



THE PALLID GIANT

by PIERREPONT B. NOYES

A Tale of a World Destroyed

by a monster who lives again today
—and threatens this world we live in.

Read of His Fascinating Power in

THE PALLID GIANT

A Novel of Mystery and Adventure

BY

PIERREPONT B. NOYES

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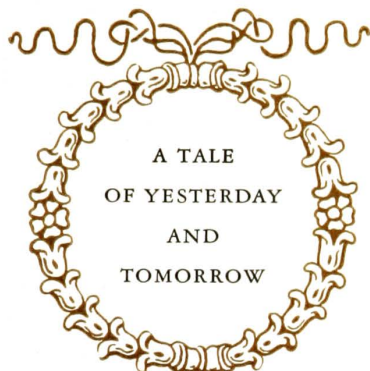
¶ Without doubt, "The Pallid Giant" is one of the most strikingly imaginative and socially significant novels of our time.

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THE PALLID GIANT



By Pierrepont B. Noyes

American Rhineland Commissioner
Author, "While Europe Waits for Peace"

NEW YORK

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To Peter

—my eleven year old son, who
went into the Grotto with me, this
book is affectionately dedicated.

CONTENTS

I	WHO IS RUDGE?	9
II	A STARTLING SUGGESTION	14
III	THE SPY	24
IV	ESCAPE FROM THE PEACE CONFERENCE	38
V	HOLIDAY	45
VI	CAVE COUNTRY	52
VII	OLD LEON TELLS A WEIRD TALE	60
VIII	EARTH, WATER AND DARKNESS	72
IX	THE GROTTO GLORIEUSE	84
X	RUDGE AND "THE BOOK"	95
XI	PROFESSOR GRIBBON TO THE RESCUE	102
XII	THE PROFESSOR GIVES UP	113
XIII	THE FACE AT THE WINDOW	120
XIV	HORRORS	128
XV	LOST	137
XVI	NOGLA	157
XVII	A "ROSETTA STONE"	166
XVIII	AT MYSTERY'S DOOR	179
XIX	THE KEY	187

CONTENTS

XX	THE DEATH-RAY	194
XXI	AN INTERRUPTION	203
XXII	AFTER THE MASSACRE	213
XXIII	DARIL TRIES FORCE	219
XXIV	PROMIL TRIES REASON	228
XXV	THE BOTTOMLESS POOL OF FEAR	235
XXVI	SUNRISE ON AK-DAR-AN	242
XXVII	DEATH FOLLOWS UNDER-SEA	250
XXVIII	"THEIR LIVES OR OURS"	258
XXIX	PROMIL'S SON AND I	264
XXX	MAR-DA FAILS	270
XXXI	ALONE!	282
XXXII	AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING	286
XXXIII	THE SHADOW OF THE GIANT	295

I

WHO IS RUDGE?

IT seems ridiculous that I, who never wrote anything more literary than a report on the world's supply of rubber or manganese, should now attempt to write convincingly the most unbelievable, true story ever told. Rudge and the Professor both insisted that I was the logical one to write it. Rudge said that if I told the story of our strange adventures in my own pragmatic, unimaginative way it would go farther toward establishing belief than the most elaborate attempt at proof, and the Professor "felt convinced" my reputation as a business man would give assurance that the evidence had been carefully examined. In the end I gave way.

That was two months ago, and now, back in New York, in my apartment overlooking Park Avenue, I find myself wondering whether the astounding revelations contained in Rudge's document did not befog my judgment, that night in Paris. I feel that Rudge should have written the story. It is his story much more than mine, and, if a certain fantastic suggestion

THE PALLID GIANT

of the Professor's be true, the story belongs to Rudge in a sense more real than any of us suspected.

It is, however, too late for regrets. I gave my promise. In addition, a sinister paragraph which appeared in the morning paper under a Paris headline is urging me to speed the work. For I have come to accept without reservation the statement which Professor Gribbon made on the eve of my departure from Paris. He spoke then with great earnestness, addressing his words to me, though I think he had Rudge even more in his mind.

"We have an *awful* responsibility,—to all the world,—and every living being in it. The knowledge which has so mysteriously come to us,—"

Here Rudge interrupted, his good-natured cynicism seeming quite out of key with the Professor's solemnity.

"The tragedy of Sra, Professor Gribbon, teaches nothing new or strange. For years, international developments have stared us all in the face, whose plain, inevitable end—" He shrugged his shoulders,—"He who runs may read."

The Professor became fairly red-eyed in his excitement. "I insist! I insist again! We three are bound,—" His voice broke with the intensity of his feeling. "No men were ever weighted with a duty more clear, more binding,—more inescapable."

It is a very surprising fact that, after that night

WHO IS RUDGE?

when Markham made his dramatic appearance in the door of Rudge's bedchamber, initiative in our little group passed from Rudge to Professor Gribbon. The former gave his assent to the Professor's plans, and acknowledged our obligations generally, but he seldom offered any suggestions.

I could not decide whether this passivity was due to a reaction from previous tension, or whether, having found that which his subconscious mind had so long sought, Rudge was absorbed in its contemplation and regretted the intrusion of mundane responsibilities. He took to absenting himself from the Cité, going on long solitary walks, and when I found him at home he was usually sitting by the fire in a brown study, his expression indicating a feeling of tranquillity which I could not understand.

The Professor, on the other hand, took this change in Rudge philosophically; so much so that, considering the intensity of his own feelings, I was considerably puzzled, until one of his typically enigmatic outbursts suggested the weird speculations which were occupying his mind. It was late one night that I found the Professor standing in the middle of his room, staring intently at the carpet. For a moment he showed no sign that he had noted my entrance; then, suddenly, without raising his eyes, he asked in a meditative staccato,

"Who is Rudge?"

I was completely nonplussed, and stopped

THE PALLID GIANT

abruptly in the doorway fumbling helplessly in my mind for the meaning of his question. The Professor looked up at me.

"Do you believe in reincarnation?" A long pause and then without waiting for my answer, he slowly repeated his first question,

"Who *is* Rudge?"

By this time I had collected my wits and my first impulse was to defend Rudge from some implied accusation or suspicion.

"Rudge is just the man we think he is. I will gamble every dollar I have in the world on the truth of what he has told us about himself."

"Of course! Of course!" The Professor hastened to explain that he had no doubt as to Rudge's honesty. "But throughout this whole affair his actions have been inexplicable, unless,—" He shook his head, and again concentrated his attention on the carpet.

This conversation was the last I had with Professor Gribbon. It took place in his apartment at the Cité the night before I left Paris on that decidedly ticklish mission which landed Markham safely beyond the reach of the French Secret Police.

I have related this incident at the risk of seeming to delay, unreasonably, my real story, because, while the implication conveyed by the Professor's questions appeared at the time preposterous, I now think it possible that this may, at least for some of

12

WHO IS RUDGE?

my readers, throw light on certain otherwise unaccountable phenomena which I shall describe.

This is not to be a tale of the Peace Conference, yet since our adventure began there in more senses than one, the Peace Conference in Paris must necessarily be the starting point for a narrative of those events which led us to the tragedy of Sra.

II

A STARTLING SUGGESTION

I FIRST met Rudge in one of the committee rooms at the Crillon. He came in, as the meeting was breaking up, to consult Professor Gribbon regarding some ethnographic work on which they were jointly engaged. The Professor was talking with Bernard Baruch in a far corner of the room. I myself was waiting for a word with the latter regarding an economic point raised in the afternoon's discussion, and, standing together near the door, Rudge and I made each other's acquaintance.

The Peace Conference was then in its second stage. That ebullient goodwill and enthusiasm which had marked the early days, was gone. President Wilson had discovered that the passionate desire for peace, and the willingness to sacrifice something of insistent nationalism for the sake of a secure peace, while still strong among the masses in Europe, was conspicuously absent in the group of Politicians and Diplomats with whom he had to deal. He remembered the humility of national leaders during the dark days of the war, and the high-sounding altru-

A STARTLING SUGGESTION

ism of their declarations in the first flush of victory, and was correspondingly disappointed to find that those same men approached the peace settlement with a cynical disregard for anything except national aggrandizement or personal gain.

My conversation with Rudge was casual: "How is your work going?"

"All right. How's yours?"

He shrugged his shoulders ever so little. "I suppose all right. It is interesting."

His parting remark, as he moved away toward the Professor, caught my attention. "It's interesting,—but the French are laughing in their sleeves. They appreciate all the information which Colonel House's organization is supplying, and they realize how much they need the moral sanction afforded by the presence of Woodrow Wilson, but they intend to make the new map themselves,—and the Treaty of Peace. A very bad treaty, I fear."

A few days later I happened on Rudge lunching alone in the hotel dining room, and at his suggestion took a seat beside him at the table. He seemed to feel the need of someone to talk to, which was my good fortune, for I discovered later that he was ordinarily a rather silent man. Not that he was unsocial but one felt that behind those shaggy eyebrows, his deep-set black eyes looked out on life with an intense seriousness. He was speculative but never dogmatic. I often thought that he doubted

THE PALLID GIANT

his own speculations as impartially as he doubted others.

Making new acquaintances among the staff of the American Section was a matter of daily occurrence in those days, but before that luncheon was over I felt more than ordinary interest in my acquaintance with George Rudge. At the end of an hour he had made the rather drab business of the Peace Conference seem colorful, if not very promising.

As he laid down his napkin and pushed back his chair he asked, "What brought you to this modern Babel, Walters?"

I thought for a moment. "Colonel House,—or rather it was what he told me of President Wilson's aims."

"The President's aims are all right, but he isn't getting anywhere with them. You are a business man, are you not?"

"I *was*. After college I worked for Mersinck & Co., the export house, and in 1916, became manager of the New York end of the business. When the United States entered the war, being past the draft age, I obtained employment in the War Trade Board just organizing in Washington, where my knowledge of foreign markets made me useful in the allocation of raw materials among our Allies."

Rudge smiled. "You were one of those dollar-a-year men who 'won the war'?"

"Dollar-a-year, yes!" I fell in with Rudge's good

A STARTLING SUGGESTION

natured irony. "But you know the M.P.'s and the women who knit socks and many others won the war."

"Millions of dead men won the war,—and millions more lost the war. Why did you come to Paris?"

"I was sent abroad many times on missions, sometimes secret, sometimes open, and when the war ended was in England. A few days before my intended sailing for home, I received a card from Colonel House asking me to meet him at the Savoy. When I called, he told me that the President was very insistent that the Peace Conference consider some plan for an international pooling of basic raw materials, as a necessary step toward insuring peace between industrial nations, and someone in the War Trade Board had suggested me as competent to advise on details of this work. I was very anxious to go home, and hardly think I would have accepted the Colonel's invitation had it not been for a statement of President Wilson's which he quoted. This caught my imagination. Colonel House quoted the President as saying:

"'Raw materials are as necessary to the life of industrial nations as food and air are to man. If the accidents of nature enable a favored few to monopolize these, the nations deprived will in the end fight for them just as a man who is starving or drowning will fight for his life.'

THE PALLID GIANT

"I could not get away from this. It was a new idea to me, but it was true. All my previous experience told me it was true. I did not feel that I could refuse to help in such a cause, and, after a hasty trip home to arrange my personal affairs, I joined the staff of the American Peace Mission at the Crillon in March."

"Good old Woodrow." Rudge's voice was affectionate. "Who else would go so far afield to corral every cause of war and try to crowd them all into this Pandora's box of a Treaty? Are you accomplishing anything here?"

"So far, no. Each country's delegate is interested in certain commodities but I detect in the conversation of all a good-natured scepticism as to the possibility of persuading any nation to share its natural advantages with other nations. In addition, they are all opposed to any plan, no matter how profitable to themselves, which will help Germany ever so little."

"I confess," Rudge said as we left the dining room, "I cannot see why this policy of pooling raw materials should be pushed when the chief beneficiaries insist on fighting it."

Apparently Rudge had taken a fancy to me, for he invited me to call at his room any evening when I had nothing else to do. My work at the Peace Conference had lost its novelty, I was fed up on Paris and Rudge interested me greatly. I called,

A STARTLING SUGGESTION

therefore, the very next evening. One visit led to another until we drifted into the habit of spending two or three evenings a week together in his apartment on the fourth floor of the hotel.

On the whole, I found him pessimistic though cheerful and always philosophical. His pessimism seemed to reach back of the petty bickerings of the Peace Conference. There was in it something which suggested a basic disillusionment as to the character and future of our modern civilization.

One evening we were sitting before a bright wood fire in Rudge's room. The warmth was grateful, although it was then late in May. Rudge always loved to sit in semi-darkness and stare into a fire. On this particular evening, I had monopolized more of the conversation than was my wont, and suspect that I had expressed a rather enthusiastic hopefulness regarding the outcome of the Peace Conference. Rudge, though he smiled tolerantly, said very little. It was evident that he did not agree with me. I tried to draw him out, and finally asked point blank for his opinion.

"I hate to be a dispenser of gloom." He lighted another cigarette. (Rudge was an inveterate cigarette smoker.) "It does not look good to me. President Wilson alone sees the real problem. The other nationals feel that they must humor him, but their ears are closed, or they think that he is talking around to some secret end. When he states terrible,

THE PALLID GIANT

fundamental truths, they think that he is talking 'words,' like all the rest. His basic thesis, that we must have a new internationalism or perish, is not denied; it is simply not heard. He is Noah, or Lot. The politicians and militarists will surely beat him,—and then," he paused, "if the history of the next generation is not more terrible than anything the world has ever experienced, it will, at least be very miserable."

I ventured the comment that the growth of French ambition and German hatred were likely to prove two dangerous factors in Europe's future.

"You are wrong." Rudge spoke with more feeling than he was accustomed to show. "In the first place, I do not believe the French people are governed by ambition. A few individuals and the military clique may be dazzled by their opportunity; but the great mass of the people—no! It is fear which is driving them to short-sighted measures.

"In the second place, the stimulation of German hatred is not likely to prove the most dangerous result of French policy. Indirectly, yes! But it is the reaction of fear on France herself,—it is perpetuating the reign of fear in the hearts of the French people,—fear of a German desire for revenge,—which will destroy the peace of the world. It was fear of Germany, much more than ambition, which kept alive French militarism before the war.

A STARTLING SUGGESTION

It was Germany's fear of Russia and her fear of French fear, which made the war inevitable."

"Sounds very pessimistic. You know, Rudge, you don't seem like a pessimist, and yet I always get from you a hopeless feeling about the European situation."

Rudge looked hard at the fire. "I know this little old Europe. For centuries it thought in terms of war and conquest. The ghastly development of war's destructiveness during the last fifty years has made it think in terms of fear, and there is no more deadly poison in human counsels than fear."

At rare intervals Rudge entertained me with accounts of his own life and wanderings. He had a passion for the history of peoples,—not the stories of courts and kings or the exploits of individuals, but the history of mankind in mass and its differentiation into existing races. He had wandered over Europe, Asia and the Mediterranean area of Africa, visiting strange peoples and studying their written records and oral traditions; and when the acquiring of new languages became so easy that it failed to hold his interest, he took up the deciphering of ancient inscriptions. At times his friends lost track of him for long periods.

All this information I obtained piecemeal during the next few weeks. In the main, our discussions, through long evenings, ranged over the activities of man in the past; sometimes the recent past, but

THE PALLID GIANT

oftener back through the obscure centuries, always ending with speculations on the origin of the human race.

Rudge had one peculiar habit. Very often, as I was preparing to leave,—a time when commonplaces are usually in order,—he would unexpectedly state in simple words a thought so fundamental as to throw new light on our previous discussion; a crisp synthesis, or a novel suggestion which opened the door to a whole new field of speculation. I used to wish that we could begin the evening all over again.

Late one night I had risen to go. Rudge shook hands, still sitting, as was his wont with me, but turning upward an intimate, almost affectionate smile which amply took the place of any formal rising or seeing me to the door, he said, "Come often." Then after a pause, "I sometimes doubt whether the thing is worth striving for. Perhaps the material accomplishment of our race has already so far outrun its moral development as to make any halfway stop impossible. It's an odd idea, but during the early days of the war, when I was studying what little the 'Record of the Rocks' has told us of mankind's origin, something in that 'Record' suggested the possibility that the same thing has happened before.

"What do you mean 'has happened before'?" I asked.

"Suicide," he replied. "Suicide of the human

A STARTLING SUGGESTION

race. How do we know but that the evolution of animal life through the ages has been, not one long upward progress, as scientists assume, but *several successive developments*, each producing a race like man and each ending when that race committed involuntary suicide. Such preceding human races may have attained to intellectual heights far beyond our own. If they employed their superior intelligence, as earnestly as we are employing ours, in developing means to destroy each other, it is conceivable that all may have perished by their own inventions; and that evolution has thus been repeatedly forced to start again with lower animal forms as a basis."

I was stunned and made some weak objections. Rudge arose, and took a cigarette from the mantel. "Yes, it is fanciful," he faced me, speaking slowly, with eyes half closed, "but as a purely intellectual exercise, think for a moment what would happen to a race of men whose material inventions placed in their hands unlimited power for destruction before they had developed moral inhibitions sufficient to prevent their using that power to destroy themselves." He struck a match.

"Put it another way; what would happen to men possessed of a 100 percent power to conquer others and only 25 percent power to conquer themselves?" The forgotten match burned his fingers. He dropped it without changing expression and resumed his seat.

III

THE SPY

THAT night I lay awake for a long time. The picture Rudge had painted of an entire race of prehistoric men perishing in a holocaust of self-destruction carried with it such overwhelming suggestions that I could not dismiss it from my mind. It made me uneasy. It took my thoughts back to our own great war and from that to the insincere peace-making of which I was a daily witness. It suggested an especially lurid background for stories which were going around Paris of new gases, high explosives and disease germs pursued with feverish industry by many of the nations represented at the Peace Conference.

All at once I had a thought which relieved me greatly. My own scientific knowledge is limited, but I have a smattering of geology, and I now recalled the orderly series of fossil remains shown in our old textbooks, which revealed animal development step by step, from the simple amoeba on through millions of intermediate forms to man. With these textbook tables in my mind, I smiled. "For once Rudge was really fanciful. The 'record

THE SPY

of the rocks' is complete and surely negatives the existence of any race of super-animals before the advent of that 'Homo-Sapiens' of which we are the immediate descendants." It was perhaps silly of me to have taken Rudge's imaginative flight so seriously but I confessed to myself that this scientific disproof came as a relief.

On the following evening a weekly meeting of our economic section prevented my visiting Rudge. Social functions and one thing after another interfered until Saturday. Then I called, but Rudge was not in his room. I was surprised for I knew that he seldom went out in the evening. On Sunday I knocked at his door three times, but failed to find him at home, and finally concluded that he had left Paris for the weekend.

When, however, another week had passed without seeing Rudge, I inquired at his office. "Mr. Rudge was here this morning but only for a few moments," said his assistant, and added, "He has been here very little during the last ten days."

Finally I met Rudge on the Rue Royale, apparently on his way to the Crillon. "Hello," I exclaimed as we shook hands. "Where have you been all this time?" Rudge looked at me and then away across the Place de la Concorde to the Pont du Quai d'Orsay and the Chambre des Deputés in the distance. He did not answer immediately. Finally he said simply,

THE PALLID GIANT

"I have moved."

"Moved? You are still registered in Room 432."

I turned and walked back with him toward the Place de la Concorde. "I have kept the room," he said. "It saves questions. I have taken a little apartment outside. I will tell you where it is. You will keep it to yourself. I am very near,—two rooms in the Cité du Renoir just off the Rue Honoré, Number 25. Come around this evening after ten. When you call ask the concierge for Mr. March." He offered no further explanations and seemed anxious to end the interview. "See you later," he called back as he left me at the corner of the Crillon.

That evening I strolled on the boulevards until ten o'clock and then found my way to the Cité du Renoir,—a very ordinary, squalid courtyard entered by a narrow passage from the Rue St. Honoré. On the left loomed the pretentious grey fronts of several five-story "pensions" whose windows stared across at the dingy backs of shop buildings fronting on the Boissy d'Anglas. Above these, myriads of chimney pots were silhouetted against the illumination of the city outside. The paving was rough cobblestone and very dirty. I followed the narrow sidewalk, peering at each number until I came to a large brick building which occupied the entire end of the Cité. This proved to be Number 25. It had the appearance of a cheap hotel or one of those semi-public buildings so numerous in Paris.

THE SPY

Answering my ring, a large and very cross-looking concierge appeared.

"Monsieur Marsh? You are Meester Waltér? Oui? Entrez."

I followed her up one flight and through a long passage to a little room which must have once been a dark storeroom, but was now used as anteroom for the apartment beyond. The woman pointed to a door.

"Voilà!" said she with stolid politeness. I rapped. A key turned in the lock, and Rudge peered out of the half-opened door.

"You, Walters?—come in."

It was the old cordial Rudge. The room, too, had the same feeling as Number 432 at the Crillon. A large easy chair of Rudge's own particular kind was pulled up before the fire, his many books were stowed effectively, if not neatly, in shelves near the window, and on a table nearby was the customary litter of papers and one or two weighty volumes sprawling open, backs up. By the fireplace,—thoughtful old Rudge,—was a comfortable chair placed exactly where I used to sit in Room 432.

After the usual greetings, Rudge showed me about the apartment. I noticed that, while he was unusually talkative, his manner suggested restraint, almost embarrassment, an attitude quite new in our relation. He had something on his mind. I waited for him to volunteer information as to the cause of

THE PALLID GIANT

his move, but as he seemed in no hurry to open that subject, I plunged into the matter uppermost in my own thoughts.

"Do you remember that very imaginative suggestion you made the other evening,—that evolution has in past ages, developed a human type more than once, and that those human races destroyed themselves with their own inventions? I know you said the idea was fanciful. But it depressed me just the same until I recollected that the 'record of the rocks,' as you call it, is complete, and proves that no such development could have taken place."

Rudge smiled. "I again admit the idea is fanciful,—no way to prove it; also no way to disprove it. Unfortunately, for your disproof, the 'record of the rocks' contains no evidence which would deny the possibility of such a history. In fact, there are positive suggestions of some great unknown developments. You understand, I was not speculating on anything which has happened to *our* human race. We know that that has not committed suicide,—yet. My thought went infinitely farther back, back to another race which may have risen to heights quite beyond our own and, completing its circle in the earlier geologic eons, vanished from the earth.

"You are perhaps unaware that tremendous breaks occur in the geological record. Take the latest one. The entire series of 'Permian' strata following the immense animal development of the early Paleozoic

THE SPY

age, contain almost no fossils of land animals. I say latest; this Permian Era ended millions of years ago, and the 'Permian series' cover an unknown period,—also millions of years. When a new rock series begins, all fossil evidences are changed; old animal species are gone, entirely new ones appear in their places.

"Suppose, now, you assume that the evolution of a super-race of men took place during this 'Permian Era,' that this race developed intellectually and materially beyond anything we can conceive, and then committed involuntary suicide as I suggested. Suppose that, in the process of destroying itself, animal life was destroyed as well, or at least most land animals; so that a new evolution was forced to begin with certain primitive types which had survived in the depths of the sea. The ages, whose history is concealed in the 'Permian blank,' were undoubtedly long enough to permit such a human rise and fall and then time beyond for the new animal evolution to get under way before the 'record' begins again."

"But would not fossil remains of that previous human type be found somewhere?"

"They might not." Rudge rose and took a book from the shelf. After searching the pages for some time, he read aloud, bending over with both hands flat on the table.

"It must be remembered that geology as an exact science does not yet exist. We are making progress

THE PALLID GIANT

toward that end but we are still obliged to deal mostly with scraps of information,—with evidence so detached and confused that our biological conclusions must be held tentatively. Until a very recent period, the crust of the earth was subject to violent changes. Strata have been shoved over one another, eroded, folded, until the rock product of any given age is very hard to identify in different parts of the world or even in different parts of the same land mass.

“In many regions are strata with some resemblances to but many differences from strata in other regions which geologists seek to classify as belonging to the same age. Such classification is always difficult and doubtful. Furthermore, conditions favorable to the preservation of fossil remains were not, as many suppose, normal, but were rare exceptions. During all the changing ages, millions of animals must have died and left no sign for every one which happened to fall into just that marginal sea bottom or that never-to-be-dried-up-and-eroded pond, or into some other environment capable of preserving its form through countless centuries. It must also be remembered that the entire fossil record of periods lasting millions of years may now, through the rise and fall of the earth’s crust, be fathoms deep in the sea.”

Rudge resumed his seat. “No, Walters, so far, man’s efforts to interpret the ‘record of the rocks’

THE SPY

have left vast vacancies during which anything may have happened."

He smiled across at me. "However, you must not take my wild speculations too seriously. No one can disprove them, but it is probably a thousand-to-one chance I am wrong."

We relapsed into one of our familiar silences. I watched his thoughtful face with the flickering fire-light on it, and was surprised to note that he was smoking a pipe.

"Why the pipe?" I wanted to start conversation and could think of nothing better to say. "I never saw you smoking a pipe before. I thought you were hopelessly wedded to cigarettes."

He did not answer at once and when he did a forced smile pretended that his answer was humorous. "I am not thinking cigarette thoughts these days." He became instantly grave. "I know you want to ask me why I am living here. I have been thinking it over and have decided to tell you. It is a long story. Suppose I begin at the beginning.

"During my senior year in college, I had a classmate named Markham,—Phillip Markham. He was a brilliant student in his favorite studies,—chemistry and physics. We were both specializing and both intensely interested in our special subjects, which seemed to create a bond of sympathy between us. He was a very odd fellow,—temperamental, intense, a great lover of adventure, the dare-devil

THE PALLID GIANT

type. No one could help liking him, excepting perhaps his professors who, I always thought, distrusted because they did not understand him.

"Several years later, when I was doing post-graduate work at the University of Berlin, as I told you, whom should I meet but Markham, also taking post-grad in his elected sciences. Later still I heard of him making a great reputation for himself on the staff of the Badischer Analyne Fabrik.

"After that I lost track of him until the early days of the war when I was shocked to read in an American newspaper that he had been identified as a German spy. The excitement of the war drove Markham from my mind until one day last week when I received a note from him here in Paris asking me to call at a certain address,—32 Rue du Montyon.

"I found Markham in a room behind a small bake shop, a short block from the Boulevard Montmartre, where he appeared to be practically in hiding. I judged that M. Weill, the proprietor of the shop, was under some kind of obligation to him, since all the family were at immense pains to insure his comfort and secrecy. Or,—wait a minute! Now I think of it, the woman looked like a German. That's it!"

"What do you mean," I exclaimed.

"You will see later. Here is what Markham told me. When the war broke out, he was in Germany. Later, with the aid of the American Ambassador, he

THE SPY

got through to England. All America was then trying to sell war material to Great Britain and Markham easily secured the British agency for a group of chemical companies. He traveled widely in England, visiting especially ammunition plants. After a time, he discovered that he was being watched by Scotland Yard, and, in spite of the war-time vigilance of governmental agencies, managed to leave the country secretly.

"Later, he returned to England in disguise and worked in various ammunition plants under an assumed name. Unfortunately a fellow named Green, whom we both knew in college, happened to visit the factory where Markham was employed. As he passed the latter, working at a machine, Green's looks and actions convinced Markham that he was recognized, in spite of the beard he had grown. Before Green was fairly out of the room, Markham was on his way to a place of concealment previously arranged. The details of his escape were thrilling but are beside the point of this story excepting to mention that after crossing to the east coast of England, by night, he was taken in a small boat to a waiting German destroyer. Markham remained in Germany during the remainder of the war. He became a most valued expert in the development of new explosives and gases for the German campaigns.

"Here Markham sprung a great surprise on me.

THE PALLID GIANT

All this time he was not a German spy,—he was a British spy.”

“Do you believe that?” I could not restrain my incredulity.

“Wait until you get the whole story. Markham’s unusual technical ability led the Germans to employ him on most important and secret experimental work which enabled him to keep the British government posted regarding new inventions. He was not expected to do small spying, but reported at rare intervals when there were major developments.

“What he told me next was even more surprising. After the war, he engaged with the French Secret Service for one purpose only,—to watch and report on the development of the ‘Death Ray’ in Germany. All the leading nations of Europe are working feverishly to perfect this. France, Markham says, has made the most progress, but the ‘High Command’ is afraid that Germany will beat them to it. His job is to be so helpful that the Germans will open all points of their work to him, and then, if success is achieved, he is to notify the French.

“Markham visits France occasionally in disguise. His visits are, the Germans suppose, for the purpose of learning whatever he can as to the progress of the French invention. Really he comes to help the French experts with the latest German ideas.

“Most surprising of all was Markham’s statement as to why he came to me. This you would never

THE SPY

guess. War-preparation is an even more ruthless business than war-making. Markham knows the nature of the game. He believes that whichever nation first perfects the 'Death Ray' will find a way to make an end of him along with most of the other experts who are in the secret. In the minds of the military authorities, the importance of preserving the secret of the 'Death Ray' is so great that even now Markham thinks his life hangs by a thread; that if he were suspected of intention to leave the work, it would be the end of him. He learned, accidentally, that I was here in Paris and sought the interview to explain his plight. He asks that, if the emergency arise, I help him get safely to America. He has arranged to keep me posted as to the progress of the 'Death Ray,' and I moved to these apartments so that I might meet him unobserved; also that I might furnish a place of refuge in case of necessity."

I was horrified. "Good God! What a fine set of peacemakers we are here in Paris!"

Rudge looked at me and then at the fire. "It is fear. Fear will destroy the world."

He roused himself and continued. "I spent some time finding just the right place. If you look out that window you will notice that it opens on the Boissy d'Anglas. This apartment did not originally belong with the hotel you entered from the Cité. Below these rooms is a shop fronting on the Boissy. All the apartments above the shops were added sev-

THE PALLID GIANT

eral years ago to the rooming space of the hotel which adjoins it in the rear. You perhaps noticed that you walked a long way back to reach my apartment.

"As you leave the building to-night look to the right. You will see an inconspicuous passage running directly from the Cité to the Boissy d'Anglas. On the left of the passage, near the entrance from the Cité, is a dingy alcove now partially filled with packing cases and rubbish from the shop in front. Poking around there last week, I found a narrow stairway leading up from the alcove. I guessed that at some former time the keeper of the shop in front must have lived above, and that this stairway was his means of access to his living quarters. Then I discovered that these apartments were connected with the hotel. I took a chance and rented this one. It turned out just as I expected,—come in here."

He led me into the bedroom. "That door opens on the secret stairs. I fitted a key and took out a few screws which had made the door fast. Markham has a duplicate key. Already he has been here once and can let himself in without ceremony if he is hard pressed.

"I decided to tell you the whole story because I hope you will visit me often as you did at the Crillon, and Markham may come unexpectedly sometime when you are here. No one else knows where I am living. The concierge is instructed not to let

THE SPY

anyone farther than the outer door or to even admit that I am in until she has consulted me. She is a sour old bird and no one will easily get by her." He smiled. "So you and I can conspire here to our hearts' content without fear of being interrupted."

"How will you insure Markham's safety if he takes refuge here?" I asked. "Governments, proverbially, have long arms."

"I have friends in the American Peace Mission who will be able to save him—men like Baruch with whom no European government would dare to interfere. The French, of course, could make no formal charge against Markham."

Rudge said only a few words as to secrecy on my part.

IV

ESCAPE FROM THE PEACE CONFERENCE

MY friend's move to the Cité, instead of separating, brought us closer together. Rudge appeared to value more than ever the relation which had grown up between us, and after the Markham episode, he urged me to visit him often.

For my part, I required no second invitation. There was something about the man which attracted me greatly,—a quality I had never met before. Hitherto I had given but scant attention to any aspect of human relations other than that which men call "practical," and my reactions to the problems of life were always direct. Having lived largely with facts and figures, I had acquired a perhaps undue respect for that much-advertised virtue, common sense. Rudge brought me something new,—imagination, and a quality of imagination which fascinated me. It was as though, after spending all my life on the plains, he took me up into the high mountains where the air was clearer; from whence the hitherto meaningless activities and relations of a billion-peopled world assumed new meaning and more ordered ar-

ESCAPE FROM THE PEACE CONFERENCE

rangement. He generalized, he idealized, and yet his intellectual approach to every subject was just as insistently objective as my own. For him, human life was always a problem, but he made the solution of that problem seem a vivid and interesting struggle.

Rudge had imagination and he had something more, something which I could never define. There was a mysterious atmosphere of detachment, of other-worldliness about him which suggested that a large part of his conscious life was lived spiritually alone.

He had a world of historical information which he made vivid by personal anecdotes, and stories of odd social or political phenomena drawn from his wide observations in many countries. He entertained me with quaint bits of folk-lore. His mother's family came from the north of Hungary where, in deep valleys, the shadows of the Carpathian mountains encourage superstition and marvellous traditions of prehistoric racial origins. I was reminded of the strange tale my stenographer, Mraaya, once told me of the peculiar legends current among her people in the south of France.

As the days went by, I saw signs of weariness in Rudge. At times he looked haggard, and I frequently suggested that he give himself a vacation. I was, therefore, pleased when he said one day, "I have decided to take your advice." Opening an atlas, he continued, "This morning it suddenly oc-

THE PALLID GIANT

curred to me that the most ancient 'evidences' regarding the lives of our primitive ancestors are in the south of France. Here!" he pointed to the map, "along the river Dordogne, and again,—here!" he pointed once more, "near the Pyrenees, are the pre-historic caves of the so-called 'Cro-Magnon' race. When I first took up the study of archaeology, I visited the caves of Les Eyzies,—right here! But I got only a sort of tourist's view. Don't you think it would be interesting to explore those caves at leisure, and all by ourselves? We might find some local character who would be more helpful than the regular guides.

"My idea would be to go to the district which lies along the base of the Pyrenees,—here!—to Aurigniac or Mas d'Azil. We will be less annoyed by tourists than among the caves of the Vezere or those of the valley of the Dordogne."

"Aurigniac?" I exclaimed, "That is the native town of my stenographer, Mraaya Beauchelais. Possibly we could get from her an introduction to just the local character you have in mind for a guide."

Rudge raised his eyes from the map he had been studying and stared absently out of the window.

"Mraaya! that is a peculiar name."

"Isn't it? And the spelling is even more peculiar, M-r-a-a-y-a. She says it has been in her family for generations."

ESCAPE FROM THE PEACE CONFERENCE

Rudge was looking fixedly at me. "Is that the girl I saw in your office?"

"Yes."

"I remember—I remember." He spoke slowly and disconnectedly. Some obscure train of thought seemed to be carrying him far away. "If she lived there as a child, she must have heard all the native traditions and old-wives' tales concerning the caves and their early occupants."

"She surely ought. Until the war broke out she had never left her native district. Mraaya is really a remarkable girl,—very capable but with odd ideas and prejudices,—has something about her suggesting the scars of a terrible experience. During the war she joined the army as a nurse, got mixed up with some American units, was clever and drifted into office work where she learned English and stenography. After the Armistice, she seems to have felt a repugnance toward Aurigniac. She came to Paris and when the Peace Conference was organizing, applied for work and was assigned to me."

Rudge spoke absent-mindedly, "Sounds like a good lead. Get a letter from her to someone who knows the caves."

"I'll do my best. It is just possible she will dislike talking of the caves. She seems reluctant to discuss her early life. She did once tell me something very extraordinary about her people. Not only she, but her mother, her grandmother and all her female

THE PALLID GIANT

ancestors as far back as she knows have been subject to a strange trance. In her family they seem to expect these and endure them as a traditional duty."

Rudge showed a new interest. "A trance? Cat-aleptic?"

"I hardly think so. In this trance she seems to pass from one personality to another,—a long series. Always at the end she is a man. Furthermore, the condition is self-induced. She told me that there is a belief in her family that these trances must be voluntarily endured once in so often."

My description seemed to excite Rudge unaccountably. His comment was not at all like him, and nettled me for a moment. "She seems to have been very confidential with you."

"Call it so if you wish. I became interested in a remark she let drop and pumped the rest out of her. As I remember, this conversation occurred at the time when I offered her a vacation that she might visit her home. She accepted the vacation but said she never wanted to see Aurigniac again."

"Very interesting." Rudge was now smiling his amends as though he feared he had hurt my feelings. "As for our present plan, she can surely direct us to some native who will give us real information instead of the ordinary twaddle of the guides."

"What about Markham?" I asked.

"He left Paris only day before yesterday and is not likely to be back within a week."

ESCAPE FROM THE PEACE CONFERENCE

On the following day I explained our plans to Mraaya, and as I expected, found her loth to talk of Aurigniac or its inhabitants. I felt also that she resented invasion of the caves by curiosity-seekers, for when I asked her to help us she was evasive.

"I have been away a long time."

"Surely, Mraaya, you know someone in Aurigniac who can give us information about the caves. Rudge doesn't visit them to gratify idle curiosity. He has a scientific interest."

"Rudge! Who is Rudge?" Mraaya spoke quickly. "Is he the man who came to the office for you last Wednesday?"

"Yes, a tall man, dark hair and——"

She stopped me with an impulsive gesture.

"I remember! Why does he go to the grottes?" (Mraaya unconsciously used the French word.)

"Rudge has been interested in prehistoric evidences for many years. He has wandered over the earth looking for such. His interest is strictly scientific."

Again Mraaya was silent, her eyes fixed on the desk in front of her. Finally she said, "Perhaps I can help you."

I hardly knew what to think of Mraaya's unexpected interest in Rudge and tried to recall the circumstances attending his visit to my office the preceding week. I felt sure that no word had passed between them on that occasion, but now recalled how

THE PALLID GIANT

persistently Rudge had looked at Mraaya, a circumstance which struck me oddly because, throughout our acquaintance, Rudge had showed little interest in women.

After lunch, Mraaya brought me a sealed envelope addressed to M. Leon Blanc, remarking, "Old Leon knows more about the grottos than anyone in Aurigniac or, I think, in France. He is a fanatic. He has spent his life hunting grottos."

Both Rudge and I were able to arrange for a week's absence from the Peace Conference and the following Tuesday was fixed upon as the day for starting our journey.

Fortunately, both of us spoke French, Rudge even showing an intimate colloquial knowledge of the language.

V

HOLIDAY

ON Monday night Rudge slept in his old room at the Crillon so that we might get an early start together. We were leaving by a seven-thirty train. When we arose at six o'clock, there was no chance for breakfast at the hotel; so we hunted up a little Buvette in the Boissy d'Anglas where coffee and rolls are served to early risers and night-workers going off duty. It was an ill-smelling place and we ate perched uncomfortably on high stools, yet Rudge was in the best of spirits. He seemed like a boy out of school with a long vacation in sight.

Outside, the rain was falling from dismal grey clouds which offered no suggestion that the sun would ever shine again. Through the dirty window panes an occasional pedestrian could be seen with his coat collar turned up, picking his way between the puddles. In spite of the depressing weather, Rudge's cheerfulness proved contagious. After two cups of black coffee had removed the physical handicap of a forcible awakening, I found myself laughing with him at the squalor which surrounded our

THE PALLID GIANT

morning meal. Rudge continually poked fun at the frowsy-headed boy who served us. It was good-natured fun and he made up to him by a tip at least three times the expected size.

Arrived at the Gare de Quai d'Orsay, we stowed our luggage in a second-class compartment, and strolled up and down the sloppy platform commenting on our discouraged-looking fellow passengers. Every incident of an ordinary train departure amused Rudge.

"See that porter with the two big bundles? It's even money he gets no tip. Then we will be treated to a delightful little sketch." Sure enough on his return the disappointed porter passed us mumbling savagely. Rudge threw at him, in French, "What did you expect from a 'rustre'?" The man cursed him and Rudge laughed.

A smutty-faced boy, perhaps four years old, who had been watching Rudge, fascinated by his unusual face or his height, now strayed from his parents who were arguing excitedly with a train-guard, and, stopping squarely opposite Rudge, thrust his hands deep in his new pockets and stared at him with the unabashed effrontery of childhood. Rudge and the boy looked at each other in silence for a full minute. Then, instead of giving the child a sou or patting him on the head as another might have done, Rudge, without changing countenance, held out his hand. The boy took it with equal seriousness and the two

46

HOLIDAY

walked, hand in hand, back to where the parents were collecting their scattered packages preparatory to entering a third-class compartment. Rudge bowed ceremoniously as they parted. He maintained the same serious air as the boy until he was back where I was standing. Then he turned with an affectionate smile to see the last of his little friend disappearing into the coach. I laughed.

"Great boy," said Rudge. Then he turned grave for a moment. "What kind of a world will he find when he grows up?" He caught himself quickly. "But that is all nothing to us now. The world and war and internationalism can go hang. What do you say? We're out of it. We're just unemotional scientists out sciencing." He smiled radiantly. "Let's never go back to the squabble and muddle of fake peacemaking. The world looks good this morning. Let's enjoy it."

Just beyond Orleans we crossed the river Loire. Rudge looked down at its current, swollen by recent rains. "Doesn't look much like the Mississippi, does it? Nor even the Ohio? And yet this river has been of priceless value to France. Before the French, the Romans made good use of it. They could jump from the Rhone to the Loire and so by water through all of central Gaul."

The Loire seemed to start a serious train of thought. "We often speak of the Romans as 'ancients,' but when we recall the unnumbered genera-

THE PALLID GIANT

tions of men and women who have lived and died on the banks of the Loire, Caesar seems a very recent visitor."

I said nothing, and after a few moments of meditation Rudge continued, "In my opinion, human civilization, if not the human race itself, had its beginning somewhere about here. Our theory of an Asiatic origin arose from the fact that the westward migration of the Aryans took place so recently that traces of it were easily found as soon as man started scientifically to investigate his own past. Yet that migration was only the last of hundreds of migrations which (usually forced by physical changes) have, during thousands of centuries, shifted the population of the earth, now east, now west, now north, now south. The trouble is that the older migrations left few evidences for future historians.

"It was just luck that somewhere between twenty-five and fifty thousand years ago the cold winds from the glacial north drove our 'Cro-Magnon' ancestors down across this country toward the Pyrenees, where mountain streams and a peculiar rock formation had, ages before, provided an immense number of caves well adapted to shelter them. For the first time human beings moved indoors. Those grotto homes preserved records which are now helping us push our knowledge of human history back several thousand years.

"The Aryan migration was never entitled to the

HOLIDAY

importance given it by 'prehistorians.' It is as though geologists were to study the latest rock strata, the 'Mesozoic,' and insist upon that as the one and only fact of geological history."

No country in the world is more beautiful than France in the month of June. Rudge's serious mood soon passed and together we enjoyed our ride through the fertile countryside and prosperous villages of central France.

At Souillac, Rudge leaned far out the car window. "That is the river Dordogne. Not far from here are the caves I visited ten years ago. Perhaps it was a mistake to pass these by in favor of the Pyrenees, but the fact is I felt a strong attraction toward an unfrequented field; also, I wanted to pay my respects to Aurigniac where the first evidences of cave civilization were found. Professor Gribbon thinks that the Pyrenees caves have been neglected. He told me the other day that in his opinion more prehistoric records would ultimately be found in the Pyrenees region than anywhere else in the world."

On the following day we took a local train from Toulouse to Boussens, and drove off over the hills in an open charette, with the snow-capped range of the Pyrenees showing its gleaming peaks to the east and west, as far as our eyes could reach. A delightful ride! For myself, I felt in no haste to reach our destination.

From Boussens to Aurigniac is twenty-one kilome-

THE PALLID GIANT

ters so that it was after four o'clock when, rounding a little wood, we came in sight of that ancient town whose weathered-grey and red-roofed houses seemed crowding up from the valley below to get as near as might be to the picturesque ruins of an eleventh century chateau which towered aloft from the top of the hill. Aurigniac is one of those unspoiled, old-world towns which are now only to be found far from the main lines of travel.

We were welcomed at the little inn with true French hospitality, and installed in chambers scrupulously neat, if a little bare of furniture. Having sent word to Leon Blanc to meet us there at eight o'clock, Rudge and I strolled through the winding streets and spent a pleasant half hour visiting the restored but still interesting Eglise, just in the shadow of the ruined chateau. Then we settled ourselves in two chairs which our landlady had placed for us outside the inn. We talked little. We were comfortable and satisfied with ourselves, and as we sat there, looking down upon the smiling landscape of the Haute Garonne, and away to the striking dark-green foothills of the Pyrenees topped by snow-white peaks, it seemed that this was exactly what we came to Aurigniac to find.

As I look back on that journey from Paris and that evening in Aurigniac, I lose faith in 'premonition.' We were on the eve of the most startling experiences of our lives and yet were more carefree

HOLIDAY

than we had been for many months. We both felt like happy truants. We had run away from the perplexing social and political problems of a world struggle; from the ambition of politicians and the fears of nations. We felt at peace with ourselves and our surroundings. We were happy in the prospect of a week's enjoyment of leisure in this beautiful country with just enough exploration to give interest to our wanderings.

I pointed to a sloping field where men and women were forking new-cut hay. "That is reality—real human life—the real world. Why have we Peace Conferences anyway?" Rudge's whole attitude expressed contentment, and he sat for a long time without replying. Finally his brow contracted. He mused, "Why war?" then hastened to add: "You are right. We took ourselves too seriously in Paris."

VI

CAVE COUNTRY

AFTER a really excellent dinner, served in a large, over-ornamented dining room on the second floor of the inn, we descended to the little café. As we entered, an old man, who had been sitting at a table in the corner, arose and greeted us diffidently. It was Leon. He proved to be of a type very common in southern France; his weather-beaten face was dominated by heavy eyebrows and a long grey moustache which curved downwards to a point quite beyond the outline of his chin. Altogether he differed little from the men we had seen driving bullock-carts or plodding behind those herds of long-horned cattle, which frequently blocked our road during the afternoon drive from Boussens.

In one respect Leon differed from all these. He had the eye of a mystic,—or a fanatic. He seldom looked directly at us, but when he did, there was a piercing quality to his gaze which made me feel just a little uncomfortable. His demeanor suggested embarrassment, but even more, a certain self-defensive reserve, as though he feared that our coming had something of evil import for himself. Rudge spoke

CAVE COUNTRY

pleasantly as he handed him the letter which Mraaya had given us. With a shaking hand, the old man opened it, and, holding the paper far from his eyes, read it to himself very slowly. When he had finished, he sat for some time looking fixedly at the letter. Finally he folded and placed it in his pocket.

“What is it the Messieurs would have me do?”

Rudge explained our scientific interest in the caves, and I added, “Mraaya says that you know more about them than any other man in France.” I thought I detected a little flush of pride at this compliment, but if so, it was quickly smothered in the same noncommittal expression which he had maintained from the first.

With his eyes still averted, he asked another question: “What grottes will the Messieurs visit?”

Rudge was studying the old man. He said, “We are trusting that largely to you. We wish to see all the interesting grottos in this vicinity. I understand that the old grotto near Aurigniac is empty and nearly destroyed, but we would like to see it for the sake of its honorable history. Then there is the Grotto Gorgas, near St. Bertrand de Comminges, and Tuc d’Audoubert, and Mas d’Azil. We are more interested in prehistoric evidences than in the grottos themselves; so we count on you to take us where these are abundant, and we are hoping that you will show us obscure and little-explored grottos where the evidences of early civilization lie still untouched.”

THE PALLID GIANT

There ensued a long silence. Leon stared hard at the table. Once or twice he looked up at me, but never, after the first exchange of greetings, did he look at Rudge. He seemed awed by Rudge. He was evidently making a silent appraisal of our character and aims, and I felt that he had selected me as the more hopeful subject for observation. Finally the old man said, "I will go with you to the grottes if you wish. When will the Monsieur start?" This time he fairly omitted me from consideration. It was evidently "Monsieur"—Monsieur Rudge—of whom he was thinking. I was an unimportant intermediary.

I looked at Rudge. He was regarding the old man with a whimsical expression on his face. "Tomorrow morning, if you will. At nine?"

Leon nodded affirmatively, still looking at me. "I will be here at nine."

Rudge called for wine, but Leon arose hastily, shaking his head. "I will not have wine to-night."

During this interview, our landlady had evinced a growing curiosity as to our conversation, seizing upon every excuse to pass near the table where we sat; and, after Leon's refusal of wine, she remained beside us. Her eyes followed his bent figure as he moved slowly toward the door and disappeared in the darkness outside. She shrugged her shoulders.

I asked, "Do you know him?"

CAVE COUNTRY

"Know Leon Blanc? Everyone knows him." She leaned toward us and tapped her forehead.

"Is he mad?" I asked.

"Not mad," the little woman scowled as though trying to find a word. "Only 'maniaque.' He cares for nothing but grottes. When I was a little girl he was hunting grottes everywhere. He still hunts them. He believes an old legend of the country-folk round about which tells of a wonderful 'lost grotte.' I think he will die searching for this. Leon Blanc, the Grotteur!" Again she shrugged her shoulders. "He has even searched beyond the Pyrenees."

Left alone, we commented on Leon's reluctance to commit himself. Rudge laughed. "Your stenographer friend assured us of a cordial reception from the old man but her letter seemed to do more harm than good. I watched his face when he read it. He fairly turned pale. What do you suppose is the matter with him? Is he afraid we will steal his grottos?"

On the following day we hired the only serviceable motor-car in Aurigniac and drove by a winding, hedge-bordered road toward the southwest,—toward St. Gaudens and Montrejeau, and the foothills around St. Bertrand de Comminges, where lies the Grotto Gorgas.

Ten kilometers beyond St. Gaudens we left the Garonne, but only for a short space. Swinging

THE PALLID GIANT

to the right, over a low ridge, we dropped into the beautiful valley of Luchon, and crossed a more turbulent Garonne,—a clear, dashing, mountain stream, just pulling itself together, as it were, after twenty miles of boiling rapids and headlong plunges from the far off Spanish Val d'Aran, where it collects the grey-blue water from many melting glaciers.

The "Grotte du Gorgas" proved truly magnificent;—spacious halls, some broad and low, others lofty with dome-like ceilings, were reached through narrow passages and galleries glittering with hanging stalactites. From time to time, Leon paused and held his candle close to the wall or some low ceiling.

The first examples of prehistoric art, thus revealed, did not, I confess, seem to me very conclusive. There were groups of short straight lines and confused curves which ran into each other, or lost themselves on rougher surfaces. There were undefined patches of bright-red ochre whose significance even Leon could not explain. It was only through much interpreting and the exercise of an appreciative imagination that I was able to see the animals he announced; until on the wall of a small chamber, Leon's dim light revealed the very definite outline of a horse with mane and tail. A part of its body was obscured by the head of a stag which had been superimposed upon it.

Rudge had eyes only for the signs of prehistoric man, and his interest in these "evidences" seemed to

CAVE COUNTRY

win him the favor of old Leon. As the exploration proceeded, conversation between these two became increasingly cordial.

It was nearly three hours after we entered the Grotto Gorgas that we found ourselves again in the open air. Rudge was enthusiastic. He said to Leon, "If, as you say, Gorgas is the least interesting of the grottos, I shall find a week with you much too short." To me he said in English, "Leon is an extraordinary man. His mind has reconstructed the history of those ancient people better than our scientific archaeologists. He seems to have an instinct for the details of their lives and his interpretations ring true."

Rudge was standing on the ledge in front of the grotto. He looked across the valley and down at the winding river, his countenance expressing great interest; extending one hand, he swept it inclusively around the panorama of hill and valley below. He spoke in English. "Imagine standing here twenty-five thousand years ago. It is early morning. The fire which burned brightly through the night has been allowed to die down to glowing coals, over which women are roasting meat for your breakfast. You are watching that little 'run' where the woods on either side come close to the stream, hoping to see a herd of deer or wild boar or a lonely moose come down to drink."

He paused, absorbed in his own imaginings. "That was a rugged race of men—and a very intelli-

THE PALLID GIANT

gent race. Their practical skill, their art, their skulls which these very caves have preserved, show that 'Cro-Magnon' man had a brain little if any inferior to our own. He was not the low-browed, unintelligent animal he has been so often painted. We must go further back,—much further back in the ages,—perhaps a hundred thousand years,—perhaps more,—to find the prehistoric brute-man of popular belief."

As we walked back through the forest, Rudge continued: "Leon drew my special attention to that double row of apparently meaningless lines in the first chamber. He says that near the entrance of every grotto are similar lines. He has examined them all with minute care and assures me that there is nothing accidental about their number or their positions or their crossings. Leon's mind has a very peculiar slant. He believes that the makers of those lines were not trying to represent anything intelligible to themselves but were reproducing with mechanical exactness some traditional figures which had come down to them from ancestors who lived ages before the 'Cro-Magnons' or 'Magdalenians.' His reasoning was very conclusive."

During our ride back to Aurigniac, Rudge was in a mellow mood. He said little more about the grottos, but remarked appreciatively on beautiful bits of landscape and showed a lively interest in the peasant life of country and village. He still had,

58

CAVE COUNTRY

I am sure, no premonition of the amazing adventure just ahead of us.

Leon, sitting on the seat with the chauffeur, relapsed into silence, broken only by monosyllabic answers when addressed. The almost vivacious friendliness of his conversation with Rudge in the grotto seemed to evaporate in the open air. I have since wondered what was going through his mind. Was it just fear or a conflict between fear and a desire to ask our aid?

VII

OLD LEON TELLS A WEIRD TALE

ON the following day we drove to Marcillac where the Grotto, from a most majestic entrance, grew steadily smaller as we proceeded, until it became a succession of narrow passages and low, rock-strewn chambers presenting many obstacles to our progress. The marvels of "Cro-Magnon" art to be seen on the walls of the "Grotto Marcillac" put an end to the skepticism I had felt. Here the drawings were too clear and well-defined to leave any doubt as to their human authorship. Horses predominated, but there were also bison, deer and woolly mammoth, as well as smaller animals.

Finally we entered a passage so low that, starting on hands and knees, we were soon forced to lie flat and crawl on our stomachs. My enthusiasm for prehistoric evidences was made of too weak stuff to carry me farther. I called through the dark hole ahead (Leon, with the light, had turned a corner) that I would return to the last chamber and await them there. From Rudge came back something which sounded like "all right," and I wriggled my way

60

OLD LEON TELLS A WEIRD TALE

backward, feet first, to the chamber we had just left. Fortunately I had in my pocket matches and a candle which Leon had given me, and I tried to amuse myself by exploring the obscure recesses of the room.

After a time I wearied of the tomb-like silence of the place and its dantesque shapes revealed by the flickering candle, and slowly I made my way to the outer world. I was often near to losing myself in the labyrinth of passages, and twice my candle was extinguished. Never before had blue sky and a sunlit earth looked so pleasing as when I emerged from that eerie home of our troglodyte ancestors.

An hour passed, and just as I was beginning to worry, the others appeared, Rudge besmeared, but radiant, and old Leon talking volubly at him from behind.

"It was great!" As he spoke, Rudge's enthusiasm, shining through an indescribably dirty face, made him as nearly ridiculous as I had ever seen him. "You should have gone on. That last room was evidently some kind of a sacrificial chamber. Besides some very perfect drawings of horses and mammoth and bison, there were actual beasts modelled in clay. Many were mutilated, some to such an extent as to be unrecognizable, but we found one almost perfect statue of a tiger, stuck full of spear holes."

I had had my fill of grottos but Rudge's appetite seemed only whetted. As we drove away he said earnestly, "If I could spend a few months here

THE PALLID GIANT

with Leon, I could tell the world more about pre-historic man than has ever been told before. There are hints too of a history running much further back than 'Cro-Magnon' times. Leon believes that these cave-people brought with them from other lands, their ancient Gods and many traditions of indefinite antiquity."

We crossed the Garonne at Salies du Salat and thence by a bad country road to Marsulas. There I was permitted, with little protest from my companions, to remain outside while they spent nearly two hours in the grotto. I wandered into the first chamber which may have been, as Rudge said, a fine "living-room" twenty-five thousand years ago but whose ceiling was so overhung by savage, loose-looking boulders that I felt nervous until again outside.

When, two hours later, Rudge emerged, he was even more enthusiastic than at Marcillac. Leon, just behind, seemed fully to share his enthusiasm. These two sat down on a large rock near the entrance to the grotto and discussed eagerly what they had seen. Leon's reserve had thawed to such an extent that when they arose to collect their scattered belongings, he grasped Rudge's hand saying, "Monsieur Rûge, I wish I had met you many years ago." He shook his head, brooding inwardly, then leaned toward Rudge as though to say something even more per-

OLD LEON TELLS A WEIRD TALE

sonal or confidential, but suddenly checking himself, he moved away down the path.

Rudge, who, since coming out of the grotto, had hardly recognized my presence, now turned to me with a slightly apologetic air. "Leon and I would have made a great pair. With him as a guide, I could have spent those years which were wasted on books and museums, in sorting out, from actual, first-hand evidence, facts for a real 'prehistoric history.' "

As we drove back toward Aurigniac, Rudge nodded almost affectionately toward Leon, sitting on the seat in front. He spoke in English, "My work at the Peace Conference is about finished. I think I shall come back here and spend several months with Leon."

When we arrived at the inn, Rudge was still in high spirits. He invited old Leon to eat supper with us and after a brief show of reluctance, the latter accepted. During the meal, Rudge plied him with questions but the old man grew more and more abstracted and uncommunicative.

The meal was finished and plans for our visit next day to Tuc d'Audoubert and Mas d'Azil had been settled, when unexpectedly Leon hinted that he would like to talk with us privately. I was taken by surprise but Rudge instantly connected this request with the old fellow's abstraction and uneasiness during the previous two days. He readily agreed.

We went up to Rudge's room. While I was light-

THE PALLID GIANT

ing the old-fashioned brass lamp and pulling down the shades, Rudge renewed the fire which our landlady had thoughtfully laid for us. Leon appeared embarrassed and ill at ease. He sat on the edge of a chair with his cap held awkwardly in both hands and looked everywhere except at his hosts. In his own outdoors and among the caves, our relations had approached a basis of equality, but it seemed that indoors the instincts of the old man's peasant breeding were strong upon him. I tried to relieve his embarrassment by some ordinary comments on the village and the inn. He answered in monosyllables. After a time, I addressed Rudge, but received in answer hardly more than I had from Leon.

Rudge had thrown himself into a deep chair and with his forehead resting on one hand, was gazing into the fire. After a time the silence became oppressive. Leon began to fidget. Then Rudge, without changing his position or looking at him, spoke in an even, conversational tone.

"Leon, you have found something. What is it?"

The old man was taken by surprise. He hesitated. "Ah, Monsieur Rûge knows much. But Monsieur Rûge does not know this. No one knows it but me. It is mine! It is mine! You will know it is mine!"

"Certainly it is yours." Still Rudge did not look around. "You want to tell us about it. Go ahead. Your secret will be safe with us."

OLD LEON TELLS A WEIRD TALE

Leon started to speak, then looked at me. "Monsieur Walt r, he will keep my secret too?"

I assured him he could trust me. Leon still hesitated. Rudge raised himself and turned toward him.

"I assume there is nothing wrong in your secret;—that you will reveal nothing we ought to tell. With that understanding you can trust it with Walters and me."

Leon seemed to have finally made up his mind. "I will tell it all to you. You will help me."

He rose and came closer to the fire, standing so as to face Rudge.

"My race is descended from the people of the grottes. Mraaya is of the same race, and more, she is one of those women called 'Les Init es' who must never leave the grotte country. When I was a boy my mother told me of the 'Grotte Glorieuse,'—the wonderful grotte in which are the sacred things of our race. All our people know of this grotte;—Mraaya knows of it; but no one has ever found it. My mother told that in this grotte is proof that we were the first race, and there is magic in it too, which would give us power over all the world. I am an old man. Always I have hunted for that grotte. People laughed at me,—but——."

His eyes, in the firelight, blazed with excitement, he seemed to crouch and pushed the hand which held his cap toward Rudge.

THE PALLID GIANT

"—I have found it."

He stopped, still holding out his cap. I was beginning to share the old man's excitement. I looked at Rudge. He was again sunk in his chair and eyeing Leon with an expression on his face I had never seen before.

"You have found it?—where?"

"Ah, Monsieur Rûge, I must tell you about it first."

The old man made several starts but seemed the victim of some internal struggle. He paced back and forth, squeezing his cap with both hands.

"You will not understand. You will think me bad. Perhaps I am. No, I am not bad. I will not touch any of the 'sacred things.' Sometime I will reveal the grotte to 'Les Initiés.' Oh! Monsieur Rûge! I have been always poor,—very poor. I am old. I shall soon die. Why should I not enjoy it before I die!"

He was back facing Rudge. The latter eyed him as before.

"Enjoy what?"

"Riches, Monsieur Rûge! More riches than in all the world!" He spread his hands wide. His knees bent lower. "Diamonds and rubies and gold,—heaps of gold and heaps of diamonds."

The climax in his revelations stopped the old man. Rudge started him again. "In the grotto?"

"Yes, in the grotte, a different grotte, full of

OLD LEON TELLS A WEIRD TALE

wonderful things I don't know. Those, I would not take away."

Rudge was beginning to see the story. Leon had found a cave full of relics of some long-gone race; probably a burial place where gold and precious ornaments had been interred with their princely owner. Before this lure of gold, Leon's mystic passion,—the religious passion of a lifetime,—had melted. Rudge calmly leaned forward and poked the fire, asking, as he did so, "Why did you tell us?"

"Because, Monsieur Rûge, you are honorable. Mraaya wrote that you and Monsieur Waltér were honorable,—I could trust you. No one else can help me, but you can save my riches for me. You can take them to America. I can go there. The Prefect watches us poor people, oh! so close. The government would seize my gold." In his mind it was already his wealth.

"You shall have part of the gold."

He stopped again, exhausted by his excitement.

"You will help me, Monsieur Rûge?" He spoke pleadingly. Then, as though a fear had struck him, "If not, you will tell no one,—you will not?"

Rudge was now smoking his pipe thoughtfully. "No, we will not tell, Leon. Show us the grotto. Until we see the treasure, we will not decide whether we can help you. First take us to the grotto."

For some reason, Rudge's last words appeared to

THE PALLID GIANT

disturb Leon. He began, "The Messieurs cannot,—you would not,——"

Then he stammered helplessly and his already over-wrought nerves seemed to give way under a pressure whose cause was by no means apparent to me. He backed to his chair, and sat down speechless. Rudge frowned, but instead of pressing him for an explanation, spoke to me in English,

"What do you make of this, Walters?"

Before I could answer, Leon had recovered himself; Rudge's words, which of course he did not understand, must have aroused in his mind a fear of losing our aid; for he rose hastily and started to speak, apparently still uncertain as to just what he should say.

"The Messieurs cannot,—no, no, they need not—I mean it is very difficult to enter the grotto." He extended his hands toward me as though hoping that some inhibition of mine would assist him. "Monsieur Waltér, if he knew, would not like to go into that grotte. It is terrible."

"You mean," Rudge looked at him from under lowered brows, "that you do not want us to see the grotto. You do not trust us."

"No! No! that is impossible Monsieur Rûge. I never thought that. I would bring the riches to you. I would save you all the trouble,—the very bad trouble of going into the grotte."

"Then you will take us there?" Rudge's tone

OLD LEON TELLS A WEIRD TALE

was compelling and assumed an affirmative answer.

Leon temporized: "Do the Messieurs really wish to go into the grotte? It is very bad, worse than you can think." He moved closer to Rudge and whispered hoarsely,—“If the Messieurs knew the grotte, they would not go. You must go under water,—through cold water,—black water!”

It was now Rudge's turn to be surprised. He asked rather weakly, "You went under water to find your grotto?"

"Yes, Monsieur. It is the only way. Deep water! Oh, so dark and cold and only a little air beyond!" He again looked at me as though inviting a squeamishness he feared Rudge lacked. The latter was also looking at me and said in English,

"The strangest thing I ever heard. Do you believe that Leon could enter a grotto under water?"

The same question was in my mind, and I asked Leon, "Do you mean that you went altogether under water or that you waded?" With one hand I indicated water up to my waist.

Leon came toward me in his eagerness. "No! No! Monsieur Waltér. All! All! Through the dark water,—as a fish. It seemed like death,—but,—” his eyes flashed, “beyond the water I found it!”

By this time Rudge had come to a decision,—for both of us it seemed. "Leon, we will go through

THE PALLID GIANT

anything you have been through. We must visit the grotto before we agree to help you."

I have never been able to decide whether Leon was at first influenced by distrust or really hesitated to introduce us to such a ghastly experience as the penetration of the Grotto Glorieuse proved to be. If the former, anxiety for our assistance had now overcome his reluctance, for he entered wholeheartedly into details of the expedition.

He explained, "That part of the grotte, until you come to the 'water-hole' has always been known to the peasants round about. Its entrance is so plain I go only by night." Then he told the story of how he found the grotto beyond the "water-hole,"—as he called it; and this account was not calculated to remove my growing disinclination for an adventure which his first suggestion of a cold plunge had already painted as anything but pleasant. Rudge, on the other hand, seemed elated by the prospect, and asked many questions about the unusual formation of the grotto.

In spite of the repugnance I felt toward crawling into the bowels of the earth,—bad enough in itself—through a water-filled tunnel, I decided to be a sport and stick by Rudge; perhaps also my curiosity had been aroused by Leon's description of the gold and precious stones in his grotto. It was arranged that on the following day we were to purchase the necessary outfits,—a chauffeur's one-piece suit, called

OLD LEON TELLS A WEIRD TALE

"combinaison," a pair of cheap cloth shoes and a loose oil-skin cap in which could be carried candles and matches.

Then Leon, still showing signs of nervousness, left the room. When he was gone, Rudge rose and stood with back to the fire, his hands folded behind him. He was suppressing his excitement, but with the first words it blazed out. "I think we are on the eve of the most wonderful prehistoric discovery ever made. What luck! Walters!"

VIII

EARTH, WATER AND DARKNESS

I MUST confess that I did not sleep well that night. At one time I had firmly decided to let Rudge and Leon visit the Grotto Glorieuse without me, and then I dreamed that both of them, in some past age, lived under water and, like the mermaids of fairy-tales, were now luring me to my death. However, in the cold light of day and after a shopping tour in Aurigniac had dispelled those sombre shadows of the supernatural, I decided to go wherever Rudge went.

At noon we three strolled down the high street of Aurigniac and out along a road which disappeared over the hills to the south. At the end of an hour we reached D——, a small village in the foothills of the Pyrenees. There we put up at a tiny inn whose proprietor appeared to be an old friend of Leon's. At the latter's suggestion, we assumed the rôle of tourists, and during the afternoon visited points of local interest and climbed nearby hills for "views."

After the evening meal, we sauntered out of the village toward the east, Leon having left with his

EARTH, WATER AND DARKNESS

friend, the innkeeper, some ingenious story to account for the probability that we would not return until a late hour. We proceeded for some distance along the highway and then turned into a byroad which wound upward among the hills. Lonesome looking groups of grey farm buildings surrounded by pastures and fields of grain, alternated with dense, dark forests. Men passed us silently,—strange, gloomy figures who turned to peer at us through the gathering darkness. A dog rushed out and barked savagely. Altogether, for me, this approach to Leon's mysterious grotto was rapidly taking on the sinister gloom of Dante's descent into hell, which I must say fitted uncomfortably with my visions of the night before.

At a lonely spot in the road, Leon stopped and whispered, "We will wait by these bushes till we are sure that no one comes." He had evidently timed our journey so as to bring us to this point just at dark. After standing in silence for a few minutes, he climbed a low stone fence, saying as he did so, "Keep close to me." Behind Leon we walked, or rather stumbled through a pasture, and crossing a muddy lane, kept our way along the line of low shrubs which bordered it until we came to a stream just emerging from the dark shadow of the hills. Following this stream, we ascended a narrow gorge for perhaps a quarter of a mile.

Leon stopped. A little way ahead we could hear

THE PALLID GIANT

water falling from the rocks. He whispered, "That is the water from the grotte. We cannot climb there but must go up the bank here."

We scrambled up through dense underbrush until we reached a comparatively level place on the side of the hill. Leon put down his bundle and having instructed us again to remove all our clothing and dress only in the "combinaison," shoes and cap, disappeared for a moment, returning dressed in his own outfit. When we were all prepared for the water, Leon gave us each matches and two candles and showed us how to adjust our caps so as to keep those essential articles dry.

It was now very dark. Against the starlight the shadow of a mountain could barely be discerned across the ravine. A short steep descent which ended with an unexpected slide down a slippery mud slope, landed us in the little stream which flowed from the grotto. The water came to our knees. It was very cold and our feet sank in soft ooze.

I was regretting my decision to accompany this old gnome to his infernal cavern, when Rudge gave my arm an encouraging squeeze, and whispered, "This will be a wonderful experience." He kept his hold on my arm while we followed Leon up the stream and into the blank darkness of a low tunnel. Once inside, we found more headroom and the ooze under our feet changed to a coarse gravel. We had proceeded, still wading, for a hundred yards fur-

74

EARTH, WATER AND DARKNESS

ther, feeling our way with outstretched hands, when the passage turned abruptly and I brushed against Leon. He was removing the candle and matches from his cap. After lighting the candle, the old man surprised us by speaking in his natural voice.

"I dared not show a light before. Behind this turn it cannot be seen outside the grotte."

We found ourselves in a small rock chamber whose low ceiling hung threateningly over a pool of liquid blackness which, in the flickering light, looked like anything but water. Holding the candle above his head, Leon waded into this gloomy pool until the water rose almost to his chin. "Come," he said. "You must take good note of the 'water-hole' while there is light." He pointed to a corner of the chamber where no sign of an opening appeared; only solid rock, as on other sides. "It is there!"

I had followed Rudge into the deeper water which now rose above my waist. It was fearfully cold. I have never been rated a coward, but as that icy water enveloped more and more of my body and I listened to Leon's hoarse voice saying, "It is no more than three meters under water to the other side," I wished with all my heart that I had followed the dictates of cowardice while it might have done some good. Even now, if it had not been for Rudge, I think I would have turned tail and fled from the grotto.

I had little time for consideration. Leon extin-

THE PALLID GIANT

guished the candle and placed it in his water-tight cap. "Remember the place," he said. Then I heard him splashing toward the farther wall. There was a final gurgle of water, and Leon was gone; and again the cavern was deathly still save as the ripples he had started broke faintly on the rocky ceiling.

The next moment Rudge moved forward saying, "I'll go next if you wish." His voice resounded strangely in the stygian darkness of the chamber. At first he seemed to experience a little difficulty in locating the opening, but, all too soon, he had followed Leon into the unseen "water-hole," and I was alone.

It is impossible to describe the horror of that moment. I was inconceivably alone. I felt as though in a trap,—worse than that, far worse,—as though the earth had opened and swallowed me, and now the primitive elements, Earth, Water and Darkness,—this awful darkness seemed the most ruthless of elements,—were closing in remorselessly to snuff out my puny life. With a tremendous effort I pulled myself together and moved through the water toward the point where the others had disappeared. I touched cold rock and followed along the wall for several yards, feeling below the water line as Leon had directed.

Then I received a fright which was not imaginary; I could not find the opening; everywhere my hand touched solid rock. Hastily I canvassed the

76

EARTH, WATER AND DARKNESS

possibility of finding my way out of the pool and back to the entrance of the grotto, but in that darkness, so intense it seemed to press against my eyes, even that alternative appalled me. Suddenly my searching hand slipped into a break in the rocky wall; I had found the "water-hole." With a gasp of relief, hardly pausing to take sufficient breath, I plunged below and struggled forward.

I had pushed my way through the narrow passage, using both hands and feet, until it seemed that I had surely advanced several yards, when my breath grew short and I lifted my head. It struck against solid rock. I must have been dazed, for thereafter, in spite of superhuman efforts to go forward, I still found only water and rock. My breath was almost gone. I gave myself up for lost. At that moment a hand grasped my shoulder and Rudge's strong arm pulled me forward and up and my head emerged into the blessed air.

It was pitchy dark and my mind was confused as to where I was, until Rudge's voice, close at hand, brought me to my senses.

"You must have tried to come up too soon. I felt a commotion in the water and reached for you. Are you all right?"

I answered "Yes," but our circumstances did not seem to warrant any enthusiastic cheerfulness; we were in a narrow passage where we could not stand erect, the rocky ceiling was still uncomfortably close

THE PALLID GIANT

to the water, and we were certainly entombed deeper than ever.

In the meantime Leon had gone ahead to where the water was shallower, and a little later succeeded in lighting his candle. I shall never forget the sight that candle revealed. We were in a long, narrow tunnel filled with water to a point within a foot of the roof, and in the slender air-space between I could see Rudge's head bobbing along as he worked his way toward the distant light, while savage, jagged rocks above seemed gnashing to devour him. From the bottom of my soul I felt that this was no fit place for human beings.

I pressed after Rudge as fast as I could. Gradually the ceiling rose and the water grew shallower until it was again knee-deep. Leon had reached a place where the grotto widened and we found him standing on a little beach awaiting our approach.

"Before we go on," he said, "see if your matches are still dry. The only real danger in these grottes is losing light. Without light," he shrugged his shoulders, "we might be here always." We dried our hands as well as we could on the walls of the cavern and were relieved to find that no water had reached our matches.

From this point on we encountered only shallow wading, save that once or twice when a labyrinth of fallen boulders and towering stalagmites seemed to bar the way, we followed Leon's wavering light

EARTH, WATER AND DARKNESS

through winding passages,—mere crevasses,—where the water rose above our waists. Occasionally too, some sharp turn or bold rock contour obliged us to cross a deeper pool. It was cold work, but I felt reconciled as long as we were spared more “water-holes.”

For nearly an hour we followed Leon thus,—a weird journey. It seemed as though this underground stream had struggled for ages with the mountain above and around it,—cutting, splitting, tearing down rock. Here, we found it slipping through a long smooth tunnel; there again, blocked by its own destructive success, it had reversed itself and forced an outlet in a new direction or had disappeared entirely, creeping out of sight under a mass of rock and debris which nearly filled the grotto.

I marveled that the old man, on that first exploration, ever found his way through it all. Even now he once or twice entered the wrong passage and, muttering to himself, would lead us back for a new start.

Finally, having climbed an unusually difficult stalagmite mass and paused on its summit for breath, we were cheered by Leon’s terse statement, “Soon we come to the dry grotte.” Rudge crept to the edge of our lofty resting place and peered into the darkness below. I followed. What I saw in the dim light was a scene I shall never forget,—unearthly, fantastic, beyond my power of description,—a scene

THE PALLID GIANT

such as I had supposed existed only in nightmares or in the brain of Dante's bizarre illustrator.

Across a shadowy chasm, monstrous rock shapes rose and more behind until their ghostly outlines faded far away in the Hadean darkness. Huge stalactites thrust their sharp points threateningly from the roof. To the right was a stark grim wall, flanked by a gargantuan column which rose sheer out of the water below and disappeared in the obscurity of the lofty ceiling. Between was the black gulf of the hell-pictures with blacker water lapping the rocks on either side.

Leon held his candle lower and I noted with a touch of apprehensive foreboding, two openings in the rock extending a few feet above the water line, one on each side of the massive column.

"That is where the water comes in," he said. "The grotte divides here. I explored that passage first. It soon comes to an end; beyond only a narrow crevasse through which the stream enters the mountain from somewhere above. The other branch, there!—" he pointed in the opposite direction, "is dry." He turned to Rudge. "I think, Monsieur Rûge, it was all dry when our people lived in the grotte. This water has broken in since."

I looked down in the direction Leon had pointed. The wall on that side curved quickly out of sight in the darkness. Between this and a dizzy pyramid

EARTH, WATER AND DARKNESS

of rock, water could be discerned but there was little to suggest any passage beyond. Leon spoke again.

"See! Just below here runs a little ledge,—we must walk on that. Beyond, by hugging close the wall, we can work our way to where there is little water. Follow me. I will show you places for your hands and feet."

He slid carefully down the steep side of the stalagmite and moving along the ledge, awaited us. Rudge prepared to follow. I studied the situation. I felt very decidedly that crawling around the face of that cliff as Leon suggested would be a ticklish proceeding. I had noted an easy slope to the right which, with a short drop at the bottom, would permit one to enter the pool and it occurred to me that I preferred a cold bath to the other route. I started down.

Leon saw my intention and screamed excitedly, "Non, Monsieur! Non! C'est profond! Tres profond!"

Apparently there was nothing for it but to follow the others. I crawled back and slowly, with many misgivings, climbed down to the ledge, flattened myself against the wall and grasping small projections as instructed by Leon, I made my way around the curve and down to the place where Rudge and Leon were standing in water above their knees. Here was an open space of considerable breadth. Other passages similar to the one by which we had

THE PALLID GIANT

entered led away in many directions, and selecting one of these, Leon led while we splashed along behind him for eight or ten yards. Then we emerged by a series of natural steps into the dry gallery at the end of which could be seen the entrance to a tunnel of considerable size and height.

Rudge stopped here and began swinging his arms violently in an effort to warm himself. I did likewise; and we swung and slapped ourselves there in the darkness,—Leon had gone ahead,—until we were again reasonably comfortable in spite of our damp clothing. Rudge remarked on Leon's indifference to cold or danger. "For the time being the strength of his passion seems able to carry him through anything." Rudge lighted his candle and we started after Leon, hurrying through a long succession of passages of varying widths and heights. Finally, after ascending a steep incline, the grotto widened into a large chamber with alcoves, two on either side, apparently carved by the hand of man. These looked as though they might have been intended for sleeping places.

Leon was awaiting us here and he now hurried to the farther end of the chamber. There three steps led to a platform faced by a wall of rock, on which were many strange figures grouped in a rough circle. Some were shaped like spears, others were round,—probably clubs, and all were pointing toward the center where a crudely drawn figure of a human

82

EARTH, WATER AND DARKNESS

being, apparently dead, was lying on what looked like a pile of rocks.

At right angle to this barrier, more steps led upward. Leon turned to us. He was trembling with excitement. "Let me go first; I have candles there." We could hear Leon moving about in the space beyond, and then a brighter light shone around the corner of the rock; he had lighted more candles. Leon called, "Monsieur Rûge," and we stepped out into the room. With a common impulse, we stopped. In spite of the preparation of Leon's story, we were not prepared for the sight which met our eyes.

IX

THE GROTTO GLORIEUSE

WE were in a chamber perhaps forty feet long and half as wide. The height was difficult to estimate in the uncertain light which reached the ceiling from a half dozen candles placed on the floor. I remember only a general impression of loftiness; for at the moment I had no eyes for details of the grotto itself. I was literally struck dumb by the dazzling, bewildering, astounding display of gold and precious stones which burst upon my view. The light of the candles, reflected from a thousand different contours, sparkled and glowed with an effect almost hypnotic. I was carried completely out of myself,—to the fabulous realms of Oriental magic,—those lurid dreams of the Arabian Nights, where Genii, in a second's time, created wealth beyond the imagination of man. The quantity and value of the gold and gems before us was,—well! simply impossible! Instinct and common sense,—all save my eyes told me that such riches did not exist outside of story-books, and for months afterward,—until the simple story of its collection was told,—I had a feeling that my senses

THE GROTTO GLORIEUSE

were under some kind of an illusory spell that night in the Grotto Glorieuse.

For a considerable space in the middle of the chamber, Leon had covered the limestone floor with a coarse cloth and in the center of this he had heaped a miscellany of gold ware, hundreds of pieces it seemed, of every size and description. Few of the objects could be identified from where we stood near the entrance, excepting the magnificent statue of a female figure which crowned the pile and an assortment of large vessels and flagons standing around the base.

While this heap of gold was the most conspicuous, it was not the most striking feature of the display before us. Its splendor was outshone by a dozen smaller heaps of gems which Leon had arranged with a whimsically meticulous concern for relative colors and values. Nearest us were the diamonds. Even at this distance of time I draw a longer breath when I think of the indescribable brilliance which flashed upon us from that pile of diamonds.

These details were not, of course, all apparent at first glance, but the general effect was staggering. Leon had placed six candles around the cloth,—two on each of three sides, leaving the one nearest us vacant. From the location of the diamonds, I guessed that on this side the old man had been in the habit of worshipping his new God of Wealth.

Not the least dramatic detail of the picture was old

THE PALLID GIANT

Leon himself. He was near the edge of the white square on which the treasure lay, his body half turned toward it in a crouching position. His hands, as though impelled by some irresistible attraction, were reaching toward the gold. With chin pushed forward and mouth half open, his profile gave the impression of a starving man about to devour some marvellous feast. Hearing us in the room, he turned his head. His body still remained in position for the feast and his hands still reached for the gold.

"Monsieur Rûge, is it not as I told you?" His voice quavered. "Look! Monsieur." Then in a tone almost pathetic in its passion,—“Ah, it is mine! Who else has any right to it? They always laughed at me. Now I will be rich; I will laugh at them.” Again he was the miser; he squatted and handled lovingly the larger diamonds. Absorbed by his treasures and mumbling to himself, he passed from heap to heap without rising from his haunches. As I watched him, I could imagine the orgies of mammon-worship which that ghostly cavern had witnessed during the last few weeks.

We now approached the white square and I was stooping to examine more closely the gems, when Rudge touched me on the arm, and pointed to some figures high up on a wall. Holding the candle above my head, I made out a continuous frieze of figures. Most of the drawing was in black or yellow ochre but every three or four feet occurred a

THE GROTTO GLORIEUSE

splash of red. I moved closer to the wall. In each case the red marks were associated with the figure of a woman either lying dead or in the act of being struck down or stabbed or otherwise killed. The representations seemed to me absurdly crude but their meaning was unmistakable.

Rudge had not spoken since we entered the treasure-chamber. He had paid but scant attention to old Leon during his passionate appeal, and at no time showed any great interest in the treasure. While we were examining the series of drawings to which he had called my attention, he appeared restless. I was reminded of a hunting dog whose instinct has detected the presence of game, close by, but who cannot determine its exact whereabouts. Finally Rudge moved toward the light. I saw him step carefully on the cloth and examine the golden pile on all sides. He even removed a few pieces so that he might look beneath; he was evidently searching for something. The miser face, opposite, watched him suspiciously. Apparently Rudge found nothing of interest among the golden trinkets, for he stepped back and disappeared from my view beyond the light.

I wandered around the chamber, searching now on a wall and again on the ceiling for interesting pictures or inscriptions. As I approached the right-hand wall of the room, I noticed that it differed from the others. I proceeded to explore. In the

THE PALLID GIANT

far corner, I found the entrance to a passage,—evidently an undisturbed portion of that original water course which, between here and the outer cliff, had been utilized by the ancient “Cro-Magnon” occupants in constructing their dwelling place. Stooping, I entered this passage. As I proceeded, there seemed to be more loose stones and debris on the floor than in other parts of the grotto.

Suddenly the tunnel turned and widened, and in the semi-darkness I stumbled over a tangle of metallic instruments or machines which filled its entire breadth. I directed my light at these. Among the complicated mechanisms thus revealed, were tubes of varying lengths with indentations running along either side, large boxes with spiral cylinders attached but with no other openings, and smaller, cylindrical objects which opened out in series of short tubes with a glass lens in the end of each. I spent some time examining these novel instruments. Their mechanical perfection raised in my mind a puzzling question as to the relation between them and that primitive race which had inhabited the cave and had executed those crude drawings we had seen in the main chamber.

Beyond, the passage seemed empty. Realizing that I had been away from my companions for a long time, and that Rudge might be wondering at my disappearance, I retraced my steps to the lighted chamber. Leon was still seated on the edge of the

THE GROTTO GLORIEUSE

cloth gazing over his knees at his beloved diamonds, and he paid no attention to my presence in the room. Rudge was nowhere to be seen. I was about to ask Leon where Rudge had gone when the latter's face appeared out of the darkness behind the candles, high above the place where it should have been were he standing on the floor of the cavern. Rudge's eyes were open very wide, his face distorted by uncontrollable excitement. He beckoned to me. I had not previously examined that part of the chamber, which the glare of the candles had thrown into obscurity, and was now surprised to find a raised platform of rock running back into a recess several yards in depth. Rudge was standing on this platform.

He beckoned to me again, and when I reached his side, seized my arm with a grip which hurt. "Make no noise," he whispered, "but step in here." I now observed that the platform was littered with strange looking chests or caskets. These were open and lying in great disorder as though someone had rummaged hastily through them. Rudge whispered again.

"Leon found his treasure in those chests."

At the rear of the platform was an opening and beyond we found ourselves in a smaller room. Here again were many chests,—some open and overturned, others apparently untouched.

Rudge led me to the far corner of this room.

THE PALLID GIANT

Stooping, he opened a small flat box or casket and taking something from it, laid it on the floor. He held his candle close. What I saw was an olive green object, eight or ten inches long, six wide and about two in thickness. He turned back a sort of cover and revealed a surface of the same color, covered with extremely faint characters. Rudge raised the first page of the book, for book it was, and slipped the palm of his hand beneath it. Instantly rows of small characters stood out clearly against the green of the page. Evidently the letters or signs had been punched through the page or had been cut through by some acid-and-stamp process. I especially noted certain beautifully curved and modulated lines above the figures, and I remember a strange impression that the text might prove to be music.

Rudge whispered huskily, "The oldest record in the world!"

Although I remained silent, I asked myself how Rudge knew that this book was so old. It seemed to me, just as the mechanical instruments I had found in the tunnel had seemed, evidence that some later race than the "Cro-Magnon" had been here; an ancient race undoubtedly, if reckoned in terms of our own history, but probably of the last three or four thousand years,—Oriental or Egyptian. Certainly this book and all the wonderful things I had seen could have no connection with the people

90

THE GROTTO GLORIEUSE

who lived in this cave and drew those rude figures on the wall. I thought also of the exquisitely wrought gold articles. These, too, must be of recent origin.

I had only a moment to consider this for Rudge shut the book and whispered, "Let's go back to Leon."

It was a weird picture we looked down upon from the platform. The white and gold and sparkle of many gems stood forth with startling brilliancy, set in a background of black shadows, between which one had an occasional glimpse of rocky walls. In the center of the stage, as it were, with the full light of the candles upon him, sat the grizzled old man with eager face and legs spread wide, toying with a huge diamond, which at intervals he held between his eyes and the light.

Rudge descended from the platform, and, walking slowly around the candles, sat down on the edge of the cloth facing Leon. The latter turned toward Rudge. For several minutes these two looked at each other without speaking. Leon was the first to break the silence. "What will Monsieur do? Are not these mine?" He opened his arms wide, with a gesture which included all the treasure, and as he did so the huge diamond flashed in our eyes. "Who else has a right to them?"

An idea occurred to Leon. "There are many sacred things in other parts of the cave which I will

THE PALLID GIANT

give to 'Les Initiés.' Most of these are surely magic. Will the Messieurs see?" He started to rise. Rudge motioned him to remain seated.

I was standing across the square from the other two. Rudge turned toward me and was evidently speaking to the old Frenchman "over my shoulder." "Has anyone, Walters, a better right than Leon? In our country, if we find a gold mine, who owns it? Ah! yes, we keep it secret until we buy the land." He looked at Leon, "Who owns this land?"

Leon was patently nervous. "I do not know." Then eagerly, "It is cheap land. I can buy it for a very little sum. It is an old pasture above here, and all the rest is waste land. The Monsieur can buy it. I will buy it for him. Then he will really own a share in the riches." Again a shade of uncertainty passed over his face, "But I alone found it. You will know that the great share is mine. You will be fair."

Rudge was not quite ready to show his hand. He again spoke to me in French across the candles. "How difficult will it be, Walters, to get this stuff to America?"

I had been thinking of this very thing and replied, "Very difficult and a little dangerous, but if we take time, I believe it can be managed."

Rudge rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Leon, we will find some way to turn this treasure into money for you. It will have to be done slowly and we

92

THE GROTTO GLORIEUSE

must leave everything here until our work at the Peace Conference is completed. I will give you five thousand francs with which to buy the land, in my name,—in our names. Our share,”—he stopped and addressed me in English, “I want no share in this kind of wealth, do you Walters?”

I was taken aback. I do not think that I am unduly covetous, but with so much wealth in sight,—so much more than old Leon could ever use, my mind had adjusted itself to the pleasant prospect of sharing in the riches. I must have hesitated for Rudge raised his head a little to get a better view of me above the candles. When I answered, I spoke diffidently, since not for the world would I have done violence to any ethical inhibitions which were influencing Rudge. “If the legal title to this treasure is satisfactorily established, I can see no reason why we should not share it. We will have contributed as much toward its realization as Leon.” Another thought came to me and I added: “It strikes me that many of the objects here are genuine works of art and have priceless value in their present form, as examples of the workmanship of an ancient civilization. If for no other reason, ought we not to stipulate a share so that those may be preserved? Leon would have them all melted for the sake of the little gold they contain.”

Rudge meditated, looking at the golden heap with a more appraising eye than heretofore.

THE PALLID GIANT

"You are right," he said,—still in English.

He turned to Leon, "Our share will be one-quarter of the treasure. In addition, we will take any one of the chests or caskets which we may choose."

Leon looked surprised. "You have seen those? Surely you can have—" He checked himself; his expression was again the cunning miser. "Have you found something? If Monsieur has found something more wonderful than these, he will share it with poor old Leon who found them all!" He looked sharply at Rudge.

The latter opened the little casket. "Here is what I have selected. I will take this." Leon was relieved. He glanced at the book and leaning over, looked into the empty casket. "Surely Monsieur can have that. He can have more, if he wishes. He can have a quarter part of all. He can be rich, too." Leon was again warming up. "Monsieur is fair. He can take what he thinks right. Only give to poor, old Leon his share."

X

RUDGE AND "THE BOOK"

BEFORE we left the treasure-chamber on our return to the outer world, plans for the future had been arranged between Rudge and Leon. The latter had readily agreed that the treasure be left in the grotto until we could devise a practicable scheme for turning it into money, and we were to send Leon five thousand francs, or more if necessary, with which to purchase the land where the grotto was located.

Rudge spent some time wrapping that precious book in his oilskin cap to keep it dry while passing the "water-hole." In the end he begged my cap as well and double wrapped the book. The outward journey was just as uncomfortable as our earlier entry to the grotto but not so thrilling. Now we knew what to expect, and even more, we were going *out* and were not, with each step, burying ourselves deeper in the earth and placing additional perils between ourselves and freedom. We ascended from what I mentally dubbed "Leon's Inferno," flattened as before, bat-like, against the wall of the cavern. It did not seem so difficult or dangerous as it had

THE PALLID GIANT

when we looked down from above, but there, as in the labyrinth of passages leading to it, I appreciated very fully what it would mean to lose our light.

As we approached the "water-hole," I shrank with both physical and mental repulsion from entering the long gallery where the icy water rose to my chin and the scanty air-space grew steadily smaller until it ended in a blank wall of rock. Leon allowed us to precede him, so that we had the cold comfort of his light when we "took off" for our dive through the hole ("siphon" Rudge called it). This time I took a long breath; I am not sure that I did not take several before I got up the courage to make the plunge. Once under water I pushed forward as long as my breath held and felt a decided sense of relief when my head emerged into the blackness of the outer cavern. Rudge quickly rose beside me, and, after a longer wait, Leon came.

The rest of the journey to the entrance of the grotto was made in darkness as before. Outside, we exchanged our "combinaisons" for normal clothing and retraced our steps to the village. Then the following day we returned to Aurigniac, where we parted company with Leon. His last words were, "Come back as soon as you can. I am old."

During the long railway journey to Paris, Rudge was singularly uncommunicative. I tried to stimulate conversation concerning the cave and the marvellous things we had seen. "I cannot possibly con-

96

RUDGE AND "THE BOOK"

nect those wonderfully perfect machines and the caskets and the finely wrought vessels and ornaments with that cave, or I should say, with the obviously crude people who inhabited it. Don't you suppose it has been used as a caché quite recently, perhaps by some wealthy family during the wars of earlier centuries or the Revolution? Of course the workmanship did not look modern, nor did it fit with any period of art within my knowledge; not even Egyptian or Asiatic art. It must have been the work of some medieval craftsman with whose productions I am not acquainted."

I waited for Rudge's comment, but he only shook his head slowly with the air of one balancing the question and stared reflectively out of the car window. I continued. "We should have brought with us at least one piece for careful examination."

"We brought the book," Rudge suggested, still looking out the window. "That does not look modern or medieval."

"Have you examined it since you left the grotto?" I asked.

"No, and I don't think I shall until I return to Paris." Then after a moment, "That book will tell us the whole story."

At Cahors, another passenger entered our compartment, after which I naturally dropped the subject. Our new companion was a well-dressed man past middle life. He soon showed a desire for con-

THE PALLID GIANT

versation. "Back from Spain? or the Pyrenees, Messieurs?"

"Neither," I replied. "We have visited the caves around Aurigniac."

Rudge acted a little uneasy. Our new friend continued, "Ah, the caves, yes! Very interesting. I used to prowl around them a great deal, but one gets tired of that sort of thing. I had a summer home at St. Girons for a great many years. I know the country and the people."

I made some very ordinary remark about the scenic beauty of the mountains. "Ah, yes; the beautiful Pyrenees! No mountains like them in the world. I know them from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean. I have climbed many of the peaks."

He finally got back to the attractions of St. Girons. "A beautiful countryside, but the people are a strange lot. They are mysterious like their caves. They believe that they have some connection with the caves."

"In what way?" I asked.

"Many of them believe that in their country mankind was born, and that their race was the first race. A young fellow whom I once employed told me with great seriousness that his mother was, by ancient right, a queen and that all this part of the world belonged to her."

Rudge suddenly showed interest in our conversation. He interrupted, "Did he say 'queen'?"

RUDGE AND "THE BOOK"

The gentleman looked questioningly at Rudge. "Yes,—as I remember it,—," he thought a moment,—"now that you mention it, he did use an odd word,—I forget, something like high-priestess or queen-priestess,—it meant the same thing. He insisted that she knew all the past. I told him that the people who lived in the caves lived like beasts and owned nothing; that thousands of years ago they were driven out by other peoples and scattered all over Europe. He would not have it so. Said his mother knew."

Our fellow passenger left us at Limoges and the train dragged its slow way to Paris with little conversation between Rudge and me. I could not avoid comparing this journey with our joyous exit from the city, five days earlier. We were then running away from care and struggle and those human problems which had weighed our spirits down. Now we were returning to Paris with new responsibilities and new perplexities.

Throughout the journey, Rudge had kept one hand always on the small bag containing that mysterious book, and at the railway station in Paris he never permitted it, for one moment, out of his possession. When our taxi stopped at the Crillon, Rudge alighted with me, saying he would walk the short distance to the Cité du Renoir. He forced a smile. "I would rather not drive up there in state."

THE PALLID GIANT

As we parted he said, "Come around to-morrow evening; I may be able to tell you more about the book."

I found a number of my friends gathered in the "press" room just off the lobby of the Crillon and they hailed me as I passed. They inquired interestedly about our journey and volunteered much political news. I soon found, however, that the Grotto Glorieuse and Rudge's pursuit of an answer to the riddle, occupied my mind to the exclusion of all other interests. As soon as I decently could, therefore, I excused myself and went to my room. For a long time I sat in semi-darkness, thinking over our strange adventure. I was especially puzzled by Rudge. I recalled that from the moment Leon asked to talk with us privately at the inn, Rudge had evinced an apprehension almost clairvoyant, as to what was coming.

The fact is, that while on one side I felt I knew Rudge very well, on another he had always been a mystery. Whenever he talked of the unknown past of the human race, he assumed an unconscious air of possession. It was not what he said but the way he said it. I am not keen at solving mysteries, and I made little progress that night trying to reconcile either the eccentricities of Rudge or the inconsistency between the Grotto Glorieuse and the things we had seen therein. That night I dreamed that Rudge wrote the book himself a mil-

100

RUDGE AND "THE BOOK"

lion years ago, and had come back to search for it; and that he said to me, "Walters! if you humans had ever got that book, it would have destroyed you all."

XI

PROFESSOR GRIBBON TO THE RESCUE

NEXT day I found my work at the Crillon flat and uninteresting. My mind would not, for any length of time, keep away from the Cité and Rudge, whom my imagination depicted studying with knit brows that meaningless text I had glimpsed when he showed me the olive green book. I had come to feel a keen interest in the book myself, though I still believed that some rational explanation would be found for that, as well as for the other inconsistencies presented by the Grotto Glorieuse and its seemingly unrelated contents. But I was uneasy about Rudge. If he were to be again plunged into such a state of depression as followed the Markham episode, I should regret our trip to the caves.

Immediately after supper I hurried to the Cité, where I found Rudge and his apartment in an equal state of disarray. After the usual greetings, he sat down wearily at the table on which was a miscellany of books and papers.

"How goes the Peace Conference?" This was, I felt, a feeble attempt on his part to steer our talk

PROFESSOR GRIBBON TO THE RESCUE

away from the struggle he had been making to find a key to the translation of his manuscript.

"Nothing much happened while we were away," I replied. "Final touches are being put on the treaty. Holmes says it is just as bad as you expected, but that President Wilson has got his League of Nations tied to the treaty so tight that those who are counting on it to enable them to 'pick the bones' of the Central Empires will find they have been flim-flammed."

"Who will wield the policeman's club of the League of Nations?" Rudge's question showed his usual keenness but his tone lacked any trace of real interest. I shook my head.

"What do you make of that book or manuscript or whatever you call it?" I asked.

Rudge raised himself and turned in his chair until he faced the table. "It's damnable! Not a clue. This language, if it is a language, differs from anything I have ever seen. I have tried everything, but am just where I started last evening." He looked doggedly at the papers scattered over the table. Finally he arose with an effort and walked to the mantel, where he filled and lighted his pipe,—and after smoking in silence for a few moments, sat down in his chair by the fire. "I have not been to bed; I have not eaten except some cakes the concierge brought with the tea. This is what I have hunted for all my life and now,—" he threw out

THE PALLID GIANT

one hand with a shrug of the shoulders, "now, apparently, I have got nothing."

I went over to the table and looked at the reams of pencil notes lying about. In the opened book those untranslatable figures appeared very graceful. There were wavy lines, broken at intervals but in the main running above every row of characters. My attention was caught by the unusual appearance of the pages. I felt of the paper, if it could be called that;—it was very thin, yet a little examination showed it to be tougher than the toughest parchment. Several leaves were lying loose on the table, having been removed from the binder, which proved to be a very ingenious contrivance, so constructed that the application of a slight pressure released any desired page. Rudge watched me while I examined the book, but said nothing.

For three days and far into each night Rudge worked almost continuously on the manuscript, in spite of my earnest pleading that he have regard for his health. Each evening I interrupted him with my visit and endeavored to draw his mind from his disappointment by talking of things which had hitherto interested him; but my successes were short-lived and unsatisfactory. We always drifted back to the tantalizing possibilities of translating those elusive characters.

On the third evening while we were sitting by the fire, Rudge said, "It is not that I expected to inter-

PROFESSOR GRIBBON TO THE RESCUE

pret this writing quickly nor even to find the key at once. I knew it would be difficult, but I trusted that a certain instinct which I discovered in myself years ago when studying early manuscripts would at least lead me to recognize the place to look for clues. I cannot understand it. I am completely baffled."

I looked regretfully at Rudge's wan face. I had given up trying to distract him from his problem and was searching in my mind for helpful suggestions.

"Why don't you get Professor Gribbon to work with you? That's his business."

Rudge surprised me by his interest in this suggestion. "Sure enough, why not?" He thought a moment. "That's a first-class idea. I need not tell him any more about the finding of the book than I wish. The Professor must have a lot of his technical stuff with him. I have wanted some 'correspondence charts.'"

Throughout the following day, thoughts of Rudge and his terrible disappointment again interfered with my doing any very effective work, and as the evening approached, I became so impatient to be with him that I entered the dining room as soon as the doors were opened at six o'clock. This was a departure from my regular habits. It had become a time-honored custom among the socially inclined members of the American Staff to gather, around seven o'clock, for dinner together at the Crillon.

THE PALLID GIANT

Certain groups always sat at certain tables and our prescriptive rights to the same seats every evening came to be recognized and respected by all who ate in the hotel dining room.

I had not been seated long when Professor Gribbon looked in at the door and seeing me alone, came over and asked politely if he could join me.

I was surprised. Hitherto there had existed between the Professor and myself only a speaking acquaintance. Naturally I welcomed him with expressions of cordiality but my "pleasure" was mixed with a slight feeling of uneasiness as to whether he would still be eating there when the regular crowd arrived. However, the Professor quickly relieved my mind on this score. When the waiter came for his order he said, "No, I thank you, I shall not dine now." The Professor was always very polite. After the waiter was gone he explained to me confidentially that he had already eaten.

He now radiated an atmosphere of mystery and it dawned on me that his new friendliness cloaked some definite errand. Then I remembered my proposal of the night before that we seek his assistance. Already a few early diners had scattered themselves about the room and the Professor observed these furtively out of the corner of his eye before plunging into an explanation of his reason for seeking me out. His secrecy had the same thorough and efficient quality as had everything else which Professor Gribbon

PROFESSOR GRIBBON TO THE RESCUE

did. He proceeded to carry on a most peculiar double monologue. Whenever anyone passed near our table or the waiter approached, the Professor passed, without break, from the low even tones of his communication to entirely disconnected scraps of ordinary conversation.

"Mr. Walters, George Rudge has asked me to call at his apartment this evening. He urged the interview so strongly I could not——"

Two men walked slowly past us. "Yes, I believe our work will be completed within another week or two. We shall——"

From the corner of his eye he saw that the coast was again clear. "—so strongly that I could not refuse. He insisted on the most absolute secrecy and said that you——"

Again he interrupted his revelations with make-believe conversation. "I hardly think I shall go directly home. I wish to——"

"—that you would guide and accompany me to his apartment. He was especially anxious that we avoid such notice as might transpire were we to leave the hotel together." Another long break and then,—“if at the end of say fifteen minutes you will proceed by way of the Rue Royale, turning left on the Rue St. Honoré, I will join you near the middle of the block.”

It was really done awfully well. I was amused but willing to play "Watson" to the Professor's

THE PALLID GIANT

"Sherlock Holmes." In a low and studiously significant tone, I said, "I will be there."

Without more words, he arose and affecting as much nonchalance as his habitual dignity would permit, shook my hand quite formally and walked out of the room.

Professor Gribbon was a short man; in build neither stout nor slim. His head was not unusually large, yet there was something in his manner, whether standing, sitting or walking, which suggested unmistakably that the Professor's head was his most important member. He was a decided blond. His hair was a straw color but the carefully tended and clipped mustache looked, in certain lights, almost golden. The Professor stood very high in the opinion of leading men at the Peace Conference. I knew that Rudge especially had immense respect for his learning and ability, and I felt pleased that circumstances seemed likely to bring us into closer association.

When I picked him up on the Rue St. Honoré, the Professor's first question revealed a state of mystification over Rudge's urgency.

"I have here certain papers requested by Mr. Rudge. Can you offer any explanation for his insistence that I bring old texts and 'keys' and 'correspondence charts'?"

"I believe I know, Professor Gribbon, but I would prefer that Rudge himself explain to you."

PROFESSOR GRIBBON TO THE RESCUE

The old concierge, who had become accustomed to my visits and had latterly relaxed her stern demeanor, looked sharply at the Professor. I hastened to explain, "Mr. March expects this gentleman."

Rudge must have been very near his door, for when I rapped, it opened instantly. He held out his hand.

"Good evening, Professor; I am indebted to you for coming here."

The Professor laid his bundle of papers carefully on the table, and I took his hat and cane, much as though I were part of Rudge's establishment. We all sat down, Rudge and I in our accustomed chairs with the Professor between us. Rudge was controlling his impatience, but his calmness did not deceive me.

"I certainly owe you, Professor, an immediate explanation after what you had a right to consider my unwarranted insistence over the 'phone this afternoon. It would have been unpardonable had I not believed that when the matter was before you, its importance and interest to yourself would be my excuse."

I was impressed with Rudge's versatility. He was now a professor talking to another professor. His undoubted excitement was well concealed, and his conversation ran on for several minutes with a polite and scholastic verbosity quite new to me. This did not last, however; his enthusiasm shone in his

THE PALLID GIANT

eyes as soon as he mentioned the book. "The oldest record in the world, I believe! Wonderful orthographic technique! The characters, their execution, the paper, the binding,—everything suggests a prehistoric civilization far superior to our own. But the text! After three days of almost continuous study this seems entirely undecipherable. Nothing to get hold of. No place to begin. No chance for 'combinations' or 'doubles.'"

The Professor asked, in a tone restrained and very professional, "Where did you find the book?"

Rudge was apologetic. "You will excuse me, Professor, I know, if I conceal its exact origin, since we are under obligations, at least for the present, to maintain a certain secrecy. I can say to you, however, that it came from the south of France and that its associations stamp it as very ancient."

Rudge arose and laid the book on the table. The Professor sat down in the chair offered. He drew the book nearer to himself and opening it, ran his eyes over the first page. Gradually he became absorbed. He turned several pages, and then back to the first. Rudge, having seated himself beside the Professor, watched his face eagerly. The latter mused, "h-m! h-m! h-m-h-m!" Finally he turned to Rudge with a confident expression which reminded me of one of those successful country doctors who, after one look at your tongue, knows all about what ails you. "We should be able to decipher this.

PROFESSOR GRIBBON TO THE RESCUE

The characters are unfamiliar but appear regular and 'connected.' They are beautifully executed. What do you make of this paper?" He bent a corner of the page between thumb and forefinger. "I have never seen any material quite like this."

Rudge drew the book toward himself. "I tried there—," pointing, "and there—. It looked like a 'double,' but see!" he pointed, then turned a page and pointed again, "see?"

The Professor very deliberately turned first to one page and then the other, speaking softly to himself, "Yes, yes! It is odd." He studied for some time, then fumbled among the papers he had brought. "I believe I will return to my room and obtain a chart for substitutionary forms of cryptograms which I overlooked when getting together the material you suggested."

When the Professor returned from the Crillon, he and Rudge went immediately to work and continued without interruption for more than three hours, while I sat by the fire dividing my attention between reading and listening to the discussions which, from time to time, interrupted their long silences. Occasionally, when these discussions became unusually animated, I went over to the table, but I never remained long. The points they argued were too technical.

On the mantel I found a book held open by another at a chapter describing the peasants of

THE PALLID GIANT

northern Hungary. I recalled Rudge's statement that his mother's family came from Hungary. I read,

"The gloomy surroundings of the Carpathian foothills encourage superstition. Here the peasants circulate the weirdest folk stories in which their ancestors were all heroes and rulers of the world. They believe that theirs was the original race. They practice magic and preserve an implicit faith in visions and incantations and in a remarkable trance to which certain of their women are peculiarly susceptible."

I was pondering the coincidence between this and Mraaya's trance and the stories we had heard from Leon, when Rudge crossed the room, and having filled his pipe, threw himself into the chair opposite me. He struck a match. After smoking for some minutes in silence, he broke out with, "That's damn fool writing, if it is writing." He scowled and puffed harder than ever. "Yes, it's got to be writing."

At midnight, I announced my intention of going home to bed. The Professor paid not the slightest heed; he did not hear, and I doubt if he would have heard had I shouted. Rudge turned around without rising, and said a little apologetically, like a boy who promises to stop fishing and go home in a few minutes, knowing all the while that he will do no such thing, "We will work a little longer."

XII

THE PROFESSOR GIVES UP

ON the previous Monday my unexpected return had aroused Mraaya's curiosity. She had then asked many questions about our trip. "Did you see Leon? What did he say?" I had replied that we enjoyed our visit to the caves and that Leon had proved to be all she had promised as a guide. Still she insisted, "Why did you return so soon?" and I had answered evasively, "Rudge had seen enough, and was anxious to get back on account of certain work." Mraaya was not satisfied but dropped the matter for the time being.

Now she unexpectedly took up her questioning where she had left off five days before. "Did Leon tell you his stories of the caves?"

"Yes."

"Did he tell you stories of our people?" She looked me straight in the eye.

"Why, yes! He told some things."

"What did he tell?"

I pretended that I was making an effort to recall the stories. "He related all sorts of old traditions and folk stories."

THE PALLID GIANT

Mraaya, playing nervously with a pencil, had been looking intently at me. Now she stood very still and stared at the wall beyond. I sat down and drew my chair to the desk in an awkward attempt to end the interview. She suddenly asked,

"What did Mr. Rudge say?"

This was a poser. "What do you mean? Rudge was much interested in the caves."

"What did he say about Leon's story?"

I was becoming embarrassed and a little irritated. What was Mraaya driving at? "I don't remember particularly. Rudge is interested in everything relating to the early ages of mankind."

Mraaya gave me a peculiar look, and walking to the other side of the room, resumed her work. Afterward, when thinking over this interview, I was puzzled by her strange interest in Rudge,—a man whom she had never seen but once and had never spoken to. I could think of no explanation, unless Leon had written her something very extraordinary about him.

That evening, as I left the Crillon, my mind was ill at ease. I am not, by nature, very susceptible to emotional or psychic impressions. But as I walked around to the Cité, I felt that we were becoming entangled deeper and deeper in some mysterious adventure, the nature of which I could not fathom. The redemption of Leon's treasure loomed ahead as a sufficiently doubtful enterprise. That seemed,

THE PROFESSOR GIVES UP

however, the least depressing of the secret activities to which our cave visit had introduced us.

Then, Rudge!—sensible Rudge, was turning into a mystic under my very eyes; not a vague ineffective mystic, but the purposeful, determined agent of some unseen mentor, searching by very practical means for a goal which he alone apprehended. What had he seen in the Grotto Glorieuse; and what did he expect to find in the book? And Mraaya—what was the sympathetic connection between these two? A foolish thought! There could be no connection. Yet I could not dismiss from my mind her look when she asked what Rudge said, and I now recollected the keen interest which Rudge himself displayed when I told him of Mraaya and her trances. The whole situation was becoming uncanny and distasteful to me. I dislike mysteries. Pre-historic investigation was one thing but if it were going to attack Rudge's peace of mind, I felt like throwing it all out of the window.

Rudge let me into the apartment and we sat down by the fire. He looked very tired. The Professor was at the table with his back to me, and his customary rigidity seemed considerably modified by weariness. He stopped work but did not turn around. Rudge spoke to him. "Let's knock off a while, Professor Gribbon, and visit with Walters. We are making no progress; we need a fresh eye."

The Professor appeared suddenly to realize how

THE PALLID GIANT

tired he was, and rising stiffly, turned toward us. "I think I will go to my room and take a little rest. I will return to-morrow,—perhaps not until to-morrow evening."

He walked over to the fireplace. "I cannot understand it, Rudge. I wonder if it is writing at all. Do you suppose that manuscript is the work of some faker who put in the figures haphazard? I wish I knew more about the finding of the book."

Rudge became animated. "I cannot tell you more now, but it is surely genuine. You said, yourself, that you had never seen anything like the paper or the binder."

"Perhaps you are right," the Professor spoke wearily. "We will make a fresh start to-morrow."

For nearly three weeks these two worked almost continuously, striving to find a "key" to the writing in that Sphinx-like book. Gradually the fruitlessness of their search began to tell on the Professor's confidence and I noted signs of progressive discouragement. One afternoon he said to Rudge,

"My early confidence was based on the voluminousness of your book. It did seem that with hundreds of pages available for 'comparison' we would be able to find a clue." He wiped his glasses meditatively. "I fear we are beaten,—unless we can find a 'Rosetta Stone.'"

Rudge saw as plainly as I that the end was near, and redoubled his efforts to discover "connections"

THE PROFESSOR GIVES UP

which would stimulate the Professor's waning interest. It was of no use. Professor Gribbon had had enough. On the following evening I found him sitting by the fire talking to Rudge, and as I entered, heard him say, "No, I do not think so. Your book *can not* be translated. The figures in it have all the appearance of organized writing but I suspect,—I have suspected all along,—that there was something wrong with it."

Rudge flared up, "What do you mean! You surely do not believe that any joker or faker or counterfeiter would go to the pains of filling hundreds of pages with figures of such mechanical perfection,—such evident orthographic consistency."

The Professor's mind was made up. He would not argue with Rudge, but took refuge in his original statement. "It cannot be translated."

I think he realized what this meant to Rudge, for later in the evening he took another tack. "The fact is, I ought to return to the United States very soon. My connection with the Peace Commission is practically ended." Then a little apologetically, "I will be glad to work with you as long as I remain in Paris."

After the Professor left, Rudge did very little work. He was gloomy, the more so, I think, because in spite of a dogged unwillingness to give up, he was half convinced that the Professor spoke the truth,—that the book was untranslatable. I was

THE PALLID GIANT

terribly sorry for him and tried hard to find subjects for conversation which would ease his disappointment.

"After all, Rudge" (I was a little proud of my own ingenuity), "the possibilities of the Grotto Glorieuse do not end with your failure to translate that book. Leon's treasure offers wonderful opportunities. I have in mind a way to realize on the jewels, and your share of the proceeds will furnish unlimited means for archaeological exploration,—even extensive excavations. You can surely find interesting old records which you *can* translate."

Rudge smiled but his words were bitter. "I wish I had not sought Professor Gribbon's help. That book can never be translated by mechanical 'comparisons' alone, and I doubt if even a 'Rosetta Stone' would solve it."

He went on reflectively, "I wish we had stayed longer in Aurigniac. I might have found a clew among those people. I did ask Leon whether he knew of any tradition regarding an ancient language but he said 'no.'"

"That tradition which kept him hunting for the Grotto Glorieuse must have been very ancient."

"That's so." My comment evidently interested Rudge. "He said his mother told him of it; didn't he?—Les Initiés too? On the whole the women seem to have been the prime custodians of cave rites and traditions."

THE PROFESSOR GIVES UP

Rudge was looking at me thoughtfully. His demeanor changed and he spoke with a new interest. "I believe I will go back there and see what I can find. Will you go with me, Walters?"

My first reaction was decidedly negative. The suggestion of Aurigniac was not a pleasing one,—recollections of the grotto and the "water-hole" were too vivid. "A wild goose chase, I fear." Then my desire to help Rudge produced an idea. "Possibly, through Mraaya, we might get the right kind of introduction to her mother. She seems to stand in Mraaya's mind for all that was odious in her relation to the cave mysteries."

Rudge reached over and grasped my hand. "Just the thing. Tell her of the book. You need not explain where we found it but get her to help us extract from her relatives anything they know which may bear on its translation."

XIII

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

NO! No! Mr. Walters, please do not press me. I cannot help you nor do I know of anyone who can. And besides,—Oh! Mr. Walters, something,—someone is seeking to drag me back to the hateful bondage of my childhood. I have tried to forget the mysteries, the savage superstitions which afflict my poor people, and which, until the war broke my bonds, held me a slave.”

I had urged Mraaya, as tactfully as I knew how, to write for us a letter of introduction to her mother, asking that she reveal such race traditions as might aid in translating the manuscript. She had refused, and finally, as result of my persistence, this unsuspected bitterness had broken through her diffidence. I was apparently beaten. How could I decently press further when Mraaya showed so plainly that the thing I asked was, not simply distasteful to her, but deeply painful.

What I said next was without definite design, being only an impulsive expression of the feelings behind my own urgency. “I am so sorry for Rudge.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

He will be terribly disappointed. Poor Rudge will make himself sick struggling with that impossible translation."

"But, Mr. Walters, we have no traditions of a language. My mother cannot help him. Really she cannot."

"He thinks she can. The bare suggestion of such help pulled him out of a most pitiable state of discouragement. If you would only arrange so that he could talk with her or any others in Aurigniac who you think might know interesting legends of the caves, it would at least save Rudge another disappointment and I cannot tell you how great a favor it would be to me."

Mraaya thought a moment. I could not see her face. Her tone was greatly changed when she said unexpectedly, "I will give you the letter but it will be of no use, I know. When does he wish to go?"

"Very soon. Perhaps Monday or Tuesday."

* * * * *

The last rays of the sun were tipping with gold the higher peaks of the Pyrenees, the wooded foothills had lost their green and the valley of the Garonne was sinking into deeper and deeper shadow, as Rudge and I came in sight of a group of farm buildings which seemed to fit Mraaya's description of her former home.

We had eaten dinner at the same little inn as on our previous visit to Aurigniac. Afterward we had

THE PALLID GIANT

strolled, with an exaggerated aimlessness, past the hay-market, where bullock-drivers were bellowing inarticulate orders at their clumsy beasts, past the great round village well—that daily meeting place for toiling women,—those other beasts of burden, who came with pots and pails and primitive earthen jugs for the family supply of water,—and so by winding roads and hedge-bordered lanes to the Beauchelais farm.

A large stone house, half home, half stable, stood close to the road. Light shone through the open door and a sound of children's voices came from within. As we drew nearer a dog rushed at us, barking loudly. A woman appeared in the lighted doorway and called sharply to him, and as he slunk away, growling sullenly, she stepped outside.

"Mraaya!" Rudge had recognized her instantly.

Mraaya held out her hand, saying simply, "I came to help you."

Rudge spoke with equal simplicity, "Thank you, Mraaya."

As she greeted me, two children, a girl of six or seven years and a younger boy, who had come out to see what was going on, clung to her skirts and stared up into my face.

"I hope, Mr. Walters, you do not mind my leaving Paris without permission."

I pressed her hand. Rudge had passed on into the house and after assuring Mraaya that I was glad

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

she had come, I followed him. We found Rudge speaking in his grave, friendly way to a grey-haired woman dressed as though for the fields, who, after accepting his self-introduction with a diffident cordiality, turned with instructions to others in the room. A man, evidently a farm-worker, arose respectfully, while a young woman hastily collected the children and departed.

"Mother, these are the gentlemen of whom I told you, Mr. Rudge, Mr. Walters." Mraaya indicated each of us as she spoke and the older woman nodded with an awkward courtesy.

She addressed me, "I thank you, Monsieur Waltér, that you have been so kind to my daughter."

In a corner of the great fireplace, sat an aged woman who eyed us inquiringly. Mraaya's mother leaned over her deferentially and said in a loud voice (the other was evidently deaf), "Two American gentlemen, Mammam, Mraaya has served them in Paris." Then turning to the man who was still standing, "Anton, you should bring wine, or," addressing Rudge, "would you rather wish tea?"

While Anton was gone, she and Mraaya set for us the best chairs and busied themselves removing the children's litter from under our feet. Then the young woman returned with wood for the fire.

I quite forgot our errand. My mind was absorbed by this altogether unique experience. The huge room with its rough timbered ceiling,—evidently

THE PALLID GIANT

the kitchen and dining room as well as the living room of the house,—was dimly lighted by an oil lamp, the inevitable *vin ordinaire* was set out for us on a deal table, the maid added fresh fuel to the fire and a kettle of water was soon steaming before its mounting flame. It was charming, delightful,—this unaffected, truly French hospitality and the rude setting of a peasant-farmer's home only added to its charm.

Mraaya, having poured the wine, was standing by the table talking to me and glancing occasionally at Rudge. Her mother also stood.

Rudge urged that both sit down. "Mraaya has told you why we came?"

The woman nodded deferentially, "Yes, I only wish I could help you."

"You know many tales of the olden days, do you not?—the very old days?"

She looked down at the floor; then nodding toward her aged mother said evasively, "She knows them."

Light from the fire threw Rudge's earnest face into strong relief as he fixed a searching gaze on the woman. Her eyes fell. He asked ingratiatingly, "Are all the words French? What of the tale of the lost grotto?"

She shook her head thoughtfully as one who would serve if she could. "All the words are French."

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

Mraaya had been looking steadily at Rudge. She suddenly turned to her mother. "The songs of Oed? Grandmère knows many songs of Oed, some are not French."

She rose, and going to her grandmother's side, spoke close to her ear. "Grandmère, Monsieur Rudge would hear the songs of Oed,—the songs not French, you have sung to me."

The old woman roused herself. "Rudge! Rudge! Who is Rudge?"

The latter had also risen and now stood beside the grandmother's chair. He stooped and looked into her face. "I am Rudge. My mother heard the songs of Oed. They knew those songs in far off Hungary."

The dim eyes peered eagerly at Rudge.

"Your mother? Is she here?"

"No, she is dead. Sing the songs for me, Grandmère."

His tone was solemnly persuasive, even affectionate. There was a long pause; then swaying her head from side to side, the old woman began in a very peculiar French:—

"All water was over the world. The rocks were grey,—” after mumbling unintelligibly for several moments, she resumed her sing-song recitation, "The son of the sea-god Rani and the beautiful daughter of Rocks——"

I was sitting opposite a window and at that moment

THE PALLID GIANT

a face appeared close to the pane, a face so distorted with rage or fear or some madness as to seem hardly human. Impulsively I exclaimed and pointed; but the face was gone before the others could turn. Mraaya alone, I saw by her horrified expression, had seen the apparition.

She leaped to the door and I followed. Outside there was no one to be seen. Mraaya had disappeared in the darkness, but she soon reappeared saying quietly to me, "You saw it? I think it was only some man from the countryside passing by."

"It was surely someone with a horrible face," I said.

She assumed a careless tone, "There are such. They are all harmless."

The others had come to the door. Rudge was scowling as he asked, "What was it?"

Mraaya answered quickly, "A face at the window. It was not pleasant. Some inquisitive passerby."

He looked intently at Mraaya but she only smiled reassuringly, and entered the house.

I thought Rudge wanted to ask more questions but Mraaya, with her back toward us, was putting wood on the fire. After a little he went over and stood, as before, behind the old woman's chair. "Go on, Grandmère—'The son of the sea-god Rani'——"

But her mind had wandered. Neither Mraaya nor her mother could persuade her to resume the recitation. "We do not tell these to any. Who is

126

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

Rudge that should hear them." She shut her eyes and nothing would induce her to talk more.

So our visit came to naught. In a way Mraaya's mother seemed anxious to help Rudge, but she said, "If anyone is to tell the tales, my mother must."

Rudge questioned both Mraaya and her mother as to possible inscriptions or any evidence of written characters in the grottos which might have aroused their curiosity. There was nothing.

It was late when we thanked our hostess for her hospitality and her efforts to aid us and gloomily retraced our steps through the darkness to Aurigniac. Mraaya insisted on accompanying us as far as the main road "so that we might surely find the way."

XIV

HORRORS

I SPENT a wakeful night and arose early the following morning. Rudge had risen earlier. Downstairs I learned that he had breakfasted an hour before and wandered out into the street. I was still at my coffee and rolls when he returned, and seating himself at the table asked, evidently by way of conversation, how I had slept.

"Not well," I replied. "Where have you been at this early hour?"

"I tried to find Leon. He was not at home."

Rudge's manner aroused a suspicion in my mind that he had decided on some new plan of action but I merely asked, "When do we start for Paris?"

He acted a little embarrassed. "I'm going to visit Leon's grotto again. I did not examine all the caskets,—there may be other manuscripts or at least inscriptions which will help." Then half apologetically, "You need not go with me. I shall not blame you for avoiding another plunge through that 'water-hole'; but I will never feel satisfied myself unless I exhaust the possibilities there."

I considered. My memories of the Grotto Glori-

HORRORS

ease, with its icy water and its gloom and its unknown dangers, were decidedly unpleasant. Yet Rudge was determined to go back; I saw that. Perhaps I might accompany him to the entrance and wait outside.

Rudge guessed the cause of my hesitation and sought to relieve my mind. He spoke cheerfully and with a matter-of-face conclusiveness,

"There is no possible need of your going, Walters. Wait for me here. I shall not remain in the grotto long."

This friendly attempt at sacrifice had an opposite effect from the one intended. I could not desert Rudge.

"If you go, I shall go with you. Two will be safer than one and really I don't mind,—if you think the journey worth while."

We again bought, in Aurigniac, the outfits suggested by Leon,—'combinaisons,' water-proof caps for matches and candles and thick soled shoes. Then, during the afternoon we took our way on foot to the mountains, having informed our landlady that we might be gone overnight. As before, our approach to the cavern was delayed until dark.

Inside the grotto, at the "water-hole," when Rudge had lighted a candle, he laid his hand affectionately on my shoulder, saying, "There is no need of your going further. Make yourself as comfortable as may be here, or better, outside, and if I meet

THE PALLID GIANT

with any mischance, you can come in after me. But there will be no trouble."

"Much obliged, Rudge. I told you that if you went in, I should go in, and I shall certainly go. Anyway, having come this far, I want to see the jewels again."

I felt that Rudge was pleased. He made no further protest and together we waded into the inky water.

"Let's do the thing right this time, Walters. While we still have light, I will definitely locate the entrance and,—” smiling whimsically at me, “don't try to come up until you have surely traveled the distance,—I should guess about three yards under water.”

He made his way across the pool with his candle held high and I was surprised to note that the water came only to his arm pits. After a brief exploration along the wall, he turned toward me.

“Here is the entrance. Remember! about a yard from this corner. Be sure your cap is tight on your head so that candles and matches will keep dry. As soon as I am through the hole I will go on to the little beach where I can light up again.”

He extinguished the candle; then a splash and a disturbance in the water told me Rudge had entered the tunnel. Following him, my own passage of the “water-hole,” though cold and uncomfortable, was uneventful, and at the end of the watery gallery, we

HORRORS

foregathered on the same little beach where Leon had awaited us before.

Thereafter, for nearly an hour we made our way through a succession of lofty chambers and long low galleries and threaded the intricacies of several rocky labyrinths. Rudge must have taken careful note of the route on our former visit, for never once did he lose his way. At the summit of the great grey stalagmite, we rested as before.

The cavern here was of enormous extent and so lofty we got only occasional glimpses of the ceiling. This time I could look on that dismal replica of the nether-world with something of awe-inspired pleasure. There was a grim artistic grandeur in those vistas of tartarean spires rising one behind the other until far away the sharpness of their edges was lost in a vast expanse of dim air.

Meanwhile Rudge was moving along the wall below me and I heard him drop with a splash into the shallow water behind the great pyramid of rock.

Then, suddenly—my heart stopped beating. I heard another splash!—a horrid guttural scream!—the sound of body meeting body with great violence, and Rudge's light went out! Above the noise of churning water, came sounds of explosive breathing and strained half-choked groans. A desperate struggle was taking place in the water behind that rock.

It was all so unexpected, so terrifying, that for

THE PALLID GIANT

a moment I stood stupefied, unable to move. Then the thought of Rudge fighting for his life in that hell-hole aroused me to action. I hardly know how I negotiated the difficult journey around the face of the cliff. That ticklish climb which before consumed minutes was now accomplished in a few seconds. As I rounded the curve, the light of my candle revealed a sight which sickened me.

Dimly I saw the head and shoulders of a beast or a beast-like man swaying above the water as he strove savagely to keep his position on top of Rudge. The creature had evidently taken him at a great disadvantage, had borne him down and with the strength and cunning of a madman, was pressing him beneath the water. I saw the back of Rudge's head appear above the surface, but the fingers of his tormentor were closed tightly about his throat and with a snarling exclamation he shoved him below.

Fear, mingled with such rage as I had never known, seized upon me. Not waiting to approach nearer, just as the creature turned his head toward me, I leaped upon his back, and, quickly finding my feet, wrenched him away with a strength I did not know I possessed. He struggled savagely but I had him, as he had Rudge, pinned from behind and, dragging him forward, I flung him into the shallow water beyond. Then I searched wildly in the darkness for Rudge. He was not far away and I hurriedly lifted him to his knees. Rudge coughed violently

HORRORS

but fortunately, having kept his presence of mind throughout, he had taken little water into his lungs. He appeared able to hold himself upright.

All at once I had a vision of the would-be murderer (I had determined that he was a man) leaping on us again from the darkness and, turning, I felt my way cautiously in the direction I had thrown him. My foot struck against something soft. Instantly I stooped and seized the miscreant by his shoulders, for he was sitting upright in the water.

By this time Rudge had recovered sufficiently to speak. He called, "Walters, where are you?"

"Here Rudge! And I have the scoundrel. Are you hurt?"

"No. Where is your light? My candle is somewhere in the water."

"So is mine. My cap too, with matches and the other candle is gone. Well, at any rate, our first task is to find dry ground and make sure we have this monster where he can do no more harm."

Rudge raised himself and waded slowly to where I was holding tightly his assailant. Together we carried the latter, limp and unresisting, along the watery passage. By good luck we took the right direction and soon found the steps leading to the "dry gallery." Mounting these, we placed our captive with his back to the wall; then sat one on each side, holding firmly his arms.

THE PALLID GIANT

"Now," Rudge spoke in French and his tone was very hard, "Who are you?"

There was no response.

"Come!" said I threateningly, and prodded him with my elbow, "answer! Who are you and what are you doing here?"

The man wriggled under my pressure and gave an exhausted grunt. "Ugh! You came to steal my gold."

"My God! It's Leon!" I heard Rudge roll over onto his knees in front of the man. "You scoundrel, so you would have murdered us for your gold?"

Further expression seemed to fail him, and after a little he settled back to his former seat, saying to me in English, "The gold has turned Leon's head. He is crazy."

"Crazy or not, I wish I had drowned him."

Reaction from such unusual physical exertion and excitement had left me weak and my mind flat, but that blood-thirsty rage which overpowered me when I saw Rudge apparently being done to death, still flamed in my heart.

"The old villain!"

Rudge again addressed Leon. "Why did you come here? Have you been living in the grotto for fear someone would steal your precious riches?"

Leon grunted again. "I saw you in Aurigniac. I saw you telling Mraaya and her mother. You promised to keep my secret."

HORRORS

"So you thought we had come for your gold? Well, we did not come here to steal your gold, nor did we tell your secret to Mraaya or her mother or anyone else."

Leon spoke sullenly. "Then why did you come?"

"We came to find another book."

"Why were you with the Beauchelais?" The defiant tone Leon had assumed was gone now.

"To ask their aid in translating that book I showed you."

There came a surprised and distinctly frightened exclamation from the old man. He stammered and gurgled inarticulately, and finally broke down, crying like a child.

"Monsieur Rûge, I am old. My head is sometimes not good. I have thought too much about the gold. I trusted you. Then I believed you would cheat me and I think I went mad. What will you do, Monsieur Rûge? What will you do? You will not help me now! Oh, you will take my gold! I have lost it all. Oh, Monsieur Rûge! Monsieur Rûge!" And he fell to moaning.

Rudge said nothing and this seemed to increase Leon's distress even more than accusing words would have done. As I awaited Rudge's reply, a very practical idea came to my mind.

"The first thing to do is to get a light in some way. Then we can discuss Leon's case."

Rudge spoke softly, as though to himself. "A

THE PALLID GIANT

light! Yes! That's a thought. We may be in trouble. Leon, have you any dry matches in the grotto?"

This brought the old man to his senses. Instinctively he felt for his cap but it too was gone.

With Leon's "No," I think it dawned on all three of us for the first time that we were in a serious predicament.

After considering a moment, Rudge asked, "Can you find the way out without a light, Leon?"

"No, Monsieur Rûge. No man could."

XV

LOST

WERE we lost?—caught like rats in a trap?—buried under a million tons of rock; and in this ghostly cavern must we find our sepulchre, unknown forever? A hush fell on our little group. Through all that hideous cavern a stillness supervened, oppressive as the impenetrable darkness round about. How long we sat thus I shall never know, for in that awful void of sight and sound, time itself was lost.

Rudge was the first to speak. He broke the silence with an inquiry so painfully unrelated to the blank despair in my own heart that it gave me a peculiar shock. It sounded almost flippant in view of our terrible predicament.

“Are there any inscriptions, Leon, on the walls of the jewel chamber or that anteroom through which we passed to reach it?”

“No, Monsieur Rûge, I have seen none,—except, —yes,—the lines we saw in the other grottes! They are there. But, Monsieur Rûge, surely I went mad when I thought you had come for my riches. I trusted you before. Monsieur Rûge, I trust you

THE PALLID GIANT

now. You will not, Honorable Monsieur Rûge!—you will not take away my share!”

I have often speculated as to the sequence of thought which passed through the minds of my two companions during the interval between that word of Leon’s which sealed our fate and Rudge’s unexpected question. Did a self-confident optimism minimize the danger of our situation and allow Rudge to turn again to that quest which, since he found the book, had absorbed his every thought? Or did he accept his doom with a fatalistic resignation?

And again,—Leon’s maudlin talk of his riches! He must have known better than either of us what the loss of our light meant. Had he still hope? Or was he so crazy that visions of gold and jewels drove other thoughts from his mind, even in the presence of death?

At the moment, listening to these two, my impression was one of fantastic unreality. Filled as I was with gloomy forebodings, their futile discussion seemed mockery. I broke in,

“Is there no possible way we can extricate ourselves from this grotto?”

Rudge showed that he was not wholly insensible to our danger by supplementing my question with a practical suggestion.

“Would it not be possible, Leon, by separating, as we moved forward, yet always keeping within

LOST

calling distance of each other, to work our way outward and in time reach the 'water-hole'?"

Leon answered reluctantly. "I fear not, Monsieur Rûge. I fear not. We would be lost and could not get back here. Then we would always be in the water."

Another long silence, and then Rudge asked, "Can you find your way to the jewel-chamber?"

Great God! Could Rudge not forget that chamber! Was there nothing that would divert him from his search for inscriptions? Once more I interposed. "What earthly good could that do us? We would be farther than ever from the entrance."

"I'm not so sure. I remember, Leon, you had candles there. Have you matches?"

"No." Leon spoke sullenly. "Only candles."

"Why?"

"I always carried matches with me."

Rudge exploded to me. "The damn fool! Crazy! Candles for his jewels but no matches! Still we might find some means to light them,—perhaps flint and steel."

Leon was propitiating. "It is not far to the jewel-chamber, Monsieur Rûge. That way the passage is simple and easy to follow."

Under Leon's guidance we groped our way slowly with hands outstretched in the darkness, to the treasure-chamber. The geography of this "dry"

THE PALLID GIANT

part of the grotto was, as Leon said, much simpler than below, where the present stream had worked its havoc. But even this short journey gave me a healthy respect for darkness as a real obstacle to travel. Leon urged us to remain near the entrance of the chamber lest we disturb his precious jewels. He muttered to himself as he fumbled in the darkness and having found the candles, gave one to each of us.

Rudge asked, "Walters, where are the metal instruments you told me about? Can you lead us to the gallery where you found them?"

We spent the next hour vainly endeavoring to get sparks by striking together parts of the machines I had discovered on our previous visit; but the metal was too soft. Rudge questioned Leon as to flint arrowheads or "scrapers" such as are to be found in many prehistoric grottos. He had collected none here. Evidently his discovery of gold and jewels in the "Grotto Glorieuse" had killed Leon's interest in prehistoric "relics."

In the end we gave it up and returned to the main chamber. I sat down disconsolately near the entrance, and suspected from the sounds which came from other parts of the chamber, that Leon was solacing himself by handling his beloved jewels and that Rudge was prowling in the darkness seeking the caskets, in spite of Leon's assurance that he had looked in all of them and had seen no more books.

LOST

I seemed to be the only one giving any serious thought to means for saving our lives.

"Let's search in the water for our lost matches; we can dry them and in time get a light."

Rudge's answer came from the region of the rocky platform. "It will be like hunting for a needle in a haystack. But," he added as he came down into the chamber, "it's worth trying."

Reluctantly Leon led us back to the stone steps where the "dry gallery" begins. I had decided that if anything effective was to be accomplished I must do it myself, so announced, "I will search for the place where the struggle occurred. Call frequently 'Rudge' so that I can find my way back."

The others offered to go but I insisted. Neither of them seemed sufficiently single-eyed to our salvation to ensure a thorough search such as I intended to make.

And my search *was* thorough. I felt like a prehistoric amphibian as I crawled back and forth through the water, skimming the surface with my hands and searching every inch of the bottom. Not being absolutely sure of the location, I even went where the water was deeper and repeatedly plunged below, sweeping my hands over the slime and gravel as long as my breath held out. It was as Rudge had said, searching for a needle in a haystack. I found one of the candles but not a match.

Wet, cold and discouraged, I made my way back

THE PALLID GIANT

to the "dry gallery" and threw myself down beside the others. "Nothing doing!" Then with a touch of asperity, "It's your turn, Rudge. What's the matter? You are usually so resourceful."

He reached over and patted my arm. "All right, old fellow. I'll do everything I can; I'm considerably interested myself in getting out of here. Let's take an inventory. We have candles but no matches, —water but no food."

Leon interjected. "Yes! food. I have a little. Bread and saucisson. I brought some with me and have not eaten it all."

This was good news as far as it went; for, now I thought of it, I was fast becoming faint with hunger. Leon rummaged in his pockets. "Here it is."

We divided equally among the three of us a half of his small stock of provisions and at Rudge's suggestion saved the balance for another meal.

"Drink plenty of water," he advised. "It will make the food go farther."

That inky water in which I had been wallowing seemed far from attractive but we were thankful our troubles were not to be aggravated by thirst.

After this we settled ourselves against the rough wall, and discussed methods of escape, but no plan promising success came from these discussions. Rudge asked Leon many questions. He even tried bullying him, insisting that with all Leon's grotto experience, he should be able to find a way out.

LOST

"No matter how long it takes, Leon, let's at least work in that direction."

"But Monsieur Rûge, it is impossible. We would fall and be killed,—we would be lost."

"It couldn't be any worse than waiting here to die."

At one time he persuaded Leon to go with him and repeat my search for the lost matches,—but without success.

Dismal, unmeasured hours passed by. Periodic discussions between Rudge and Leon and the former's cheerful tone, which did not sound at all like that of a man who had given up, kept hope alive in me. After one of these discussions Rudge said to me in a tone of disgust, "Leon is a total loss." Then in French, "I think we shall leave you here, Leon, and go about our business."

"Do not leave me, Monsieur Rûge," he wailed. "You would only be killed and I should die alone."

In truth, Leon's physical and mental powers had been so terribly overstrained that now the stimulus was gone, he was suffering from a reaction which left him without strength or courage. He was helpless,—just a childish old man faced by a horrible fate which he had no will nor power to combat.

Finally Rudge announced that he was again hungry. "Let's wait though. The Lord knows we may need the food worse later on." The physical sensation of hunger seemed to arouse him from that

THE PALLID GIANT

apathy which had for some time kept him silent and he put his arm affectionately around my shoulder.

"Good old Walters! I got you into this scrape, didn't I? It is up to me to get you out."

My heart was warmed by his words. A great wave of regret that such a man as Rudge should die before his time turned me from my own troubles. My soul was full of bitter rebellion against fate. I would fight to the end! I said,

"We surely ought to make a try for it, darkness or no darkness, before we give up."

"Right." Rudge shook off the last trace of lethargy and arose to his feet. "You and I would certainly rather die trying to get out than sitting here doing nothing. Let's go! Leon, Walters and I are going to find our way out of the grotto. Will you go with us?"

Leon's voice was shaky. "You cannot! You cannot!"

Rudge spoke sharply. "We cannot be any worse off than here. Brace up Leon! Come along and help us."

"But, Monsieur Rûge, it is impossible. I know." Then, either fright at the prospect of being left alone stimulated Leon's memory or else the alternative plan which he now proposed had all along lain in his mind and he had held it back as being too dangerous. "There is, near the other branch, an

LOST

old 'air-hole.' It reaches up through the mountain. Once a small stream came through there but the sides have fallen in. Far up in it a little light still shows."

"Why didn't you tell us this before?" Rudge was angry.

"Because, Monsieur Rûge, even to enter it would be dangerous. It is not easy to find, and to get there we must go far in the water among all the rocks you saw back of the deep pool. The 'air-hole' is on the other side. Perhaps we could not find it, and if we did, perhaps we could never find our way back here in the dark."

"You should have told us before. Anything is worth trying and we have been wasting good time."

"But I know 'air-holes.' This one is loose and I am sure you cannot get up it."

"We shall certainly make the attempt. Walters, in default of better, it sounds like a chance worth taking."

"It does," I agreed.

"Leon, you lead the way. Walters will remain here at the point where we leave the 'dry gallery' or near enough so that he can surely find the place again, then if your 'air-hole' proves impossible, his voice will guide us back."

We descended into the water and a few yards along the passage Leon turned to the left. Rudge gave me a parting injunction, "Don't go so far from

THE PALLID GIANT

here that you cannot find your way back." Then he splashed through the shallow water after Leon.

At intervals he called to me and later I heard frequent halloos intended evidently for Leon. I made a careful examination of the topography of the grotto at this point, following for some distance along a solid wall. This finally broke up into a chaos of huge boulders between which narrow passages ran in every direction. I decided to wait here.

The last two halloos had been Leon's. Rudge must have gone beyond him. I was feeling a little uneasy when suddenly a cry of pain came faintly down the winding passages. There was silence; then a moment later Leon's voice calling excitedly, "Monsieur Waltér, come! Come quick!"

With a sinking heart, I hurried in the direction of his voice. "Keep always to the right!" Leon urged me on. "Here! Here!"

The distance was greater than I supposed and it seemed to my impatience that I never would get to him. As I reached Leon's side he pushed me forward with a trembling hand. "There! Monsieur Rûge is caught in a slide."

I could hear Rudge's voice somewhere above me faint and muffled, saying, "Be careful! Keep back! That rock is slipping."

Disregarding the old man who was wailing, "I

LOST

knew it! I knew it! I told him!" I pressed nearer, calling, "Where are you, Rudge?"

"Walters? Good! But don't come nearer. I'm caught in this chute. Tons of loose debris are above me. A big rock grazed my shoulder and is now gripping my foot,—but I can feel it slipping. When it goes, it will be death to anyone below. Keep clear!"

I was desperate. There was Rudge suffering unknown pain, his life in mortal danger and a devil of darkness holding me at arms length!

"What about you, Rudge. Are you hurt? Can't you free yourself?"

His voice came faint and told of savage pain. "I'm afraid I'm done for. 'Twas worth trying. I climbed several yards. Then something gave way. The rocks and debris above me are held,—I don't know how. When I slip, it will surely all come down. The shaft slants toward you, so look out!"

Leon grasped my arm. "Here! behind this boulder."

It was just in time. As I stepped away, the huge rock which had pinned Rudge's foot bounded past us and landed in the water beyond with a loud splash.

"Here I come!" Rudge was sliding out of the "air-hole." "For God's sake keep back. It's all coming."

THE PALLID GIANT

I could not keep back. If this was the end of Rudge, I would die with him. In spite of Leon, I leaped around the protecting boulder. Rudge's foot struck violently against my shoulder; instinctively I seized him; madly I dragged his body toward our retreat. His movement had evidently dislodged the shaky jam above. There was a crunching sound, then a roar as a mass of loose rock rushed past us.

Rudge was lying where my desperate lunge had landed him.

"That was a close one! Good old Walters! You saved my life,—for the time being anyway."

"Are you injured?"

"Not seriously. It was just luck though. Enough rocks came down that chute to grind a man to powder."

We were on one of those gravelly beaches which seemed to collect near the pools. I helped Rudge to a sitting position with his back to the wall, and as I did so, felt something warm like blood on his hand. "Are you bleeding? Where are you injured?"

"No blood to amount to anything. My foot is bruised and I feel faint but I don't think any bones are broken."

Leon now broke forth, "I told you. Oh! I told you, Monsieur Rûge, that 'air-hole' was impossible."

"So is everything else impossible in this accursed

LOST

cave." Rudge showed little interest in Leon's maunderings. "Perhaps that slide has cleared the 'air-hole.' Have a look Walters."

I located the place where Rudge came down and studied the darkness above from every angle.

"I see no light."

"Leon, you know the place better than Walters. Go around there and look it over carefully."

The old man muttered to himself but Rudge's tone admitted of no denial. I heard Leon cross the gravel. He came back very soon saying apologetically, "No light at all, Monsieur Rûge, no one can ever try that again."

Rudge did not comment on Leon's conclusion. "Can you find your way back to the 'dry-gallery' Walters?—or you, Leon?"

The latter answered quickly, "No, Monsieur Rûge. It is all confusion,—no passages, only winding among rocks. Once I was nearly lost there even with a light."

"What do you say, Walters? Can we find our way?"

"We can certainly try."

"We can and we will. It is a mess but men have survived worse." He tried to stand up but was evidently suffering from shock and would have fallen had I not seized his arm. "I'm afraid we will have to wait a while. Just straighten out that leg bent under me."

THE PALLID GIANT

Rudge's cheerfulness was contagious or I had exhausted my capacity for misery. I found myself looking forward with a kind of pleasure to our struggle with those malignant enemies, darkness and rocks. If we failed to find our way out, we would at least die together in an active man-sized adventure. That would be better than this horrible waiting for death.

We filled in the time of waiting for Rudge to recover his strength by recalling pleasant incidents in our past association together. Rudge told of Professor Gribbon's oddities. "It was simply inconceivable to him that any manuscript with sufficient data could defy his system. He laid our failure to everything but himself. You know the Professor is as curious as a woman. I think he would have given up earlier had he not hoped to learn more about where we found the book."

I was not even outraged when Rudge fell to quizzing Leon again about inscriptions and legends of his race. At first the latter closed up like a clam. Rudge urged persuasively, "What does it matter? Anything you tell us will be told to dead men."

Leon still held back. "I do not know them. Madame Beauchelais knows all. Why did she not tell you?"

Rudge overlooked the last remark. "What of the legend of the Grotto Glorieuse? You told us

150

LOST

that such a legend kept you hunting grottos all your life. Of course you know that story."

"Yes,—but—I do not know it well."

Rudge assumed a tone which had broken Leon's resistance on several previous occasions. "Leon, you know that legend, and I want you to repeat it to us. You got us into this trouble; the least you can do, since we ask it, is to repeat for us the legend of the Grotto Glorieuse." There was no answer. "I want to know how the sacred things came here,—who hewed out that treasure-chamber and how the grotto was lost so many years."

Leon was still silent but his will, always weak in Rudge's presence, could not withstand the pressure.

"I will tell you, as my mother used to tell it to me. That was very long ago. I may forget."

Then followed the weirdest experience of all this weird adventure. Lost in the remotest part of a ghostly cavern, facing what seemed certain death, leaning against a rough rock wall with my arm around the shoulder of that friend who had just miraculously escaped disaster, I listened to a husky voice recite in dull rhythm a tale which fitted so completely our eerie surroundings that as Leon proceeded I was transported back those thousands of years and felt as though Rudge and I belonged with the prehistoric men of the caves. There were frequent pauses and much hesitation and several times Leon repeated himself, but he knew it all,—every

THE PALLID GIANT

word. It had been his life-long religion; had made him "manique"; had kept him grotto hunting, and now,—had led him to his fate. All this was in his tone. This is Leon's tale, the leged of the Grotto Glorieuse:—

*From the frozen North came snow and ice,
Creeping, creeping through endless ages,
Smothering the earth,
And hurling spears of biting wind
Among the haunts of men.
Again, again and ever again,
As the forests shrank and the fields grew grey
And bison and mammoth died,
The people of Saa sought in the South
New Hunting grounds.*

*And always the holy Lanuids,
The sacred priestesses of Oed,
Went first.
They journeyed to find new "Fields of Rocks";
For, since the world began,
Lanuids had ruled mankind
From a "Field of Standing Rocks."
By steps, by many painful steps,
The Shrine and sacred things of Oed
Were carried ever farther South,
And still the savage winds pursued.*

*The people shivered.
They would have died
Had not a thousand caverns, deep in the rocky hills,
Opened to shelter them.*

LOST

*They fought the cave-bear for his den;
And day and night they prowled for food.*

*Soon, swarms from the East came near,
Fierce men from Azak
And the hills of Dar,
And sorely did these press the people of Saa.
Song, the savage Song,
Was king of the men of Azak.*

*The "Field of Rocks" grew colder
Till the Lanuids carved a grotte for the Sacred Shrine,
The Grotte Glorieuse,
And killed the slaves who carved it.
But Nogla,
Aged Nogla, oldest of all the Lanuids, raged—
"Dare not to leave the 'Field of Rocks.'
In the beginning our father Oed
Placed the Lanuids in a 'Field of Rocks'
And charged that there they guard the sacred things.
Think not to disobey and live."
But the younger Lanuids only laughed
And left old Nogla in the "Field of Rocks" alone.*

*Then Nogla, gaunt and grey as the upland hills,
Or the "Field of Rocks,"
Raised her bony arms to the sky
And cursed them all.
Grey gloomy clouds racing southward
Seemed to mock her cry.
Dust filled her eyes.*

*By night, the old hag Nogla
Squatted before a little fire of sticks*

THE PALLID GIANT

*And crooned.
Listen to her crooning—
"Like worms
They crawl into the earth to warm themselves.
They leave me here to die.
Nogla is old and weak
But Nogla has a serpent's bite.
Nogla will lead those false ones to their death."*

*At dawn, a crafty Nogla faced the younger Lanuids
In their sacred grotte.
Deceitfully, old Nogla wept.
"Last night I grieved that I should part from you in
 anger,—
Beloved companions!
I am the oldest daughter of Oed.
I have dreamed the dream of Oed
More times than all the fingers on my hands,—
Yea, many more.
Last night I dreamed the dream again.
I saw that worse than flight
From the 'Field of Rocks'
Is your sacrificial sin.
You kill, not as Oed decreed,
Women who mate with men of other tribes,
But yearly, when the hunting moon is full,
You sacrifice an innocent maid.
Look to your dream!
You have defied the laws which place the sacred shrine
Always among upstanding rocks.
Do not then, longer, add that other sin.
Court not the awful curse
Laid on such Lanuids as neglect to kill*

LOST

*Women who wed outside our tribe.
Look to your dream!"*

*The younger Lanuids shrank from Nogla's accusing eyes.
She brandished the stick on which she leaned.
"Full well you know that Marna,
Daughter of Sen,
Has broken the law of Oed,—
Has wed the savage Song.
Kill Marna and redeem your other sin."
Then Nogla, greyer and older than before,
Stalked from the shadowy chamber.
Back to the "Field of Rocks" she went
And crooned by the fire,—
Crooned and waited.*

*No longer did the younger Lanuids scoff at Nogla's words.
Fear filled their hearts.
They knew she spoke the truth,—
That Oed condemned to death
Only such women as break the marriage laws of Saa.
Drua, their leader, spoke,
"Marna shall die."*

*By treachery,
The bride of Song was trapped
And taken to the sacred shrine
And killed,—
To appease the Great God Oed.
And Nogla crouched by the fire among the rocks
And smiled a crafty smile.*

*Then up rose Song
And swore a bloody oath—*

THE PALLID GIANT

*He'd kill the priestesses of Oed.
Song called to his wolfish pack—
"Revenge your King!"*

*From Fen and River-Forest men of Ozak swarmed
And slew full half the men of Saa
And seized their wives
And made the grottes their own.
But the sacred grotte
With the mystic lines of Oed inscribed above
They dared not enter.
They feared Oed's magic.
They waited round about
Till hunger drove the Lamuids forth.
Song killed them all.*

*The tribe of Azak seized the land.
Those men of Saa who saved their lives
By carving high, at cavern mouths,
The sign of Oed,
Acknowledged Song their King
And ever after were as men of Azak.*

*Nogla, aged Nogla,
Laughed
And stole into the sacred grotte
And cursed it
Forever
And died.*

The hoarse voice stopped. A silence of death joined with the darkness of death. To me death seemed very near.

I heard Rudge mutter, "The curse of Nogla!"

XVI

NOGLA

I AM not by nature superstitious, and up to the time Leon introduced us to the Grotto Glorieuse, I would have resented any suggestion that Rudge was superstitious, but now in the suffocating darkness, with Leon's voice ringing in my ears and imagination conjuring his sinister face in front of us, Rudge's low-spoken "The curse of Nogla!" seemed a rational explanation of our plight. We had entered the Grotto Glorieuse in defiance of the curse of Nogla. Worse still, Leon, who was bound by heritage of race-tradition, had defied it, and we three, defilers of the sanctuary, were expiating our sin by a horrible death. Rudge started to speak again.

For some time I had been increasingly conscious that a certain area in that black vacuity which had so long denied sight to my eyes, was showing a different shade of black than elsewhere. This faint cloud was not stationary but continually shifted its position. My first thought was of an optical delusion, similar to mirages in the desert; it even occurred to me that my mind was becoming unbalanced.

THE PALLID GIANT

I shook myself free of this obsession. There certainly was a band of faint yellow grey in our dismal firmament. My hand grasped Rudge's shoulder. "Look! What is that? There! Above! It's light! Look, Rudge! It must be light!" I sprang to my feet. "See! There is the outline of a rock!"

For the moment, hope and fear made chaos of my thoughts; no orderly reasoning as to the cause of the phenomenon was possible; but Rudge's quick mind leaped to a strange conclusion. He spoke in a voice low but stern, "Leon, you have deceived us. You have a confederate in the Grotto."

Leon's reaction to the now broadening band of light was equally suspicious and recriminative and burst forth almost simultaneously with Rudge's words. "You told! You told! You said you told no one!" His explosive accusation, however, was only the reflex of a sudden fear. He grovelled before Rudge. "That is the direction of the entrance. See! there is the great white rock. No friend of mine comes there, Monsieur Rûge. That comes from below as you came!"

By this time there was light enough in the cavern to verify Leon's statement. In our journey to the "air-hole" we had evidently worked around back of the gloomy pool which had so impressed me on our first visit to the grotto, and now we saw, between great boulders, the outlines of that huge stalagmite mass which towered above the water. From behind

NOGLA

this, the light was approaching. It was still faint, shining evidently from that part of the huge chamber which extended far on the other side of the stalagmite. Brighter and brighter it grew until it glowed above the barrier as the glare of an approaching automobile glows above a hill long before its headlights come into view. Above us, the lofty ceiling caught the rays and great rock shapes between us and the black pool showed in deepening silhouettes.

Now we were all standing. We gazed mystified, awestruck. In my own heart joy, hope and a great thankfulness struggled with unreasoning fear. Who in all the world besides us three knew of the grotto beyond the water? Why should anyone come at this moment? Was it for rescue or to do us harm? It passed through my mind that others might have discovered the jewels and that finding us there and wishing no sharers in their secret, they would murder us.

I looked at Rudge. In the dim light, his countenance was inscrutable. I could detect neither fear nor exultation. I had a momentary glimpse of Leon's face also and saw written thereon intense astonishment and perplexity.

The light, as it came nearer, swayed more and more and the shadows above us leaped dizzily from point to point. Now, he who carried it was climbing the stalagmite from its other side. Now, the light appeared above its top, blinding our eyes so

THE PALLID GIANT

long accustomed to darkness. Now, a figure rose and held a candle high. It was a woman!

"Nogla!" shrieked Leon, his feelings already wrought to the highest pitch. "Mon Dieu! It is Nogla! I knew it! I knew it!" And his voice ran off into a wail of abject fear.

As Leon's cry died in the silence of the cavern, a wave of pagan horror swept over me. I stood frozen by a primal fear, like an unreasoning savage facing the manifestations of supernatural vengeance.

The light moved forward and suddenly,—a woman's voice echoed among the rocks,

"Mr. Rudge, are you here?"

"Mraaya!" Rudge and I exclaimed at the same moment.

Then Rudge called back. "Here, Mraaya, beyond the rocks. Don't go a step farther. We will come to you."

It is impossible to describe my feelings as the truth dawned on me,—that Mraaya had come to our rescue. Wonder and gratitude were mixed with amazement that she could have overcome such obstacles.

Impetuously I rushed into the shallow water and in spite of Rudge's warning, "Wait a minute, Walters," I threaded the narrow passages between and plunged into the deep pool. Memory of the sloping side of the stalagmite which I had once before essayed, gave me confidence that I could thus

NOGLA

reach Mraaya's side. I swam to the lowest point and after several unsuccessful attempts to get a footing, pulled myself out of the water and climbed to where she stood.

In my enthusiasm I would have embraced her but remembering my wet garments, thought better of it and grasped her hand saying, "How in the world did you get here, Mraaya? How did you know we were here? How did you find the way?"

My impetuosity was checked by a call from Rudge. "Walters, light your candle or,—that is probably wet,—Mraaya, have you other candles?"

"Yes, Mr. Rudge, several. Have you no light?"

Her calmness was like Rudge's habitual calmness, "Mr. Walters can light one of these and take it to you."

From an oilskin cap similar to those we had worn, she took a candle and lighted it.

"Leon is there too," I hastened to inform her. "We should have three candles if possible."

Mraaya gave a start. Her voice was not pleasant to hear. "Leon! I thought so!"

With three lighted candles in one hand, I found the passage of the cliff somewhat difficult but managed it and following the guidance of Rudge's voice, reached my companions.

When we were all back on the stalagmite, Rudge again expressed his approval of Mraaya but without excessive emotion. These two puzzled me more

THE PALLID GIANT

and more. Their relation seemed more intimate than Mraaya's and mine had ever been, but I saw no evidence of a tender feeling. Rudge accepted her efforts to help him as a matter of course and she gave devotedly in the same spirit.

As Leon climbed up from the ledge, Mraaya spoke to him fiercely under her breath, "Yours is the blame, you vaurien!"

The old man made no answer nor did he look at Mraaya. I asked, "What time is it? How long have we been here?"

"'Tis near midnight. More than twenty-four hours have passed since you entered the grotto."

Suddenly she swayed. She would have fallen if Rudge had not caught her and gently lowered her to a sitting position on the rock. For the first time I noticed how pale Mraaya's face was and how haggard. There was blood too on her hands. Her dress was torn and bedraggled.

"Rest a little." Rudge's voice was low and sympathetic. "We will help you on the return."

Mraaya settled back against Rudge contentedly. "I don't know how I ever got here. Oh, it was horrible!" She covered her eyes with her hands. "The 'water-hole,' ugh! and those awful rocks! I lost my way and would have given up,—if I could." She looked up in Rudge's face. "I had to go on. I wandered on for hours,—on and on and on! Oh!

NOGLA

if you had not been here!" Again she covered her eyes.

I could not see Rudge's expression. After a moment, he turned to Leon standing below in the shadow, "You will lead the way. Don't go so far at any time that you cannot see our light."

The old man moved away, his light twinkling among the rocks; now disappearing, again reappearing beyond, like a will-o-the-'wisp, until it became stationary at the farther end of the great amphitheatre where the stream entered a narrow defile.

"Mraaya," I asked, "how did you know we were here? Why did you come?"

"It was Leon's face at the window that night. I recognized him. I should have told you then. When next day I found that Leon had disappeared, I knew I must follow you. I feared he was crazy and would do harm to Mr. Rudge"; she corrected herself, "to you and Mr. Rudge."

"But how did you learn of the 'water-hole?' And how in the world did you find your way through it?"

"I was in the grotto just around the corner when you and Mr. Rudge were in the water preparing to go through. I heard him tell where the opening was. And I heard what he said about matches and candles in your cap."

Rudge again spoke feelingly, "Mraaya is wiser

THE PALLID GIANT

than I. I should have been warned when I found that Leon was gone."

Mraaya volunteered, "My mother says he has behaved oddly for some time."

I was still amazed that she, a woman, could accomplish such a difficult and dangerous,—such an impossible journey which must tax the strength and courage of a man. I asked her how she dared go through the "water-hole" and how she found her way all that distance.

"I don't know; now it seems impossible. But then something pushed me on. I was not even afraid except that I might fail." She looked up at me. "You know, Mr. Walters, I have been in many grottos. When I was a little girl I used to go with Leon."

Rudge asked, "When did you come here?"

"I came at dark. Oh! hours and hours ago it seems. After you disappeared in the water I went back to Aurigniac and waited and when you did not return, I bought a cap and candles and matches. I feared trouble. I feared Leon. I didn't know what he could do but I feared he was bent on harming you."

After a time, Mraaya insisted that she was recovered enough to proceed. At first we supported her one on either side, but she grew stronger and later would have dispensed with our aid had not Rudge said decisively, "You must not walk alone."

NOGLA

It seemed but natural that after his frightful experience, Rudge himself needed help but he showed no signs of weakness and hardly permitted me to do my share with Mraaya.

It was a slow, tedious journey with Leon's light always blinking at us far away, save where he turned a corner or entered a tunnel. We crawled through the "water-hole,"—Leon first, and Rudge last. I caught Mraaya in my arms as she rose to the surface of the outside pool but she laughed bravely and made her way out saying, "I am not afraid now."

Leon had disappeared, and outside the grotto we found no trace of him.

We walked back to Aurigniac slowly through the night. At a lane which turned off the highway a mile or so outside of Aurigniac, Mraaya insisted on leaving us. "It is only a short way and I am strong again and not afraid."

But Rudge said gravely,

"Leon may be about somewhere. We shall make sure that you get home safely."

She offered no further objection and after seeing her enter the house, we made our way to the Inn, surprising the landlady equally, I think, by our appearance and the lateness of the hour.

As we parted for the night, Rudge pressed my hand. "Walters, you are a friend worth having." Then he shook his head gloomily. "To-morrow I shall go back to the grotto, but this time alone."

XVII

A "ROSETTA STONE"

MY sleep was haunted by thoughts of Rudge's determination to visit that loathsome cave again. I knew him, and knew he would not leave Aurigniac without, as he said, exhausting the possibilities of the Grotto Glorieuse. Should I go with him? During breakfast we both avoided the subject, but he could not keep away from discussion of our recent adventure.

"That was a wonderful tale of Leon's. Could you write it out as he told it last night, Walters? I believe I could."

"Hardly,—word for word, but many passages are still vivid in my memory,—'Then up rose Song and swore a bloody oath, he'd kill the priestesses of Oed.' Oed must have been a patron deity of the 'Cro-Magnons.'"

Rudge pushed back his plate and leaned with both arms on the table. "That legend may explain the Grotto Glorieuse,—and the jewels, but it does not help us with the book."

"He didn't even mention the book, did he?"

Rudge ruminated, "The scenery was well set up

A "ROSETTA STONE"

for 'Cro-Magnon' times,—the 'age of ice'; and the characters seemed somehow familiar. Nogla, among her standing rocks,—Oed,—'the great God Oed.'"

"Those 'Cro-Magnons' were certainly mystics. Do you suppose their 'dreams'?"—this was a random shot—"have any connection with Mraaya's trance?"

Rudge raised his head and looked at me. His eyes opened very wide. "Mraaya's trance! Of course!" He was now looking, not at me, but through me. "Why didn't I think of it before,—she can read the book!"

"Mraaya can read the book?"

"I should have known it! Where is she? Will she go directly to Paris? Let us hurry back,—in her trance Mraaya can read it."

Rudge was tremendously excited. Instantly I thought of Mraaya's aversion to all the superstitions of her childhood and was tempted to regret suggesting her trance.

Rudge's mind worked rapidly. "When can we start for Paris?"

I looked at my watch. "Not 'till evening now, but we can be there in the morning."

"Will she surely return? Perhaps we ought to get word to her here."

"No need, I think. She is still working for me and will return as soon as she sees us,—or rather you, safely out of Aurigniac."

THE PALLID GIANT

The next day Mraaya did not show up at my office in Paris, and I decided that she had remained in Aurigniac until Rudge was surely out of Leon's radius of action.

In one of the corridors of the Crillon I met Professor Gribbon.

"Good morning, Mr. Walters. So you and Rudge have returned? I called at his apartment and that very dignified woman at the door informed me that he had left the city. No one here seemed to know where you were,—hence I inferred that the two of you had gone on another expedition. Were you, may I ask, searching for more of those mysterious puzzle-books?"

"No, Professor Gribbon,—for aid in translating the old one."

"Ah!" The Professor raised his eyebrows. "Dr. Von Diebrich in Berlin, perhaps? Or that elderly visionary, I had almost said charlatan, Herr Laswyck of Prague who reads inscriptions by the stars or some kind of Indian number necromancy. Seriously, Mr. Walters, I would go a long way to help George Rudge, but—" he placed his finger on one of my vest buttons, "he has an impossible problem."

I was not sure whether Rudge wished to disclose his plans to the Professor but decided to let him do it himself if he wished.

"Go over and see him anyway, Professor Gribbon. It will cheer him up."

A "ROSETTA STONE"

"Gladly! I will go gladly, if you think my pessimism regarding the translation will not add to his feeling of disappointment. Walters, I still wish he would tell me something about the origin of the book. That might suggest a source of information which I have overlooked."

"Ask him again. Go over with me this evening—and ask him."

We three were sitting around Rudge's fire, much as we had on other evenings. There was this difference. The Professor was trying to be diverting and his transparent efforts drove Rudge deeper and deeper into himself.

"Hanish has found nearly all the fragments of the Karnac tablet. You should go to Vienna and help him translate it, Rudge."

Rudge dismissed the subject with a short, "He won't let anyone help him."

The Professor finally worked around to the point which interested him. "Perhaps I could assist you to more effect with your manuscript if I knew its history."

"As I told you before, we are bound in honor not to reveal its origin. This I will say, however. That book was ages old when the Karnac tablet was inscribed."

Rudge took no notice of the Professor's doubting 'um!' but turned to me. "Have you seen Mraaya?"

THE PALLID GIANT

"She has not returned. I feel sure, however, she will be here to-morrow."

Rudge had evidently decided to take the Professor into his confidence. "When she returns, Professor Gribbon, we will have a clue to the translation of that book. Mraaya's trance is our 'Rosetta Stone.'"

The Professor sat up very straight and looked from one of us to the other. "Trance! Trance! I would hardly expect you, Rudge, to attempt to dream out a translation. Who is Mraaya?"

I waited for Rudge, but he evidently preferred that I answer. "Mraaya is my stenographer. All her life she has been subject to peculiar trances which appear to be connected with thought transference,—or something of that sort."

The Professor was, I thought, surprised at Rudge and a little shocked that he should even consider a proposal so fantastic in connection with a scientific work such as the interpretation of language. He sucked in his breath audibly. "Hardly that, Rudge. Hardly that! Why don't you let me take a few pages of your book to America when I go? I might run across something which would help you. That book is really a very interesting enigma."

Rudge was impervious to the Professor's astonished declamation against "necromancy." He said quietly, "If you will come here to-morrow evening,

170

A "ROSETTA STONE"

Professor Gribbon, I think you will hear something not in your catalog of scientific realities."

The next day I approached Mraaya with many qualms; in fact I did not mention the trance at all, but told her that Rudge was sure she could assist us with the translation and asked that she accompany me to his apartment. She agreed, adding, "But I cannot help you,—I really cannot."

"He thinks you can."

Before dining, I called at the Cité and told Rudge of Mraaya's consent to go with me to his apartment in the evening. I warned him that nothing had yet been said to her about the trance; she had simply agreed to come and help in any way she could.

Mraaya met me on the steps of the Madelaine and, turning into the Boissy d'Anglas, we entered the covered passage to the Cité. I had forgotten how disreputable the little hallway looked and the steep, narrow stairway. I could hardly blame Mraaya for asking,

"Does Mr. Rudge live here?"

"Yes, but this is not the regular entrance to his apartment. We are entering a back way to avoid observation in the hotel."

Though Rudge must have heard me unlock the secret door, he awaited our approach in the front chamber, standing with his back to the fireplace. Now he stepped forward. His eyes were very

THE PALLID GIANT

bright. "Thank you, Mraaya, for coming. We need you."

Mraaya's reply, as always with Rudge, was simple and she showed no signs of embarrassment. "I will do whatever I can."

She bowed to the Professor rather diffidently, and avoided sitting down. As Rudge resumed his position, standing with his hands behind him near the fireplace, she looked at him questioningly. "Where is the manuscript?"

Together they went over to the table and Rudge opened the book. All this time I was growing nervous. Just how could I best introduce the subject of Mraaya's trance? My deception could not be continued much longer, and I felt that the explanation was up to me, since I had brought her to the apartment under false pretences.

She was shaking her head over the book. I braced myself. "Mraaya, I have told Rudge about the trance you described to me. He believes that in one of those trances you can read the manuscript."

Mraaya turned quickly and gave me a look full of reproach. "How could you!"

I stammered. "It was some time ago that I told him."

She seemed on the point of saying something bitter but instead walked to the window and turned her back on us. As she did so, she threw over her shoulder, "I will never go into a trance again,

A "ROSETTA STONE"

never!" The Professor sat up very straight and removed his glasses. It was typical of the Professor that he looked at me and then at Rudge before turning to study the girl at the window.

I confess that I was flustered, but having gone so far, was determined to play my part to the end. "But, Mraaya, it is our one hope and you told me the trance was never painful."

"Please do not ask me; I cannot."

I looked instinctively at Rudge; so did the Professor. There was a full minute of silence. Then Rudge walked over to Mraaya and said in a low tone, "That grotto where you found us is the Grotto Glorieuse. This book came from there."

Mraaya made no answer. For a moment she covered her face with her hands and I thought gave a little shiver. Then she turned and faced Rudge. "I will do as you wish."

From that moment Rudge took charge of the affair and Mraaya cooperated with him, paying little attention to either the Professor or me.

Rudge apologized: "We have no couch."

"It is not necessary." Mraaya spoke quietly. "This big chair will do as well."

Rudge drew the chair into the bright circle of light near the table. The Professor now took his seat with pencil in hand and some especially prepared sheets of paper before him. Rudge had evidently persuaded him to take Mraaya's trance seri-

THE PALLID GIANT

ously and together they had laid plans for recording her words. Rudge brought some cushions to make Mraaya comfortable. They conversed in low tones. I was pleased with the success of my efforts to help Rudge, but I confess that for a moment I did feel something more than surprise at the complete understanding which had been established so quickly between these two.

Presently they seemed to reach a decision and Rudge came to the table where I was looking over the Professor's shoulder. "I shall assist Mraaya. She suggests that you and Professor Gribbon retire into the next room for a few minutes. You need not shut the door."

Standing in the bedchamber, we could hear them talking in low tones; then, after a period of silence, Rudge called us back to the room. Mraaya was reclining in the chair with her head thrown back and her whole body relaxed as though in sleep. Her eyes were still wide open. A deep pallor had overspread her face; her features were drawn and there was a quality of strange, remote unearthliness in her expression which gave to the scene an emotional significance never to be forgotten. Soon she began talking rapidly but in a language we did not understand. At first her voice was inexpressive and the tone monotonous. After this had lasted for fifteen or twenty minutes, she suddenly gave a low cry, recovered her poise, and then shot out a single word

174

A "ROSETTA STONE"

with an expressive wave of her hand. From that time on, her moods changed rapidly. I held my breath, being somewhat alarmed at her violence. At one moment her voice conveyed terror, then a sudden note of command; at times she wept, and there were intervals when she did little more than mutter.

The torrent of ever-changing exclamation and gesture continued for more than an hour, growing more startling all the time. I became apprehensive and looked at Rudge who had throughout been standing in front of Mraaya, watching her intently. He appeared absorbed but not in any way disturbed.

At last the succession of harsh sounds ceased. Mraaya's tone became quiet and her speech measured and modulated in a very peculiar manner. Rudge moved a step nearer, then waited several minutes, listening. At last he seemed satisfied. Motioning the Professor that the time had come, and taking the unshaded lamp, he handed it to me whispering, "Hold it there." Then pressing lightly Mraaya's forehead with the thumb and forefinger of one hand, he took a page of the book which had been backed with a sheet of white cardboard, and held it before her eyes where the light shone brightly upon it.

The effect was instantaneous and very startling. Mraaya gave a little shriek and made as though to rise. Then she settled back in the chair and began an excited monologue, something between singing

THE PALLID GIANT

and talking. The Professor's pencil worked rapidly. He was evidently recording the sounds by some system of his own. The first series of sounds was repeated. Then Mraaya's tone dropped at least three full notes of the scale. Again it rose and again it fell, but not to the same extent as before. Now Mraaya's body shook. She gasped and closed her eyes; then lay perfectly still. I was alarmed. Rudge leaned over her calmly and scrutinized her face. He removed the pressure he had kept, until then, on her forehead, laid the page on the table and, resuming his position in front of Mraaya, spoke without taking his eyes from her face, "If you and Professor Gribbon will retire again, I will bring Mraaya out of the trance."

The Professor was excited. As we stood together in Rudge's bedchamber, he whispered in my ear "very remarkable. If the young lady can interpret those sounds, we shall have a clue."

When, a few minutes later, Rudge summoned us from the other room, we found him sitting near Mraaya, leaning forward and chatting with her. She was still in a reclining position and though her face was pale, it was composed. She was smiling and talking earnestly to Rudge. Neither paid any attention to our return until the Professor, standing very straight, said in a most formal manner, "Madoiselle Mraaya, you have done us a great service. We shall hope that your sacrifice will result in an

176

A "ROSETTA STONE"

addition to scientific knowledge." Mraaya smiled graciously at him, and seeing me nodded, but quickly turned back to Rudge.

The Professor took his seat at the table. Rudge spoke, "Will you now, Mraaya, begin your story again so that the others can hear it all?"

Mraaya drew herself upright and in a quite unembarrassed manner proceeded to tell of her trance. "The same strange thoughts, as always before, went through my mind. Some were terrible, some grand. They changed so fast that I had no time to realize what each meant. Finally I became 'The Man' as I always do at the end.

"I was thinking those tremendous thoughts which come to me when I am 'The Man,'—thoughts of the killing of women and of trances and priestesses and strange human beings,—when something happened which never happened before. Suddenly a great light burst on me, and huge figures passed before my eyes. They were strange figures, yet they seemed to fit with my thoughts. Something hurt me. I was never hurt in a trance before. It seemed a struggle between what I was and what I had been. New thoughts burned their way into my brain,—these: 'Weary I am of being a God,' over and over again, and then, 'Long enough have I lived. I am ready to die.' I felt torn asunder. I thought that I had myself died. After that I knew nothing until I found myself again in this chair, and Mr. Rudge

THE PALLID GIANT

sitting there looking just as though he had understood all the thoughts which had passed through my brain."

Rudge smiled. "Is that all you can remember, Mraaya? Do you recall other thoughts which came with the figures?"

Mraaya pondered a moment. "No, it was all too vague excepting the words I told you. I cannot even remember how they looked, but the thoughts pierced my brain and hurt me. 'I am ready to die'; that is the last I remember."

The Professor finished his writing and turned toward me. "Perhaps the young lady can identify some of the characters here in the book. It would be of great assistance in our work if she could correlate the characters, and especially these first lines, with the words as she has reported them."

Mraaya went to the table and studied the page. She shook her head. "No, they look just as unfamiliar as when I first saw them."

XVIII

AT MYSTERY'S DOOR

WEARY I am of being a God." Those words bursting upon me from out the depths of that prehistoric silence, which broken skulls and caves and fossil foot-prints have only made the more abysmal, destroyed whatever of mental complacency I had preserved through the previous ten days of deepening mystery. They were like the notes of a bugle, piercing the witch-hunted silence of an enchanted forest where the rustle of dead leaves had been the only sound for centuries. I was awestruck; but even more, Mraaya's revelation completed that chaos in my mind which Leon and his Grotto Glorieuse,—and Rudge,—and Mraaya herself,—had already begun. I floundered among monstrous inconsistencies.

What of the fine wrought gold, the jewels, the intricate bronze mechanisms? What of those ultra-civilized productions found in the Grotto Glorieuse side by side with 'Cro-Magnon' daubs in yellow ochre? And now, what of Mraaya's trance! taking her back along a psychic trail of 'Cro-Magnon' heredity which should have landed her among the

THE PALLID GIANT

speechless, thoughtless ancestors of the human race, but which, instead, connected suddenly with Rudge's more-than-human book, and enabled her to interpret the cryptic words of,—of whom?—when?—where?

We emerged, Mraaya and I, on the Boissy d'Anglas and walked to the end of the block without a word having been spoken. Mechanically I hailed a passing taxi. We were still silent as the chauffeur crowded his car through the after-theater traffic on the Boulevard Malesherbes and it was not until we neared Mraaya's pension that I pulled myself together sufficiently to warrant conversation.

Prodigious prehistoric possibilities and unrealities were still dominating my thoughts. I knew that when I opened my mouth to speak I would say something ridiculously grandiose or very commonplace. Chance determined that it should be the latter.

"It is too bad to keep you out so late, Mraaya."

My companion came suddenly out of a brown study and when she answered there was nothing in her voice to indicate any unusual excitement.

"It is nothing, Mr. Walters. I am very glad if I have helped you, even a little. You were right, urging me to go to Mr. Rudge, but," I thought there was still a note of reproach in her voice, "you should have told me about the trance."

As the taxi drew up to the curb, Mraaya laid her

AT MYSTERY'S DOOR

hand on my arm, saying earnestly, "You will make sure that Mr. Rudge keeps his promise,—you heard him promise—to let me read the translation?"

"I certainly will, Mraaya. You are entitled to know it all."

I was torn between desire to talk further with Mraaya and an irresistible urge to get back to the apartment and learn what this revelation meant to Rudge.

"Good-night, and thank you again." I climbed back into the taxi and told the chauffeur to drive as fast as he could to the Madeleine.

As we raced down the Boulevard Hausemann, those words burned in my brain:

¶ "Weary I am of being a God. Long enough have I lived. I am ready to die."

Who was this demigod? How was he connected with Mraaya? And the cave?—and Rudge? Mraaya had said, before we left the apartment, "Mr. Rudge knew more about my trance than I did myself." Then I thought of the lack of surprise Rudge displayed in the Grotto Glorieuse and the little interest he showed there in anything save his inexplicable hunt for the book.

Suddenly I sat up very straight. My God!—Rudge's "fanciful" speculation of two months back! Was that a part of this plot? He had suggested that ages ago,—in the "Permian era," as I remem-

THE PALLID GIANT

bered it,—a race of human beings inhabited the earth, superior in material development and intellect to our own. Was Rudge a seer of visions? Were the words Mraaya had uttered, written by one of those men?—Impossible! That was millions of years ago. No book could have been preserved so long. Mraaya's psychic trance could not reach back a million years. I accused myself of becoming more fanciful than Rudge.

Arrived at the Cité, I found the Professor and Rudge sitting side by side at the table. The former was reading from his paper, and at the first suggestion of a pause, I broke in.

"What is it all about? Who is this man who is tired of being a God? I cannot make head or tail of it. Do you believe he has any connection with your fanciful Permian idea? How could Mraaya be connected with that?"

Rudge looked at me over his shoulder. His face was very solemn. "This book will tell. We need not speculate. It will take time, but we can wait."

The Professor peered over his glasses at Rudge with a slightly annoyed expression. Rudge resumed his work. At midnight I made tea and, rather reluctantly, both men joined me.

"Have you made any progress?" I asked. Rudge waited for the Professor to reply but as the latter continued to sip his tea in silence, he himself answered.

AT MYSTERY'S DOOR

"So far, we are only systematizing our records and settling the method to be used."

It was evident these two had no intention of satisfying my impatience by guessing, now that the true explanation was apparently in sight.

I was never in such a painfully unsettled state of mind as when I went to bed that night; and the next day was worse. By noon, I could stand the suspense no longer, and violated the traditions of the Cité by visiting Rudge in the middle of the day. The Professor had stepped out for lunch. Rudge assured me that he, himself, had eaten a good breakfast and required no more food until tea time. He looked grave but was in the best of spirits, and it came over me how completely we two had exchanged parts. Yesterday Rudge had seemed distraught while my anxiety was all on his account. To-day he had an air of contentment, as though sure of ultimate success, and it was I who raged inwardly with a rebellious impatience for answers to those questionings which Mraaya's trance had aroused.

My principals in New York had been hinting for some time as to the possibility of my returning home at an early date, and now our Amsterdam representative appeared in Paris with a cablegram instructing him to seek my assistance in settling certain matters. There was no help for it. This man, Arnem, stuck to me like a brother. For a week he kept me from the Cité and would have consumed more of my

THE PALLID GIANT

time had I not, following a chance meeting with the Professor at the Crillon, forcibly broken away from him. The Professor told me that they had completed translation of a small portion and would soon be ready to read it "connectedly."

Late that evening I rapped on Rudge's door. During the early stage of our adventure I had been slow to accept the mysterious phenomena which we encountered as anything but surface mysteries. Common sense told me that, remarkable as were Leon's cave and Rudge's book, some rational explanation would be found for both. I did not fully understand Rudge's excitement. Now, however, the thing had taken possession of me almost as completely as it had of him, and my mind anticipated a dramatic revelation. My heart balanced between hope and fear.

I found Rudge looking very solemn, but with his solemnity was an air of immense satisfaction as he said, "We have finished the first chapter. Walters! It is terrific,—unbelievable." Professor Gribbon, with his back to us, continued for at least a quarter of an hour, checking the finished sheets of translation. At last he turned his chair around, and after assuring himself that he was in the best possible position for light, began reading.

TRANSLATION

¶ Weary I am of being a God! Weary I am of being a God! Long enough have I lived. I am ready to die. Alone am I in a vast world. In all this desolate waste of land and sea live only "the brutes" who fear me, and my half-wit children who believe that I am a God. How great a loneliness has been my lot. Already have I prolonged existence seventy years beyond the "first normal" ¹ and could perhaps add seventy more, if I would. I will not.

¶ My priesthood now has stood the test of three generations. Hardly do I know why I have done these things. What to me is that immeasurably distant future? That which I have done may save for some new race a million years, or may be lost in the dreary ages, through my children's ignorance, or be submerged in the turmoil of "the brutes."

¶ There only remains to write this chronicle. Those to whom I shall entrust its keeping, would never understand, though they could read it. Their brains and the brains of their children and their children's children, for countless generations, will be too small and weak to

¹ This was a guess of the professor's.

THE PALLID GIANT

understand. Their minds can compass only passion, superstition and fear.

¶ For more than a hundred years I have closed my mind to the tragic past,—tragic! yet inevitable.

¶ Well spoke the sage of old:

*If man unsheathe too far that flaming sword—
The power of life and death—
The Pallid Giant Fear will seize
And plunge its blade into man's breast.*

When the Professor stopped reading, I could not restrain myself. "What does it mean? 'Alone in a desolate world!'—'My children!'—'A hundred years!'—'My priesthood!' What does it all mean?"

Rudge was not thinking of my outburst. His mind was evidently far away and his comment was addressed to the fire rather than to either of us. "A million years!—Yes, millions!" He turned to the Professor. "I told you that that book contained the oldest record in the world."

The Professor laid on the table the sheet of paper from which he had been reading, and removed his glasses. He did not look at Rudge. I had an impression that he was puzzled and a little bewildered, but his expression was still insistently noncommittal.

XIX

THE KEY

IT was now late in July, the Treaty had been signed by all parties, and President Wilson, with most of his leading advisors, had returned to America. I lingered in Paris hoping that in the progress of translation I would find a solution of the tantalizing riddle which our adventure in the grotto had begun and which the few mystifying lines already translated had deepened a thousand-fold. An irresistible attraction kept me at that Cité most of the time. I found many ways to help the translators, yet throughout felt like a child permitted to look on at grown folks' parties, while still too young to attend.

The Professor had taken a room in the same building and on the same floor with Rudge. These two men seemed to vie with each other in disregarding all the rules of health. They worked long hours and took little or no exercise, and their eating would have been neglected and scandalously unhygienic if I had not assumed charge of that part of the daily program and led them up, as it were, to their meals. We were an oddly assorted trio,—complete oppo-

THE PALLID GIANT

sites, if that word can be stretched to include three. And yet, I think that each in his own way enjoyed immensely those weeks spent together in the little room overlooking the Boissy d'Anglas.

Rudge was just as cordial as ever. He even tried at times to satisfy my curiosity as to new revelations foreshadowed in the daily work of translation, but always, when it came to speculating on the authorship of that remarkable document found in the grotto, some mysterious inhibition seemed to take possession of him. He would stare out of the window. "Not now! Not now! We shall know it all when we have finished."

The work of translation proceeded with surprising rapidity, in spite of violent differences of opinion between the two translators, which often brought their work to a complete standstill. At such times, having exhausted their arguments, both would stare silently at the papers in front of them. Rudge usually gave way and made the best compromise he could with the Professor's literalness. Often he seemed at his wits' end to make the latter's awkward words fit into sentences which to him represented the meaning of the text, and these compromises always marred the simplicity and peculiar rhythm of his translation.

I once heard Rudge say, "Here ideas are expressed with their subtlest meanings. Not only the beauty and simplicity of this ancient language, but the real

188

THE KEY

thoughts of the writer are being murdered by your clumsy words."

The Professor shook his head stubbornly. "An original translation should be accurate. You can turn it into poetry afterward, if you like."

This insistence on a literal accuracy was responsible for such words as "leader-man" and "air-machine" as well as many awkward sentences which appear in the translated text. Yet the Professor seemed to recognize that it was Rudge's instinctive interpretations which made translation possible,—that without them, his technical labors would be fruitless, even with the aid of clues Mraaya had given. He permitted Rudge to dictate the final text, which enabled the latter to preserve, throughout, that very curious style which was, it seemed to me, inspired by some intuitive appreciation of the unknown writer's language.

One morning I arrived at Rudge's apartment before Professor Gribbon.

"I have some news for you," Rudge took his pipe from his mouth. "I met Mraaya the other day in the Bois. She had a letter from her mother telling of the death of poor old Leon. He died very suddenly."

Met Mraaya?—in the Bois? I was much more struck by this than by the news of Leon's death.

Rudge was refilling his pipe. Whether he sensed the thoughts passing through my mind, I do not

THE PALLID GIANT

know. He looked up with one of his winning smiles and said, "That relieves you of a difficult task—disposing of those jewels. We can decide at our leisure what to do with the grotto and its contents. You and I own it now."

Just then the Professor entered. "By the way," Rudge addressed me a little apologetically, "after I learned of Leon's death I took the liberty of telling Professor Gribbon the story of the Grotto Glorieuse, and the finding of this book."

"Very remarkable! Very remarkable!" The Professor wagged his head, and stared at the carpet in front of him. "I cannot understand a civilization, such as the one suggested by your book, existing so far back as 'Cro-Magnon' times."

"You forget," Rudge spoke combatively, "that this book was written millions of years before the 'Cro-Magnon' age. The caves of the Haute Garonne themselves are products of an age immensely later than the book."

The Professor assumed a dogged expression. They had discussed this before. "True, if your suppositions are correct as to the age when the book was written."

"They are correct." I noted the sparkle in Rudge's eyes. "The Grotto Glorieuse was simply the last resting place of those sacred treasures which included the book and which during countless cen-

190

THE KEY

turies must have migrated with migrating tribes, like the 'Ark of the Covenant.' ”

The Professor persisted. “Who preserved them so carefully through the ages you count?”

Rudge hesitated. “Reveal to me the chain of heredity along which Mraaya’s trance takes her back to ‘the man,’ the writer of the book, and I will show you unnumbered generations of devotees who guarded his relics with their lives and whose later descendants, the ‘Cro-Magnons,’ in comparatively modern times (twenty-five thousand to fifty thousand years ago), enlarged a natural grotto to make a fitting temple for the sacred things of their race.”

The Professor said no more though he appeared unconvinced, and Rudge was apparently willing to let the subject drop. They were soon hard at work.

Early in September, translation of another section having been completed, Rudge and the Professor devoted an entire day to putting the finishing touches on their work. At seven o’clock in the evening, Professor Gribbon was still puttering at the table, comparing passages with the original text and arguing over his shoulder at Rudge who sat calmly smoking his pipe by the fireplace. I was getting impatient. It had been agreed that the Professor should read this section aloud and I began to fear that his dissatisfaction with details would lead to a postponement. I had a thought.

“Let’s break away and go over to the Chatham

THE PALLID GIANT

Grill for dinner." (The professor had a weakness for certain food at the "Chatham.") "You two ought to give your minds a rest,—get away from translation, so that the reading will suggest something to you besides words. You have been living with words, words, words for a month. I don't believe either of you have sensed what it is all about."

During dinner, I managed to divert them from the subject uppermost in their minds until, while we were waiting for dessert, Rudge asked insinuatingly, "What do you say now, Professor, as to the antiquity of the manuscript?"

I think the professor felt that something of this sort was coming. He answered weakly: "There is no direct evidence."

That touched off Rudge. "Evidence! What about the earthquakes? Just recall the facts. Ten million years ago, when the earth was shrinking much faster than now, earthquakes were of daily occurrence,—many each day. Great mountain chains were being born. It exactly fits the story. Human beings then must have lived very close to the earth, unless, as the record states, they found a way to moderate the violence of those convulsions."

"Do you really believe," the professor seemed to be fighting his own convictions, "do you believe that any race of men could control earthquakes?"

"And why not? How can you place any limits

THE KEY

on man's utilization of the physical forces in nature? Electricity and the Radio are only foretastes of the mighty unseen forces we shall discover and use,—if our race lasts long enough.”

At this point I interrupted the discussion. “You both promised to drop this subject during dinner.”

We walked down the Boulevard Madeleine in a silence which grew more solemn as we approached the Cité. A hush of expectancy pervaded Rudge's apartment. Seating himself near the table, Professor Gribbon made a great show of deliberation, carefully arranging the sheets of translation and scanning several of them critically. At last he began reading:

XX

THE DEATH-RAY

TRANSLATION

MY earliest recollections are of living under-sea. All men were living under-sea and none dared stay on land except on moonless nights or in dense fogs. The story of that all-destroying beast which Daril loosed upon the world was written by my father and given me the night he died,—that awful night when Promil's son sped through the ocean's sombre depths to bring us word of Arto's murderous plan.

¶ "Preserve this record," thus my father spoke, "as warning to mankind. Here may all future generations read how pride and intellect uncurbed by fellow-love brought low the human race,—brought man to this,—" He pointed through the window where our 'nar'-lights faded to the gloomy darkness of the sea, and monstrous shadowy forms moved to and fro. "More cruel than those monsters there have men become. The few still left alive now skulk in dark recesses of the sea, hiding from

THE DEATH-RAY

dangers which their cruel fear alone creates. To you and Promil's son belongs the task of saving these. What I have written here, I leave with you."

¶ This is the tale my father told:—

¶ War raged through all the world. Yet 'twas not war alone but preparation for its gruesome harvests drove man from that earthly paradise he had attained through countless centuries of toil and misery. Before this last great war, science had multiplied the fiendish instruments with which men killed their fellow men,—projectiles which afar killed hundreds, poisoned air and poisoned water, fire-machines and bombs of which each minute separate particle gave forth gases, deadly as serpents creeping along the ground. At first devices for defense kept pace with new machines for killing men, but in the end these lagged and war grew ever more calamitous. For two long generations then, none dared to fight; fear kept the peace. Yet that same fear made war inevitable.

¶ Throughout those years 'twas held a grave offense to talk of war. Yet all men thought of war, and secretly each nation strove to put itself in readiness. Our men, the men of Sra, outran all others in devising new machinery for war. Hence they ran fastest toward the war, and when it came, they were accused of being the aggressors.

¶ And this was true. Those very men who for-

THE PALLID GIANT

merly had held huge armaments the only guarantees of peace, when national disputes grew bitter, urged that "for the sake of peace" we be the first to strike, and when a host of enemies surrounded Sra, they voted, "Kill! kill all, that Sra have peace."

¶ For all the world joined arms against us. Slowly, day by day, they pressed our armies back, fought us with weapons we ourselves devised, killed countless men and women and children in their homes, with fire, disease and poisoned air, and ruined harvests by the spread of insect pests.

¶ Starvation, misery and blank despair had gripped the land when Daril summoned to a midnight council all the "leader-men" of Sra. The four were there to whom had been entrusted power supreme throughout the war and with them twenty other "leader-men." Daril was master of the "four,"—Daril the iron-willed.

¶ Now, standing forth, he raised his hand,—the hairy hand of all the Morlod race,—and pointed toward the South.

¶ "The ruthless men of Aranáy are in the mountains there. Their engines, creeping upward, near the topmost peaks. For us 'tis death or desperate acts."

¶ A voice broke in. "Yet, do we not control the air?"

¶ "We do. But should their tunnelling escape

THE DEATH-RAY

our watchfulness, that air-defense would crumble over night."

¶ Another cried, "'Tis time to ask for peace!"

¶ "Peace?" Daril frowned. "You little know the kind of peace you'd get."

¶ "True, but however bad their peace, the longer we continue war, the worse that peace will grow. What would you do?"

¶ Daril shook his mighty head with all its shaggy mane. His voice was hoarse. "I'd kill our enemies."

¶ More calmly he explained. "We have the means. Science has at last devised a force of universal death,—Klepton-Holorif!—a force with which we can, if we so will, sweep from the earth whole peoples,—every human being, life itself."

¶ Men gasped. Klepton-Holorif!—a force of universal death! I now recalled wild tales which told of something still more terrible than all the killing weapons known before. Some said 'twas our devising, and again a panic-fear was spread in Sra by stories that our enemies had found this all-destroying force.

¶ Daril's words again resounded through that lofty hall. "Our study of atomic energy proved long ago that that cohesive force which binds together matter in mass can be destroyed, and recently the formula was found for neutralizing this cohesion in 'life-compounds,'—for dissolving substance into that infinitude of basic par-

THE PALLID GIANT

ticles from which it came. Already we have built machines whose deadly current sets at naught all interferences, and, far away as Drac or Marillar, has power to instantly turn 'living tissues' into dust."

¶ Dread silence followed Daril's words, while horror swept the dark assembly. Promil asked how Daril could be sure of this.

¶ "We learned by trial! Recently, you will recall that, in an eastern province, several thousand people disappeared. They vanished, and with them vanished trees and growing plants. You will remember how that all in Sra were mystified, and many feared our enemies were making war with some strange form of poison gas."

¶ We remembered.

¶ "That was an accident resulting from our test. We directed the dissolving current toward live creatures placed against a hill. They crumbled into dust and with them all the animal life and every form of vegetation straight away beyond the hill. Then, first we learned that minerals, though not themselves dissolved, in no way check this 'ray' of death,—that neither soil nor rock, however great their mass, afford the least protection from the killing shafts of 'Klepton-Holorif.' "

¶ I could no longer hold my peace. "I fear this new invention. Where will it end, if—?" Daril broke in,

THE DEATH-RAY

¶ "I fear it too. If I believed no other nation could perfect like 'death-machines,' I would, in spite of all the danger we are in, destroy our own, and, for humanity's sake, would put to death all men who know the formulas, save only 'leader-men' whom we can surely trust. But,—others will succeed, even as we. In Muta, we believe them near it now."

¶ Then someone asked, "In what measure would you mete this death?"

¶ Daril spoke in solemn tones. "From all the earth, I'd sweep our enemies. It is our lives or theirs. Soon they will know of our success; they may already know,—so rare is secrecy,—and then,—those men would take no chance."

¶ "But why?" I asked. "Why should they desire to kill a helpless people? Do they not believe us at their mercy?"

¶ "I fear not their desire to kill. Even they are not so wicked as to crave the death of millions. *I fear their fear.* They dare not let us live, knowing or even fearing that we have a power so terrible, to kill. From now, there is no middle-ground. Two nations, both with 'Klepton-Holorif,' may not live side by side. Such unseen, ever-present threat of death would soon break through man's thin veneer of self-control into the bottomless pool of fear, and then,—either another people would inherit all the earth *alone*, or we alone. 'Tis they or we."

THE PALLID GIANT

¶ Promil urged agreements. Daril said, "Agreements, always in the shadow of such awful threat, could never be maintained."

¶ To gain delay, I asked for details of his plan.

¶ Daril answered, "All is ready. Thirty of the fastest 'air-machines' have been equipped with 'Klepton-Holorif.' Their speed is such, their swath of death so wide, that ere the sun goes down a second time their flight can make of all the earth outside of Sra a lifeless desert."

¶ "When would you do this thing?"

¶ "To-night, if here we are agreed. Huge lights will blaze to mark our boundaries."

¶ "Horrible!" I cried and in that silent room, I knew the heart of every man was answering my cry. Emboldened I began, "Great Daril, I beseech you,—"

¶ Hark! What sound is that? A deep sonorous rumbling from the ground. Louder! Louder! Nearer it comes! Sharp splitting noises from the air! The building heaves and great cracks yawn. A woman shrieks! Outside a crash and men are running,—shouting, terrified.

¶ Twenty faces, ashen pale, turned to Daril's face. He stood there for a moment rigid,—listening; then he raised his hands on high. "The great blue wheels of Aag are turning in the seven pits. 'Tis madmen have released the mid-earth 'wandering fires' and now an earthquake rolls beneath the land of Sra. Treachery!

THE DEATH-RAY

'Tis treachery! For how could men of Aranáy have found the pits?"

¶ Indignation stared from Daril's eyes. "A hell-born wickedness! Man, man himself, has sought the suicidal aid of those all-shaking, crushing, grinding, slipping tremors of the shrinking globe, which, in the days before his science conquered them, forced men to crawl upon the ground. Shamelessly our enemies undo our greatest work, the binding fast fierce nature's fiercest prodigy,—the earthquake. Some traitor to his race has loosed those giant wheels, miles deep in the seven pits, whose Aagid current has for centuries eased down the earth-strains, making of the foretime shaking world a safe abode. Again the rocks will roar their shifting pains; again as in the terrifying days of old, will daily earthquakes shatter all the works of man."

¶ A panic rush and all the "leader-men" were gone, save Promil and I, and Daril in whose face I saw a desperate resolve.

¶ "With an earthquake, men of Aranáy have spoken. I will answer them as they deserve."

¶ Promil seized his hand. "Consider, Daril. The blow you aim at them will strike down many innocent; yea, more,—beyond control, it may strike back and overwhelm us all."

¶ Daril's words were few. "I will control this death. Promil, the trembling earth has likely ruined our defense. Their air-machines will

THE PALLID GIANT

come,—they may be coming now,—to spread black clouds of death, throughout the land. It shall not be!”

¶ I wandered long among the frightened crowds which filled the city’s streets. Again the earth was still but panic fear was in all hearts. At home, I walked the floor with heavy heart, and brain benumbed by horror, till, stifled and oppressed, I sought the terrace where a soft night breeze refreshed me. Long I gazed on the myriad, never-changing stars. For ages these had looked unmoved upon the tragedies of earth; for ages more their light would shine serenely and impartially on human happenings. It stilled the tumult in my soul.

¶ The city, far below, was silent now. The world was silent as a tomb. Suddenly,—a muffled, purring sound, and from the darkness near at hand a shadow rose, and disappeared among the stars,—then another,—and another,—and another. Motionless I stared into the night, as though if only I could see I might recall those winged messengers of death.

¶ I muttered. “Fate, the fate of all, in those black forms, has now flown free of man’s control.”

The professor sat very still while Rudge, puffing away at his pipe, looked across at him with an air of quiet exultation.

XXI

AN INTERRUPTION

FOR some time I had been carrying on a correspondence with the Managing Director of Mersinck & Co., wherein I met his increasingly urgent suggestions that I return to New York by a variety of excuses which, read in series, undoubtedly convinced him that for some unknown reason I was "stalling for time." I think he suspected a love affair. Finally, after several cable exchanges, I flatly told him that I had interests in Europe which I was unwilling to leave for the present, and offered to resign my position. Quite unexpectedly he agreed to a further leave of absence, but asked that I first return to New York for consultation and to arrange for the administration of my department while away.

I sailed for New York on the twenty-ninth of September, assuring Rudge that I would return within six weeks. On the day before I left Paris, I quite unexpectedly met Markham. Professor Gribbon had left the apartment and Rudge and I were preparing to go out for lunch when a low grating sound in the next room, as though a key were turn-

THE PALLID GIANT

ing in a lock, caught the attention of both of us at the same time.

Rudge raised his head and listened. "It's Markham. Wait a moment."

Rudge disappeared through the open door and I heard a whispered conversation. When he re-entered the room, he was accompanied by Markham, a virile, athletic-looking fellow seemingly in his early thirties, although his thick, dark hair was sharply marked with grey and there were lines in the handsome face which might have been either the product of age or of an extra-strenuous life.

As though from habit, Markham glanced quickly around the chamber before entering. Then he acknowledged Rudge's introduction, looking me frankly in the eye and saying with a delightful boyish smile, "Bad consciences make cowards." He added, directing a broader smile at Rudge, "I expect I could claim all the medals, European or American, for lying and unblushing deceit."

Rudge was amused. He evidently had a real liking for the man and replied good-naturedly, "Everyone to his trade. It's a long time between your visits, Markham. How goes the war?"

They discussed for some time the progress made in France and Germany toward perfecting the "death-ray," Markham explaining that unexpected difficulties had been met in both countries. "Their progress has been backward since I saw you last."

AN INTERRUPTION

Rudge grew very serious. "Will they get a 'ray' which can be used practically to kill at long distances?"

"They won't stop till they do. They are plumb crazy on the subject and whenever they strike a devilish improvement on the old war stuff, it only seems to make them crazier than ever for this 'ray' which will wipe out their traditional competitors."

Markham was an attractive fellow. His cynicism and international sophistication seemed merely a superficial overlay on a nature still almost boyish in its eagerness for experience and personal accomplishment. When his own danger came into our discussion, I asked.

"Do you really think they would kill a man who had helped them develop their 'death-ray'?"

"They would do anything; the sons of guns! to put their blessed country squarely astride the neck of Europe. For a hundred generations they've dreamt of Caesar. Napoleon gives them a great kick. It's the 'High Command' and diplomats and would-be rulers I am talking about. The people, the millions, they don't want any of it, thank you."

When he was gone, Rudge said, "A queer fellow, playing a queer part, but I wish there were more like him."

My stay in New York lasted much longer than I had expected. Settlements which I could not delegate without injustice to my employers were delayed

THE PALLID GIANT

by one exasperating complication after another until weeks ran into months. I fretted continually. At intervals brief letters came from Rudge telling of steady progress in the translation, and wondering why I did not return. Then a sad event postponed my departure from the United States indefinitely. My father had been ailing for several months and in November he died. My mother went to live with a married sister but it was not until March that I disentangled the financial confusion of my father's estate so that final settlement could be left in the hands of that sister who was my co-executor.

Finally, near the end of March, an urgent message from Rudge made me desperate and I engaged passage on the Saturday boat, without regard for "unfinished business." Rudge had written, "We shall complete the translation before you can get to Paris unless you start at once. Answers to all the riddles which troubled you are in sight. Even the Professor has lost his skepticism. He is dizzy. Walters! we have the most marvellous story ever told, the most terrific."

I arrived in Paris late on Saturday afternoon, and went directly to the Cité. During the voyage the wildest speculations concerning the story of Sra and its author had absorbed my thoughts to the exclusion of all other interests, and now, as I waited for Rudge to open his door, I was in a fever of expectation.

"Walters!" Rudge grasped my hand with un-

AN INTERRUPTION

thinking pressure. He was thinner than when I left Paris and appeared physically jaded. "You are just in time. Everything is in readiness for dictation of the last chapter of the book. The Professor is in his own room. He has been there all day. For some time he has, I think, feared that I was going crazy from over-work. We have worked hard—too hard. We need your fresh spirit and clear-headed common sense. The Professor concluded that my mind was becoming unsettled because I told him the substance of the last two chapters before we had 'outlined' them."

His smile broadened. "The professor is all right, but he does not know some things. I have lived with that book until every line and curve of the text relates itself to ideas already formed in my mind. Naturally I see meanings before his mechanical system reveals them."

Secretly I was worried by Rudge's appearance and what he had told me of the Professor's suspicions, but after we had chatted for half an hour, I saw that there was no change in him excepting that he was very tired. We laughed together over the Professor's alarm.

More seriously, I said, "He did not know you well, as I did, before you found the book. For my part, I believe that when the story is completely told, it will, by satisfying a subconscious longing in your nature, make you more like other people.

THE PALLID GIANT

I am not sure that I shall like you as well then,—but you will be happier.”

Rudge laughed for a long time, in his quiet way. “What right have you, Walters, to that kind of perception,—you with your tariff-and-net-price mind?” He leaned forward and slapped my knee affectionately. “Let’s have some of your good tea once more. You go and call the Professor.”

The Professor appeared very glad that I had come, and carefully closing the door, started to tell me of his fears. I laughed at them and think I convinced him that Rudge’s psychic intuitions were neither new nor dangerous.

We three had tea in Rudge’s room just as we had done so many times before. I found myself cast in the agreeable rôle of a long lost brother or prodigal son; and better yet, they told me in so many words that they had discovered I was a necessary part of the little group which had lost its balance during my absence.

For that evening there was no work on the translation. As the guest of honor, I had my way and we dined at our favorite restaurant, sitting long over the dessert and exchanging news of Europe and America.

I inquired about Mraaya. It was the Professor, not Rudge, who answered my question. “She still retains her secretarial position at the Bank,” and he added, “Our work has not called for another trance; 208

AN INTERRUPTION

though there have been times when I could have wished to check up Rudge's translations by her positive testimony."

Rudge let this now familiar plaint of the Professor's pass with a smile. "Mraaya will be glad to see you."

The next afternoon I left Rudge and Professor Gribbon hard at work on the translation of the last chapter and called at the Bank. Mraaya certainly appeared glad to see me. I was quite thrilled. The fact is, I had forgotten what an attractive girl she was and how really beautiful with her delicately cut features made warm and glowing by that golden coloring I had often noted in the women of southern France. Her dark hair was drawn back severely from a broad white forehead and formed a striking setting for a pair of even darker eyes which, under their curving brows, had often baffled me with something in their humid depths speaking of guarded mystery,—of some old secret hidden in her soul forever; but which to-day looked at me frankly, flashing with the joy of life. This was the real Mraaya, the vividly feminine Mraaya whom I had seen at rare intervals in our past association.

We adjourned to a little restaurant and spent an hour recalling old times. We even discussed our adventure in the grotto. I was enjoying this tête-à-tête so much that I sought topics of conversation to prolong it and, in spite of a decision, made months

THE PALLID GIANT

before, that Mraaya belonged to Rudge, I found myself wondering whether he really cared.

"By the way," I asked, "has he made good on his promise to let you read the translation?"

Mraaya became serious. "No, Mr. Walters,—that is,—not entirely. Professor Gribbon has read most of it to me."

"Professor Gribbon? Where did you see him?"

"He came to my pension."

Our professor visiting Mraaya! Here was a new idea. "Have you seen him often?"

"Yes, many times. He always comes on Thursdays."

This was amazing. I knew that the Professor was a widower but had never, by any possibility, conceived of him in this light. The old rascal! Quite oddly, a jealousy for Rudge's sake rather than my own took possession of me.

Something of this must have shown in my face, for Mraaya laughed,—a quizzical, merry laugh.

"Now, Mr. Walters, don't be suspicious. You men are all alike." She laughed more. "Professor Gribbon came to oppress me."

I was disconcerted by Mraaya's merriment and more mystified than ever.

"He is studying my trance. He brings notebooks and after asking many questions, writes pages of notes. I don't know how many books he has filled already. You see,"—she explained, "I told him
210

AN INTERRUPTION

how much I wanted to read the translation and that Mr. Rudge had promised I should. Since then, Professor Gribbon has brought the chapters as they were completed and read them to me. He calls it an 'exchange'."

"Does Rudge know this?"

"He must. Last week Professor Gribbon read what he said was the end, but it did not sound like an ending. I asked if there were not more. He admitted that there were a few final pages but unimportant. Then he said the translation was not complete; but finally when I pinned him down, he told me that Mr. Rudge preferred I did not hear the last two chapters, or something of that sort. Why do you think Mr. Rudge said that, Mr. Walters?" Mraaya's tone was anxious.

"I can't imagine. But don't worry; Rudge would never break a promise,—I promised you too, didn't I? By Jove! I have an idea. We are to have the final reading to-night. I'll take you to the Cité with me. Rudge can't refuse. You went there when he needed you and he can't refuse when you ask to hear the results of your assistance. Besides, how can either of us deny you anything,—you who saved our lives!"

The more I thought of it, the more I liked the idea. "I will arrange with Rudge and call for you after dinner,—say at eight o'clock."

When I first proposed the plan to Rudge, he

THE PALLID GIANT

scowled a little, but after a moment smiled good-naturedly. "You and Professor Gribbon are trying to spoil Mraaya. I certainly intended she should hear it all in the end,—if she wished to. Of course we owe it to her. I feared she might be a little shocked when she learned her race-history and the *raison d'être* of her trance. But,—why yes,—after all, perhaps that will be the best way for her to hear it."

So we were four instead of three at the reading. Professor Gribbon and I tried to do the honors for Mraaya, but Rudge seated her in his own chair saying with a new gentleness in his manner, "This is the last of your book, Mraaya."

She looked up at him and I thought there was a quality in her voice, too, which I had not heard before. "You knew I wanted to hear it all."

Rudge's answer to the reproach in Mraaya's tone seemed decidedly enigmatic. "You choose, then, to eat the fruit of the tree which stands in the center of the garden,—perhaps it is just as well,—that was millions of years ago. It was another world."

The Professor read:

XXII

AFTER THE MASSACRE

TRANSLATION

SLEEP never came to me through all that night. With visions of the ghastly massacre begun, my soul was agonized, and prospect of the future saddened and perplexed me. Would not this unseen agency of death, from which no man could shield himself, beget in human hearts a new and awful fear? Last night's debate had shown that this new fear, the fear of another's fear, had power to grip the souls of even the greatest men,—of men like Daril and Abinény. It made them murderers. What then, when all the people sensed the monstrous potency of Klepton-Holorif? Would not a shocking storm of killing sweep the land?

¶ Through two long nights and days mysterious rumors held the land of Sra in vague suspense, while hideous, haunting silence brooded over all the world outside. Then secret summons came. The council met,—distressed, foreboding. Daril rose, with stony face.

THE PALLID GIANT

¶ "All the world save only Sra is now a desert,—uninhabited. Danger from without can never threaten us again, but, men of Sra, great need there is to guard against new dangers from within. Certain things have I already done. The death-machines were broken up as each returned, save only one which I now hold in my 'sartif.' Those men who knew the 'secrets' are imprisoned,"—It was whispered afterward that these were put to death. "The wheels of Aag again hold firm in the seven pits."

¶ "Already rumor rages through the land,—whispered tales of the unthinkable destruction wrought by this new agency. We must, without delay, inform the people. Let every leader-man here present, when this council ends, fly quickly to his province, summon all his 'Dornics' and frankly tell them of the 'massacre.' Explain those things which made it necessary. Show them that the happiness, perhaps the lives of all may now depend upon their leadership. Instruct them to discourage talk of this new death, and urge all people, as they value life, to hold the past taboo and Klepton-Holorif a thing to be forgotten."

¶ When Daril finished, little more was said. The past was past and future dangers claimed the thought of all. I hastened to my province, and before a horrified assembly there I spoke as Daril bade, but at the end I added words of my own; for now, from out my soul-confusion

AFTER THE MASSACRE

of the night, had come a great distrust of safety sought through any brain-wrought scheme.

¶ "As you would live, seek earnestly for that relation,—'mar-da' (fellow-love) which makes another's welfare as your own. If such relation be not found, some mutual bond like 'parent love,' some spiritual equalizing of the human love of 'Me' and 'Thee,' our race, I fear, will perish from the earth."

¶ And now this tale must wait, that I may tell of certain things which greatly influenced my life and may have altered human history.

¶ Promil was, by taste, a man of science, and before the war, had visited many lands. He lived much in an under-water ship whose windows offered chance for closer study of sea animals and plants. In Promil's ship were double "water-gates" through which he could at will pass out into the sea, where powerful "nar"-lights rendered visible the water round about. He now resumed his ocean wanderings and often did I join him on the ship.

¶ One day while sailing near the coast of Ara, Promil said, "Ramil, something have I learned of great import. Come, you shall see."

¶ Together, donning "face-masks" which enabled us to breathe submerged, we passed out through the "gates" and sank ourselves where nar'lights from the ship shone bright. There

THE PALLID GIANT

Promil pointed to a line which ran along the rising shoreward slope.

¶ "See you that line? It marks an even depth above which grows no vegetation, save a few young plants just creeping from below."

¶ I did not understand. Promil explained,

¶ "That line means this,—when Daril's air-machines flew off the coast 'that night' " (we always said 'that night'), "the deadly current lost its killing power in the sea. Below a certain limit, plant destruction ceased. From this I learned that 'Holor' " (people used this shorter name for Klepton-Holorif) "becomes quite harmless after passing through ten feet of water. See you not strange possibilities in this?"

¶ "Strange!" I murmured. "Strange 'twould be if man, pursued by dangers of his own devising, finally took refuge here—" I pointed past the grisly fronds of 'octus' waving their ghost-like arms in the shoreward ebb and flow, to where, beyond, the murky water faded to the blackness of an endless ocean realm.—"It must not be."

¶ Then slowly we ascended to the ship, and Promil addressed me solemnly, "If Daril does not make an end of 'Holor' while he has it in his power, weaker hands will, later, fill the world with death and fear of death, and then no safety will be found save in the sea. Ramil, I have asked from Daril one of those now useless under-water fighting ships. This I shall fit as

AFTER THE MASSACRE

home for my 'group-family' and stock it well with food, and place therein the seeds of grain and vegetables and trees. And then, if 'Holor' slips its leash on land, we can live safely under sea, and grow our 'natural-foods' on some far distant coast. I pray you follow me in this."

¶ "But what of all the millions on the land?"

¶ "True! what! Daril holds their future in his hands. We can but hope, and meantime should provide safe refuge for our families."

¶ The ship which Daril gave me was a huge affair. A hundred separate rooms there were, besides vast storage space for food and other things.

¶ Years passed,—years full of hope and, on the surface, confidence,—and then, there came a day when Daril's messages gave Promil much uneasiness. He called me, saying through the air, "Ramil, come to me. Come under-water that our meeting may be surely unobserved."

¶ We met near Ara's shore and Promil took my hand. "I fear the worst. There is in Sra much bitterness and secretly much talk of Klepton-Holorif. The knowledge that behind the rule of Daril lurks that awful power of life and death is poisoning men's minds. The issue, no one can foresee. I called you here to tell you,—I am building now an 'apar-ith,' a house beneath the sea."

¶ Later, near a savage cliff along the coast of Aranáy, I also built an "apar-ith." Deep in the

THE PALLID GIANT

sea, on columns firmly set among huge rocks, I reared a spacious mansion, sealed tightly from the water round about and with its top so far below the ocean's waves that only when the sea was smooth could even faintest glimmer from the sun shine through that blessed water, which protected us from Klepton-Holorif. Air and power and light came to us through a hidden "brin." Its "rakon" was hid among the rocks above the cliff, and always faced the sun.

¶ Our "apar-ith" had, through the "land-ward-tube," a secret passage to the land, but in general we entered by the "double water-gates" and through the "sliding-tube" from the ship.

XXIII

DARIL TRIES FORCE

THE "Holor Massacre," which killed a major portion of mankind and made the earth in greater part a desert, fell in the year 726, "Polar-fixation Onn."¹ Sixteen years later, during the year 742, a serious discontent disturbed the peace of Sra. It happened thus:

¶ Government, which modern man has only cheerfully endured in times of war, had now maintained its arbitrary rule through many years of peace, and though destruction of the world outside of Sra made evident to all the need of such control, yet as the years went by men fretted at its interferences. When they complained to Daril, he reminded them that government in ancient days had been the system under which men always lived. They answered, "One can never turn back time."

¶ Modern man has largely governed himself, since long ago he learned to take account of

¹ The professor surmised that dates were reckoned from each conjunction of the magnetic pole with the geographic pole of the earth, and that "Onn" was a designation for the latest of such conjunctions.

THE PALLID GIANT

scattered and remote results and weigh the total good or ill against desire. But in those earlier ages cause and effect were far apart in the minds of men. Desire for action then impressed itself upon their wills more vividly than consequences only half-perceived. Immediate results were never given proper weight and those remote were wholly overlooked or registered but faintly in men's consciousness. Lacking thus the modern poise, human beings a thousand years ago were irresponsible. Government and laws were necessary then.

¶ 'Tis easy, thus, to understand why Daril's long delay in ending government should irk the people.

¶ Meanwhile, another and more active discontent was fermenting in Sra. Forced labor, save in time of war, had been unknown for centuries. Machinery and chemic power reduced the need of manual work until the "labor-services" were always filled by free enlistment.

¶ When now the peoples of the earth, with whom our produces had been exchanged, were dead, when all materials supplied by other lands,—food, fibers, metals, and the rest,—had been cut off, the nation waked to pressing need for much new work; cultivation of the soil in distant parts, seeking far those minerals our country lacked, creation of machines which we had never built, and many other deficiencies to be made up.

DARIL TRIES FORCE

¶ Daril kept in force the war-time "labor-draft." Work doubled and doubled again, and still increased. For a time the novelty of manual labor kept the new 'involuntary workers' contented, but as years went by they came to look with jaundiced eyes upon their fellows who escaped the "draft."

¶ Hence came that discontent which flared into defiance in the year 742. Rin was leader of the "Protest,"—Rin, before the war a musical composer, now a worker in the dull routine of "maarin." He brought to Daril three demands,—inclusion in the labor-draft of every adult man; division of authority among the people's representatives; and sharing the control of Holor with those representatives. "Sharing of authority would be a sham," Rin's petition read, "if you, through your monopoly of 'Holor,' hold above our heads the power of life and death."

¶ Daril yielded as regards the labor-draft, but said, "To share control of 'Holor,' at this time, would be unwise. You know not what you ask. 'Holor' would destroy you all."

¶ "Destroy 'Holor' then," said Rin. "We will trust 'The Four' who know the secrets."

¶ Daril shook his head. "It cannot be—yet."

¶ Rin was violent. He shouted, "You are cowards. You fear the people,—that they will kill you for the 'Holor secrets,' as you killed the engineers."

THE PALLID GIANT

¶ Daril, although wounded by the taunt, maintained a calm in his great mind. "Rin, you know me better. I will tell you why. In the beginning we had warning that the 'Holor secrets' had escaped. For years we have pursued these clues. We dare not, till all doubts are cleared, relinquish power to rid the land of such a curse as Klepton-Holorif in other hands would prove."

¶ But Rin had gone too far. He organized conspiracies through all the southern provinces. Secretly he armed his followers and tried to compass Daril's death, and, failing this, he roused the people of the South against the government, demanding that an end be made of Klepton-Holorif. Daril held his patience long but in the end, without the aid of "Holor," crushed them all, and hunted Rin for many months. Rin disappeared.

¶ Late one night, Promil suddenly was summoned by an urgent call to Daril's side. Daril was ghastly pale.

¶ "Rin is a demon, and with his fellow demons has the 'secrets,' and is building 'Holor-machines.' That which I feared has come to pass; the spawn of 'Holor' threatens in the South. 'Tis horrible, but hardening our hearts, we must destroy a part that we may save the rest."

¶ "No, surely." Promil spoke as few dared speak to Daril. "Pray consider whither runs

DARIL TRIES FORCE

this road. Your wisdom chose to rule by over-awing force. But fear has bred more fear and threats bred counter-threats. 'Tis my belief that, had you, following 'the massacre,' destroyed the last machine, man's reason would have been your firm ally and none would now be 'found to tempt the death which all could see. Instead, you kept alive that murderous beast, and rightly do you call this present threat 'the spawn of Holor.' "

¶ Deep in Daril's heart he knew that Promil spoke the truth. His face showed painful thought; but Daril's ways were set. He only said,

¶ "Too late!"

¶ "No! not too late. Destroy the parent beast and call on those who cultivate its 'spawn' to do the same."

¶ Long Daril seemed to search the chances of that course which Promil urged; and then,—his eyes grew stern again.

¶ "I trust not Rin. 'Tis better that the parent beast, now caged by me, devour its vicious offspring, fast as they are born, than that the land become the victim of a raging pack of 'Holor' beasts, all uncontrolled. 'Tis now their lives or ours, and after us the lives of all."

¶ That night, throughout six southern provinces and parts of two beside, there perished every living thing. Daril, himself, destroyed them all "to save the world."

THE PALLID GIANT

¶ Then panic swept the land of Sra. Horror, fear and anger knew no bounds. Men went mad. Normal life was at an end. All asked, "Wherein lies safety?" None could answer. There were whispers of safety in the sea. Crowds sought the shore and some, beside themselves, leaped in and drowned; while others hid in caves and women with little children wandered in the desert far away from Sra and died of hunger.

¶ Rin, meanwhile, was safe. Whether he learned by treachery, or whether he, by instinct, sensed the danger of that night, was never known. He left the southern provinces in time to save himself. 'Twas also never known if Daril's murder was inspired by Rin; for, on the heels of the "second massacre," Daril was killed,—struck down in broad daylight; and so unnerved and frightened were the men of Sra, his murderers, unhindered, took the government. Promil they sought, but he escaped to the safety of his apar-ith.

¶ Daril's assassins, common ruffians, knew not how to rule, and anarchy ensued throughout the length and breadth of Sra. Their's was a reign of ignorance and fear, and power maintained by empty threats; for, had the truth been known, they were without the means for "Holor." Not one knew aught of Daril's "Holor-machine" or of the necessary formulas,

DARIL TRIES FORCE

nor did the leaders dare employ such men as knew.

¶ Then Rin rose up,—the bold and crafty Rin. He had in some way learned the secret of the rebel ruffians' impotence. Rin sent them Public threat, "Assassins that you are! if instantly you do not leave the 'anchreod,' you die! and (more's the pity) many round about must die with you."

¶ Through one long night the people in the city agonized between two threats of death. Next day the cowardly rebels fled and Rin was king.

¶ At first he sought, or feigned to seek, the good of all, proclaiming, "I will do what Daril should have done,—forever make an end of Klepton-Holorif."

¶ But secretly Rin lived in fear. For Daril's "Holor-machine" was gone, and spite of all his crafty inquisitions, he could never find a trace of that or of the men who with it fled. Those good intentions, which at first he seemed to hold, were smothered in a rising tide of fear. Behind a host of guards, he hid himself, and armed a thousand minions, who throughout the land spread terror with their hunt for 'Holor.'

¶ Rin reigned for many months, while fear and misery ate out the hearts of men. Death, unseen, sudden death, brooded over Sra. Neighbors suspected neighbors; friends distrusted friends, and murders, always the result

THE PALLID GIANT

of fear, were many. This new fear, the fear of another's fear, obsessed all men. They called it 'timour' and spoke in whispers of its deadly work.

¶ Then came a shock which brought despair to those who through it all had struggled hopefully. The men who murdered Daril, had, it seemed, concealed his Klepton-Holorif machine and hid themselves among the crowded workshops of the western provinces. As Rin's search failed, they grew more bold, and with the aid of students, made this ready to repeat its deadly work.

¶ Again the curse of "Holor" followed those who held its power to kill, and turned them into cowards. They feared each other. When the time for action came, all wished to fly since none dared stay behind. One half-crazed workman turned the current on and made as though to smash away the shield; which would have surely ended all of them. He was struck down. Then five men flew by night, and "Holor" put an end to the life of Rin with many innocent beside.

¶ A time of terror and madness now began, the like of which was never known before on earth. "Holor" was king, and "timour,"—fear of fear,—his faithful servant. Many learned the secret formulas and power passed rapidly from group to group, while every change wrought death and desolation in the land of Sra.

DARIL TRIES FORCE

¶ At times, control of "Holor" came to wise and courageous men. Then, mighty were the efforts to establish confidence. But all was vain. Some wretch, who secretly had built a death-machine, would strike in the dark, and overnight Sra waked to find itself new-kinged.

¶ The land was crossed and scarred with desert strips where "Holor's" blighting touch had turned all life to dust; and men stole silently across great lanes of barren earth and naked rock, where forests parted or green fields on either side made contrast with the waste between. For death was written over Sra in monstrous lines of grey.

¶ When Rin was killed I left the land and flew to my group-family under sea. For seven long years, the "terror" raged in Sra. Then came a respite.

XXIV

PROMIL TRIES REASON

SAFF in far off ocean homes, we watched events in Sra, Promil and I. We were not hopeful, but pity ever urged us on. Often under southern stars or the deep blue skies of a tropic sea, we paced his ship or mine for what seemed endless hours, discussing plans of rescue for that tortured remnant of people still alive in Sra; discussions which led round a circle of futilities. Promil often said,

¶ “ ‘Holor,’ that too terrifying threat, with ‘timour,’ fear of another’s fear,—together form a circle, inescapable.”

¶ And then one day I answered Promil’s hopelessness,—“Yes, inescapable through any intellect-created scheme, but ‘mar-da’ has the power to save such hearts from fear. From the first I urged upon the people of my province cultivation of this love, and I believe that with its aid you now can rescue Sra.”

¶ Promil was thoughtful. “Tell me more of your ‘mar-da.’ ”

¶ “I see it dimly, I admit. And yet I know that man can teach his heart to weigh more

228

PROMIL TRIES REASON

equally with his own, the happiness of other men. All parents have this love," I pointed toward my son. "'Timour' could never come between that boy and me. If forced to choose between my death and his, I'd choose myself to die."

¶ Promil pondered long. "What is it you would have me do?"

¶ I eagerly explained. "Friends with whom I worked in former years have sent me frequent word of Sra. Despair and misery have broken people's wills so that you can, I am convinced, arouse a spirit there which, like a shield, will stand between them and their fears. And then, your wisdom, backed by such a wave of eager faith, could find a way to make an end of Klepton-Holorif.

¶ "By aid of those same friends, I'd spread report throughout the land that you were coming back without defense of any kind, 'to save the people.' Let them tell of some mysterious power you bring to drive out fear."

* * * * *

¶ We flew to Sra, and there we found conditions pitiful beyond our thought. Promil, as I hoped, was hailed "The Great Deliverer." Around him people flocked and swore to do his bidding. Sternly Promil spoke to them. "Die like men, if you must die, but meanwhile, live like men. In your own hands is your salvation."

THE PALLID GIANT

¶ Whether Promil's brave philosophy took root, or whether sodden minds a little sensed my plea for "fellow-love," no one could say. But surely, for the moment, men felt safe and boldly walked before each other.

¶ Yet it was not the men of Sra helped Promil most. The women had been saved by mother-love from depths of that despair,—that mental and moral coma which had settled down on all the world of men. For sake of children, mothers never ceased to struggle through those awful years, and now they rose in mass to work for Promil's peace. They preached of love with fervor of the love they knew. They organized for work. They hunted men from every hiding place and ruled their sluggish minds.

¶ Those women never flagged. Through them, unselfish love,—“mar-da”—became the creed of Sra. All gave assent, and if, as Promil judged, the change in human hearts had not gone far, still faith in each other's faith gave confidence.

¶ Life still was not the life of former days, yet when a year of "Promil's peace" had passed, order and safety,—almost happiness, returned to Sra. Once Promil said,

¶ "Ramil, your work is bearing fruit, but in this generation, love of man for man cannot be trusted. I place reliance most on woman's passionate desire for peace. Her fiery trial proved that woman's power to rise above despair is much superior to man's. Brave thinking and

PROMIL TRIES REASON

a year of energetic action now have given her control; I pray that this control be held until a generation rise which knew not 'timour.' Later, 'mar-da' may, as you believe, become mankind's protection from its own destructive thoughts."

¶ Another year and still another passed, and confidence increased until both Promil and I, at times, encouraged our "group-families" to visit Sra.

¶ Four years of "Promil's peace" went by. The fifth began with normal life, it seemed, a firm reality. Yet Promil worried. "This is the crucial year," he said. "The minds of men are fast recovering from their shock. That lethargy which stood us in good stead is vanishing, and normal vigor is returning to men's intellects and wills. Our peace has been a woman's peace. What now will normal man do with this peace?" Again he asked, "What think you? Is there Holorif concealed in Sra? Are the secret formulas remembered still?"

¶ I knew not what to say. "In any case, you now control the making of machines, and search has been so thorough, think you not, that all have been destroyed?" Still Promil worried.

¶ Later, he called me secretly. He looked distressed. "Maran,—you know him,—formerly a leader-man,—has frequently of late brought me suspicious word of other men, now this one and now that. I studied the workings of his

THE PALLID GIANT

mind. Suspecting that his own fears had returned, I charged him thus and pressed the charge until he told me all. He said,

¶ "A wave of self-defending fear is spreading over Sra. A panic search for Holor and the "secrets" occupies men's thoughts and rumor tells of more than one success. When I approached those named, to ally myself with them,—for Promil, we who knew the terror of those awful years are not as brave as you,—they all denied the charge.' Maran, in days gone by, was brave,—a man of character and self-control. If Maran's mind is now a prey to 'timour,' what of others?"

¶ Promil was right. The end was near. Discoveries, suppressions, and alarms came fast. Exposures, punishments, wild tales of "Holor" soon destroyed the confidence so newly built, and "timour" raged again. Promil dealt with an iron hand; I preached of "mar-da," and the women worked with panic energy to save the peace. Both of us were often near to death.

¶ There came a day when Promil learned of secret work on "Holor-machines" in Drac, an eastern province, separated now from western Sra by ghastly deserts. Promil called me to his side. "I leave to-night for Drac with four companions. If I succeed, I shall return within five days. If not, then all is lost. Instruct your men-of-the-sea to bring their air-machines to Bara (Bara was the northern-most province

PROMIL TRIES REASON

of Sra), at the mouth of the River Sel. Go secretly yourself to Bara. Wait for me or for some message."

¶ No words can tell my anguish as I looked at people doomed, it might be, to the "terror" again and death, for many I had come to love and all I would have gladly given my life to save.

¶ Promil flew to Drac; four men were with him in the air-machine. They landed there without defense and Promil, to his face, charged Niron with concealing "Holor." Little did Promil ever tell of that which followed, but he with one companion, five days later safely reached the River Sel.

¶ That night, Dron's air-machine with Promil, two other men and me rose very high and pointed south to safety in the sea.

* * * * *

¶ My father's writing ends with this. 'Twill be my task to tell of that which happened later in the sea; and this I well may write since youthful as I was, I came to play a dreadful part in that last struggle between "mar-da," man's love and "timour," man's self-inflicted fear.

¶ Although I then was but a tiny lad, the sorrow of that gloomy night when Promil and my father stole back under sea, still lingers in my memory.

¶ Dron, my father's helper and best friend, stayed always with the ship. I loved Dron

THE PALLID GIANT

almost as his son, and he loved me, and when my father was away, he stood to me as father. One night Dron disappeared. Then Arneé, Dron's assistant, drove the ship beneath the water night and day, and brought us to our apar-ith. Six days was Dron away and no one knew the why save Arneé. On the seventh morning, suddenly he reappeared, and with him Promil and my father came.

¶ The three said little. All seemed stunned by some mysterious blow. When Promil passed out through the "water-gates," he only pressed my father's hand and looked him squarely in the eyes. He seemed to me a man grown very old.

¶ I asked Dron what this meant. He answered only, "Ask your father." And my father said, "Wait." Later I understood,—those three had seen the tragic end of "Promil's peace," and knew that Sra was at that moment in the throes of death.

XXV

THE BOTTOMLESS POOL OF FEAR

GEARS passed, while the fear-mad human beings left in Sra plotted, skulked and killed each other. Little did we "ocean-people" know of those last tragic days, but rumor's tongue told vaguely of the one-time happy land dissolving into scattered green oases, and told again of those oases shrinking, step by step, as gruesome deserts,— "Holor's" work,—devoured most living things outside the sea. One man alone, through all those awful years, escaped from Sra, a former "leader-man" named Rel. I never learned his story save that secretly he flew to Muta, where he found an under-water ship and rescued his group-family.

¶ Meanwhile, I grew to be a man, surrounded by my father's loving care. He told me all the tragedy of Sra but, more and more, he urged that we forget the past and turn our thoughts to man's new ocean world,—his refuge and last hope. For myself, although the tragedy of Sra aroused a certain indignation, yet it was im-

THE PALLID GIANT

personal and vague. It could not greatly mar the happiness of youth.

¶ Within the narrow limits I had always known, adventure, secret explorations, search for knowledge,—these and more were filling full my life. My father tried to open up the world for me, yet in a way he held me back; I felt that he was fearful. Not that ever, in his heart, did he nurse “timour” as concerned himself, but he surrounded me with safeguards which I did not understand and half resented. When sailing on the surface of the sea, I seldom was allowed to go outside, and in our apar-ith I was denied those fascinating chambers where were engines and machines, save only as I went with him or Dron. More and more his limitations chafed me.

¶ Arneé saw my thirst for new experience and helped me secretly. I came to think that he knew everything. He showed and carefully explained to me the “food-machines,” and those great coils from which our talks with Promil came, and the “brin” whose farther end, concealed among the rocks above the cliff, brought power to us from the sun and outer air. He told me of the “raato” where, through the years of living under-sea, Dron and his men had grown those “natural-foods” which human beings crave as alternates with “manufactured-foods.” He told of going thither through such storms and inky blackness that at times they

236

THE BOTTOMLESS POOL OF FEAR

lost their way or fell among the rocks. Those men who nightly vanished into outer darkness came to be the heroes of my boyhood days.

¶ Whenever it was Arneé's night to lead the men, I went along the "landward-tube" to where the stairs began, and there he left me to return alone. But crouching low, I always waited till the last man passed from sight. I even waited on, and strained my ears to listen while their footsteps on the ever-steepening stairs grew faint and fainter, and there was stillness in the tube, and fancy told me all had gone into that unknown world above the sea.

¶ My father, also, saw with sympathy my restless urge. One day he took me up the "landward-tube" and out upon the cliff. A great storm lashed the sea. Black clouds raced inland, dragging monstrous shadows crost the distant plain. How I was thrilled! I had before looked on the sea from the low vantage of our ship, but never until now had stood above and viewed the land. Another time, he led me through the "double water-gate" and let me stand beside him, face to face with the sea.

¶ These glimpses only made me more impatient for that outer freedom I had seen. Arneé showed me how to work the "gates," and how to use the "face-masks" and the "sinking-bags" with which a swimmer in the sea may sink or rise at will; and then I ventured out alone.

THE PALLID GIANT

Never will I forget that first forbidden expedition in the sea!

¶ I kept then close by the "gates," but later, gaining confidence, I searched through all the shadow-land beneath our apar-ith. Outside, the "nar"-lights shone and threatened sure detection of my truancy, but in the dimness there I wandered unafraid among the great supporting columns of our apar-ith, which loomed like endless rows of gloomy giants marching on me from the murky distance of the sea.

¶ Between the columns, all the space was filled with indescribable confusion of grotesque and jagged rocks, pyramids and leaning obelisks and "raage" with savage arms. This became the secret playground of my boyhood days, the scenes of endless exploration. I learned it all before I grew to be a man. I knew the shallows and the sudden depths. I found the natural bridges to the rising cliff. Outside the "landward-tube," I followed up its curve,—up toward the shore and outer air, until the sun shone through the sea upon me.

¶ Other boys there were in our group-family, but save for these, the only boy I ever saw was Promil's son who often with his father came to visit us. He dazzled me with tales of fighting monsters and sea-imps. Promil's son had been in Sra. I liked him and admired him greatly, and we often planned how we would make a different world when we grew up.

THE BOTTOMLESS POOL OF FEAR

¶ Yet more than all, my father was my greatest happiness. He helped me play. He helped me learn. He showed me wonders of material things, and as I grew, revealed the spiritual world and made the soul seem more to be revered than all the rest. "Remember," he said, "all life is one. You are not you; I am not I; they are not they in any final sense. A common life is in us all and to a universal sea of life all must return. What parts the separate You and I have in the larger scheme, we may not fully understand with human minds. One thing is sure;—stark selfishness so far belies the close relation of our souls, that even here on earth it has the power to banish happiness. Life is not worth one single, selfish fear." I loved my father and believed his words.

¶ Then came the great adventure of my youth. One day my father called me to himself. "The time has come when I can serve again, and you can be of service too. Yet if you join me, it must be the action of your own free will. Since danger is involved, I cannot urge it."

¶ My spirit leaped. "Joyfully will I go anywhere with you! No greater happiness can come to me, my father, than to share your danger, and to help in any task with which you charge yourself."

¶ He smiled a happy smile. "I knew it. I was sure of you, my son. Here is the case. When

THE PALLID GIANT

'Promil's peace' was gone and all the land seemed doomed, we took account, Promil and I, of our new home,—the sea. We knew that through the thirty years of alternating fear in Sra, other powerful men, from time to time, made underwater ships their homes, and stole away to regions distant from the perils they foresaw. Promil knows where twenty-eight group-families, including his and mine, are living under sea in ships, each near a 'homing-ground where secretly they cultivate the land the same as we.

¶ "All these ocean groups have Holor. Promil's wisdom seeks to drive this from the sea, and so forestall the curse of fear, and bring again the happiness of life on land. So far, his efforts to this end have failed. Whenever he has asked a meeting of the 'ocean-folk,' a lurking fear has seemed to hold them back. Frankly he accused them (through the air).

¶ " 'You fear your fellow-men. If you permit to smoulder in your heart that hellish fire which burned up Sra, the sea will prove no refuge. Cowardice will bring you all the miseries you fear. We, whom the flames of 'timour' have yet spared, are few and in our keeping are all human hopes. One stroke of manly courage now, and safety, freedom, happiness may all be ours; and more, the glory may be ours of salvaging mankind.'

¶ "All are well disposed toward Promil's plan

THE BOTTOMLESS POOL OF FEAR

but in their hearts the fear they learned in Sra makes each distrust the other. Promil seeks to get these men together that agreements may be had which in the end will lead to mutual confidence. To-day he said to me,

¶ “ ‘Ramil, men have faith in you,—faith in your love of fellow-men. They know that you alone, of those now in the sea, did never arm yourself with “Holor.” Their love and reverence is great.’ ” Tears came to my father’s eyes. “ ‘So great that none would do you harm. If you go first to a meeting place’ (he named the sandy flatness of a nearby island) ‘all will join you without fear.’ ”

¶ My father laid his hand upon my arm, searching deeply in my eyes, and in his face stern purpose shone.

¶ “ ‘Your part, my son? It is to go with me, if you so will. Promil hopes that if he tells the doubters, ‘Ramil waits your coming and beside him stands his only son,’ then surely all will trust, and gather for that better understanding we must have or perish.’ ”

¶ I seized his hands, and kissed them passionately. “ ‘You know how joyfully, my father, I will go with you,—there or anywhere, with you.’ ”

XXVI

SUNRISE ON AK-DAR-AN

DAY was breaking when our air-machine rose from the ship. Higher and higher we flew. My heart beat fast. The joy and wonder of it all! I felt that, like the marvelous gold and crimson clouds above, we mounted high to greet the sun. O'er Araney our journey lay. Its grey and swarthy shadows passed below until a silver thread of surf marked out the opalescent sea, on which there glowed a fiery pathway to the just emerging sun. The world! A gorgeous world! My spirit soared; delight broke forth in joyous exclamation.

¶ My father looked at me. An infinite sadness in his eyes gave way to quiet joy at sight of my abounding happiness. He smiled; then turned his gaze to the glory around about, and, rather to himself than me, he murmured, "This man inherited. And, this—" he pointed to the desert far below, "this he has made of it."

¶ Swiftly we flew. The sun was scarcely high enough to overlook the sea, when Ak-dar-an, the island Promil named as meeting place, appeared below. On this we landed where the

SUNRISE ON AK-DAR-AN

sandy beach had greatest breadth, and there we stood. My father scanned the sky.

¶ First, Promil came. Out of the blinding glory of the east he flew, and gently settled on the sand near our machine. The two old friends embraced without a word. Then Promil took my hand.

¶ "Rao, son of Ramil, we have lived to see the demons of man's own creating drive him to a self-destruction unbelievable. To-day you have a glorious part in making end of all this madness, setting human feet upon the path,—"
He stopped and listened,—

¶ A whirr, somewhere above! My father pointed to a speck beneath the clouds, which, growing larger, circled gracefully and came to rest beside the two machines. Out stepped a man, erect and very tall, who moved along the beach with rapid stride. I looked at Promil. His face was radiant.

¶ "Well done, Alir! You waited not that others show the way, and coming thus makes doubly forcible the influence you bring."

¶ I knew that Alir was, in Sra, a powerful leader-man, albeit with a nature somewhat stern and cold. He spoke.

¶ "Promil,—and Ramil, I am come because I know that you alone can save these wretched, fear-struck men from self-destruction."

¶ An answer trembled on my father's lip. I sensed its quality. But ere he spoke, another

THE PALLID GIANT

sound was heard above; another circling of the shore, and from a fourth machine stepped Naya, foster-son of Daril. Flushed and nervous, Naya hastened toward our little group and greeted each with rapid words. He clung to my father, looking in his face, and asking questions which, it seemed to me, were meant to draw assurance from a braver soul.

¶ Then came Zir and Arto and the old and grizzled Aleran; then two machines at once; and then, as though the rest had hid in corners of the sky until assured of safety by the numbers on the beach, there came a rush of air-machines from every quarter, just as 'gar-birds' gather thick at roosting time.

¶ Cordial greetings passed around. Faces told of hope and joy at meeting friends so long estranged by fear. My father said to Promil, "This seems a good beginning, surely. You can lead them where you will."

¶ Promil frowned. "Why do they stand? Is there not still a wary watchfulness in all they do? Let us sit down." All followed Promil's lead, but not without instinctive backward glances to assure themselves of safety. Promil spoke,

¶ "Friends, never in the history of the world have men met under such sad circumstance as ours to-day, and never with so great a need of courage. The past,—I hardly need relate. The present,—a handful of frightened human be-

244

SUNRISE ON AK-DAR-AN

ings, 'gainst all nature, buried in the sea. And the future,—if we, here present, cannot free ourselves from slavery to fear,—to 'timour' which has stripped the land of life and now broods sinister and silent on the sea,—there *is* no future for mankind; only a few unhappy years and then,—another soulless, Godless planet will forever whirl in space."

¶ He paused. Then sweeping his arm around the circle of men,

¶ "Among you all there is not one who would, by nature, harm a finger of his fellow-man. Then why this fear? 'Tis 'Holor' teaches murder, through fear of murder. Man overreached himself inventing death, and all save us have paid the penalty with death. Must we as well?

¶ "Those gathered here were strong, brave men of old; many were leader-men. I call on you to purge your hearts of fear, and severally, returning to your under-water homes, sink Klepton-Holorif, material and machines, in depths of the deepest sea. Then only, can we meet with minds to take good council for a life worth living."

¶ Naya, weak, emotional Naya, cried, "Promil's wisdom has the power to save. All else has failed. Let Promil be our King."

¶ He would have spoken more but Promil raised his arm in gesture of command. "We want no King! This moment calls for acts,

THE PALLID GIANT

not make-believe devices of a superstitious past. Weaklings would obey in vain, for only strong men's hearts can banish 'timour.' "

¶ And now the voice of Alir boomed across the sand, "Promil is right. We stand here face to face with death. Real thoughts and acts, alone, can save us. Following Promil's lead, I will, regardless of the rest, destroy my Klepton-Holorif machine; but—first,—(I hesitate to speak) there still are men in Sra who have that cursed agency of death, and our new confidence will die before 'tis born if danger from that source is left to hang above our heads."

¶ All eyes turned anxiously to Promil, but my father could no longer hold his peace. "For shame, Alir! A sorry start we'd make toward confidence were we to stain our hands with blood of fellow-sufferers. Know this! that talk of courage, and strength, and wisdom, and 'real acts' will prove us vain as Naya's 'King' unless our hearts shall grasp the only force which now can save us from the curse of Klepton-Holorif. If we continue holding each his happiness and life so far above the happiness and lives of other men, all measures we may take will prove as weak as ropes of sand. If thus, the end is near."

¶ My father hesitated. Promil half rose. "Through all these years, Ramil has stood alone,—humbly I say it,—has stood upon the only solid rock of safety for mankind. Practical

246

SUNRISE ON AK-DAR-AN

wisdom led the world to 'Holor.' Practical wisdom, during fifty years, has failed to check its ravages, and all the while our pride of intellect has smiled at Ramil's teaching. Daril failed and I have failed. Worse than fools are we if now we listen not to Ramil's words, and turn our minds from over-weening care for self. Boldly each must stake his chance of death against the lives of friends. Thus only shall we mingle with and better know each other. Thus only can we cultivate that love,—that 'mar-da,' which Ramil says aright has power to save."

¶ Deep silence fell on the assembled company. With hesitation, Alir spoke again. He seemed like one whose mind was balancing between two thoughts. "Perhaps, good Ramil, what you say is true. Think you that men,—"

¶ Arto interrupted, "Ramil is right,—'mar-da' must save; and Promil is right,—isolation is the enemy of love. But you, Alir, spoke truly too. Free life among the dwellers in the sea, a life from which that love must grow, will not be possible as long as half-crazed men in Sra have Klepton-Holorif. Such awful unseen threat of death will shake the stoutest hearts."

¶ Bitterly, between his teeth, spoke Promil. "Cowards are already lost—"

¶ "Not cowards, Promil," Alir again seemed certain of his mind. "Cowards would not be here. This gathering proves we have the cour-

THE PALLID GIANT

age to carry out your plans, once danger from outside is gone. I pray you, do not shake your head, but let us have your strength and cordial help in doing that which can be done. Insist not on conditions which would put in doubt the issue."

¶ Here Rel broke in,—Rel, who last of all left Sra, "Promil (it is an awful thing to say), but Alir speaks the truth. Those still in Sra are now so stricken mentally they are like children holding weapons far too dangerous. We of the sea have kept our 'poise,' and can find peace and can renew the land, but not with such a fearsome threat held over us. Only a few are still alive in Sra, and those most miserable. It is the greater good to end their misery,—and save the human race."

¶ From every side approval came. My father struggled desperately. He would have gone himself to Sra, and, using threats of death now planned, persuade those pitiable refugees to make an end of "Holor." I remember well the words with which he ended his appeal. "You hope to start the reign of 'fellow-love' by killing fellow-men."

¶ It came to naught. All listened with respect but, lashed by the scorpion-whip of fear, they brushed aside appeals to conscience or humanity, demanding that the threat of "Holor" from the land be first removed. At the last my father's words fell on deaf ears.

SUNRISE ON AK-DAR-AN

¶ A secret lot was drawn, that he who executed final doom on Sra might be unknown. This finished, Alir pledged the loyal help of every man towards making safe the sea, "*when death no longer threatens us from Sra.*"

¶ The meeting ended. Parting courtesies were drowned in noise of many air-machines; for some there were who plainly showed their haste to be away. Alir was last to go as he had been the first to come. He took my father's hand in one of his, and Promil's in the other.

¶ "I would I might have stood with you." The stiff-necked Alir bowed his head. "Perhaps I erred. I felt I knew these men and feared to place too great a strain upon their courage. I hope, but—the task is still with you. Good-bye."

¶ When all were gone and we three stood alone upon that sandy shore, Promil turned toward us a face grown haggard and very old.

¶ "Ramil, all, I fear, is lost."

¶ My father looked far out to sea, then at the clouds, and at the sun now mounting to full noon. A smile came to his eyes. He laid his hand on Promil's arm.

¶ "No, Promil, not yet lost. As long as you and I and our two sons keep love and confidence, a center will exist which can be made to grow until it takes in all the rest. It is for us to find a way."

XXVII

DEATH FOLLOWS UNDER-SEA

AFTER Ak-dar-an, my father's spirit sank. His face was always brave, but often he would sit for hours in silent thought. He clung to me, and in the task of cheering him, I found a happiness which all the memories of Ak-dar-an and Klepton-Holorif could not destroy. We talked and read together, and sang, and sometimes went about the ship where he would interest himself again in "zat" and "marnif" until his spirits rose and he smiled. Then I was happy.

¶ We waited anxiously for Promil's word, hoping he had found some means to stay the doom of Sra. In vain we waited; on the seventh day a brief report from Alir said, "No living thing is left in Sra."

¶ Then fell another blow. One night a message came from Promil's son, "My father is ill and begs that you will quickly come to him."

¶ That night, delaying not for safety of a journey under-sea, we flew to Ara, and arriving just at dawn, went down to Promil's apar-ith by way of the landward-tube whose opening among the rocks my father knew.

DEATH FOLLOWS UNDER-SEA

¶ As we entered, Promil's eyes were closed, but at a word they opened wide and settled lovingly upon my father. In a weakened voice he spoke.

¶ "Ramil, the end has come for me. I am without regrets, excepting for my failure to perceive, until too late, the truer spirit which has always burned in you. I worshipped reason. Reason has failed as Daril's sternness failed. Your 'love' alone remains to save mankind."

¶ He paused, exhausted. Beckoning to his son, he took his hand and placed it in my father's hand.

¶ "Ramil, no words can tell how I have loved this boy. You love him too, I know. Be now, to him, a father. And you, my son, cleave to this new father,—a better father far than I have been,—my best beloved friend." Again he closed his eyes and when he opened them, he looked at me, then at his son. "Brothers now!" was all he said. Then Promil died.

¶ His son, as though his heart would break, threw himself upon his father's lifeless form, sobbing in agony, "Father! Dearest Father!" Then something in that father's face brought back his courage, and he grew still. He knelt and seized my father's hand. "My father now!" Then slowly rose again, with swimming eyes, and took my hand, "My brother now!" My love went out to Promil's son.

¶ All this time, my father stood as in a daze, save only that his eyes had answered thought for

THE PALLID GIANT

thought with Promil till the end. Now he broke down and wept and softly laid his hand on Promil's brow.

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¶ Three years passed quickly by. At first it seemed this final shock would lay my father low. My heart was heavy seeing him grow weaker, day by day. I watched him just as he, for years, watched over me, and spent my time devising ways to lure him from those thoughts which made him sad. Still he was brave.

¶ One day I said, "With only you, this seems a goodly world. We two will always strive together for that brotherhood of man you long so much to see."

¶ He roused himself. "You speak the truth, my son, and shame me for discouragement. And there is Promil's son. If we three keep the love which binds us now, it shall prevail against this generation's fear. My time may not be long. So hold with Promil's son; for after all, 'tis you and he must save the human race." Promil's son came often to our apart-ment, and brought my father cheer.

¶ Alir made one attempt to carry out the plan agreed upon at Ak-dar-an. This failed and Alir died, and Aliro, his son, so we were told, showed secret signs of "timour."

¶ There came a day when Zir and Arto and Aleran pressed Promil's son to join with them in

DEATH FOLLOWS UNDER-SEA

measures which, they said, alone could end the reign of fear. They urged that men like Aliro and cowardly Naya waited only for a chance to free themselves from "timour" by killing all the men they feared. Zir and Arto were brothers; Aleran their uncle.

¶ We should have opened to my father this conspiracy, but we were fearful for his life, and tried in every way to shield him. Too long we waited. Those false friends, playing on the fears of Promil's son, persuaded him that mankind never would emerge from its long burial in the sea until such men as they distrusted were removed. The loyalty of Promil's son was proven by his coming to our apar-ith to seek my father's mind on things they planned to do.

¶ Never shall I forget that night. Promil's son was hesitant for long.

¶ "Father! I know not how to speak. Your spirit shames me ere I say a word. I beg you will not judge too harshly.

¶ "In the sea, are men who only bide their time until safe opportunity appears to kill the rest; nor is it possible to separate from these the innocent. We know the 'homing-grounds' of all, we know a way to clear the sea,—with 'Holor'; which, having done, Zir and Arto and Aleran and I will bring to you our 'Holor-machines' to be destroyed.

¶ "Pray, be not angry! Surely there is reason in our plan; 'tis sacrificing men who know not

THE PALLID GIANT

love,—know only fear,—that we may bring the reign of love on earth.”

¶ My father now had partly risen from his bed. His face was deathly pale and from his eyes looked horror.

¶ “Can this be Promil’s son? The poisoned minds of cowards have poisoned you. Never! though you knew your doom were sealed to-night. Better far to die!”

¶ He seemed about to faint. I hastened to his side, but passionately he shook me off and sat upright. His eyes had never left the face of Promil’s son.

¶ “Come here to me. Son of the man who stood against great Daril’s false philosophy, and, at the last, perilled his life to save his fellow men. I beg you, by the love you bore your father, have no part in such atrocious deeds.”

¶ “But, Father Ramil, they will only kill each other,—and us. For, know, that skulking in the sea are ‘killing-men’ more dangerous far than ‘killing-monsters’ there,—” he pointed through the window to the gloomy darkness of the sea.

¶ Solemnly my father spoke. “Be not yourself a monster then. Come nearer, foster-son. I saw your father stand ’mongst ‘killing-men’ and say to them, ‘Die! if you must, like men; but live, while you live, like men!’ Promise

DEATH FOLLOWS UNDER-SEA

me that Promil's son will die, if he must, before he'll kill his fellow-men."

¶ My father's strength was gone. He closed his eyes and settled back upon the bed. My heart froze in my breast, and over all my body spread a deathly chill. Ere I could cross to where he lay, Promil's son was on his knees beside him, pouring forth remorseful words.

¶ "Father! My Ramil Father! I promise what you ask and more, if only you will show again your love for me. Make me forget that look of horror, I will die for you——."

¶ My father opened wide his eyes. Weakly he smiled but with a world of kindliness, and when he spoke, forgiveness had replaced stern indignation. He laid his hand upon my cheek, which I was holding very near, but spoke again to Promil's son.

¶ "All around you are those passions which have made the world a hell. I blame you not, but charge you;—cherish your father's memory. Close your ears to all the councils of a murderous fear, and cleanse your soul of selfishness which values low the lives of fellow men." His breath came hard. "I trust you."

¶ I cannot bear to tell the agony of that long night, though many years have passed since then. My father died. We two, Promil's son and I,—at the last,—but no! Let me forget. The sun of happiness passed from my life.

THE PALLID GIANT

The dearest father who ever lived was gone, and since that time, my joy has been to make my life continue his.

¶ The grief of Promil's son was little less than mine. To me, he poured his inmost soul, exposing doubts and fears, born of the doubts and fears of other men. He begged that I would always bring to him my father's spirit.

¶ Late that night, Promil's son and I discussed conditions in the sea. He said, "Fear not; with your good father's face before me, I shall firmly hold myself apart from schemes of Zir and Arto and Aleran and urge on them an honest conference of all the twenty-eight who met at Ak-dar-an. Yet much I doubt their will to join with us. They think Aliro has already formed a group to carry out some murderous plan."

¶ Frankly we talked of "timour" as a dread reality,—a plague,—disease which did destroy men's wills. Promil's son, that night, held nothing back. He told how Zir once said, "I trust good Ramil, but if he should die, who knows the spirit of his son? He has not 'Holor' now, but, influenced by fear, his youthful enterprise might find machines and Holorif in Sra."

¶ I urged on Promil's son, "Now is the time for you to stand with me. I have no 'Holor.' Destroy your own. Your father told my father at Ak-dar-an that he would lead the

256

DEATH FOLLOWS UNDER-SEA

way in this, and, but for sickness, think you not it would have now been done?"

¶ He wavered. But often as he neared a brave resolve, thoughts of Aliro and Zir and Arto held him back.

¶ "Rao, you are right I know, but till Aliro and the others make an end of Klepton-Holorif, I dare not make an end of mine." He turned toward me a friendly smile. "Perhaps my 'Holor' is protecting you as well as my group-family."

¶ I knew my father's thought and said, "Not so. Believe me, I would rather die than owe my life to 'Holor.' "

¶ At parting, he embraced me silently. He loved me then, I know, and his heart was overfull of sorrow for my father's death.

¶ Thereafter, during many days, we had no word; then this from Promil's son,

¶ "Rao, I refused to join with Zir and Arto and Aleran, repeating to them all your father's words. I urged a conference, but they refused my plea and went their way. To-day, from Arto came report that they had carried out their plan,—that all in the sea were dead except the three of them and you and I,—we five and our group-families. Arto excused the deed, 'it was their lives or ours.' "

XXVIII

“THEIR LIVES OR OURS”

CENTURIES ago, one of the world's great thinkers wrote: “Arrogant intellect can create material power unlimited, but who can uncreate? And when the perils of his own creating shall have over-passed man's feeble will, what power can save the world?”

¶ These words, once quoted by my father, often came to me, when added to my sorrow for his loss, I found a new anxiety. Hitherto I had not sensed the awful curse of Klepton-Holorif, the overpowering fear which, in its presence, seized upon the hearts of men. As a boy, my father's tales of “timour” and the massacres in Sra had shocked me, yet they seemed apart from the realities of our own world; and even after Ak-dar-an, my grief was largely personal. I grieved then for my father's grief, much more than for the men in far off Sra. That those were murdered in cold blood incensed me, but more as when one reads of former wars or some disaster in a distant land.

“THEIR LIVES OR OURS”

¶ Now, men I knew had murdered men I knew, and whispers of a murderous distrust among those left, who should be friends, had filled my ears. I talked with Dron, quoting that ancient writer's words,—“Who can uncreate?”

¶ “My father's instinct told him truly that mankind had overpassed its feeble will, inventing death. 'Twas not alone that war denied the love of fellow-man, but he foresaw the day when war would end all war, by ending man. He would not, to protect himself, have any part with 'Holor' even though he knew that all beside were armed. For his sake then, and for our own, my task shall be to end its fatal power. I am resolved to go at once to Zir and Arto and Aleran, and, drawing lessons from the past, demand that we who now remain shall 'uncreate' this monster which already has devoured the rest, and threatens us.”

¶ Dron shook his head. “They would not trust your words. And even though they did, they would not risk the chance that Promil's son refuse his part.”

¶ “Then I will stand again, unarmed, on Akdar-an while each delivers his machine and sees me sink them in the sea, and scatter to the winds their Holorif. I know that Promil's son will not refuse to be the first to come.”

¶ Still Dron held back. “Your thought is right, the only hope of those still living lies in

THE PALLID GIANT

'uncreating' Klepton-Holorif. But,—you never saw, as I have seen, the power of fear to make men cowards. I would not grudge the risk you'd run (although you now owe leadership to this group-family) did I not doubt the possibility of good to come from such an enterprise. First find their wills through 'air-talk' and find if Promil's son will take the lead, permitting his machine to be destroyed before the others. Then I will join in any plans which promise well."

¶ I called to Zir and then to Arto, then to Aleran. I got no answer. I then called Promil's son. The answer came from one I did not know.

¶ "Promil's son is absent, and Navon, his 'first-man,' is absent too."

¶ "Where and how long?" I asked.

¶ "We do not know."

¶ I was perplexed.

¶ Dron shook his head.

¶ "I fear more killings now are in the making."

¶ We had not long to wait. That night we heard the well-known sign, and then the voice of Promil's son.

¶ "Rao, pity me! I have this day killed fellow-men, but only in defense of my own life. Listen! As I promised you, I urged on Zir and Arto and Aleran that we four make an end of Klepton-Holorif. Much talk there was and much evasion. Finally, Arto owned to me that

"THEIR LIVES OR OURS"

since their treachery, although remorse burned in their hearts, it left them more than ever cowards. Following this, there must have been between the three of them, a long discussion, since I heard no more for several days. Then Arto speaking, as he said, for all, announced,

¶ "We have decided on a course. To-morrow, at sunrise, we with our group-families intend to sail away until we place between ourselves and you as great a distance as this huge round world permits. Think not hardly of us, Promil's son, that we lack trust in you; we fear ourselves as much as we do you. In truth if we fear you, it is because we know you must fear men who killed their friends. Accursed be 'Holor'!

¶ "Now, Promil's son, we think that separation is our only chance. If we shall keep to our new sea, and you to yours, no question will arise between us. Perhaps, with time and distance, fear will pass away. Goodbye.' Zir and Arto and Aleran were gone."

¶ The voice of Promil's son was choked. He stopped, but soon he spoke again,

¶ "I try to think that Arto meant, then, what he said, and only later he or Zir or Aleran lost courage to leave behind them anywhere another man with Klepton-Holerif. I believed him then and on the second day, with part of my group-family (Oh! why not all!) I left our apar-ith

THE PALLID GIANT

and sailed outside the 'senro-ith',¹ to enjoy new freedom on the surface of the sea.

¶ "Navon was suspicious. He suggested that we fly to where the under-water ships of Zir and Arto and Aleran were sailing toward the South. Rising to a height from which large objects under sea can be discerned, we flew along their track but nowhere could we see a ship. Navon grew more suspicious, and in haste we flew back to our apar-ith.

¶ "There,—it still seems unbelievable,—float-in in the sea, we saw the awful wreckage of our apar-ith, and deep in the waters near, three shadows, groping like black 'stolera,' searching for our under-water ship to make complete their dastard work.

¶ "At sight of this, all feeling left us both save fear and hatred. We landed near, and took beneath the sea our 'Holor-machine' which Navon, long before, had covered for such under-water work. We placed ourselves outside and just below the great rock sill which spans the narrow entrance to our 'senro-ith,' and crouching there, we waited. Their ships in passing out, we knew, must hug this rock, or show their tops too near the surface for such coward hearts; and then,—our death-machine, from underneath, pouring its deadly current through

¹ Evidently some kind of artificial harbor enclosed by a break-water.

"THEIR LIVES OR OURS"

so little water as would lie between the ships and us, must end the lives of all within.

¶ "We waited long, concealed behind that sill. First came the broad-nosed ship we knew for Aleran's, and as its great black body passed above, all life within it crumbled into dust. No sound was heard. Tenantless, that underwater tomb sailed on, and vanished in the darkness of the sea. Perhaps," he laughed a mirthless laugh, "perhaps, like the 'varnet,' forever it will prowl the sea, seeking its master.

¶ "Soon Zir's ship passed above our rays of death, and pilotless as Aleran's, it started on its final voyage, empty save for memories,—and dust. Then Arto's ship came last; and all the treacherous three and all of their group-families were dead."

XXIX

PROMIL'S SON AND I

RAO! you are listening? Speak! I pray you will not misconceive the case! What could I do? By all the love I bore my father and yours, I had no murder in my heart till forced to choose between their lives and ours. I swear it. Treacherously they killed a half of my group-family, and would have killed us all. The cursed 'raage-mars.' Speak to me, brother!"

¶ Still I knew not what to say. My mind refused to judge, and by some instinct, seeking more delay, I asked a question.

¶ "How could they reach your apar-ith? Was not your 'senaral' in place?"¹

¶ "No, Rao, when we sailed outside that morning, we believed that Zir and Arto and Aleran were far away, and carelessly I failed to drop the 'senaral.' They must have sent most powerful 'zenti-blau' through the entrance to our

¹ The "senaral" was evidently some kind of a protecting curtain hung across the entrance to the "senro-ith" or artificial harbor. A reference later to "controls" suggests that this curtain could be electrified, as it were, in a way to make the passage of ships into the enclosed basin impossible.

PROMIL'S SON AND I

'senro-ith' with deadly aim, to work destruction so complete,—but, Rao! hold me not away with words. Did I not act as any man would act? Could I have acted otherwise? I crave your sympathy."

¶ I answered hesitatingly. "I cannot judge your act. Pressed as you were, I might have done the same. I know not. The pity is that long ago you did not make it plain to all that harm could never come from you,—be rid of 'Holor.' "

¶ "Would that I had had the courage!" Promil's son spoke earnestly.

¶ Suddenly a new thought came to me. "However, brother, now in all the world are only you and I and our group-families. From out this welter of death may come a peace, in which our task shall be to make the world again a human world, a better world. And first," said I, "we must destroy all trace of Klepton-Holorif."

¶ Promil's son spoke eagerly. "Not Klepton-Holorif alone, but all the agencies of war, both old and new, shall be destroyed."

¶ It almost shames me when I think of how my spirits rose,—building a glorious future on such ghastly ruin. My heart was lighter than at any time since Ak-dar-an, when first the murderous possibilities of fear had shown themselves to me. I said to Dron,

¶ "At last the world is free to all our people.

THE PALLID GIANT

Let men, and women, and children, young and old, enjoy the outer air and glorious sun."

¶ Dron shook his head. "Not yet." Dron's heart was scarred by memories of war and massacre and "terrors." His wariness could be excused.

¶ I said, "Why not? Promil's son is killing now that murdering beast which kept us under sea. Surely all the world is ours!"

¶ Dron still demurred. "I hope with all my heart your hopes come true, but,—let us wait a little. I know well certain of his men, and Promil's son will have fierce opposition in his own group-family. Navon and others there so long have fed their courage on their own ability to kill, that only by the utmost firmness on his part will Promil's son make final end of Klepton-Holorif. I say again, 'Tis wise to wait. I will go above with you, or visit Promil's son (in truth such visit might be well) but let the others stay below until their safety is assured."

¶ I wondered whether "timour" now had touched the heart of Dron. He saw my thought. "No, Rao, your good father taught me to fear fear, but not fear death. More, when he denied us Klepton-Holorif, his wisdom blessed us all; for he who hugs to himself the means to kill, teaches his heart the fear of being killed."

PROMIL'S SON AND I

¶ I had no word from Promil's son the following day as I had hoped, nor on the next day, nor the next. Then came this message,

¶ "I find my family so shocked by their experience,—I am myself so shaken that, before I join with you in future plans, I think it best to journey far away, where horrors of the past can be forgot and minds return to normal. Brother, forgive delay. I cannot tell you all."

¶ I did not understand, but said "Refresh yourself and hasten back; my love is always with you."

¶ Dron looked alarmed, and I perceived his thought. I added quickly,

¶ "Have you made end of Klepton-Holorif?"

¶ A pause; and then the answer came,

¶ "It is because the minds of many here are agitated by the thought of losing their defense, that I am leaving. I had at first the heart to do the thing you asked, but in this atmosphere of fear,—I shame myself in telling it,—the subtle seeds of 'timour' now have grown till they have sapped my will to struggle with my leading men. I know 'tis cowardly, Rao! But bear with me,—and them. The end will be the same."

¶ I could not believe my ears. "Promil's son! for shame! From just such cowardice the human race is perishing. Sail where you will but first end 'Holor.' "

¶ My pleading failed. Something held him

THE PALLID GIANT

back. His last words were, "You cannot know conditions here. Trust me."

* * * * *

¶ Unhappy were the days which passed till Promil's son returned. I could not understand, but Dron said,

¶ "I was much with Navon through the war. He fears that I will council preparations for defense. Navon is a very willful man. When they return, 'Twill need your active presence there with Promil's son to overcome his influence."

¶ Then came a day when Promil's son called me from somewhere near the wreck of his old apar-ith.

¶ "Rao, I am a most unhappy man. 'Timour' has gripped the souls of my group-family. In my own heart, I fight it with my love of you,—and of your father. But when I nerve myself to make an end of Klepton-Holorif, Navon and others act as though they would go mad with fear, or more, defy me to my face.

¶ "Never! never, dear brother, will I be cause of harm to you. Listen! One night the record of this accursed fear came to my mind. 'What if "timour" were to seize on me as it has on other men.' Rao, I went about to kill myself; but then I thought, 'What will Navon do? No, I must live and conquer "timour" in myself and curb the will of others.'

¶ "This is what I have resolved to do. To-

268

PROMIL'S SON AND I

tomorrow I shall sail away and place between us half the world. Thus separated, we can live our lives apart until the lapse of time has done away with fear and I can come to you with Klepton-Holorif destroyed. My heart is breaking. I love you still, and only go away to save you surely from myself,—and mine. Farewell!”

¶ The tumult in my brain was such, I talked at random. I called to Promil's son, offering to place myself, defenseless, at the mercy of him and his, to let them search our ship and apart for “Holor”; to go myself wherever they might wish,—do anything to satisfy their fears. No answer came. I know not whether Promil's son did even hear my passionate appeals. Beside myself, I raved to Dron. His face was gloomy but he did not speak, for Dron had feared this thing.

¶ On the second day, this message came from Promil's son, “We hold our way.”

¶ Two days, and then another message gave assurance that their journey had continued without change. Dron knew their speed, and reckoning the sound, made certain that the distance sailed would tax their utmost power. Promil's son was surely gone.

XXX

MAR-DA FAILS

HS day by day the threat of danger (if "Holor" in the hands of Promil's son was danger) sped, with that fleeing ship, farther from Araney, a longing seized on my group-family to know the freedom of the world above,—on all save Dron. He still was cautious. Yet even he gained confidence with time, and gave assent.

¶ Ah! those were happy days, those first bright days on land. Many in my group-family had never seen the sun, or the sky, or the ever-changing clouds. A joy no words can tell shone in the eyes of all. They wandered far and wide, or standing near the shore, looked out upon the restless sea whose surface had till then remained the only sky they knew. The apart-ith, our home so long, now seemed a gloomy place, and living under-sea a thing to be abhorred. All pleaded that the time had come when we could make our home on land. I talked with Dron and he agreed, albeit still with evident misgivings.

MAR-DA FAILS

¶ Back from the shore, behind a low rock ridge, our 'raato' lay. To this we carried food and shelter and other needs of life, all joyously assisting in the work, and never in the history of the world has the sun looked down on greater happiness than our group-family enjoyed, living through many golden days, on the only spot of green in all the land of Araney.

¶ Later, Dron proposed that we should seek a better place in which to fix our permanent abode. He pointed out that all around our apar-ith the shore of Araney presented to the sea a rocky front, which made approach by ships too dangerous. Together Dron and I made frequent voyages in search of such a place.

¶ Far to the west, we found a country gently sloping toward the sea, where clear, fresh streams which I had never seen before, flowed into sheltered bays, and, all around, the soil gave promise of a rich return. This seemed the perfect living place we sought.

¶ Before our explorations were complete, Dron found a need of certain "ranc" and "saransic." We left the ship sunk in a little bay and flew back to our apar-ith, intending to return next day. While Dron went inland to the "raato," I descended to the empty apar-ith.

¶ For a time I sat alone among my books, brooding, absorbed in memories of the past. Oh! that my father might have lived to enjoy with us deliverance from the sea! And Prom-

THE PALLID GIANT

il's son! Why had fortune parted us just as boyhood dreams were coming true?

¶ Suddenly! a fearful noise in the landward-tube, and Dron, more falling than running down the stairs, burst into my room. "Quick, the 'face-masks' and 'sinking-bags'! Promil's son, from somewhere in the air, has swept the land with 'Holor.' He will not long remain above, but soon will enter here to make complete the fiendish work which brought him back from his pretended journey to the 'farthest sea.' Our only chance lies through the water-gates."

¶ Dron waited not for questionings, but down to the "keeping-room" and quickly back with "masks" and "sinking-bags" and "fire-machines" as well.

¶ "We may need these to protect ourselves from monsters in the sea. Hurry! I pray."

¶ While donning our equipment for the sea, proof came that Dron was right in urging haste. From out the landward-tube an odor crept, faint, unknown to me, but telling Dron, who had in Sra smelled Klepton-Holorif, that those who sought our lives were sending "Holor" down before they dared to come themselves. The curve of the landward-tube alone protected us,—protection which would vanish as the men descended.

¶ "Quick!" Dron shouted through his "mask," and to the water-gates we rushed, and out, and

272

MAR-DA FAILS

sank ourselves in the sea, and crawled among the rocks beneath the apar-ith.

¶ For a moment only in the shadow there, we lay. Then Dron exclaimed in tone of blank despair.

¶ "We're lost! The depth of water over us,—between these rocks and the floor above,—is not enough to shield us from the 'Holor' rays. For Promil's son will surely throw the deadly current all about and up and down to make it certain that no enemy still lives."

¶ A thought went through my mind,—a memory from boyhood days. I seized Dron's arm. Climbing, crawling, dragging ourselves between and over huge upstanding rocks, hurrying with all the speed delaying water would permit, we reached a deep, black hole, and plunged to the bottom. Saved!—for the moment; water enough above our heads to defy the rays of death, and darkness which no light of theirs could pierce!

¶ We crouched there, breathless, thankful for the cavernous darkness of a hole where "siracs" often prowled, and now "sea-imps" peeped down from rocks above, then scurrying away, crept back to peep again.

¶ I dreaded much to question Dron about the fate of our group-family and thus to have my fears confirmed. He did not leave me long in doubt. He told this story:

¶ "From the 'raato,' coming here, I paused a

THE PALLID GIANT

moment at the entrance of our landward-tube to watch the white waves beat against the cliff. Our men who bore the 'ranc' and 'saransic' were far behind.

¶ "Suddenly, again that odor which I knew of old! 'Holor!' I turned. No one in sight. Only a little cloud of dust where I had seen our men so short a time before. Instantly I knew it all and plunged below." Dron spoke bitterly. "'Timour' conquered Promil's son. Navon, in the end, persuaded him that you would get from Sra the means for 'Holor.' This world is much too small for men possessed by fear to know that others live with 'Holor' power to kill. Promil's son came back to free himself from fear, by killing us.

¶ "Through some good fortune, when the current from their distant air-machine was first directed at our shore, it struck beyond the cliff on which I stood."

¶ Dron knew my silent questioning, and now was hesitant to speak the words. At last he laid his hand upon me as my father would have done, saying solemnly, "I doubt not every one of our group-family is dead."

¶ Grief filled my soul. There in the darkness of that slimy, under-water hole, I cursed and reviled the treacherous heart of Promil's son.

¶ "Never will I speak his name again. As brother, I cast him off, and for my father, I cast him off as son."

MAR-DA FAILS

¶ Dron, all this time,—resourceful Dron,—was thinking of our plight, and whether or where a road to safety lay. He interrupted now,

¶ “If we can make our way along the bottom of the sea, across the waters of our ‘senro-ith’ and past the rocky wall outside, unseen, and if our ‘masks’ hold out until we round that westward point beyond, we there can lie concealed till darkness comes. Then, traveling by night, if we can reach our ship, we may elude their vigilance, and get away to distant parts in safety. Our greatest danger lies in observation while we pass the lighted space around the apar-ith. It is a desperate chance, but we must take such chance or die in this dark hole, or when our ‘face-masks’ are exhausted, die by the hand of Promil’s son.”

¶ Dron’s words aroused anew my ire, and I was near to wasting time in futile rage when he broke in, “If we would save ourselves, we must be quick.”

¶ I asked, “But what of ‘Holor’ when we leave this deep, and rise to shallower rocks above?”

¶ Dron’s thought had compassed this. “Klepton-Holorif is far too dangerous a force to use in the narrow confines of an apar-ith one moment longer than necessity demands, and caution has by now shut off the current.”

¶ We climbed up from the hole and slowly made our way among the rocks, back to the shadow’s edge. There, where the huge, fan-

THE PALLID GIANT

tastic shapes of this dark under-water world showed black against the outer light, we,—two human figures,—standing forth as black as they, paused and peered beyond.

¶ My place was first, but hardly had I raised myself when Dron, beside me, seized and dragged me back.

¶ “Look!” he pointed. “There!—What monstrous shadow moves this way?”

¶ I looked. Monstrous the shadow was beyond all terrors ever told of the sea, and on it came, moving slowly straight toward where we crouched transfixed by fear.

¶ “See!” I muttered in bewilderment, for from the shadow’s front a light flashed out. Dron dragged me closer down behind the rocks.

¶ “A ship!” he whispered. “Promil’s son, ’tis evident, delayed his air attack until his ship was near, planning, no doubt, to make our apar-ith his own. The men above have found the “sen-aral controls’ and working these, have made the entrance to our ‘senro-ith’ safe for the passage of the ship.”

¶ My brain was stupefied. It crossed my mind that I would rather die there in the sea, than by the hand of Promil’s son. For a moment Dron was silent too, then asked,

¶ “Are we near the water-gates?”

¶ His words restored my poise. “Yes, very near. That lofty rock, so weird in shape; is

MAR-DA FAILS

just below the gates. I know it well for years ago my boyish fancy called it 'raging raage.' "

¶ A plan was forming in Dron's mind. He now explained, "In our haste we left the outer gate half open. When their ship shall swing beside the apar-ith to make connection through the 'sliding-tube,' that open gate will tell the men above that someone, still alive, is in the sea. All chance of escape will then be gone.

¶ "This we must do, or surely die. Our 'fire-machines,' which in the air will throw destruction far, can penetrate the waters of the sea about a tall man's length. Held close, their chemic fire will cut its way through 'blant' or 'mestolif.' When Promil's ship comes near and swings abreast of us, we both must plunge below, and underneath cut holes so large the rush of water will engulf them all ere they can save themselves."

¶ Much Dron knew of under-water ships, and knew the vital parts where holes would do the greatest harm. He said, "While I go toward the forward end as far as possible without encountering the 'under-window' lights, do you move toward the rear. Then, when you see the flare of my machine, bore swiftly. Cut away a plate as large as this," he spread his arms, "then get from underneath before the ship shall sink, and back into the shadow of the apar-ith."

THE PALLID GIANT

¶ With nerves drawn taut, we waited. Slowly the huge black form swung round.

¶ "Now!" And Dron had plunged below. I followed to the point assigned. One moment of suspense and then I saw a glare where Dron had gone, and heard a noise of rushing water along the bottom of the ship. I opened wide my "fire-machine."

¶ A roaring filled my ears; the hissing steam was blinding; rushing waters threw me back,—'twas fearful work! With life and death at stake, I gathered all my strength and pressed the "fire-machine" against the side. A great expanse I circled, cutting through and through, both coverings of the ship, and as this weakened portion cracked, I leaped away. A dull explosion forward like some far off "zenti-blau," and then a crash beside me, and the entering water nearly sucked me to the ship.

¶ Back in the shadow of the apar-ith, I turned and saw the great black hulk sink slowly to its final bed. Then Dron came up, and shouted through his mask, "Be quick! The men above now know that we are here. I see no other chance for life except to risk the lights, and make a rush to gain the outer sea."

¶ I grasped his arm. Again the knowledge gained in boyhood days was means to save our lives. "No, follow me."

¶ We struggled through a mass of rocks to

MAR-DA FAILS

where the landward-tube curved upward toward the cliff.

¶ Dron quickly saw my plan and said, "The hole we cut in the landward-tube must be so large that flooding waters shall completely fill the apar-ith ere doors are shut or 'face-masks' found. When each has cut one side, drop you below and let me finish, lest working close we harm each other with the fire from our machines."

¶ We rose until the light of day shone through the sea upon us. We struck! Our green and yellow fire blazed out, and quickly pierced this thinner shell. Two long straight cuts we made. Then following Dron's advice, I sank along the tube.

¶ Within I heard the water splashing down the stairs; a sound of madly hurrying feet! and voices calling to each other:—cursing!—terrified!—too late! A ripping noise above! A crash! And rushing down the "Tube," a torrent drowned all other sounds.

¶ Dron was now beside me, and we listened to the roaring flood, plunging down inside the "tube," engulfing all those things I loved, but drowning too, the men who sought our lives.

¶ A terrible revulsion filled my soul. I sickened thinking of the apar-ith. My father's room! His chair! His bed! His books! The places where my early life had found its all! The home of those beloved companions who so

THE PALLID GIANT

miserably had perished on the earth above. Those dear companions! My human world! My people! Mounting rage dissolved in grief. Would that I had died with them!

¶ And then,—'twas strange,—I thought of Promil's son. He loved my father,—he loved me,—he surely had loved me! Now he was dead. My love revolted at the thought that Promil's son could seek my life. I spoke aloud, "I do not believe that Promil's son is there. This treachery was Navon's work: He killed my brother first and did this thing himself."

¶ I had forgotten Dron and where I was until he touched my arm.

¶ "Think you not that Navon planned our death and made away with Promil's son that he might work his will?"

¶ Dron spoke sadly, "We will never know."

¶ He saw my grief, and urged me gently. "Rao, our masks are nearly spent. The time has come to go. It may be over-caution on my part, but, if you know the way, I think it wise to move along the shore, still under sea, to where the rocks (as I remember) form a little bay with sandy beach. There we can emerge unseen if any man were left above. I doubt this; for I doubt the willingness of any one so filled with 'timour' as they were to separate himself from all the rest. 'Tis probable that all were in the apar-ith and all are drowned. Yet to me it seems a safe precaution that we look be-

280

MAR-DA FAILS

fore we show ourselves. And then, the cliff can be ascended there more easily than near the apar-ith."

¶ We made our way to the little beach Dron named, and rested there, then climbed to the rocky upland by that easier ascent, and studied cautiously the land and sea.

¶ We were alone.

¶ Awestruck! we looked upon an empty world—a barren waste of sea and sand, and all the human race now dead! Gone forever! Only we two,—Dron and I,—left to see the awful, infinitely awful end. Soon we would go,—: I rose and stretched my hands up toward the arching dome of sky,—

¶ "Oh, God!"

¶ Somewhere behind me, Dron exclaimed despairingly, "Where are no souls, there is no God."

¶ My ears alone heard Dron. My eyes turned toward the west and all the soul within me reached with helpless, hopeless longing toward the setting sun.

XXXI

ALONE!

NO other word was spoken. We stood there on that overlooking rock as in a dream, until the sun went down and the air grew dark,—grew dark as that unlighted sea which hid mankind while the tide of human life was running to its ebb.

¶ What thoughts passed through the brain of Dron I do not know. For myself, unearthly visions held and froze my soul. Hope set with the setting sun, and night brought fevered dreams in which our earth seemed now condemned to darkness evermore. In my imagination, Dron and I were human specks, abandoned, forgotten by that departing sun, and left by a pitiless God to pay the penalty alone for sins of a self-destroying race.

¶ In a monstrous nightmare of unreasoning despair, I saw the sun, now freed from its age-long task of giving light and warmth to a human world, speeding far away through infinite space; speeding to join those other myriad suns, the stars, which have through eons played their unknown part in the infinite

ALONE!

scheme, with only a few scant rays of light to waste on dead or dying planets like our earth.

¶ I reeled and sank prone on the rock. And then,—as I gazed at the winking stars, my vision mounted. Hope returned. Hope whispered, “Somewhere in this universe the sun still shines, and a million other suns. Would this infinity of light blaze through eternity for naught? What though our earth grow dark and empty as a tomb! Life here is short! With hope came courage for the days ahead. My poise of mind returned.”

¶ Yet sleep held far away from both of us that night. Dron’s mind was filled with stern realities, and struggled with the possibilities of that new life which on the morrow must begin for us. At times he voiced his thoughts. He hoped our ship lay deep enough to have escaped the sweep of Klepton-Holorif. He spoke of food within the ship, and seed we most would need for future cultivation of the soil.

¶ I strove to interest myself in future plans, but often, through the night, great waves of sorrow overwhelmed me. Tragic questionings drove all else from my mind.

¶ “Are all the men and women and children whom I loved now surely dead?”

¶ And again, “Did I kill Promil’s son?”

¶ “Did he seek death for me and mine, or was it Navon’s work?”

¶ Then came an awful thought. “Yesterday

THE PALLID GIANT

I killed my fellow-men. I, who believed that I would die myself before I killed another, when confronted with a threat of death, killed and killed again, with never a thought of love or even mercy,—only fear that I might fail to kill. Oh! my Father! What say you to such a son! I wept, ashamed.

¶ Whenever I was silent long, Dron led me back to talk of how we'd live, and where, and whether other men by chance survived.

¶ With morning's light, youth's hope and love of life grew strong. Within myself I said, "If now, when only two are left in all the world, the sun has come to shine on us, surely we have place in the larger plan and there is work for us to do!"

¶ We found our air-machine unharmed, and near it, Promil's son's machine, wherein there came to Araney those men who took the lives of our group-family, and would have murdered us.

¶ Bereft of hope, since that which Dron had seen made death for all our family seem sure, we hastened to our home of yesterday behind the rocky ridge. We saw there,—dust and desert, only these—and death, where but so short a time before our loved ones revelled in the new delights of sun and gentle winds and freedom of the outer world.

¶ Grim and silent we returned and, still in pain-

ALONE!

ful silence, flew to the waters where our ship was left. 'Twas safe and all the food and seeds therein untouched by Klepton-Holorif.

¶ Again the setting sun did fill my soul with utter loneliness, too great to bear. Hasten, Dron! Blot from my vision all this ghastly emptiness! Drive fast the ship; dive deep in the darkest sea, to the home we loved, to that other loneliness my Father knew.

XXXII

AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING

LITTLE now remains to tell. During the next few years we, Dron and I, journeyed to many lands, travelling by sea, or flying in the air-machine.

¶ We spent much time in Sra. I marvelled at the cities with their endless streets and gorgeous habitations; at the ships and docks and manufacturies,—all empty, silent, motionless! We chose as home the southern coast of Sra, where formerly my father's province lay, and there we planted seeds, brought from our ship, and saw, as years passed by, the green of field and forest spread along the shore.

¶ Dron knew the former ways of man's abandoned world. Whatever we lacked to make life comfortable, he found. Dron himself was more than friend; 'twas his companionship made bearable those first few years.

¶ One day he came to me as I was sitting on a lonely beach and looking out upon the sea. He asked, "Does your old under-water home still hold a lure?"

¶ I answered, "No. Although beneath its sur-

286

AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING

face lies my father's mortal form (and Promil's son's), yet here in Sra he lived that life which in the olden days he loved so well, and here I wish to stay."

¶ Dron persisted. Dron was always frank. "I think I know your mind. Desire for immortality has always been a strong, persistent passion in the human breast. Continuing Self through endless generations of blood-related progeny is, after all, the immortality most real to man. If now life seems to you an aimless thing, it is I fear because you lack that hope."

¶ Never had I considered this, as Dron now stated it. I pondered and was silent. He continued,

¶ "Perhaps there is a way. In days gone by, on an island far from other land, there lived a race of perfect human type save that they lacked the human brain, and that their gullets were not formed for speech. Many, at different times, were brought to Sra for study or amusement. They were taller and in physical proportions equalled or surpassed our modern man. Some thought them human. Yet never did they show a reasoning power beyond the horse or dog, and nothing could they learn except some simple tricks which other animals may learn. Their island was reported very hot and so ill-atmosphered that men from other climes could not remain there long and live.

¶ "I doubt if Daril's men, 'That Night,' did fly

THE PALLID GIANT

so far afield to kill a race of harmless 'brutes.' If not, there is in them the basis for a human race, if you but add a human brain,—and soul."

* * * * *

¶ Our journey to the isle of Mrac was long; twenty days without a sight of land, and then at dawn on the twenty-first an island rose above the sea. We drove our ship high on a sandy beach, and landing, cautiously approached the forest. The "brutes" were there. Boldly we sought to capture one, and failing this, we tried to lure with tempting food, and showed bright colors which all simple folk admire. This also failed.

¶ Then Dron's forethought prevailed. Three powerful "Platron" (light-machines) which he had brought, we took ashore. Two, forming an angle at the ship, were placed in such a way that flaming paths of light embraced the forest. The third, set far along the shore, was made to form the base-line of a dazzling triangle.

¶ Terrified, the "brutes" shrank from this light. Dron moved the farther "Platron" slowly toward the ship, and as that shaft of green and yellow fire pressed from behind, a horde of panic-stricken "brutes" rushed through the forest,—crowding, scrambling, crawling on their hands and knees, and uttering piercing cries of fear.

¶ Headlong, out upon the beach the leaders

AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING

came. They stopped, and made as though to turn and flee. Impossible! A half-crazed mob behind came on with solid front, more closely crowded as the angle narrowed toward our ship. Behind them all, the fearsome burning shaft of light pursued relentlessly.

¶ The foremost "brutes" were pushed along the narrowing darkness to the ship. With many snarls and yells, they scrambled down the open way to the "Pral" which Dron had made secure to hold them for the voyage. 'Twas thus the "brutes" were brought to Sra.

¶ With this near-human stock we bred, and kept our "Gla-ni" (half-breeds) separate. They proved a hardy, comely race, in stature taller than the men of old, and very strong. They learned to talk, and came to understand the simpler facts which touched their daily lives, but only faintly did their intellects perceive relations in the physical world which their six senses could not verify. Abstract ideas never seemed to find a lodgment in their brains, and spiritual truths excited no response.

¶ Fear ruled our "Gla-ni,"—fear and a certain reverence. Grovelling before the dread phenomena of nature's power, and often seeing me defy that power, they thought me God, and worshipped with a cringing awe. Yet easy lives they lived, with ample food and simple tasks. For Dron had trained the "brutes" to do all arduous physical work.

THE PALLID GIANT

¶ The "brutes,"—those other creatures, fashioned perfectly in human form, but lacking man's essential attributes, multiplied in spite of decimating deaths from cold and insufficient food. Always they bred to the very limit of their food supply, and spread as vegetation spread. To the "brutes" who worked, Dron doled out grain as supplement for fish and roots, which otherwise did serve as scanty rations for this ever-growing multitude. These, too, were ruled by fear. Our weapons, which were magic to the "Gla-ni," represented sudden death to the beast-like instincts of the "brutes."

¶ Dron and I were pleased that our ambitious plans should meet with such success. We hoped to fill the empty world with this half-human race, and so anticipate by several million years that slow and cruel process which, unaided, nature must employ to bring from lower forms of life another animal like man. Ages saved! And more; though science and history proved that nature would in time create such higher type, it did not seem an equal certainty that vital spark we call the soul would reappear. Our half-breed race, I felt, would keep alive that spark.

¶ All went well with us, and with our plans, until the year which, starting with the sun's great winter turn, became 820 Onn. Then suddenly our fondest hopes seemed vain.

AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING

¶ We knew that "brutes" and "Gla-ni" did at times mix blood, but hoped such "breeding-down" was rare. Now, Dron found proof that all taboos were gone; that "brutes" were mating with our half-breed girls with all the freedom of a common racial origin: which made it sure that in a world of multiplying "brutes," our human spark would soon die out. For well we knew that "Gla-ni" mixing with the "brutes" would end by being only "brutes." Too late we saw our error,—bringing males from Mrac.

¶ Dron instituted sternest laws. He promised death to any "Gla-ni" mating with the "brutes," but his severity brought little change. We were two to watch, and those we set ourselves to watch were many. Stupid as they seemed, their clannish secrecy defied our utmost inquisition. Dron became discouraged.

¶ Then it was that knowledge I had gained from books and from my father led me to a plan by which, I hope, our half-breed progeny will keep their blood unmixed through all the years to come.

¶ The plan was founded on a well-known "psychic-sleep" (Pal-ni-ran). In this "half-sleep" the "object-mind" is made to think the thoughts which, at the time, the "subject-mind" is thinking. Not only thus, but if the hereditary chain of "Pal-ni-ran" be never broken,

THE PALLID GIANT

each generation after, will in the same "half-sleep" recall those thoughts.

¶ This power of "forced-suggestion" I combined with such a priestly system as in earlier days, through superstition and taboos, ruled primitive men. Nine of the most intelligent "Gla-ni" girls I chose as priestesses and rulers of their tribe. I gave them weapons (simple-things) with which they could intimidate the rest. I made their lot desirable; setting them apart with better housing, better food, others to serve their wants, and easy circumstance.

¶ Each priestess, then, was made to undergo the "Pal-ni-ran," and sunk in that half-conscious state, I pressed into their minds ideas which I wished repeated down the age-long line of their descendants.

¶ First:—I thought, and made them think, "Enforce, by threats of death and death itself, the separation of our 'Gla-ni' women from the 'brutes.' These women are your special charge. Kill! Kill all who mate with 'brutes.' "

¶ Next:—In order that this new tradition should endure, I charged each priestess, as she loved her life, to pass along to every female child, through "Pal-ni-ran," the thoughts and race taboos which I had given her.

¶ On plastic minds, I stamped the details of this "passing-on," and dressed it all in solemn garb of priestly rites. Each priestess must, when big with child, undergo again the "Pal-

AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING

ni-ran." Each female child, when five years old and every five years afterward, must undergo the same.

¶ Thus, two ideas, *separation from the "brutes"* and "*Pal-ni-ran*," were made a vivid part of priestly consciousness, designed to pass from mother to child through endless generations.

¶ Dron approved my plan, and added thoughts of his own. He said, "Surround your priestesses with pomp and mystery. Give them a temple. Around this temple raise a forest of rocks,—a maze of threatening spires too intricate for simple minds to penetrate." This, we did. Great stones were brought, and on a plain above the river Sren a rocky labyrinth arose. Within, a temple was begun,—a place where all the priestesses should live and hold their state.

¶ Dron had another thought: "Simple minds admire bright baubles, gold and precious stones, and, since there is infinitude of such in Sra, let us collect the most magnificent and so delight the hearts of priestesses, and lead the subject Gla-ni to a mystic reverence. This, too, seemed wise. We journeyed, Dron and I, through all the land of Sra, selecting from abandoned homes the largest gems and colored stones and graven ornaments of gold.

¶ While searching there, we made a strange discovery. We found that "Lert" of which all houses formerly were built, and which was

THE PALLID GIANT

thought to be as permanent as native rock, was crumbling on its outer surfaces. Later, we saw that metal implements, save such as came from under-water ships, showed signs of dissolution.

¶ Dron, astonished, said, "Not only living things, it seems, were harmed by Klepton-Holorif, but other substances have suffered basic change which will in time destroy their present forms. Natural rock and ore and gold (of all the treated metals) alone seem able to defy its slow, decaying blight."

¶ With this in mind, our priestesses were given weapons and machines which, coming from our under-water ship, had never felt the touch of "Holor."

* * * * *

¶ More than fifty years have passed. Dron, my faithful friend, was killed by a falling rock while working on the temple. I am alone!

¶ My task is finished. The priestesses have learned to rule. Three generations now have guarded "Gla-ni" women from the "brutes" with iron hand and terrible taboos. They hold the "Pal-ni-ran" a sacred rite,—a heritage as dear as life itself. Through all the ages, or at least until some human race is set so far above the "brutes" it cannot mix, "Pal-ni-ran" will take the minds of priestesses, step by step, back to me,—will make them think the thoughts I willed the *Nine* to think and do the things I willed the *Nine* to do.

XXXIII

THE SHADOW OF THE GIANT

THE Professor had before him only one remaining sheet of paper which he studied thoughtfully for some time.

“This last is a sort of postscript. At the top of the page is that peculiar word ‘Varamo.’” He glanced around at Rudge. “Unquestionably some kind of a parting salutation.” He read:

VARAMO

¶ I, Rao, son of Ramil, saw mankind perish,—saw the last of the sons of men die miserably, wickedly,—pursued by a passion more ferocious than the savage northern wolf. Fear, the child of self-love, both unchanged since the days when men were savages, unchanged through all the centuries while intellect was building to the skies material power,—fear desolated a beautiful world; turned the joyous peopled garden into an awful void of brown and yellow desert and naked mountains.

¶ My father Ramil saw, when the intellect of man had given to his unbalanced will a Godlike

THE PALLID GIANT

power of life and death, that then a love of fellow-men,—“mar-da,”—alone had power to chain the wolf of fear. Then!—it was too late. ¶ I, Rao, son of Ramil, last of my kind to look on this unspeakably lonesome, man-made desert called “the world,”—am ready to die.

VARAMO.

The reading ceased. At last Rao's story had reached that other human race which he believed would some day people the earth again. The Professor sat very still. The last page, covered like all the others with his ultra-legible handwriting, lay on the table before him. He stared at this and then at the other pages neatly piled near his extended right hand. Rudge, sitting in the shadow, made no motion. The silence oppressed me. I looked hard at Rudge and would have addressed him had not a turmoil of thought and feeling made speech impossible. Among ideas so stupendous, so awful, my mind could only grope. I was literally speechless.

After a time, Rudge aroused himself, more, I think, because he felt it was his part to say something, than from any wish to discuss what he had heard or any need to share his thoughts with others.

“Walters, do you remember what I suggested months ago about a race which should develop its intellect and material power out of all proportion to its self-control?”

THE SHADOW OF THE GIANT

It was a question only in form. After a little he continued in the same tone,

"Is our civilization paralleling the history we have heard? Will our national armaments and national fears keep on stimulating each other until someone invents a modern Klepton-Holorif?"

Just then the Professor, for the first time since he ceased reading, shifted his position. He turned his chair half around so as to face us as we sat near the fireplace. I am not sure whether he intended to speak or not, for at that moment a slight noise in the next room directed all eyes toward the open door leading to Rudge's bedchamber. Soft footsteps approached. An instant later a man appeared in the doorway. His face was deathly pale, and when he caught sight of the Professor, sitting in the full glare of the table lamp, he made a quick motion as though to withdraw.

"Markham!" Rudge ejaculated. Then realizing that Markham was alarmed by the presence of strangers, he hastened to add, "Don't be afraid. These are friends,—all in the secret. They will aid you if trouble comes." At the same instant, Rudge noticed Markham's excitement and asked,

"What is the trouble?"

Markham's lip trembled. He glanced again at the Professor.

"They have it; *the death-ray*."

"Are you sure? How do you know?"

THE PALLID GIANT

"LeGrand told me. I arrived in Paris this evening and found him waiting for me at Weills. There are still details to be worked out but the main problem is solved. LeGrand says the 'ray' will kill at a distance of 10,000 meters. He thinks our time has come."

Rudge looked at me, then at the Professor. The latter made no sign. He was sitting up very straight and staring hard at a spot in the carpet. Rudge spoke, "There you are, Professor." Still the latter made no sign that he had heard other than a slight shifting of his position in the chair.

This unresponsive persistence of the Professor's meditation apparently had the effect of turning Rudge back to the disquieting thoughts suggested by Rao's story. For a moment his eyes sought mine, then, half closed, they rested on the fire. His chin sank upon his chest. Rudge was lost in thought.

There followed the strangest silence I have ever known—a silence filled with gargantuan thoughts. At first I longed to speak, to break the spell, but I could find no words with which to express the monstrous unformed visions surging through my brain. Then a most peculiar obsession seized me, a feeling that the silence was Rudge's silence, that it was an emanation from him, and that through it I was connected with his thought. From that moment I never took my eyes from his face.

He turned suddenly to the Professor. "I know

298

THE SHADOW OF THE GIANT

what you are thinking. 'Is that bell which sounded the death-knell in Sra, tolling again?' "

Still no word from the Professor.

All this time, Markham had remained standing in the doorway just where he first appeared. We had forgotten his presence, and he himself was evidently puzzled and fascinated by the drama being enacted in the room. He sensed, from our looks and words, a great mental or moral struggle the nature of which he could not guess, and instinctively felt that we were disturbed by something outside of and far greater than his own trouble.

After a time, how long I cannot tell, Rudge arose with a motion as though to break away from visions which appalled him. He deliberately laid down his pipe and leaned one arm on the mantel. In this position he found himself facing Mraaya. She was looking up at him and her eyes were glowing with a light I had never seen in them before. As these two gazed steadily at each other, I saw Rudge's face soften and his jaw, which always had a peculiar muscular set when he was thinking intently, relaxed. The deep wrinkles faded from his forehead. He smiled.

Half hypnotized, I had been following the changes in Rudge's mood and now I knew that the very color of his mind, as it were, had changed. No longer did the "material" oppress him. I was not at all surprised by his next words.

THE PALLID GIANT

He straightened up and, throwing back his head, faced the Professor:

"Is it possible—is it just possible that the teachings of Jesus Christ have, in spite of the insistence of creeds and the smother of doctrine, taken such deep root in human hearts that when our crisis comes, an unsuspected power of fellow-love—the 'Marda' Ramil preached too late—will reveal itself, and save our race?"

The Professor had never taken his eyes from the carpet. Now he arose stiffly and, with his back to us, stared fixedly at the manuscript on the table. For several minutes he remained in this position. It was evident that he was profoundly moved and greatly perplexed. Suddenly he turned and walked to the window where he stood looking down at the crowds in the Boissy d'Anglas. We waited expectantly. The Professor drew his hand slowly across his forehead.

He said only, "H-m."

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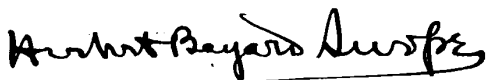
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THE AUTHOR

Business man, economist, student of international affairs, and writer—there is probably no American better qualified than Pierrepont B. Noyes to write a novel as sweeping in its scope as “The Pallid Giant.”

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