothers his victims' cries by his cloth—that is why there has never been a cry nor a scream when men have been attacked—and then strangles them."

"Fine!" exclaimed Merivale with sarcasm. "But how about those punctures? And what's his big idea? And how does he get by the patrols and get away?"

"I don't think the punctures as you call them have anything to do with the case at all," I replied. "How do we know they were not on the bodies of the people previous to their being killed? A lot of these Cholos have sores and eruptions, you know. And maniacs are notoriously clever in eluding those set to capture them. A naked Hindu or Chinaman can slip through the shadows where no white man could pass undetected."

"Well, I hope you're right," said Rogers. "I don't believe in spirits any more than you do, Barry. But I'll admit I had a bad turn when I saw that ghostly-looking, cloud-like thing float away from the watchman's body and vanish. But I expect the excitement is over for tonight. The east is beginning to lighten. It's almost morning."

But though the excitement was over for the night, as Rogers said, the coming of day brought most exciting news to us at Negritos. Sturgis called up from Lobitos, and my face paled when he informed me that two men had been found killed—strangled—at his camp. Hardly had he finished speaking when Colcord called from Talara and reported that four murders had been committed there. An hour or two later our wireless operator picked up a message from the Grace Liner *"Santa Julia"* with the astounding news that three persons—two men of the crew and a passenger—had been found dead upon the ship's decks that morning, and that all appeared to have been garroted. And, as if this were not enough, we heard from Paita that there had been a similar killing there.

My brain whirled; I could scarcely believe my senses, and the others were struck dumb by these incredible reports. How was it possible that such things could have occurred? How could the murderer have killed victims in Negritos, Lobitos, Talara—fifty miles away at Paita—in the same night? And even if it were possible for any human being to have rushed hither and thither over such an area, there was the incredible fact that he, it, whatever it was, had struck down victims aboard a steamship twenty miles from the coast.

Henshaw was the first to break the tense, awed silence. "Damn it!" he ejaculated. "It's impossible. I'm not superstitious and I'm willing to admit anything within reason. But this is too much. No human being could have done this. Either there's a crowd of the murderers—an organized gang—or else, well, I'm not going to admit the ghost or spirit theory yet, but if it's not the work of a gang it's the work of some damn force or power or plague and not anything human."

"McGovern will assure you it was neither plague nor disease," I reminded him. "And," I added, "Rogers and Merivale actually saw something. Isn't it possible—even if highly improbable—that it is the work of some new and strange creature—some bird or gigantic bat, some sort of vampire?"

"I'm beginning to think anything's possible," declared Henshaw. "And by the way, it looks as if we'd have to shut down if this keeps on. All my gang at Lobitos have quit and half the Cholos here have cleared out. McGovern tells me he's leaving for Lima this afternoon; the drillers and riggers are ready to quit, and every woman in the camp who can get away is going to leave this damned place by the first ship."

I nodded. "Yes, I know," I replied. "And I can't much blame them. Any murders are bad enough, but with the mysterious and uncanny added as they are here, no one wants to hang around. And no one knows who may be the next victim. Do you know, one thing that puzzles me is why so few of the whites have been attacked. Poor Major Stevens is the only white man killed so far, and the only other one attacked was McGovern."

"You forget those three on the *"Julia,"* he reminded me. "They were all white."

"And there have only been two women killed," put in Merivale.

"I don't see as those facts make any great difference," declared Rogers. "The fact remains that people are killed every night, that beginning with two the first night the—well, murderers—have increased their toll to eleven—if we include McGovern, who escaped by the skin of his teeth—last night. At that rate of progression there should be twenty-five deaths tonight, fifty or sixty tomorrow night and several hundred by Saturday."

"My God!" cried Henshaw, "I hadn't thought of it that way. Why, damn it, Barry, if this goes on everyone will be wiped out in a week!"

I forced a smile. "Provided Rogers' mathematical series of progression continues, there won't be a living man or woman left on earth in a year or so," I remarked. "But we have no reason to assume that the same increase will continue. Put it another way. The murders began here with two, and last night only one was killed here. Possibly the activities of the killers will be devoted to other localities in the future. But to my mind the all-important thing is to find out who or what they are, why they are killing people at random, and how to put a stop to it. It is not the number of deaths, but the fact that there are any; the fact that no one is safe—that is important. As a mere matter of lives lost—why, last year more men were killed by accidents right here in Negritos than all those who have been murdered. It's the manner, the cause of death, that makes it so terrible."

"Well, how are we going to get anywhere? And what more can we do than we have done?" demanded Merivale.

"I suggest we put a barbed wire entanglement around the camp," said Rogers. "If the—the thing—gets in through that, we'll know it's not human."

"And flood the whole damned place with searchlights," added Henshaw.

"We'll do both," I agreed. "And if the—well, the murderer—gets in and attacks anyone, we'll be able to see him at any rate."

BUT—though it sounds utterly incredible and impossible—despite the barbed-wire barrier and the flood of light, another person fell a victim to the mysterious death that night—and this time a white woman, Mrs. Veitch, the schoolteacher, who, throughout the terrifying and exciting times had remained unperturbed and had slept nightly on her sleeping-porch. And from such places as Piura, Salaverry, Trujillo and Catavia came reports of the same weirdly mysterious deaths.

"I tell you it's a plague or a disease," declared Rogers. "McGovern just imagined he was attacked."

Henshaw snorted. "And didn't you yourself swear you and Merivale *saw* something?" he asked.

"I did," admitted Rogers, "but I've come to the conclusion we were both deluded. We must have imagined it. If you can suggest anything within reason—other than some virulent disease—that can kill people hundreds of miles apart and can come in here through barbed wire and flood-lights and strike down victims, then I'll admit anything. But every detail is like the effect of some plague—the way it has spread, the unexpected way it strikes, the lack of wounds on the bodies, the condition of the blood of the victims. And those marks—or punctures—all indicate some terrible, unknown malady."

"One thing I have noticed," observed Henshaw, "is that this whole business has started since that earthquake and the change in the climate. It's only since the rains started and vegetation grew up that these deaths have occurred. That in a way would bear out the plague theory. I don't know, but it's possible that there's some germ in the soil that has been revived and made active by the wet weather."

"On the contrary," I declared, "we had no deaths during the intensely rainy period. All the murders have occurred since the rains stopped and the weather has been dry, and that looks to me as if it had no connection with the rain."

"Hmm, well, we may have a chance to decide upon that," said Henshaw. "It's clouding up and looks and feels like more rain."

He was not mistaken. It began to rain that afternoon; by nightfall it was pouring, and throughout the night it came down in torrents. And not a death occurred, not a murder was reported within the rainy area, although six men were killed and three women murdered about Salaverry and Trujillo, where no rain fell. Of course, as I pointed out, this might have been a coincidence, but when, on the four succeeding nights, it rained and no deaths occurred, and when the rain had extended southward to Chancay and not a murder took place anywhere, we began to feel that the rain had a lot to do with it and that Rogers' theory of the deaths resulting from some disease was the correct hypothesis.

And as days followed days and not a recurrence of the killings was reported, and as the weather continued rainy, we all decided that, regardless of the fact that none could explain it, no scientific or medical solution could be given, yet the mysterious deaths had been brought about by some germ or spore or microbe that was only virulent during dry spells after heavy rains. As Rogers put it: Some unknown deadly germ was bred or developed from a dormant state by the rain, but only became active when the weather was dry. But even he could offer no suggestion to account for the fact that the deaths occurred only during the night.

However, as the plague seemed over, as all were now convinced that there was no human element in the matter, and as the rains seemed likely to continue indefinitely—the Weather Bureau and the meteorological experts agreed that unless another alteration of the ocean's bed took place, the climate would remain permanently wet—those tragic, terror-filled nights were almost forgotten. The drillers and riggers, having had no opportunity to sail away, overcame their fears and returned to work; the Cholos drifted back to the camps from the hills, and the women abandoned their packing and preparations for departure and decided to live on at the camps.

Once more I was free to carry on my studies, and one of my first acts was to make a visit to the strange plants I had been so long forced to neglect.

Much to my chagrin I found them wilted, dead, and with only the scars on the back to show where the flowers had been. In vain I searched about, looking for fruit, seeds or even remains of the blooms. But several weeks had passed, the rains had been severe, and decomposition of all dead vegetation was very rapid. I was greatly disappointed, but it could not be helped, and transforming my botanical expedition into a hunt, I started through the jungle in the hopes of securing some quail or pigeons. I had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile when I reached the banks of one of the recently formed streams and, following up this, I came upon a partly decomposed, mushy, gelatinous object lying at the edge of the water. For a moment I thought it the body of some fish or animal, but there was little odor of decaying animal matter emanating from it, and as I bent nearer I discovered that it was the wilted and decaying flower of some unknown plant. Something about it appeared familiar, and suddenly it dawned upon me that it was the blossom of one of my queer shrubs. Quite obviously it had been blown or washed to the stream and had been carried by the current until it had found a resting place on the shore. It was a very poor specimen, but I examined it with great interest. From what I could determine, it differed but little from the flowers I had seen before in their nearly opened bud-form. The purple color had faded to a dingy brown, the white had turned yellow and was discolored, but I could still distinguish the gigantic bulbous calyx, the membranous fringe that encircled the long semi-circular petals, the thread-like filaments that I assumed were stamens, and the fragment of a thick, fleshy, spiny pistil. In full blossom and freshly opened upon its parent stalk, it must have been a gorgeous and truly remarkable sight, I decided; but it was beyond preservation and with a sigh of regret that I would probably never have the opportunity of witnessing the strange plants in bloom, I turned away.

But a few minutes later I came upon another of the decaying flowers. This time, to my amazement, I discovered that the jointed, leafless shoots of new plants were sprouting from the earth about it. Here was a most interesting state of affairs. There were no seeds or fruit but new plants were germinating from the flower itself, apparently. Still, upon second thought, I realized this was not so remarkable. Many of the Cacti and Bromeliads, I knew, would grow from portions of the stalks, even from the buds or flowers, and I had long before decided that my plants were closely related to if not members of the Cacti or the Bromeliad group. But more than anything else I was greatly elated to know that I might yet have a chance to witness the blooming of the growths. If the rains continued, they would spring up and develop rapidly, and in a fortnight more should bud and blossom. That afternoon I found several more of the old flowers, and in every case new stalks were sprouting up. At that rate, I thought, in a few months the whole mountainside would be covered with the plants, and I imagined what a truly wonderful sight would be presented when they were covered with hundreds, thousands, of the huge, magnificent flowers in full bloom. What a pity they were night-bloomers like the cereus! But even so, a hillside covered with the gigantic white

and mauve flowers when viewed by moonlight would be a sight never to be forgotten, and worth coming many miles to view.

ALMOST daily I visited some of the plants. They grew rapidly, seeming to absorb the remains of the flowers, and to my surprise I found them scattered over a very wide area. And my surprise was increased when, in speaking of them to my friends, Merivale said he had run across one of the growths far out in the area of the former desert, and Sedgwick declared he had been attracted to some of the queer-looking plants when he was more than half way to Lobitos. It seemed incredible that the big flowers could have blown so far, and I could only account for it on the supposition that there had been other plants that I had not located at the beginning of the rainy period.

When, soon after, I saw indications of the nearest plants budding, I became quite excited, and I watched with intense interest as the buds swelled, the flowers developed, and glimpses of the white and purple blooms showed through their rough brownish integument. Finally the time came when I felt that on any night the blooms might open and, fearing that I might miss the sight, for I felt sure the flowers lasted in their full perfection for only one night, I decided to visit the plants that evening. But the rain came down in torrents and when, after half-wading through the water and mud and drenched to the skin, I reached the nearest clump of plants, I found the flowers in exactly the same state as they had been in the day before. Very obviously they would not expand during rainy weather, and cursing myself for an idiot—for I should have known that this would be the case and that few night-blooming flowers open except in fine weather—I returned to camp, deciding to await dry weather before again going tramping off on such another wild-goose chase.

But I was doomed to bitter disappointment once more. I was unexpectedly summoned to a new oil field being prospected at Langosta Bay, and as luck would have it, dry weather commenced almost as soon as I left. Langosta, being quite out of the world and a mere prospecting camp in the desert—for owing to some freaky wind current or its location this area had not altered in climate like the rest of the coast—no news of the outer world reached us except when—once a fortnight—a Lima-Guayaquil plane dropped in on us with mail and newspapers.

Hence it was two weeks after my arrival at Langosta before we had any news of our friends at Negritos and Talara. And when the Ford trimotored plane came gliding down and we received our letters and the papers, we found them filled with most amazing and fearful tales. Everywhere, during the past week, men, women, children and even domestic animals had fallen victims to the baffling, mysterious death that stalked abroad at night and struck down silently, instantly. More than fifty had been killed in and about Talara; as many more had succumbed from the plague at Negritos, for by this time everyone was agreed that it *was* some terrible, unknown malady. Nineteen out of the total population of four hundred had died at Lobitos. Several of the native villages in the hills had been completely wiped out, and scores had been killed at Paita, at Salaverry, about Trujillo and back in the hills about Piura. A few deaths had even been reported from as far south as Casma and as far north as Tumbes, but the center appeared to be about Talara and Negritos, and a theory was advanced that the germs of the deadly, terrible disease were brought up by the drilling or by the oil. Work had completely ceased at the camps. Nearly all the Cholos and most of the whites had left the stricken district, but finding a rigid quarantine in force at Lima and in all other parts, the poor frightened inhabitants had been forced to return to their homes, where they were living in a state of terror almost impossible to describe.

Doctors and specialists were being rushed from the States and the Canal Zone to the locality with orders to make a thorough investigation and to locate the death-dealing germs, and the International Petroleum Company had employed the most eminent specialists at enormous salaries and with offers of veritable fortunes in the form of rewards to anyone who could discover a way of checking the inroads of this new menace to the entire population of the country.

The first to arrive had been Doctor Heinrich, the noted German biologist, who had been in Guayaquil making an intensive study of tropical fungus diseases of the skin. He had dashed to Talara by plane and had at once plunged into the problem with his customary energy and thoroughness.

BUT his first reports somewhat amused me, despite the seriousness of the situation. The deaths, he announced, were the result of some malady that attacked the respiratory organs, the effect being to smother the victim. This primary effect was followed almost instantly by a high fever, a constriction of the throat muscles, and the consequent rupture of small blood vessels. The germs, which he felt sure entered the system through the almost invisible openings in the skin, caused, as a third and final effect, extreme anæmia. Examination of the blood remaining in those stricken showed practical elimination of the red corpuscles, and in some cases practically no arterial blood whatever. Undoubtedly, the learned doctor proceeded to explain, the remarkable statements of McGovern and others describing the feeling of a cloth being thrown over their heads and a strangling arm encircling their necks, was the result of the smothering effect of the germs entering the human system. In mild attacks—which had been extremely rare—the symptoms had all been identical in this respect. All those who had been attacked described the smothering cloth, the pressure upon the neck, the mad struggle to escape. These were precisely the mental impressions that would result—so he averred—from the effects of the malady as he had described them. Pressure upon nerves and arteries, caused by the spasmodic contraction of the muscles affected by the germs, would induce pressure upon the brain and mental illusions. Hence the victims, feeling smothered, would imagine the cloth and the external pressure, and might quite reasonably be expected to imagine seeing objects that did not exist.

Hence, he argued with Teutonic logic, the fact that several persons had sworn to seeing indescribable forms rushing off when, by herculean efforts, they had recovered from the attacks, merely proved that they had been temporarily mentally deranged by the effects of the germs entering their systems. He had, he continued, made a very careful examination of all such persons, and had found them invariably excited, in a state of nervous exhaustion, and subject to violent and sudden fits of terror and to suggestion. He had endeavored to isolate the germs from samples of their blood, but so far without success, and he concluded by stating almost positively

that the disease was neither contagious nor transmissible; that it was in a way similar to tetanus, and that it was unquestionably the result of the alteration in climatic conditions. "In all probability," he wrote, "the germs have been present but dormant in the deserts for centuries. The rainfall has invigorated and propagated them, and as they become active and dry, they are carried by the wind to find lodgement upon their living hosts. It is a notable and suggestive fact that the activity of the disease is confined to dry periods and to the hours of darkness; also that while the deaths resulting from the disease have spread southward—with the prevailing winds—they have not spread northward against the prevailing air currents, except in a few isolated cases."

As preventative measures, he recommended remaining indoors after dark—he pointed out that with one or two exceptions no one in well-closed houses had suffered—bathing in carbolic or other disinfectant solutions, and refraining from excitement, overeating, exhaustive exercises or nervousness.

Poor old Doctor Heinrich! The very morning after he had published his report—which contained nothing we did not already know—he was found dead on the steps of his own home, another victim of the "night death," as it was now called.

And as if his death had been the signal, the rains had come again, and not a death had been reported since.

"Looks to me," observed Torrens, the long, lean-jawed Texas engineer, "as if what you-all need over at Negritos is a lot of fire-hose. These bugs don't look to bite when it's wet. Just keep a lot of hose playing 'roun' the camp and the bugs'll keep away."

"I'm not at all sure that such a scheme might not work," I said, "but it would not help the rest of the world. And there's another queer feature to the whole horrible business. Not a death has been reported from any of the sections that are still dry—from this district, for example, or from Cacamaquilla or the Huaranay country."

"'Pears like to me the bugs sure like places where there's sunshine after showers," drawled Torrens. "Mebbe they'd dry up and turn into bug mummies out in this desert country—feel like I might get mummified myself if I'm here much longer. And they're night birds, too. All jokin' aside, ain't it possible they can't stand sunshine or heat and that's why they don't wander thisaway? Anyhow you look at it, it's damn bad, and I'm sure glad those bugs ain't mooning around here. Lord A'mighty, it's smotherin' enough without them addin' to it."

THE next news we had told a very different story. The rains had recommenced, and for ten days not a death had been reported. The doctors and specialists had reached Talara, and had been busy making an intensive investigation, but I could not see that they had reached any definite conclusions nor had they come to any agreement, aside from the fact that all believed that the deaths were the result of some unknown and remarkable germ or microbe. Some held that it was a minute microscopic animal and not a true germ; others declared it the spores of some plant-like growth related to the fungi or moulds, and others were equally insistent that it was the microbe of a true disease.

Neither did they agree as to the origin, the means of dissemination and the habits of the thing. Some claimed it was the result of the climatic changes, others that it had been introduced from some other locality, and others declared that it was a new development or form of the mysterious Chan-Chan fever.

One savant was positive that the germs were carried by night-flying insects, and in support of his theory pointed out that such insects invariably appeared in large numbers on clear nights after heavy rains. His colleagues were equally positive that the germs were blown about by the wind, and as proof called attention to the fact that the strongest winds always blew at night, that during dry weather there was always a breeze, while during the rains it was almost calm, and he further argued that wet weather would lay the germs as it did any other dust. But there could be no argument in respect to the results and the deadly character of the new malady, and all the schemes so far tested had proved ineffectual in so far as preventing attacks was concerned. No, I am mistaken in that statement; no person who had remained indoors with doors and windows closed or screened had been attacked, and as all the white residents of the district had obeyed orders and had been careful to remain indoors after nightfall, no deaths of the whites had occurred, and only Cholos and other natives, who slept in open barracks or sheds, had succumbed, aside from several members of the patrol, who had been found dead at their posts. This, declared the authorities, shed a ray of hope. If everybody kept indoors from dark until dawn, there was every reason to think that the deaths would entirely cease, and, so argued the learned doctors, if the deaths could be completely checked for a time, the germs, finding no hosts, would soon die out. And in order to prevent all possibility of the germs finding victims, all the Cholos and Indians had been rounded up and were nightly locked in barracks and no live stock of any sort was allowed at large after sundown. And as it was now established that the "Night Death" was due to microbes and to no human or outside agency, all police and patrols were abandoned, and soon after sunset the entire country was as silent and deserted as the tomb. Just how well this plan had worked out could not be determined, because, as I have said, the rains had again commenced, and no one positively could state whether the cessation of deaths was due to the weather or to the precautions taken.

These were the conditions that existed when, having completed my work at Langosta, I returned to Negritos.

As it was still rainy, and as I felt certain that there was no danger as long as it was wet weather, I decided to have a look at my long-neglected plants. There were severe penalties provided for anyone violating the rule about going abroad after dark, but I intended fully to risk it if I found my plants were about to bloom, for I was determined that I would see the strange growths while in flower. I was not greatly surprised to discover that the growths had increased amazingly. But I *was* surprised to find how far and how much they had spread. They were in fact everywhere, scattered through the jungles, sometimes singly, again in groups, and in some spots forming miniature forests and covering large areas of the hillsides.

I found, however, that a comparatively small portion of the plants bore buds, although those that showed no indications of approaching florescence appeared as vigorous and as fully matured as the others. This I accounted for on the theory that a certain proportion were sterile (a condition that exists commonly among many of the cacti

and allied plants) and incapable of producing flowers, and my theory was more or less borne out by the fact that those that had no flower buds had developed leaves.

These leaves were remarkable growths and resembled the gray pendant lichen known as Spanish moss more than anything else. But they were quite different in structure, being composed of innumerable slightly wavy threads or filaments sprouting from a short, fleshy stem, and pale bluish-green in color. While examining these —for my interest had been transferred from the buds to the leaves—I discovered another interesting peculiarity of the remarkable plants. In every case where the growths had sprung up from the fallen decayed blossoms the stems bore the filament-like leaves and no flower buds, whereas—and this took me some time to discover—flower-bearing growths had sprung up from directly under the bunches of drooping, hair-like leaves. Not for some time did it dawn upon me that my strange plants had a most amazing life cycle. In other words, there was a two-phase cycle: the flowers producing non-flowering plants that in turn bore leaves (or perhaps flowers of another form) which, falling to earth, produced plants that bore only flowers. Such a mode of growth and reproduction was not, I knew, unknown among plants. Several of the parasitic tropical plants, known popularly as "air-plants," have a similar habit, the seeds producing non-flowering plants with jointed stems which break apart, each section developing a plant that bears flowers and seeds; and several ferns have a similar mode of propagating themselves; while among the marine plants the dual habit is not unusual. To me this was particularly interesting, as it tended to prove that the ancient forms of plant growth that had been brought into existence from long-dormant semi-fossil seeds by the rains had habits closely related to the marine forms of plant life. And as I had long held to a theory—and had written several monographs on the subject—that all plants originally were marine forms and that, with the receding of the waters and the increase of land, certain species and genera adapted themselves to a terrestrial existence, I was, of course, greatly pleased to find that, in my strange growths about Negritos, my theory was borne out to a certain extent. I was in fact quite convinced that many of the plants on the hillsides were very closely akin to existing marine forms and that my strange, jointed, rapid-growing, huge-flowered, night-blooming shrubs were the most closely related of all to marine growths.

Their amazingly rapid growth, their fibrous character, the semi-translucent flowers, all reminded me of bryozoans or algæ more than of true terrestrial forms of plant life.

And now this new discovery of their mode of propagation was another point in favor of my newly improvised theory.

Moreover, as I now realized for the first time, it would not be at all surprising to find the nearest air-breathing relatives of marine plants here in Peru. As I have said, all, or nearly all the plants, were extremely ancient forms that hitherto had been known only from fossils; and, in the second place, the country, as I knew from my paleontological studies, had been beneath the sea at no very remote period (geologically speaking) of the past. Hence, assuming that I was correct in my theory of the evolution of plant life, it would be natural that the earliest terrestrial forms of plant life and those most closely resembling their maritime ancestors, should be found here.

ALL of this of course passed through my mind far more rapidly than I have written it, and having located several plants that I judged would bloom that night —provided the rain ceased—I returned to Negritos, feeling that I had accomplished a great deal in support of my pet botanical theory. In my mind I was already composing an article on my discoveries for publication in the Journal of the International Society for Botanical Research.

It did not, however, stop raining that night nor for several nights; but at length the sun shone again, the last clouds drifted away over the Andes, and I prepared to sneak off and fulfill my long-delayed desire to witness the blooming of the plants that had interested me—in fact, I might say had obsessed me for months.

There was no great difficulty in getting away from camp unseen. Everyone was within doors, there was no patrol, no police, no guards, nobody to detect me, and I chuckled to myself at the thought of how different were the present conditions to those when the first mysterious deaths had occurred and the place had been alive with armed guards searching for an imaginary murderer or maniac.

My thoughts reverted naturally to the incidents of those days, to McGovern and his terror of something that had not existed except in his overwrought and superstitious mind; to Rogers and Merivale and to the terrifying, nervous dread that had filled all of us when the nightly deaths had seemed to savor of the supernatural and uncanny. Of course I realized I was taking a risk; there was a remote chance that I might be attacked by the malady that stalked its victims invisibly and unannounced on dry nights like this. But I am something of a fatalist; besides, scientific ardor is not easily dampened by thoughts of personal risks or dangers, otherwise few great scientific truths would have been discovered. But even a scientist is not always immune to vague, indefinable fears, and I felt a peculiar and far from pleasant or comfortable sensation of impending danger, as if some unseen, indescribable peril hovered near.

Once or twice as I glanced, half-nervously, at the star-bright sky, I fancied I saw dim, cloudlike, moving forms passing swiftly overhead. Little chills tingled along my spine as I recalled Rogers' horrified expression when he spoke of the "thing" he had seen vanishing from the vicinity of the dead watchman. Was it possible, I thought, that there *were* such things as ghosts, spirits, forces of which we knew nothing? With an effort and a forced laugh I threw off my foolish, almost superstitious feelings. Probably I had not seen anything, and if I had, what more reasonable than to suppose them drifting clouds or even large night-flying birds—herons, jabirus or wood-ibis perhaps. Still, it *was* dashedly lonely, eerie and mysterious out there alone, with the black loom of the Andean peaks in the distance, with the dark shadows of the hills, with the thousand and one unaccountable noises of the night on every hand, and with not a living soul, the glimmer of a light to indicate a fellow human being in the whole vast expanse. And though I had no concrete ideas nor thoughts of meeting anyone or anything, I involuntarily gripped the hilt of my machete—which I invariably carried on my trips into the jungle—and kept a keen watch on my surroundings. But nothing happened. I saw no signs of life—except an occasional night-hawk or a fluttering, burrowing owl, and presently reached the edge of the dense vegetation.

The plants that I had selected to visit were close to this

edge of the jungle, and as I had already cut an open trail through the growth, I approached the spot readily, noiselessly, and came within sight of the group of tall, stout, articulated stalks. I had not come in vain; looming ghostly in the darkness I could see three of the immense white and purple flowers fully expanded and looking as large as beach umbrellas in the uncertain light of the stars. For a moment I gazed at them entranced, drinking in the wonder and beauty of this floral display; then I stepped closer to examine the details of the blooms.

Suddenly I started and stared. There was no breeze here in the shelter of the hills, not a leaf of the vegetation stirred, and yet—incredible as it seemed—the flowers were moving, vibrating, pulsing, as if alive! Could it be the effect of the light or of my eyes striving to see clearly? No, I was positive it was no optical illusion. I focused my gaze upon one blossom, watched it. It *did* move! The bulbous purple calyx seemed to pulse slowly, deliberately, the white membranous fringe that was now spread flat, like a gigantic plate with convoluted edges, waved and fluttered; the long, fleshy multicolored petals undulated, and the slender, attenuated stamens waved, twisted and coiled about the great, rough central pistil. To my amazed, incredulous eyes the flower actually appeared to breathe, to be endowed with sensate life, to be struggling, feeling, exploring the air about it, as if searching for something. I was fascinated and at the same time filled with a nameless fear. Still staring, I drew back, my eyes fixed as though hypnotized upon that giant flower that now, for some inexplicable reason, appeared to me a horrible, uncanny, monstrous thing. And then my hairs seemed to rise on end. I felt a gripping terror, cold chills ran over me. Before my very eyes the great palpitating flower freed itself from the stalk and softly, silently, rose in air like a white balloon, and with stamens trailing and fringe undulating, it came slowly drifting towards me. I could not take my eyes from it. My mouth seemed dry. I was incapable of movement. I could not even cry out. For an instant it hovered above me and then—God, will I ever forget it!—the monstrous thing dropped swiftly, like a descending parachute, towards me. In a flash, in the fraction of a second, I remembered McGovern's description of the smothering, clammy cloth that had dropped over his head. In a flash I realized that it had been no hallucination, that the "thing," the "ghost," which Rogers and Merivale had seen, had been no figment of their imaginations. And in the same flash of intelligence I knew that the "night death" was no malady, no microscopic germ. I knew that it was these awful, silent, monstrous, living flowers of the mysterious plants.

A trailing, slimy thread-like stamen touched my cheek, and with a hoarse, inarticulate cry I leaped back. I felt a rasping something graze my neck. The air seemed suddenly shut off from my panting lungs, and with a mad, savage yell of frenzied terror I slashed viciously upward and outward with my machete. I felt the blade bury itself in some soft, yielding body. Thick, ill-smelling, salty liquid spurted over me. A pulpy, horrible mass struck my shoulder, and clinging, twining, snaky, sticky, nightmarish fingers seemed to close upon my left arm, my throat, my body.

Screaming, struggling, slashing, almost bereft of my senses, I tore the things loose, leaped aside and freed myself of the gruesome, awful thing that lay, panting, pulsating but writhing helplessly upon the ground. I felt weak, faint, almost paralyzed. Then some sixth sense caused me to turn. And just in time. Two more of the terrible, silent, deadly things were drifting down upon me! Before I could run, before I could move they were dropping towards me. But my first awful, superstitious terror had left me. The things, uncanny, terrible, supernatural as they seemed, were real. They were neither ghosts, nor demons nor spirit. They could be destroyed, killed.

Alert, watchful, I waited until the trailing, writhing stamens and the great flesh-colored pistil—that even in my deadly fear and excitement I mentally likened to a great boa with weaving, ominous head—were close above me. Then with all my strength I struck and leaped aside. With a soft swish the keen steel sheared through the mass. The thing veered, canted, capsized like a rudderless airplane, and with vicious blows I slashed it, hacked it until it fell. But I almost lost my life in doing so. The third monstrous thing was upon me. I felt its hellish, smothering folds about my head; the swaying, rope-like central organ rasped across my neck. Only the fact that I was stooping, bending forward, saved me. With a scream I grasped the thing, wrenched it loose and felt my hand lacerated and stung as if with a thousand red-hot needles as I did so. I thrust and lunged with my machete, and, ducking, dodged from beneath the enfolding mass.

I was sick, nauseated, weak with terror and with my efforts. Everywhere about me I knew were more of the weirdly, horrible, deadly things. At any instant a dozen, a hundred might be upon me. Even the stalk from which these three had been freed bore several more ready at any moment to float free and attack me. And overcome with such fear as I never knew could exist, panting, screaming, I turned and raced towards the open country and the camp. Once or twice I glanced back, expecting to see the dim, ghostly shapes pursuing me. But I saw nothing. Perhaps there were no others, maybe only those three bloomed into life that night. But even while I ran, while I spent my breath in shrieks that could have been heard in the distant camp, the truth dawned upon me. I had escaped the "night death" by the narrowest of margins, but I had solved the mystery. I knew the truth and, bizarre, incredible, impossible as it seemed, I knew the secret of those strange plants, of the death-dealing, living blossoms. The plants were land hydroids, gigantic representatives of those puzzling marine growths that seem a connecting link between plants and animals. And, like their small marine prototypes, they bore living, carnivorous organisms—gigantic jelly-fish—that floated through the air instead of through the water.

And, like the marine jelly-fish that bud from hydroids, these gigantic man-eating things, those vampires of the desert, in their turn propagated plant-like growths that bore seeds or spores which produced hydroids with their living independent organisms in place of flowers.

THAT I could think and could reason collectively and sanely while I raced, stumbling and fear-stricken, towards the dark camp may seem strange; but there are queer kinks in the human brain, and my subconscious mind worked along scientific lines even while my conscious mental processes were devoted to striving to reach safety before some of those ghastly, vampirish, night-borne creatures overtook me. Although I was unaware of the fact, I must have yelled and screamed in my excess of terror as I ran, for presently lights glimmered in the blackness ahead, and as I reached the first buildings I saw

a door open and plunged, exhausted and spent, through the portal. Even in my half-mad, half-fainting state I recognized Merivale and Johnson.

"Shut—shut the door!" I gasped. "Keep everyone inside if they value their lives! I—it—they—" I staggered forward and dropped senseless onto a couch.

I opened my eyes to find my two friends bending over me with anxious faces.

"Thank God you've come to!" cried Johnson. "What on earth has happened, Barry? Where have you been and what was that you said about 'it' and 'they' ?"

With a tremendous effort I steadied my shaken nerves and, in broken, jerky sentences told them of my terrible experience, of the horrible man-eating creatures that had attacked me. The two men exchanged glances, and I could see that they thought me mad or suffering from some hallucination. My anger was aroused at their skepticism, although Heaven knows they had every reason to doubt the truth of my wild and incredible tale.

"Damn it!" I shouted, sitting up. "It's true—every word of it. Look here—" I showed them the palms of my hands, bent my head that they might examine the back of my neck. Merivale whistled. There were the same red punctures that had appeared on the corpses of all those who were killed by the "Night Death."

Johnson glanced at me keenly. "By Jove, I'm beginning to believe you, Barry," he declared. "I admit the yarn sounded like the ravings of a madman at first. Gad! to think of gigantic, carnivorous jelly-fish flying through the air in the darkness—it gives me the creeps."

"And it bears out everything and solves everything!" exclaimed Merivale. "I knew that I never imagined that ghostly thing which Rogers and I saw after we found the dead watchman. And McGovern wasn't drunk or dreaming. By the Lord, Barry, you've solved the mystery. We must get Rogers and the rest and tell them."

But though Merivale and Johnson were convinced, the story was far too wild, too impossible and too fantastic for the others to swallow. Doctor Hepburn pooh-poohed it and advised Merivale to give me a sedative and put me to bed, adding that I had probably had a mild attack of the malady and had imagined the ridiculous details, but that it was my own fault for having disobeyed orders in going out after nightfall. Only Rogers, who like Merivale felt that his hitherto discredited statements were borne out by my tale, believed in my story. "Very well," I announced, "wait until daylight and I'll prove it to them. I wish to heaven some of these idiots had been with me."

AND though they discredited my statements—or at least put them down to the effect of the supposed malady—quite a crowd assembled the next morning to listen to my story at first hand and to see me attempt to prove the truth and accuracy of my tale. But when, reaching the spot where I had fought so desperately against the awful things, I pointed to the dismembered, pulpy, discolored objects upon the ground, and they saw the swollen buds of others upon the strange plants, doubts began to give way to belief. Still stubborn, old Hepburn would not give in. He declared that in his opinion the things were flowers and nothing more, that he didn't believe they could move independently, and that having fallen a victim to the "germ" of the plague while watching the flowers expand, I had imagined all the rest when in a semi-delirious state and had blindly slashed at harmless blooms of the plants.

"Possibly," I said scathingly, "as you are supposed to be a scientist of sorts, you may know the differences between plant and animal forms of life. In that case I suggest we examine these creatures that you claim are flowers—vegetable growths."

He snorted. But he could not refuse in the presence of the others. To me it was a most repugnant undertaking, and I shuddered as we examined the mutilated things. Presently Hepburn rose and extended his hand. "I apologize, Barry," he said. "You were quite right. Gentlemen"—turning to the group about us—"Doctor Barry deserves the greatest praise and our heartfelt thanks. He has solved the mystery of the Night Death; he has laid the ghost. These—er—creatures are unquestionably invertebrate animals—much like gigantic jelly-fish in their anatomy. They are literally vampires—blood-suckers—and, like their marine relatives, strictly carnivorous. These slender, thread-like filaments that I mistook for stamens are tubes ending in toothed suckers and through which the blood of their prey is drawn. It was the marks of these suckers that were impressed as punctures upon the skin of those killed by the Night Death as we have called it. In all probability the creatures in life exude some powerful poisonous emanation that renders their prey almost instantly unconscious, once the things have dropped over them. Do you not agree with me, Barry?"

I nodded. "Entirely," I assured him, "or rather"—with a laugh—"you now agree with me. The things are composite, polypod jelly-fish—communities of animals similar to the Portuguese Man-of-War."

"How in thunder can they fly?" demanded one of the men. "They're heavy, they haven't any wings, and you can't tell me that petticoat arrangement can lift 'em up by waving back and forth."

"I imagine," I replied, "that the balloon-like body is filled with some sort of gas produced by the creatures themselves. As they broke off from the parent stem last night they floated upward without visible effort. I—"

"Well, what's the answer?" asked Elliott, the camp superintendent. "Now that Barry's solved the mystery of the devilish things, the question is, "How are we going to stop it?"

"Chop down and burn all the damned trees," suggested someone.

"An excellent scheme as far as it goes," I assented. "But how are you going to destroy them all? There are thousands—perhaps tens of thousands—scattered everywhere. They grow so rapidly that by the time half are destroyed there will be as many new ones to replace them. Wherever one of these things drops to earth, a dozen shoots sprout up, and each of these produces dozens more that bear from three to ten of these vampires."

"Well, here goes to end these!" cried the first speaker as, leaping forward, he commenced hacking down the thick stalks. Others joined him, and in a few moments not one of the plants was left standing in the vicinity.

"Fine!" I commented. "But by tomorrow or next day, if you return here, you'll find twice as many have grown up. And as deaths have been caused by these creatures as far away as Piura and Chancay, there is every probability that colonies of the plants have started in those distant localities."

The men gazed at one another with blank faces. "For God's sake, what *are* we to do?" demanded Johnson. "If these hellish things keep on increasing, the whole of South America—perhaps the entire world—will be destroyed."

"Undoubtedly—if they are not checked," I agreed. "I—we—must think of some method of exterminating them. There must be some means, if we can hit upon it. But for the present the best thing is to round up every available man and destroy every sprout, every one of the fallen creatures in the neighborhood."

It seemed a herculean task, but two thousand men can accomplish a vast amount of work, and a small army began scouring the hillsides and valleys in a desperate war upon the sources of the terrible Night Death, while full accounts of my discovery and pleas for co-operation in extirpating the things were flashed by radio to every town and settlement within a radius of more than one hundred miles.

But this hand-to-hand battle I knew would never result in the complete elimination of the things. And it could not be continued indefinitely. It was essential that some means of wiping the things from the earth should be devised, and I racked my brains and conferred for hours with the others in what appeared to be a hopeless effort to evolve or invent some such means.

Somehow I could not get the idea out of my mind that the fact that the vampires moved only at night and only in dry weather lay the key to the solution, and yet, try as I might, I could not see how we could turn these facts to our advantage. And then sudden recollection of McGovern's experience came to me. Oil! Oil had routed the thing that had attacked him. We had oil in unlimited quantities. Why not spray the entire country with oil? I dashed to my fellows and explained my scheme, and instantly all fell in with it. We had three planes at Talara and a dozen more were available at Lima and elsewhere. Before nightfall our planes had been equipped with spraying apparatus, and the next day they were flashing—like gigantic dragon-flies—back and forth above the jungle, spraying every square foot of the country with the heavy oil.

Within a week twenty planes were at work. Soon the greenery vanished under the black coating, and far and near—to well beyond the most distant spots where the Night Death had taken its toll—the country was drenched with the shower of crude petroleum. The most careful search failed to reveal a single living plant of the terrestrial hydroids, and when no more deaths occurred, even in dry weather, and when the people, regaining confidence, remained out of doors at night, we judged that the operations had met with entire success.

Still, for weeks an airplane patrol was maintained, until Nature again took a hand and removed all danger of the recurrence of the terrible deadly plague. With the eruption of Orsini volcano in southern Chile, the ocean's bed again altered, the Humboldt Current resumed his long interrupted course and once again the west coast of South America became a rainless, barren desert. And until the climate again changes, the Night Death will be a thing of the past, the Vampires of the Desert will never reappear.

Perhaps this will never happen within the present century or again such changes may take place tomorrow or next year.

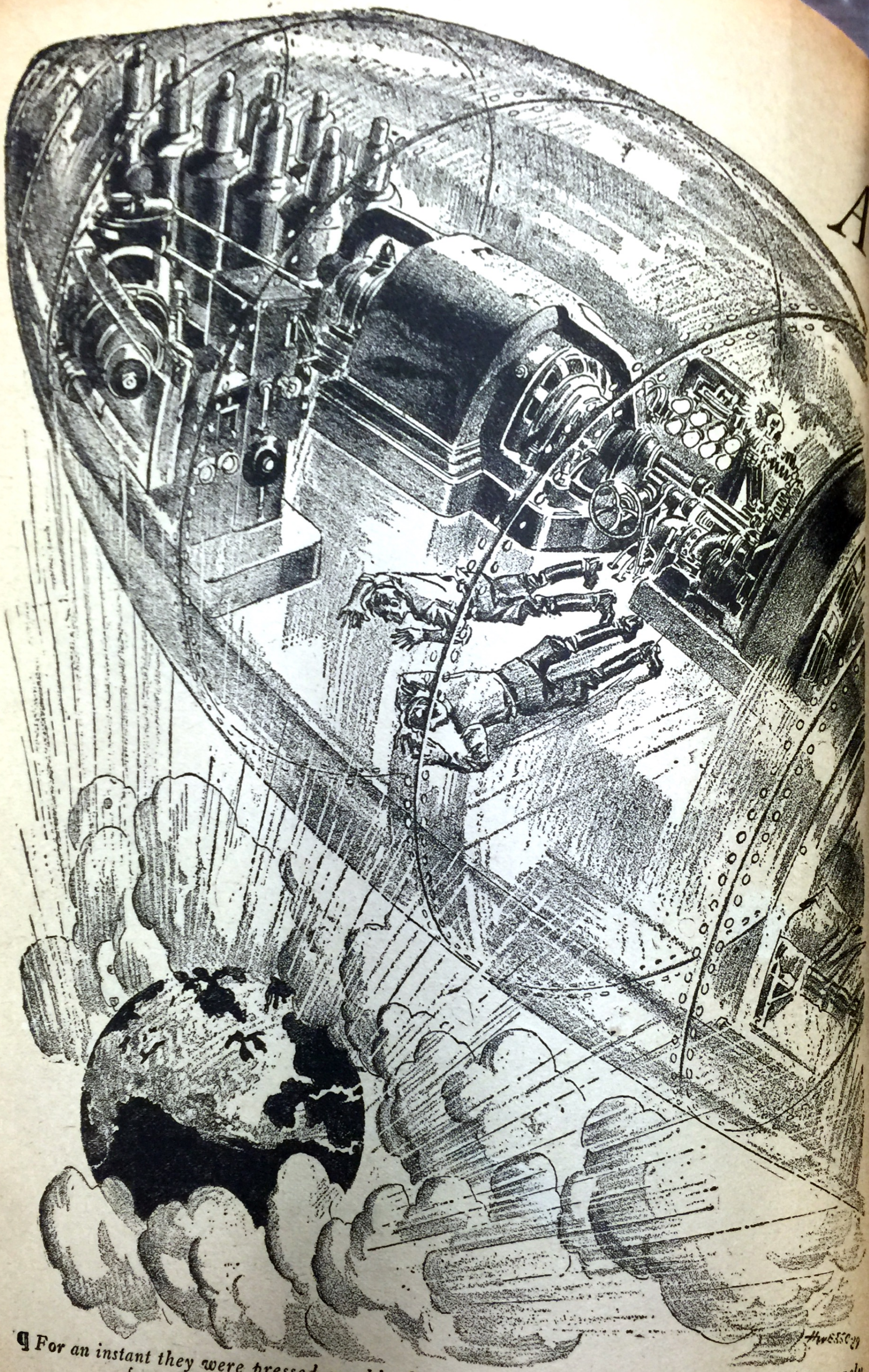
THE END

Sonnet to Our Magazine

We give too little time to introspection
  And, coward-like, become quite satisfied
  With daily failures. Thus we seek to hide
From all that lies ahead: for our protection
We try to shun the future's sure direction.
  Herein we err—we lose our strongest guide
  To our success, and are but firmly tied
With cramping bonds because we flout reflection.

This is an age when Fiction rules at will—
  When Science takes great strides and knows no bound.
The first is great, the second greater still,
  And in this book the twain are ever found
Clasped hand in hand. . . . Then let us laugh at sorrow—
For fiction written now is fact tomorrow.

—EDWARD PARSONS

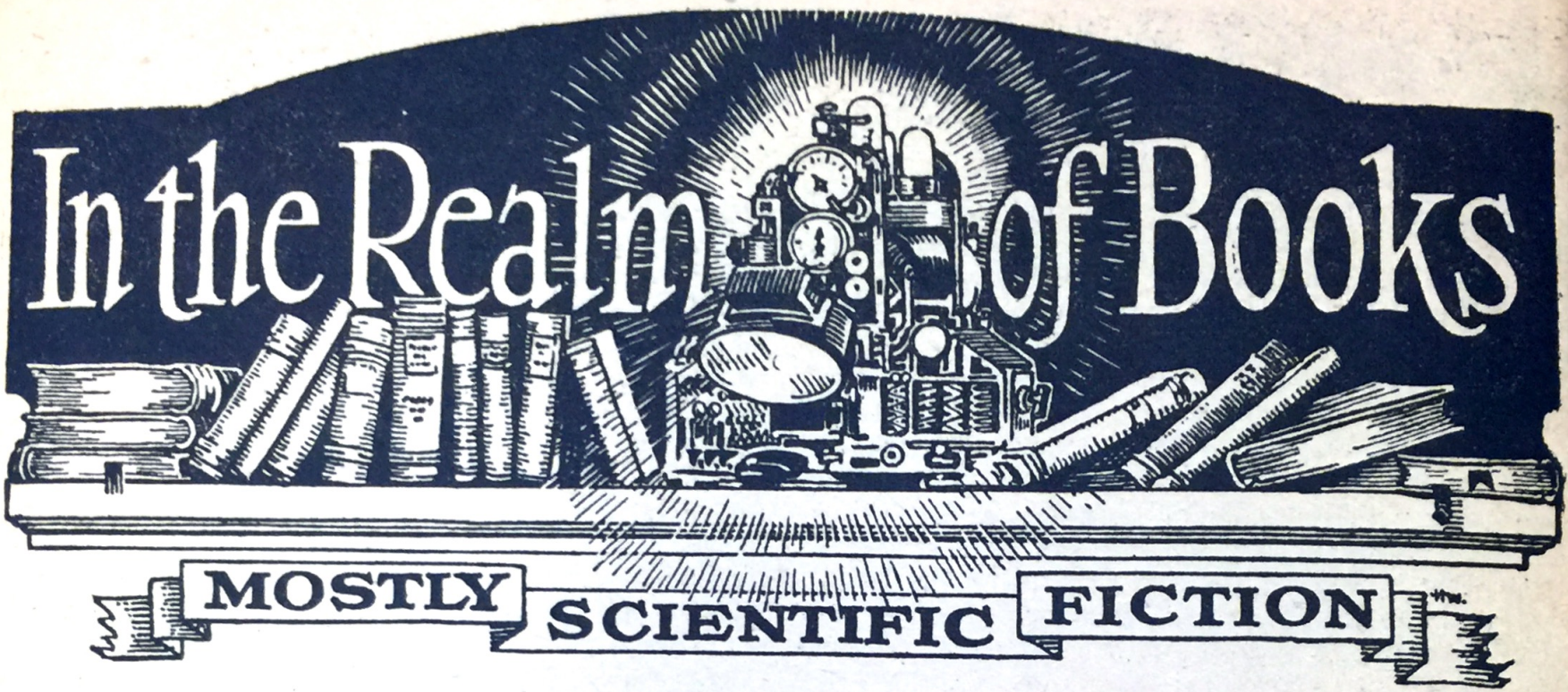


¶ *For an instant they were pressed crushingly against the floor, and then they floated strangely free. There was the earth rapidly dropping away from them below.*

The Miracle

Oh, chlorine gas is poison,
And sodium has a fault,
But wed the two and you will brew
The miracle of salt.

—*Susie M. Best.*



World Domination

"The Earth Tube," by Gawain Edwards. *Published by D. Appleton & Co., N. Y.,* $2.00.

THIS book draws a vivid picture of the struggle for world domination between the Caucasian and the yellow races, with Asia coming out second best.

It starts with the discovery of seismographic disturbances and earthquakes repeated at regular intervals. Dr. Scott, assisted by King Henderson and by his daughter, Anna, figures out scientifically that the Asians have constructed a tunnel clear through the center of the earth and even predicts the exact location of the mouth of the tunnel on the western hemisphere. Their statements are greeted with contempt and unbelief, but even Dr. Angell, the secretary of war, a typical incompetent politician, is finally convinced. The western end of the tunnel is discovered to be located near Buenos Ayres, and it is found that the metal used by the Asians for construction purposes is indestructible. It is further discovered that an enormous earth traversing car is the cause of the numerous earthquakes. This car, traveling by gravity, is used to transport men and machines to the Western hemisphere, and finally the Asians begin their conquest of the Americans.

Their tanks, constructed of "Undulal," which is indestructible, are invincible and the victorious march of the Asians cannot be stopped. All means to stop the advance fail, and as a last resort, King Henderson invades the Western stronghold of the Asians and discovers the secret of Undulal, which can only be destroyed by liquid air. He is taken captive, and condemned to death, but is shown all the secrets and marvels of the Asian cities. He is also transported with the earth car to the Eastern stronghold and then returned to the Western hemisphere. He has met an American girl, who, destined for the harem of the Asian king, finally helps him to escape, by taking a daring chance.

By the use of liquid air the advance of the Asians is finally stopped. In the meantime the Asians have built airplanes from which they dump enormous quantities of gold, thereby upsetting the enormous treasury balance of the Americans, but by the discontinuing of gold as an economic base, the scheme of the Asians is frustrated. The Western stronghold of the Asians is destroyed including the Earth tube, and after a series of tremendous earthquakes peace reigns once more upon earth.

This book can safely be recommended to all lovers of scientific fiction.

It is vividly and plausibly written, and it is to be hoped that Mr. Edwards will not stop with this book.

—C. A. BRANDT.