

FANTASTIC STORY

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A Classic Novel

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The EVENING STAR

A Novel by DAVID H. KELLER, M. D.

I

TELL him I'm busy—he'll have to come back." The little white-haired man spoke without turning his head, so intensely interested was he in the vision in the telescope.

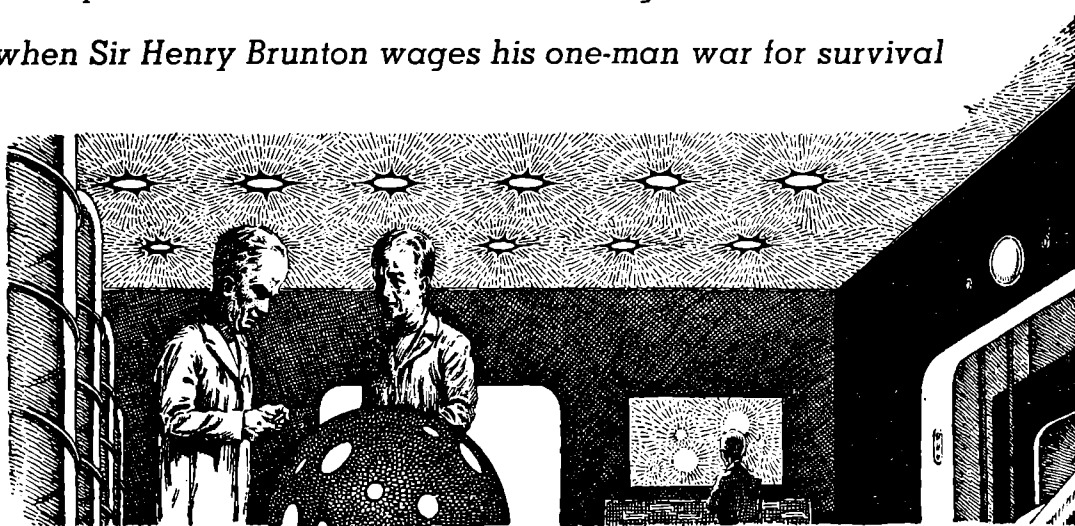
The assistant scratched his head in perplexity. "But he seems bound to see you," he stammered at last.

"Tell him I'll attend to him tomorrow."

The young man left the observatory and the little man, in perfect silence, gave his undivided attention to the stars.

But his solitude was again broken by the sound of a hearty greeting. Be-

*The spark of conflict bursts into flaming action on Venus
when Sir Henry Brunton wages his one-man war for survival*



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fore he had time to turn around with a reprimand, strong arms had seized him and swept him from his seat, lifting him up in the air. Angrily he turned on his assailant—but his frown changed to a look of astonishment, then a smile.

"Harry, dear lad!" he cried. "Where did you come from? I haven't heard of you for so long that I thought you were lost for good in some wilderness."

"So, you're really glad to see me, Percy?" asked Sir Harry Brunton. "You didn't seem so when you told your assistant I could wait till tomorrow. My word, think of it! Not seeing you for years and then having to wait till tomorrow! After all the good times we had at the old University too."

AND then the big man tenderly led the little man to a comfortable chair, drew another chair close, lit his briar pipe, and between puffs, fairly beamed at his friend.

"It's awfully good to see you again, Harry," whispered the little old man. "I suppose you've been into all kinds of devilment since we last met?"

"Hardly that—but I have knocked around a bit! I suppose you've sowed a fair amount of wild oats yourself?"

The astronomer laughed. "Not so many, Harry. You know how I was at the University—always up at night looking at the pretties in the skies and then so sleepy the next day that you had to help me with my lessons. Well, after I graduated I put more than half of the fortune I inherited into this observatory in Arizona.

"I would rather have stayed in England but the climatic conditions were not good enough. So I came here—and here I have been for the last thirty years. I have been spending the income from the other half of my fortune and a fair part of the principal in trying to prove my one thesis—namely, *that there is life on other worlds than ours.*"

"And have you been here all of thirty years?"

"Not quite that. Now and then I go

down to Flagstaff and less often I attend some scientific meeting and read a paper on my findings—but I suppose that ninety-nine percent of the time I've been right at this eyepiece."

"I envy you, Percy. I've been to Australia and Gobi and two years in Greenland and some in Central Africa but you've been to the furthestmost parts of the universe."

Percy Whitland sighed and closed his eyes as he murmured, "Not the furthestmost parts, Harry. I have seen just a corner of space. Our cosmos is so vast that the highest-powered telescope can see only an infinitesimal part of the whole."

"My word! I can't even imagine distances so great. Listen, lad! I've made a long trip to talk to you about things out there"—he waved his hand toward the star-studded dome—"but perhaps I've come to the wrong man. Perhaps you'll just laugh at me?"

"I'd never laugh at you, Harry," said the little man gently.

"But you know so much more than I do!"

"And you know lots that I don't. Why not speak up? The night is yours."

"All right. But first a few questions. Do you really think that anywhere out there there is organic life of any kind?"

"I wish I could answer that! Do you recall Giordano Bruno? There was a man! He had the courage in sixteen hundred to say he believed there were other worlds than ours, each with some form of life on it. They tried to make him retract but he held fast, and they burned him at the stake.

"They put poor old Galileo in prison for daring to say that the earth moved around the sun and at last, unable to stand the tortures of solitude any longer, he made a public retraction. However, even as he knelt and acknowledged the error of his former statement, he murmured under his breath, *'and yet it does move.'*"

"Those were sorry days for astronomers. Times are better now but even

in the last thirty years I've been sneered at when I've publicly made the statement that there was scientific proof of life on Mars. I've been laughed at as an utter fool when I suggested that parts of Venus could be inhabited by human beings."

"But do you think so? Truly?"

"Yes, of course! But the idea that every little planet is a possible home of living structures is not accepted by most modern astronomers.

"When I talk about our planets I feel at home. I'm among neighbors, old friends. Good old Neptune and Mercury are just like nearby towns. I can study

"As an astronomer I think it doubtful. As a man I hope that Mars and also Venus hold beings similar in some respects to us. I have tried for thirty years to prove that this is so. Now, just between us two, I say that I do not know."

"How would you like to make sure?"

"How could I do that?"

"By going to Venus!"

"Excuse me for a few minutes," exclaimed Whitland, and turned away.

FOR long minutes he worked with his telescope. Then he motioned to Sir Harry to take his place at the eyepiece.

Space Opera



FAITHFUL readers will recognize, in THE EVENING STAR, the celebrated sequel to its celebrated predecessor, THE CONQUERORS. Dr. Keller himself thought THE EVENING STAR surpassed the original story and whether he be right or optimistic we leave to you.

There is a fascination about sequels. Having grown to know a family of characters and seen them battle out their differences, human curiosity impels us to know more about them and see what happened next. So that the more human of us welcome sequels eagerly.

In any case we welcome THE EVENING STAR because it is an excellent example of a period in stf writing when the space opera was beginning to shed its swaddling clothes, when a ray gun and a rocket ship were alone not enough and such elements crept in as plot sophistication, irony, drama and humor. So have at it!

—The Editor

the canals on Mars and do all kinds of dreaming about Venus. And yet, when I seriously approach the question as to whether there is life on our nearest neighbors, I waver between desire and hard facts.

"It is so hot on the surface of Mercury that liquids boil there, while it is so cold on Neptune that everything is frozen hard. Adams and St. John believe that the atmosphere around Mars contains only fifteen percent of the oxygen that our earthly atmosphere contains. Venus has probably one percent. The question is—can life exist under such conditions?"

"But what do *you* think?"

The anthropologist saw a bright silver crescent that seemed to be enveloped in a white mist.

"How near is it?" whispered the astronomer.

"Near? I could hit it with a rifle bullet."

"Think so? That's Venus. It's getting as close to earth as it ever does and that means that when it comes to inferior conjunction* it will be twenty six million miles away from us. That isn't far, of course, as stellar distances go, but at the same time it's a tidy little stretch.

*Inferior conjunction in this case occurs when Venus is between the earth and sun.

"I understand that men ultimately expect to travel through the air at the rate of six hundred miles an hour. Going that fast, it would take eighteen hundred and five days or five and one-half years of constant travel to arrive at Venus. Yet you say it seems so near that you could hit it with a rifle bullet."

"Do you suppose man will ever conquer the problems of space, just as they've gone down under the ocean in submarines and into the air in planes?"

"You come to my rooms, Harry. I can answer that question better there. I'll turn the work of the night over to one of my assistants. They thrive on responsibility. My, but it's good to see you!"

Slowly he led the way out of the room which housed the enormous telescope. Walking, he measured barely four and a half feet in height. By nature a small person he had been deformed by tuberculosis of the spine in childhood. He was a hunchback. Brunton was shocked to see the ravages time had made on that harassed body. The anthropologist, over six feet tall and in glorious health for his age, seemed by comparison to belong to a race of supermen.

Percy Whitland led the way down to the rooms under the observatory. For years these had constituted his only home. Here he had studied and dreamed and longed for something to happen that would confirm his theory of the existence of life on other worlds. In this solitary building he had lived a life apart from the world, having as companions only a few young visionaries who dared to share his dreams. In these rooms he had silently fought discouragement and disease.

He was growing old now but although still unsuccessful he was undismayed. The more his body withered the more bravely he used his eyes and his intellect in wresting from the universe its many secrets. Yet all he had accomplished was nothing compared to the mighty mysteries which lay just beyond his grasp.

AS SIR HARRY BRUNTON walked behind the shrunken body of his former college mate he caught a glimpse of the struggle of all those years, of the silent heroism that had made the conflict endurable—and he saw more plainly than ever that only the mind of man matters, only the soul has a life that is worthwhile.

Whitland entered a large room and paused. It was a library, filled from the floor to ceiling with books of every size and description. A central table held more books. They overflowed the shelves and cluttered up the floor and the chairs. There were maps, magazines and folios. The little man turned on his guest with justifiable pride.

"Here is the finest private library on astronomy in the world. Men come to this room from all over just to read pages that can be seen nowhere else. This is my mental workshop. Here I check and recheck the work of the previous night. For thirty years I have not spared myself. No slave ever worked harder than I have.

"And why? Because I feel that each night may bring the final clue, and that clue might be lost forever were I to allow myself a moment's relaxation.

"Suppose I should find the answer to one of my questions at the end of another month? What if just a little more work would suffice? How terrible to think of death interrupting the labor of thirty years when I am just on the threshold of success, when I am passing from doubt to certainty! This is the thought that has driven me on.

"Not a cheerful thought, you'll say. Perhaps not, but it's one that I've never been able to shake off. Well, you're enough of a scientist to appreciate the value of such a collection of books. Even here in Arizona I've heard of your remarkable researches in anthropology. Suppose we go into the next room."

"My word!" exclaimed Sir Harry as he passed through the doorway: "You don't mean to tell me there's still another roomful of books?"



They were quite different from men and women on Earth

"Yes, but of an entirely different nature. In the first room there was nothing but cold science. But in this second room I have filled its shelves with the fantastic dreams, the stupendous hopes of men who, never satisfied that what they dreamed might happen, placed their visions on paper. Here are interplanetary tales dealing with other worlds than ours, and with life on these planets of every possible shape, size, color and deadliness.

"I have a standing order with booksellers all over the world to send me lists of all such novels or short stories. I have everything by Verne, Wells, Serviss, Gernsback and Otto Willi Gail, as well as a host of other writers about

the unknown.

"And I not only buy these books but I read them all! Some are good and some are poor but they are all representative of a great truth. Underneath the hopelessness of it, behind the impossibility, the futility of it, lies this fact—mankind feels that someday *interplanetary travel may become possible!* There is always that hope.

"Less than twenty-five years ago men were laughing at Verne and Wells. Now they are reading about rocket-plane carriers and calmly discussing a flight to the moon. And here's another interesting point. In all these travels to distant stars, the adventurers from earth always find life—monstrous in

some respects but with the same mental reactions as human beings. Who would want to read a story of travel to a distant planet unless life were discovered there?

"The tired business man, the clerk and the scientist who buy the thrillers on the newsstands, all want to read about such adventures, because they want to think that these may someday become actual facts. That is the universal hope of the race. We have conquered the water and the air and now we want to explore the unlimited space that surrounds our earth.

"And that hope is my hope. I have approached it from the standpoint of pure science; but when I am tired, exhausted with my mathematical problems, I turn to these books and anaesthetize myself in their fancies."

SIR HARRY said sympathetically, "So! You really feel that life may exist somewhere else?"

"Yes, though it may not be life as we understand it. It may be animal, vegetable or mineral.

"Or we can look at it from another viewpoint. We know that the human ear is receptive only to certain sound vibrations. The human eye sees only a part of what there is to see, and so on. Suppose a race existed on some other planet with such a rate of vibration that neither the human eye nor the ear could receive them, yet in some way they were able to make themselves known to us?

"These and dozens of similar hypotheses have disturbed my waking moments and filled my dreams for years."

"And all these questions could be answered if explorers were able to conquer space?"

"Certainly!"

"Do you think that men will learn to do it?"

"Yes. At the rate they are advancing now, no one can tell what will happen a thousand, five thousand years from now."

"And you think the proof of other life can be furnished only by the actual journey to other worlds?"

"It seems so. Of course, the radio enthusiasts think that they could radio to Mars if only an interplanetary code could be devised. I've always thought that if there were beings alive on our planets, they would be trying as hard to communicate with us as we are with them, and that some day something might be accomplished. But when everything is said and done, the fact remains simply this: *No one can tell whether or not such life exists without going there to make actual observations.*"

The anthropologist drew his pipe from his pocket and started to fill it. "Let's go where we can be comfortable and talk a little. I have something to say to you."

"Certainly. I have a room that has nothing in it except a fireplace, two easy chairs and the greatest puzzle in the world."

"That sounds interesting."

Once in the room, Sir Harry Brunton looked around him. On a marble pedestal, near one wall, he saw a replica of the Venus de Milo.

"You're right, Percy. Woman is a puzzle that no man has ever solved. You must meet Charlotte. She loves me devotedly, and yet at times she makes me feel like wilted lettuce."

II

WHITLAND climbed into one of the great over-stuffed armchairs and carefully adjusted his crooked spine to one of the hollows in the upholstery.

"Who is Charlotte?" he asked.

"She's my wife; at least she would be if we could ever spend a few minutes in company with a preacher."

"You mean you're living together?"

"Not exactly, but—well, it's a long story. For the last year Charlotte and I have been living a most unusual life in most unusual surroundings and with

a very odd sort of people. We've spent a year with the Conquerors."

"That doesn't mean much to me."

"No doubt you are so interested in your stars that you forget to read the newspapers. The Conquerors are a race of dwarfs who claim that intellectually they are eighty thousand years in advance of the average human being. They drove the inhabitants out of five American states, and so far as I have been able to find out the people have never gone back. The British Government asked me to investigate the trouble and I did. I went to the base of the Conquerors and became one of them. It was an experience. Touch and go most of the time, but I rendered them a service and they promised not to destroy the human race. Some of our party were liberated, but I decided to remain there as a hostage. At the last moment Charlotte decided to stay with me.

"All things considered, it has been a remarkable experience, especially the part connected with Charlotte. Poor girl! In love with me and yet refusing to marry me unless I supplied a preacher, and at the same time, refusing to leave me.

"You'll undersand better when you meet her. But she is just one of my problems. Those dwarfs had decided to wipe out our race. They had discovered the bacillus of a new disease and were going to sow it over the earth from their airplanes. I was fortunate enough to play a good poker game with them and they reversed their program. They have something else on their mind now, and until that is accomplished, they are going to let our race live on."

"Are you telling me the truth or just making up a science-fiction tale?"

"I don't blame you for thinking it's just another story, Percy, but it's all true, just as I have told it to you. That's why I'm here. The Conquerors are almost ready to send an expedition into space on a journey of exploration, and their first objective is Venus. They

found out that you were an authority on astronomy. Of course their idea is that we Middle Men, as they call us, are very far behind them in all scientific knowledge except astronomy. They have lived beneath the surface of the earth for so long that they have neglected the study of the heavens. So they wanted an authority. At first they were going to kidnap you, but when I learned of it and realized that the man they wanted was the Percy Whitland I'd gone to college with, I entered into the discussion.

"I told them point blank that it wouldn't do them any good to kidnap you, that you would die rather than be driven. Then I suggested that they invite you to go with them, and offered to carry their invitation to you. At first they were suspicious, but when I showed them that they had in Charlotte the finest kind of hostage, they consented to let me make the trip. Of course, it was hard on Charlotte to stay there at Reelfoot Cave all by herself, but she's a true sport. So, there's the invitation. Will you join our expedition to Venus?"

The astronomer slowly dropped from the chair to the floor and walked over to his friend. He put one hand on Sir Harry's knee and with the other seized the Englishman's right hand in a convulsive grip.

"You're not teasing me, are you, Harry?" the little man pleaded. "You aren't just making fun of me, are you? Why, I would sell my soul for a chance to make a trip like that! Even if I died before I returned, what a wonderful end I would have, knowing that at last I had solved some of the questions that have been haunting me for over thirty years. You say these people are actually going to Venus? And want me to go along with them?"

"Listen to me. I know something about Venus that I have not dared to speak of even to my pupils. I shall be glad to share my knowledge with the wise men you've mentioned if only they'll let me go with them—but of course, you are fooling!"

"*It is all true.* Of course, they haven't actually tried out their space machine yet, but I think it will work. They have been over a hundred years in designing it. They are really very brilliant, and they want you to go with them. And I am going too, Percy, to take care of you and Charlotte, and see that nothing happens to you. You're going to have an experience no other earthling has had. How soon can you get ready?"

"Very soon. It won't take long to select a few books."

"How about clothes?"

"Won't these I have on do?" replied the happy man.

EXPLAINED Sir Harry, "The airplane is somewhere up there in the darkness. It's noiseless in flight and absolutely under the control of its pilot. All he has to do is to press a button now and then and the electrical robot does the rest. I was to be here at 2 A.M. and flash a signal three times from my flash light. They will come down to the ground at any point we wish."

The two men were about a mile from the observatory. For over half an hour, they had waited in silence on the sands of the Arizona desert.

For Percy Whitland it was the period before the curtain rose on the most stupendous drama of his life. For the English anthropologist it was just the beginning of one day more. For the last fourteen months he had not only seen strange dramas, but had been one of the leading actors in them. Now he had only two dominant desires—to save his race, the people whom he was fond of calling human beings, and to make Charlotte happy.

Suddenly Brunton took out his flashlight, pointed it toward the heavens and flashed it on and off three times. He waited a few seconds, turned the light on and stuck it in the sands. They did not have to wait long now. Silently and without warning, something loomed above them, a soft light appeared and the bulk of a plane landed noiselessly.

Small voices greeted Sir Harry, a hasty conference was held, and then the little astronomer was assisted up the steps into the plane. Sir Harry followed him and the door was shut. All lights were turned off and conversation ceased.

Percy Whitland remained silent as long as he could and then he asked, "How soon are we going to start, Harry?"

"We have started; we are well on our way back to the place I call home."

"But there's no noise, no vibration. I've never been in the air, but the machines that have passed over my observatory always made a lot of noise."

"Those machines, Percy, are children's toys compared to this one. These people have a new kind of power. I believe it is obtained from the smashing up of the atom."

Percy Whitland rubbed his hands excitedly together. "I know something about that!" he whispered eagerly.

"Fine! Perhaps that was one of the reasons they wanted you to go with us. This old bus runs rather smoothly, doesn't it? In reality we are going nearly five hundred miles an hour and I understand their planes are capable of much higher speeds. Just how fast are we going?"

HE ADDRESSED the question to a large-headed dwarf who was seated in front of them. After a slight delay this strange-looking man, who was acting as pilot, replied, "Four hundred and fifty miles, Sir Harry. We should arrive at Reelfoot at daybreak."

"That man is sitting there with folded hands," exclaimed Whitland.

"Certainly. What else is there for him to do? The gyroscopic control of the machine keeps it at the proper altitude, the power flow is absolutely automatic and before the trip was started a radio beam was established between the Crater at Reelfoot and your observatory. All that this man had to do was place the car in the path of the ray for the return journey and turn on the

power. I understand our race is able to do something like that for a short distance, ten or fifteen miles, to make flying in fog safe. The only difference is that these people are able to go around the world on such a beam if they want to. Usually, however, they prefer their tunnel cars."

"What do you mean by tunnel cars?"

"It's like this. These people live in caves and enormous craters connected by tunnels very much like the Holland Tube in New York. They travel through these tubes in long cylindrical cars nearly as large in diameter as the tunnels they dash through. They use the same motor power in these cars that they do in their airplanes, and I believe they are going to use something like that in their space machines."

"You've been living with them for over a year? What a wonderful experience it must have been!"

"I suppose so. Just like living on the verge of an explosion all the time; and then there was Charlotte."

"Yes. I had forgotten her. That seems the strangest part to me. All the years I knew you at college you never even spoke to a woman. We thought you were a real woman-hater."

"Well, it's hard to explain, but Miss Charlotte Carter is not like other women I have met."

Whitland smiled.

"Evidently not."

Just then dawn came and with it, Reelfoot Lake and the Crater. Gentle in its flight as a falling feather, the air machine settled on the edge of the precipice.

The anthropologist opened the door, and led the way to the apartment where Miss Charlotte Carter awaited them.

"No use telling the Co-ordinators that I succeeded in bringing you back with me," explained Sir Harry. "They have radio-television that enables them to follow a man very accurately and not only see him but hear his words. But now, allow me to introduce my fellow anthropologist, Miss Charlotte Carter,



When the car crumpled, there was an ear-splitting shock as though worlds had suddenly crashed into each other

lately of Virginia."

Whitland bowed and gently took the lady's hand.

"I'm proud to meet you. Harry and I went through Oxford together and though we haven't seen each other much since then, we've never lost our love for each other. I'm glad he found you."

"That was nicely said," answered the white-haired lady. "Of course, he's told you about my being here. He wanted me to go when the others left, but I just couldn't bear to leave him alone among strangers for the rest of his life. So I stayed. We are going to be married just as soon as we are able to find a preacher."

"And in the meantime she helps me forget my worries, Percy," chimed in Sir Harry. "Come, let's have some breakfast."

He pushed a button on the wall; a hitherto unseen door opened and a table set for three rolled into the room. Miss Carter made a charming hostess and, in spite of the unusual surroundings and strange food, the visitor ate heartily.

"I think you'd better rest now, Percy," suggested the Englishman. "You've had rather an exciting night. I'm going to show you to your room and we'll have dinner when you awake. Just rest and forget everything except your happiness in the prospect of accomplishing your great desire."

The big man did not leave his friend till he had seen him safely tucked away under the covers of a bed. When Brunton started to leave the room, Whitland called him back.

"I think Miss Carter is very lovely, Harry. You ought to be congratulated—on your fellow anthropologist."

Sir Harry patted the little man on the shoulder.

"That's splendid, Percy, I'm glad you like her. We're going to be so happy to have you with us, old chap."

When he left the room this time Whitland fell asleep.

SIR HARRY found one of the Co-ordinators waiting for him in the living room of the apartment.

"It is well to note, Sir Harry," the dwarf said soberly, "that it all turned out just as you said. We were confident that you would come back, but we were not at all sure that the astronomer would return with you willingly."

"He was more than willing. Let me tell you something," Brunton nodded confidentially. "He is a very brilliant man; in fact, I think he is far ahead of any astronomer in my race. Of course, I can't tell how his mind compares with the mind of your Specialist in Astronomy, but I think he will make a valuable addition to the scientific group working out the details of our trip to Venus."

"What does he think of the possibility of life on that planet?"

"He feels that it can be proved only by going there."

"He is certainly a very peculiar man," mused the dwarf. "Did you notice anything remarkable about his body?"

"No. He just looks a little weaker and a good deal older than he did when I knew him back in college."

"I see. He always has been the way he is now," the Co-ordinator reflected. "Some of our specialists have a peculiar idea about him which will be developed later on. The Directing Intelligence will arrive tomorrow for a conference and then we will start the final preparations for the trip. Have you anything to do this evening?"

"Not a thing."

"Then a few of us will stop in for a game of poker. Since you started to teach us the game, some of us have given it a good deal of thought."

"Well, you ought to make fine card players. You have what the Americans call perfect poker faces."

"Explain just what you mean by that."

"It means that you never indicate by your faces what your feelings are. In

your case, having no feelings, you betray no elation or despair."

"I understand now. It is something that we can't help. We three Co-ordinators will drop in tonight."

It was late in the afternoon before Whitland awoke. He found his friend reading by his bedside. It seemed hard for the little man to orient himself.

"Is that you, Harry? Where are we?" he asked.

"How odd! Don't you remember? At present you're in my private apartment in the Reelfoot Crater, one of the principal bases of the Conquerors."

"That's right. I recall now. And it must all be true. What a peculiar light!"

"It certainly is. These fellows have certainly solved the problem of illumination. It comes from a cold heat and their specialists say that it has no harmful effect on the retina. Better take a bath and dress. Our friends have asked that you wear the costume of a Specialist. Then we'll have dinner and later on some of them are going to drop in for a game of poker. Do you play?"

"Never have."

"Imagine that, when you could have used the stars for chips in a game with a fellow sky-gazer. I'll bet you can learn."

"I hope so."

DURING the past year, the Directing Intelligence, the three Co-ordinators and Sir Harry had held many a conference. Sir Harry was asked his opinion on every subject under discussion and, while his advice was often disregarded, it was weighed soberly enough to make him feel that he was considered a valuable member of the nation of Conquerors.

The morning after the poker game another conference was held, but at this one the guest from Arizona was present. As usual, the Directing Intelligence lost no time in starting the conversation.

"You may think it odd, Mr. Whitland, that we asked you to come here to

assist us in our interplanetary journey. You may feel that we are strangers to you. In reality, we have been in very close touch with you and your work for a good many years."

"I'm surprised to hear that."

"You won't be when I finish. Long ago we had some fine telescopes and did all our own astronomical work. But we realized many centuries ago that in order to investigate the stars properly we had to have telescopes of great size, and these had to be in clear open places free from dust, mist and vapors. We could not use such telescopes ourselves because of our desire to remain unknown. So we started to experiment. We sent agents out to the surface.

"One of them helped Piazzini on his career, so that he discovered Ceres in 1801. Previously, in 1781, with a telescope that we indirectly paid for, Sir William Herschel had discovered Uranus. We were directly interested in the work of Professor Adams of Cambridge and that of the Frenchman, Leverrier.

"When you were still a boy our attention was called to you in many ways. We helped you through your University, and in the year of your graduation made you a rich man. Perhaps you wondered how the uncle who left you his fortune had acquired his wealth. You can guess now. We wanted you to discover the truth of certain unanswered questions which we felt were vital to the success of your undertaking. The exploration of the skies year after year was necessary for this. You did that for us as we knew you would. Our psychic life was at a low ebb that time. We lacked initiative. But Sir Harry, by his discovery of the specific hormones that our bodies lacked, has restored us to our former mental alertness. For that, we are indebted to him.

"So thirty years ago, when you started to devote your life to astronomy, we felt you were working for us, as your special hobby was Venus, the 'evening star.' That planet is the objective of our first space journey."

"May I ask a question?" said Whitland.

"Yes." The Directing Intelligence nodded his head in a regal manner.

"Why do you wish to go to Venus?"

"There are several reasons," the dwarf answered. "The first is biological. As you probably do not know, we are an emotionless race. We discovered that the action of the sun's rays was responsible for most of the emotions.

"For this reason we moved into caverns and away from the rays of the sun. Now that we wish to expand our nation, it becomes necessary to come out to the surface. The earth is too much exposed to the sun's rays. But Venus, we know, is well protected by its great layers of clouds. If therefore, our expedition is a success, and the conditions on Venus are favorable, the whole nation will be removed."

"You honor me in offering me a part in this," was Whitland's modest answer.

"Not at all. Now there is one part of your life that is more than of interest to us. In fact, it is one of our greatest reasons for determining to destroy the Middle Men as soon as we return from Venus. They would have been destroyed before now had it not been for Sir Harry Brunton. I suppose you understand what atavism is?"

"Not entirely. You see, that deals with biology, and I have not thought much about that science during the last thirty years."

"I'll explain it to you, then. Occasionally an individual is born with the physical or mental traits common to a species that existed ten thousand or a hundred thousand years ago. Examples are the Darwinian tubercle on the ear, unusual remnants of hair on the body, peculiarly shaped teeth, webbed fingers, persistence of ancient sounds in infantile speech, cervical ribs and a hundred other anomalies, showing evidences of the pit from which mankind has slowly climbed to its present height.

"We all realize that there is such a thing as atavism, and it has never wor-

ried us, because we understand it. But suppose we take the exact opposite. What would be the result if, in every generation, there were ten individuals born who were physically and mentally ten thousand, fifty thousand years ahead of their times? What would happen if these ten found each other and organized for the defense of their race against us? Of course, if we were fortunate, we could identify all these individuals and block them in some way, even kill them. But suppose they became too clever for us! We went into every phase of this danger, and at last decided that it was important that the only safe plan was to destroy the source by blotting out your race."

"This is very interesting to me," interrupted Sir Harry. "As an anthropologist I am well acquainted with the problem of atavism. That is simply the result of inheriting traits from remote ancestors rather than recent ones. But how can an individual inherit traits from generations yet unborn?"

"YOU have a perfect right to say that the future generations are as yet unborn, but that does not mean that they don't exist. We believe that the future does exist, but in a different time dimension. It is true that no two bodies can occupy the same space at the same time, but perhaps two bodies could occupy the same space at different times. That is as far as I can go just now in the explanation, but we have certain examples of life that make us feel that, when a child is formed, there is possibly a fusion of the child of 1931 and the child of 9931. As there would be only one body the result would not be like the average human being of either age, but the intelligence would be far above that of the ordinary Middle Man of what you call the human race. Now, I am going to ask you a question or two. Have you ever found a physician who explained to your satisfaction why that ego of yours that you Middle Men call soul is occupying a body so unlike Sir Har-

ry's and so much like mine?"

"No, not to my satisfaction. Most of them said that it was the result of tuberculosis, others spoke of intrauterine rickets, and still others mentioned dysfunction of the glands of internal secretion. I have not seen a doctor for thirty years. I lost faith in them and stayed away."

"Were your parents normal and healthy persons?"

"I never knew. They died when I was young."

"Have you felt a close relationship with the men and women of your generation?"

"I never had a real friend except Sir Harry Brunton. I always felt shy on account of my deformity and my difference of intellectual interests."

"Have you ever had an operation or accident in which you lost blood? Was your blood ever examined?"

"Yes. While I was at Oxford a pathologist examined my blood and said that I had a great excess of white

corpuscles. He thought that a fatal condition; but I am still alive."

"You, of course, have no objection if we examine your blood?"

"Not at all."

"Very well. We will send for our Specialist in Pathology."

This Specialist must have been previously summoned, for he entered the room at once. The Directing Intelligence ordered him to make an examination of the blood of the astronomer.

A lancet was plunged into the ear lobe, and glass slides and pipettes were prepared to receive the blood. The Conquerors gathered around the man from Arizona. Even Sir Harry peeped over their heads.

The blood flowed white from the wounded ear.

"The ichor of the Gods!" said the Directing Intelligence without emotion. "We were right. Mr. Whitland is not a Middle Man. He does not belong to the human race of 1930. On the con-

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trary, he is one of our nation, the descendant of one of our agents, who intermarried with a woman of the Middle Men. He is what you call a Conqueror."

WHITLAND swayed a little and might have fallen, had not Sir Harry caught him. Then he recovered himself and smiled.

"That is good news. Instead of being with strangers, I am wonderfully blessed by being among my own people. It makes me more anxious than ever to help you in any way I can."

"We will have another consultation tomorrow," concluded the Directing Intelligence, nodding. "It is well that we have you here—as one of us. Had you recognized your power it might have been necessary to blot out your existence in some way. As you are a member of our nation, we want you to live as long as you are useful to us. Still, the very fact that you have proved to us by your blood and intelligence that reverse atavism is possible, makes me more determined than ever to destroy the present race of Middle Men, saving only about two hundred who are to form the New York Colony."

"And I have always said," added Sir Harry, "that a civilization that cannot defend itself against any danger is no longer worthy of existence. I can say that because I, also, am a Conqueror. Of course, I have asked that their destruction be postponed till we return from Venus. But though the debacle is postponed, it is inevitable."

The four Conquerors and the two Middle Men stood up as the conference adjourned. The Englishman, looking at the five small men, was astonished to find, now that there was an opportunity for comparison, how very similar Percy Whitland was to the members of that strange race. There was a difference; his head was not quite so large, his hands were smaller and his lower limbs were more sturdy. The forehead was less prominent, the lower jaw more developed; yet the general resemblance

was marked.

The two college chums returned to the Brunton apartment where Miss Carter was waiting for them.

"Did anything new happen?" she asked.

"My word, yes!" her lover replied. "They have been investigating Percy and think he is a Conqueror. They have examined his blood and claim that he has the same ichor in his veins that they have. They claimed him as a brother at once and made no end of fuss over him. At the same time they are determined to kill the rest of our race—when we come back from our space trip."

"I don't think Mr. Whitland is at all like them. It is horrid of them even to think so."

"Well, it doesn't make any difference. I am glad that he's here with us. He's going to be a big help in many ways. He may have ichor in his veins, but he has a heart in him that is as big as all out doors."

IV

WE ARE showing you this machine and explaining it to you so you can point out its weaknesses to us, if there are any," explained the Specialist in Aviation. "We feel that we have taken into consideration every possible factor, but we want to make certain."

The party of Specialists, with Percy Whitland and Sir Harry, were standing alongside of the space machine, constructed to carry a goodly load of the nation of Conquerors on their journey of exploration. It was a cigar-shaped aircraft, nearly six hundred feet long and a hundred and fifty feet high. The bottom rested on a long slanting earth groove, the machine rising into the air at an angle of forty-five degrees. The surface was of metal, so highly polished that it was hard to tell where the metal body and the thick glass windows joined. The party took an elevator and descended to the bottom of the hole, where

the rear end of the new machine lay comfortable and safe on pneumatic cushions, reinforced with powerful spiral springs. At the very end four openings showed jet black against the clearness of the polished metal. Fifty feet from the end there were other black openings arranged like beads around the circumference, at equal distances from each other.

"This is a perfectly constructed rocket ship," explained the Specialist responsible for the ship's construction. "The forward motion depends on the four rear tubes; the steering is done by making use of selective combinations of the other tubes further front. The ship itself is made of three layers of beryllium, between which are almost perfect vacuums. The beryllium weighs one-third of an equal volume of aluminum. We have solved to our satisfaction most of the problems which, so far, have kept us on this earth. We feel that once we ascend beyond the atmosphere of the earth, we shall have no trouble in going through space at a speed thus far considered impossible. The first problem is to overcome the gravitation of the earth. I wish you would give us your figures on that to see if ours harmonize."

"Well," replied Whitland. "To be on the safe side, I think that your spaceship ought to leave the earth at a speed of six miles a second. That would be nearly three hundred fifty miles the first minute and by that time the ship would be well outside the earth's atmosphere. Of course, it would have to keep on going; otherwise it would be captured and become a satellite like the moon. Once your car is sufficiently beyond the heavy gravitational pull of the earth, it can attain quite a respectable speed and keep on going until it gets within the gravitational influence of Venus. Your ship will be moving in space that is relatively empty. It has always been my idea that a properly propelled ship could be made to travel with the same speed that our earth does about the sun, approximately eighteen and half miles a

second, or about one thousand times the speed of the fastest express train. Of course, such a speed can only be obtained in space where there is no atmosphere."

"You agree with us then that space is relatively empty?"

"Absolutely."

"Then we are not apt to be impeded by friction. What other dangers are there?"

"How about your supply of oxygen?" Whitland asked.

"That has been arranged for. We will make it as we need it, and we can remove the carbonic acid gas. Our food supply is also going to be adequate."

"Is your ship so tight that it will hold its air when it is in the almost perfect vacuum of space?"

"Yes."

"Well, of course, there is danger from meteors, but mathematically your chances of avoiding them are very good. What have you done to slide into the atmosphere of Venus so slowly that you won't heat the ship to such a temperature that life within it will be destroyed?"

"A very good question. Just as soon as we approach the atmosphere of Venus, we will turn off all our power except just enough to guide the ship, so that we will enter the atmosphere in a slanting direction. Then we will start some shots from the rockets on the front of the ship, and these will act like a brake. Our mathematicians have calculated that we shall be able to take our time descending to the Venusian surface once we enter her atmosphere."

"Then all that remains is to determine whether your source of power is adequate for the trip."

"That's all. You had an example of it in your air trip here from Arizona."

"I understand that you destroy the atom?"

"Completely. By means of an extraordinarily high voltage we are able to break down the atom and release its energy. Breaking down carbon, for ex-

ample, gives us eighteen thousand million times the amount of energy we should obtain if we simply burned it as coal. This energy we use for our rocket explosion. It is being done all the time in the universe around us, in the suns and stars in space."

"Yes," agreed Percy Whitland slowly, "there is no doubt that the complete destruction of matter in space is responsible for the highly penetrating rays that are constantly battering the atmosphere of the earth. It is probably this force that keeps alive the sun and stars."

"Have you any suggestions to make, Mr. Whitland?"

"Not now. I shall have to think it over."

Just then a message came from the Directing Intelligence, stating that he intended to call on the astronomer that evening.

"You are becoming popular," commented Sir Harry. "A little more and I am going to become jealous of you. It's Mr. Whitland here and Mr. Whitland there. They seem to forget that I exist."

The little man laughed at him.

"Forget it, Harry. I'm just a new toy for them to play with. When they want action, they'll come to you. I'm not forgetting you. I have a surprise for you and Miss Carter that I'm going to spring on you some day."

SAID the Directing Intelligence that evening to Whitland, "I understand that your ideas of conditions on the planet Venus are different from those of most astronomers. Is that true?"

There was only one other at this conference, Sir Harry Brunton. For some reason, the Directing Intelligence had thought it best not to have the three Co-ordinators present.

This caused the two friends from the earth's surface a considerable amount of surprise, for in all previous meetings the Coordinators had been present. It seemed therefore to Sir Harry that

there had been some changes in the relationship between the Directing Intelligence and his subordinates.

Sir Harry's comment on this strange event was to wink at Percy Whitland significantly.

"I suppose you are right when you say I differ from them," replied the astronomer from Arizona, "for I represent the hopeless minority. I think we all see the same things, but we differ in our interpretation. In the seventeenth century Bianchini, the Italian astronomer, made frequent observations and drew maps of what he claimed to have seen on Venus. The interesting thing about those maps was that the continents were of the same size and shape on both hemispheres, that is, on both sides of the planet. It remained for another Italian, Schiaparelli, to point the way to the great truth behind this similarity. What the first Italian thought to be two hemispheres were the same. Schiaparelli demonstrated that Venus always presents the same face to the sun as it circles around it during its year of two hundred twenty five of our days. He watched the 'evening star' night after night and month after month, and found that the surface markings never changed.

"His conclusion was that there are two distinct portions to Venus—a dark half of intense cold and a light half of intense heat, at least sixty degrees hotter than it ever becomes on the Earth. On the basis of that discovery almost every astronomer in the world believes that life is impossible on Venus."

"And you?"

"Oh! I had to be different. That was my hobby. I felt that there *ought* to be life there; so I started out to prove it. But before I go on with my opinion, suppose I describe to you the geography of Venus as it is generally accepted by my co-workers. The hemisphere that faces the sun seems to be a desert, wind-swept and sun-baked. Dust storms of great velocity sweep over it, polishing its dirt floor till it becomes smooth as

marble. Great crevasses extend in every direction where the heat-tortured surfaces have been torn apart by thermal changes. Every drop of moisture is carried into the upper atmosphere by the heated winds. These blow high into the air and then roar to the right and left, till they reach the dark edges of the other dismal hemisphere which never knows the piercing rays of the sun. These moisture-laden winds, these water-bearing clouds, entering the land of perpetual darkness, condense and pour down their burden of moisture. First it descends as rain, but as soon as the darkness gathers into a more Stygian gloom, it becomes a blizzard, a snow such as no earthly eye has ever witnessed. These blizzards have been going on for thousands and hundreds of thousands of years. All of that dark side of Venus is covered with a perpetual mantle of snow over a layer of ice and it all rests under an eternity of desolate midnight. The cold wind, with all its moisture taken from it, curves around till once again it comes into the land of perpetual sunlight, where it picks up more water in the form of vapor from the heat-tortured desert.

"That is the way Venus would look if we could see all of her. One-half of it baking desert, the other half covered by glacial ice and heaps of everlasting snow. But around the south pole rise lofty mountains, whose peaks we can see projecting like warning fingers above the clouds of heated moisture. These mountains must be over twenty miles high, perhaps higher.

"What a fascinating spectacle it would make to be out in the emptiness of space with a powerful telescope, and watch the eternal cycles of climate on that mysterious planet. Or to be an ageless observer, who has seen the evolution of the planet from time immemorial.

"One could have observed not only the evolution of Venus from the day she was flung off from the sun as a glowing mass of lava—but also the catas-

trophe—the collision between the sun and a visitor from space that brought all the planets into existence.

"It should make one feel a little humble when he compares his own little life span, his own little powers and intelligence with those mighty forces that have made our planets and cause them to speed ceaselessly around our sun."

WHITLAND was afire with glowing enthusiasm. It was with a great effort that he suddenly remembered that he had wandered far from the subject of their discussion.

"We were talking about the violent contrasts of the climates on Venus," he said meekly.

"My word!" said Sir Harry. "And yet you think there is life there? Hot as hell on one side, and cold as hell frozen over on the other, and no place to go! Where could they live, those dwellers in Venus? What will happen to us if we ever arrive there?"

"Do you think that you really know enough about Venus from your observations to predict what we might find there?"

"I haven't finished," said Whitland, smiling at his giant friend. "I started to study Venus from my observatory in Arizona, and my photographs showed peculiar markings on the planet which made it look like a wheel with dark lines as spokes. These spokes never varied.

"From my observations I deduced that while Venus always presented the same face to the sun there was a slight shifting every four months in the position of a band or zone, due to the inclination of the axis of the planet. Now whenever this oscillation occurs, a long strip of land extending from pole to pole and about one hundred miles wide is brought from its state of sunlessness into the sunlit area. It remains in the full glare of the sun's rays for four months and then slowly goes back into the shadowless night of the doomed land. The same has happened upon a

similar area one hundred miles wide on the other side of the planet, which now turns its glaciers toward the sun, and four months later goes back again.

"Can't you imagine what happens? Venus is thirty million miles nearer the sun than Earth is. The temperature on the hot side is perhaps twice that of our Earth. Within a few days, the glaciers are suddenly exposed to the intense heat of a tropical summer. Naturally the ice and snow melt, and a flood of water rush headlong in mighty rivers out to the torrid deserts of the Venusian hell. These rivers are perhaps five hundred miles wide as they leave their source in the melting snow mountains. As they rush over the baked mud, more and more of the water sinks into the hot dirt and the rivers become narrower. At last they are exposed to the full heat of the torrid sunlight and wither away into clouds of steam, which, carried to the atmospheric belt of the planet, once again turn into the snow and ice of the cold half of this peculiar world.

"There must be enormous clouds of steam-filled air, and I am sure that it is due to these clouds that we cannot see any of the surface distinctly. We are told that Venus has an atmosphere but that it is so attenuated that life cannot exist there, and that what atmosphere there is has no oxygen. I believe that this is not correct. Where there is so much water, there must be oxygen.

"If we look at the 'evening star' from this point of view, we see that one side is torrid and the other side more than frigid, but between these two extremes is a circular strip of land, several hundred miles wide and twenty thousand miles long, that is neither very hot nor very cold. If people lived there, they would always see the sun low in the sky, and have pleasant conditions with regard to both light and heat. There would be abundance of water for agriculture. It seems to me that there is everything there to allow a splendid civilization to develop. There is also an-

other point to be considered. What effect has a covering blanket of moisture-laden clouds, fifteen or more miles in thickness, on the heat that pours down from the sun? Perhaps conditions there are more livable than we imagine."

"You present an excellent argument," said the Directing Intelligence. "Yet there must be a great many weaknesses in it, for according to your own statement, not a single one of your astronomers agrees with you."

"I know that. But at the same time I believe I am more nearly right than they are. You see, the telescope I was working with in Arizona is practically the largest one in the world, with a four hundred inch mirror. Its size was made possible by the development of the use of fused quartz. I can obtain much sharper details on my photographic plates than others can. In fact, I obtain a picture of Venus entirely different from that of any other astronomer. But after all, it is simply a matter of interpretation. For years we have worked and studied and plotted and tried to explain the canals of Mars, and now, Hopewell, the famous astronomer, says there are no canals—that they have not been able to withstand the acid test of photography. I showed him my pictures of Mars, and he simply shook his head and said that they were not canals, but that he did not know what they were. I think that sometimes the best of us think a thing so long and so hard that we end up by believing it."

THE Directing Intelligence stood up, signifying that the interview was at an end.

"We will try it. There are still some questions that cannot be answered at the present time, but we will find the truth eventually. If we succeed, our race will indeed be worthy of the name of Conquerors. If we fail, we will die in empty space or on some planet that for the first time will feel the presence of human life. I—"

There was a slight buzzing of an in-

strument on his table. He adjusted a pair of earphones and then spoke. Immediately one of the Co-ordinators entered the room. While his face wore the usual expressionless gaze, there was something in his eyes that indicated news of the greatest importance. He lost no time in making known his errand.

"We have just been receiving some unusual messages at our radio-receiving station. We thought that you might like to know of these at once."

The Directing Intelligence nodded.

"For several hours we have been receiving very strange communications. At first we thought they were in code, but then it dawned on us that someone was trying to communicate to us in actual language. We decided to call in the Specialist in Philology and he told us that every time the message came it was in a different language, but that each time it meant the same thing. For a long time the dead languages of the Middle Men were used—ancient Chaldean, Egyptian, Greek, Basque, the old Gaelic, and a dozen of others. Then came medieval languages and modern—Italian, English, Russian, and other European languages—and finally, as if to show their thorough mastery of every language, they sent the message in our own tongue. I suppose that message came in over a hundred different forms."

"It's easy to understand why it came that way," commented the Directing Intelligence, "for whoever was sending it was not sure of the language that was being spoken here and in order to make sure that it would be understood he used every language of every age. What was the message?"

"A peculiar one. Simply this:

Follow Number Eighty Five"

"That's very interesting. What does it mean?" asked the leader of the Conquerors.

"We don't know. That's why we wanted you to know of it at once. You,
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as the Directing Intelligence, are all-wise."

The Directing Intelligence turned to Brunton. "I am afraid my people will need another treatment from you. You see, they rely on me completely. They have no initiative."

Then, turning back to the stolid Coordinator, he said, "I do not understand it. Broadcast the question at once to every Specialist, *What does eighty five mean in connection with this message?* Say that an answer is to be given at once. I will await a report."

He waited. Specialists in America, in Africa, in Asia, in Australia caught the question flying with the speed of light through the air and reluctantly replied that they did not know. As answer after answer was flashed back it was more and more apparent that the question would remain unsolved. Meanwhile Whitland and Brunton had been dismissed and, at Whitland's suggestion, had gone to visit the central radio station of the Conquerors.

V

IT WAS the next day when the two men, haggard and weary, appeared before the Directing Intelligence.

"Have you found the meaning of that strange message?" asked Whitland.

The dwarf shook his head. "I have two hundred negative replies from two hundred Specialists."

"I think we have found an answer," Whitland said calmly.

The Directing Intelligence fixed keen eyes on the astronomer.

"Since we left you, we have spent most of the time at your radio station," Whitland began. "Working in cooperation with its controller, we have been able to determine the general direction of the source of the messages."

"And that is—"

"From interplanetary space!"

Only the faintest movement of the Directing Intelligence's eyes betrayed any excitement over this astounding news.

"Furthermore," Whitland continued, "the messages seem to come from the general direction of Venus, which is approaching inferior conjunction with the Earth.

"We can not say positively that the messages *do* come from Venus. But there is a likelihood that if there were intelligent beings on that planet and they wanted to communicate with the Earth, they would avail themselves of this opportunity when the two planets are closest to each other."

Another flicker of the Director's eyelids indicated that he was closely following Whitland's exposition.

"Now," continued Whitland, excitedly, "there remained the big question to settle! Suppose intelligent beings were communicating with us, what would their message mean? Remember that they said '*Follow number eighty five.*' They evidently wanted the message to reach only beings whose knowledge is sufficient to penetrate the meaning of this apparent code. And if we could do that, the Venusians, if Venusians they are, wished us to have a means of finding them."

He paused for a moment to regain his breath. Brunton placed a supporting hand on the little man's arm, meanwhile looking at him in admiration.

"Now I deduced at once that the means of communication for such a purpose could be one of two things—either a radio beam such as you use for guiding airplanes, or a ray of light perceptible to our spectroscopes. The number eight-five could refer to a wavelength or some other quantity. But, acting on the hunch which is often the means to great discoveries, I tried a new tack. In the scale of the atomic number of various elements there are two missing places—one is number eighty five and the other, number eighty seven."

"What are these substances?" asked the Directing Intelligence.

"That is the interesting point. We all know that hydrogen has the atomic number one and from there on we go

up to and include the number ninety two. Of course, some of these substances are very rare, but we are sure that all of them exist. However, eighty five and eighty seven are missing numbers. We feel sure that they exist somewhere, but we have not found them in any spectroscopic analysis of the light from the stars. So they are simply unknown elements, the existence and characteristics of which we can only guess at."

The Directing Intelligence turned slowly in his chair so he could look directly at Whitland.

"Then you are saying that you know something about a thing, when in reality you know nothing about it?"

"Yes. That is my position. But—suppose that this message is from some form of life in Venus? They tell us to 'follow eighty five.' The very word *follow* implies that they know, or hope, that somebody contemplates a trip to their planet. It looks as though they were trying to help us to reach them. They give us a pathway! Oh, that is a stupendous idea, but it may be possible! Suppose they are sending us a ray of light that gives distinctive bands in the spectroscope—a spectrum different from any so far known? Then all we should have to do would be to mount a spectroscope in the front of the car, and, by automatic control, keep the nose of the space car continually in that ray of light."

THE DWARF raised his hands in protest.

"Do you mean to say that we could follow a ray for twenty six million miles?"

"Well, there is no need to," interposed Brunton. "The way we look at it is that you will have your own means of getting to Venus. Your Specialists with the aid of Mr. Whitland are perfectly competent for that. But, my word! Suppose you find that your own path checks with a beam of light with the characteristic spectrum that we think belongs to 'eighty five'. Then you

would have definite proof that some beings on Venus want us to come!"

"And if the ray is there," Whitland said, "it must start from the same place that the message came from. We know that we are continually receiving light from Venus. What is that light but rays? Suppose those people had a great quantity of this element eighty five and were to heat it in large enough amounts to send out a radiation? It may be that the entire planet of Venus is composed of this substance, but that up to now the thick blanket of steam has been able to hold the rays back. Perhaps they have found some way of blowing that fog aside for a short time? I don't know! But if I could lay my hands on a spectroscope, I should like to see just what kind of light is coming from Venus at the present time."

"We have a small telescope right here, also a spectroscope."

"I would much rather use my own in Arizona. Should you object to my returning there for a few hours of observation?"

"Suppose you use our apparatus first. If you don't obtain results, we will consider your request."

Early that evening the party was in the observatory, and Percy Whitland was feverishly adjusting the mechanism of the telescope in harmony with the spectroscope. At last he finished and the "evening star" was brought into the optical field. With him were the Specialists in Astronomy, Chemistry and Mathematics, as well as the Specialist in Aviation and the Directing Intelligence.

"Now, we can watch the spectrum appear. I presume we are all familiar with the various lines. I should like to have the opinion of all of you as to just what we are seeing."

Slowly the bands of light began to form until finally they became stationary. Whitland sucked in his breath with an astonished gasp, but the Specialist in Chemistry nodded his head with conviction.

"That is new!" he said slowly.

"It certainly is!" agreed Whitland. "We are looking at the spectrum of an element that so far has never been identified. It is different from any stellar spectrum I have ever seen, and there are certain lines there which make me confident that the light is originating from a luminous element in practically a pure state. It comes from Venus!

"Gentlemen, here is my advice. Change the nose of your space car so that the very tip forms the end of a telescope. Make that telescope as nearly perfect as possible. At the inner end attach a spectroscope. You will find then, if my deductions are correct, that the path you have chosen for reaching Venus will keep your space car always in that ray of light."

"Just one more question," said the Directing Intelligence. "We know that all the stars are made of many different elements in combination. What basis have you for the belief that this is the spectrum of but one element?"

"I told you that I was not absolutely sure," replied Whitland, and there was an element of weariness in his voice. "But it is a reasonable deduction. They may have collected it, or it may be natural—a huge mountain formed of one element. Or Venus may all be of that material, and we never saw the spectrum because of the clouds."

Slowly the Directing Intelligence shut his eyes. The veins in his forehead enlarged and pulsed rhythmically. Little beads of sweat came out on his domed forehead. Ten minutes passed, twenty minutes—and at last he spoke:

"I direct that the changes in the space car be made."

IT WAS late, very late, when the two Middle Men returned to the Brunton apartment. Miss Charlotte Carter was waiting for them. When they entered the living room, she was busy darning stockings, and there was no doubt about the fact that these stockings were the property of Sir Harry.

"Well, my dear friends," she exclaimed, "you certainly have had a day and a night of it. Do you think you can stop long enough to eat lunch before you return to work?"

"My word, Charlotte!" sighed Sir Harry, sinking heavily into an easy chair. "I hope there's nothing more for the next twenty-four hours. It was not just physical work, but the tremendous task of trying to follow the scientific discussion of these Conquerors—and Percy. My dear, you would have been proud of Percy if you could only have heard him strut his stuff before the rest of them. He made them look pretty cheap, with all his accumulation of knowledge, and it looks very much as though he would be the next Directing Intelligence if anything happens to the incumbent. They don't like to acknowledge that he knows a shade more than they do. It makes them feel a little peeved, but he made them admit it. Looks as though our friend Percy Whitland were a real man. I hope you will never admire him as much as I do, for if you do, it is all over with your present admirer and humble slave."

Miss Carter blushed, as did the man from Arizona.

"He's just teasing us, Miss Carter," protested the little man. "You know how these people look up to Harry."

"They look up to me all right," acknowledged Sir Harry, "but it's on account of my six feet three inches instead of my brains. But to change the subject, Charlotte, what do you think happened to keep us away so long? We actually received messages from Venus, indicating that sentient creatures want us to go there. And had it not been for Percy, no one would have had the least idea what these messages referred to. My word, but he made their eyes bulge out when he showed them their real meaning! Let's eat and then try to get some rest."

The minutes passed in silence while the tired men satisfied their hunger. At last the woman spoke.

"And are we really going to Venus, Harry?"

"Yes, some of us. Perhaps the Directing Intelligence, the three Co-ordinators, about one hundred of the Specialists, and Percy. I suppose they will take me along."

"How about me?"

"Why, I was going to propose that they let you go back to New York City."

PASS THE LETTUCE

A COW has to eat 165 pounds of grass to turn out 50 pounds of milk. Normally Elsie puts in a seven-and-a-half hour day of chomping, regardless of the condition of the pasture. In that time, if the grass is five inches high she will get her 125 pounds of forage. If the grass is only two or three inches high, she will only get about 45 pounds for the same amount of tooth gnashing, figuring 50 to 70 bites per minute. She lies down nine times for a total of 12 hours during the 24. She chews her cud seven hours a day, grazes a distance of four miles, drinks 10 times.

These earth-quaking statistics were collected at the University of California, probably shattering Bossy's privacy and peace of mind forever.

Your nieces will be delighted to see you."

Slowly she put down her work. "Don't you understand that I cannot go back? Not now! And I certainly am not going to stay here all by myself. Suppose something should happen to you while you are on the trip? Who would take care of you? There may be life on Venus and perhaps you might not be able to return, and would just stay there and marry one of those women."

"What women?"

"Why, those women on Venus."

"My word, Charlotte! You know I wouldn't do that. How could I without a preacher?"

"Men have done it before. Please, Harry, promise you will take me with you!"

"I don't see how I can—all right, I'll try! Please don't cry—don't even look as though you were going to! You see, Percy, the little lady loves me, and when she remained here she naturally thought we would slip out to a church somewhere and be married by a preacher. But she discovered too late that these Conquerors don't have either a church or a preacher, so we couldn't get married. She has been just as nice as everything about it, but it was a great disappointment to both of us."

SAID Whitland, "I believe I can do something for you when the right time comes. But to change the subject, Harry. When we start on the trip, what's going to happen to all these poor slaves they have here, and to the rest of the nation?"

"That bothered me for a while, but I have proposed a plan to them that has finally received the approval of the leaders. I think they will start to put it into effect tomorrow. Their first plan was to kill everyone they left in their underground cities, even their own people; for you see, without the leaders, the mass of the Conquerors are helpless. Then when they came back they were going to start a national life with new units. You see, they perpetuate their race like ants or bees, and have only a few females; almost all their active units are simply neuter workers. But I proposed that they give each person a somnifacient* hypodermic, to last at least a year. If the dose is not repeated at the end of a year, the units slowly die a painless death. If desired, they can be given another sleep hypodermic or they can be given an injection that will restore them to activity. So, that's what's going to happen. When we leave the

*Sleep-producing.

Earth, everyone in their crater cities will be asleep, and if we don't come back in a year's time, they will remain asleep—forever."

"That's one reason why I want to go with you men!" declared Miss Carter, emphatically. "It's that little doubt about your coming back. What would life be worth to me if I had to wait year after year, hoping against hope for your return, and knowing year after year the hopelessness of it?"

"Charlotte!" said Sir Harry, and there was a warm, vibrant tone to the word. "Do stop worrying! If I go, you go! Perhaps—why, perhaps we may find a preacher there, who knows! Now, be a dear and go to bed. I want to talk a little to Percy before we turn in."

So the little white-haired lady said goodnight and left the room. The two men watched her till she disappeared.

"She certainly is in love with you, Harry," whispered Whitland.

"I know that. Think of her giving up everything just to stay with me. What's your reaction to all you've seen and heard, Percy?"

"Looks like an adventure to me, a grand adventure!"

"Do you feel any different since you found out that you are practically a Conqueror yourself?"

"No. I don't think there's very much change in me."

"You still feel that you're a human being, one of us, the same kind of being that I am?"

"Yes, I guess so. I have their blood in me and perhaps their intellect, but at the same time I still have all the emotions of an ordinary man. I can harmonize with them intellectually, but when I see their faces, absolutely devoid of feeling, I grow cold all over. It makes me shiver when I think of their plan to kill the human race—when they come back from Venus."

"I see. Then I can tell you something . . . They have promised me that they will not slaughter mankind till they return. They are going to Venus,

Percy, and we are going with them, and it looks as though Charlotte was going, too. But Percy—we are not going to return!"

VI

FOR the next two weeks there was a hum of ceaseless activity all around the giant aircraft. Had it not been for the super-human intelligence of the Specialists, the perfection of their robots and the surplus of human slaves, the necessary changes involved in placing a telescope in the nose of the machine could hardly have been made without actually rebuilding the space-flier.

But the construction was attacked from a dozen points at once, and at the end of two weeks, not only was the telescope in place, but it was arranged mechanically so that it could always be pointed at Venus. Whitland, seated in the specially constructed cabin-observatory, had the satisfaction of looking through the scope at his old familiar friend, and of personally adjusting the spectroscope so that every ray of light that entered the telescope had to pass through the spectroscope, to be instantly broken into the bands of the spectrum. The plate that finally received this broad band of many-colored lights was delicately adjusted to control the mechanism that controlled the telescope. Gyroscopes, set in three planes, were able to control to a fraction of a degree the course of the ship so that it always would be pointing in the direction of the chosen course.

This course had been laboriously plotted by a consultation of the Specialists in Mathematics, Astronomy and Aviation together with Percy Whitland. The shot was to be aimed at a point in the orbit of Venus, where it was expected the planet would be in four weeks, the time allotted for the journey. This point was to be the inferior conjunction with the Earth.

Once the flight was started and the void of space penetrated, it would be

necessary only to see that enough power was developed to maintain a sustained flight through the vacuum.

The new spectrum remained constantly true to type. The scientists studied it from every point of view, and they were all satisfied that the light was proceeding from a new element. Some wanted to call it *Venusore*, but the majority favored naming it *Whitore* in honor of the new Conqueror from Arizona.

No more messages had come from the distant planet—a circumstance that caused some comment. Was the cessation of communication due to the senders' knowledge that the message had been understood, or had they been disappointed at their failure to receive an answer? Either way, they would soon find out the real truth. They had sent a message to Earth, and Earth was replying with a spaceship, loaded with Conquerors!

As the need for the slaves came slowly to an end, they were collected by hundreds and thousands and given their sleep-producing hypodermic. This seemed, to many of the Conquerors, like a useless expenditure of time and effort, but it was the command of their leader, and they had obeyed passively for too many years to disobey now. Skilled experts entered the Queen house and put to sleep the females, who knew no other life than that of propagation. The endless belt in the incubator house was stopped, and the premature infants were taken out and disposed of. The nurseries were visited and all the baby units put to sleep.

The little ones who never had known the embrace of a mother's arms were lulled by a needle. In the laboratories where human experimentation was in progress, the subjects of incomplete scientific investigation were sunk into a narcosis, which would put an end to the mental tortures of their countless humiliations for a year to come. Last of all, on the day before the actual departure, all the Directors and over one

hundred twenty five of the Specialists were assembled at Reelfoot, placed in long rows on the floor of one of the dry caverns, and there stupefied so that, when the rest of the nation returned, they could be awakened to a life of renewed usefulness.

The hum of work had come to an end. The Specialist on Aviation and his assistants again went over every part of the machinery on which the lives of a nation depended. At last they were satisfied. All the stores were in place. Every person had been assigned to his special cabin. Work was allotted to each individual.

Only Miss Carter seemed without a specific task. The Conquerors were not pleased with the idea of taking her with them but, as usual, Sir Harry had been able to carry his side of the argument. It seemed that she darned his stockings, and no one else knew how. He argued that he was not capable of doing his best unless his stockings were darned, and that no one could darn them except Miss Carter, and—

The Directing Intelligence made Sir Harry stop there.

"I never could understand why you wanted this thing, Sir Harry. It is true that I had her brought here, because I had the idea that all Middle Men wanted female things like that for their slaves; but instead of making a slave of this one, you treat her as more than an equal. You don't even live with her, because you haven't found the proper person to say words before. How can you be happy on the trip if that useless unit goes with you?"

"I tried to explain about the stockings."

"Don't go all over that again. Take her with you if you want to, but keep her out of sight."

EVENTUALLY everything was done. The day and hour for the departure was set. At the last moment a careful check-up of the food requirements made it necessary to eliminate twenty-

five more of the Specialists, and these were put to sleep along with their dormant fellows. The actual embarkation was begun. Every passenger was in place. Percy Whitland, the Directing Intelligence, the Specialists in Electricity and Aviation were in the pilot-room back of the telescope. Nothing remained except for the Directing Intelligence to touch the button that would initiate the first rush of power through the stern rocket tubes, causing explosions that would in minutes place the car well out of the earth's atmosphere and, in a few hours, far beyond her fatal attraction of gravitation.

A Conqueror in charge of shutting down the central radio station approached his Specialist with a message. The latter transmitted the message to his superior who in turn sought out the Directing Intelligence, who was holding a long and earnest conversation with Whitland in the control room of the ship.

The Directing Intelligence turned to Whitland.

"The same thing is happening that took place the other evening. Messages are coming through space in every known language. The message is always the same, no matter what the language. It is this:

"Protect against eighty-seven"

"Another element!" exclaimed Whitland. "First comes the instruction to follow eighty-five, and when we are all ready to do that, we receive a warning to protect ourselves against eighty-seven! But that's the other unknown element. How can we protect ourselves against something that we are ignorant of!"

"You think there is a danger?" asked the Director.

"There must be! These friends of ours on Venus must realize that element eighty-seven possesses power deadly to life. They feel that we are ignorant of it, and so have decided to warn us of it."

"That sounds reasonable," agreed the

Directing Intelligence; "You believe that such an element exists in space and yet our scientists remain ignorant of it?"

"Yes, I think I can explain that. The Earth is blanketed with an atmosphere which contains a large percentage of oxygen. There is no doubt that this blanket shields us from the intensity of the cosmic rays. Some of these are changed to heat rays, and some may be totally blocked in their attack on the Earth. The people on Venus may realize our ignorance and may be trying to warn us of a danger that will come as soon as we reach empty space."

"But our Specialists assure me that all this has been taken into consideration."

"I believe they are correct—to the extent of their knowledge. There is no reason to doubt that the walls of our spaceship form ample protection against the rays that we know about. But how about the rays from element number eighty-seven? How can we protect against an unknown danger?"

"There are only two things we can do," said the Directing Intelligence. "Either remain for further study, or touch the button that will send us into space."

SOMEHOW the news spread through the ship. A low buzz of conversation filled every room. Minutes passed and at last an hour, leaving the Directing Intelligence still undecided. Finally, refusing to assume the entire responsibility, he called for a conference of ten of his leading advisors. This number included the three Co-ordinators, Sir Harry and Percy Whitland. The problem was stated to them and they were asked for an opinion. Several of the ten refused to express themselves, replying that their previous experience and acquired knowledge were insufficient to throw any light on the difficulty. Whitland had told all he knew when the message first came. To the surprise of all, including the orator himself, it

was Sir Harry Brunton who decided the matter for the conference, and what he said was not a solution but a challenge.

"We call ourselves the Conquerors!" he almost shouted to the other nine men in the room. "We pride ourselves that we have ruled the Earth for thousands of years with an intellectual rod of iron. For a century we have been planning a voyage in space to find new worlds to conquer. Are you going to hesitate because of a simple message? A few words that mean nothing and may be simply the idea of some idiot? We are all ready to go. If we hesitate now because of a supposed danger we will never go, for as fast as we protect ourselves against one danger another will develop to scare us. Never before in the history of the Universe have men come so near annihilating space as we came today, and are we to hesitate, turn back, frightened at something we do not understand? I am an Englishman—at least, I was one till you adopted me into your great nation—but even the

nation I have renounced never knew when to quit. My vote is for an immediate starting of our journey. Let us deal with each danger as it arises!"

When he was asked later about his reactions at this most perilous moment, Sir Harry smiled. He was not certain, he said, that his appeal would have any effect on these stolid emotionless people. But as an anthropologist he had believed that one's emotions can never completely die. A spark of them always remains that may be quickened into life. As he looked at the Conquerors on the completion of his speech, he did hope and feel that something vague and dormant had been touched ever so slightly and there was the merest stirring inside of these emotionless beings . . .

The Directing Intelligence looked around the council. Then finally with an effort he arose, signaled to the Specialists in Electricity and Machinery and to Percy Whitland to follow him into the

[Turn page]

pilot room. As the entire ship rested at an angle of forty-five degrees all motion was by movable stairs, but at last the room was reached and the signal was passed through the ship to prepare for flight. Each passenger securely fastened himself in a pneumatic chair, built to protect against the violent displacements which might occur during the first few minutes of flight.

Then the leader of the peculiar nation known to us as the Conquerors, touched the button.

With a tremendous roar, the great space flyer rose from the pit and sped like a silvery comet into space. Up, up it went and gradually its nose was turned to the point in space where there was to be a meeting with Venus four weeks hence. The men in the pilot-house saw the needle of the speedometer swing slowly around as the space visitor gradually gained in speed. So far, the automatic control was working perfectly, there being not the slightest change in the spectrum. The propulsive machinery of the ship was also delivering its power in such a smooth flow that there was little throb, little noise, only a continuous power, a mighty propulsive force that shot the silver needle through space that had never known a human visitor.

Hour after hour the four sat in the pilot-house and then, satisfied that all was well, the Directing Intelligence and Whitland left. The astronomer went at once to Sir Harry's cabin.

"That was a fine effort you made, Harry," he said. "For a while I was almost enthusiastic myself over the prospect of a safe trip. Then I saw your idea."

"My idea?"

"Certainly. You've never forgotten that you are an Englishman. Your country comes first. I know why you want this trip started."

"Percy! Are you a mind reader?"

"Not much of one, but enough to follow your mental processes."

"Then suppose we hunt up Miss Car-

ter and have something to eat? They loaded the storage rooms with food tablets, but I have an idea that by this time the little lady has taken six of those tablets and converted them into a palatable meal. She must be worried. She's a splendid little lady, Percy."

"You bet she is! I have something in mind for you two."

The space machine shot on steadily into space. It was flying in an almost complete vacuum, and consequently, meeting no resistance, its speed became greater and greater. Finally the men in the pilot-house had the satisfaction of seeing that they were traveling at a speed of about forty thousand miles an hour that would bring them to Venus on the twenty-seventh day.

Hours passed by, and days, without the slightest change in the program—days devoid of the least unusual experience. The passengers soon adjusted themselves to the deadening routine of the enforced confinement.

It must not be thought that the departure of the space flyer from the Reelfoot Crater had passed unnoticed by the other people on Earth. During the initial hours of its flight the ship had at once been noticed and followed by many astronomers. While numerous explanations were offered, only two men, Mallory Wright and John Ormond, had a clear conception of what it meant to mankind. They knew that the Conquerors were off into space and that Sir Harry was with them, and they were confident that in some way he would hold back these scientific wolves from their desire to destroy the human race.

VII

IT WAS not till the sixth day of the interplanetary trip that trouble started.

Despite its automatic controls, the ship seemed unable to stay on its course. Time and time again, rocket shots on the side of the ship would point its nose toward the point in the heavens that determined the ship's course. But, as

though an invisible hand were drawing it away, the ship seemed to turn about, or as one of the Conquerors expressed it, "the heavens seemed to swing around to the left."

The spectrum from Venus, however, continued to show the presence of element eighty-five.

With the greatest difficulty Whitland and the other Specialists put into operation a second telescope with spectro-scope attached and began to make observations of the light entering the car from other directions than Venus. Window after window was used as an observation point, but in every case a familiar spectrum was obtained. It became harder all the time for the robot pilots to keep the space car in its proper course. Several times it was so far out that it became necessary to fire a lateral rocket for a ten minute period to shoot the car back to its correct course.

After thirty hours of patient observation Whitland found what he was looking for—a new spectrum—and there was no question that it represented the element with atomic number eighty-seven. It was also easy to tell where the light forming the new spectrum came from. A fine spectrum was obtained when the auxiliary telescope was pointed directly at Van Maanen's Star.

There was something in that ray of light from that far distant globe that kept pulling the space car away from its course and into a direct line with the star, which was also in line with the sun. Perhaps, thought Whitland, the threatening star might even be a super-gravity attracter that would pull the car off its course so far that it would become lost in space or plunge into the sun.

The Directing Intelligence was called into consultation. As usual, Whitland acted as spokesman. More and more he seemed to be recognized as the leader of the intelligentsia on the space car.

"The trouble," began Whitland, "is caused by a star called Van Maanen's Star, named in honor of the celebrated

astronomer who discovered it. Yes, we have known of that star for years, and we thought we had its spectrum—but—and here's the rub—the most vital of its rays must have been shut off from our telescopes by its blanket of atmosphere. On Earth we could see it but very faintly. In luminosity we considered it one of the faintest of stars, having but one six-thousandth of the light of the sun. Yet it has a surface temperature of seven thousand degrees; so we have calculated that it must be a trifle smaller than Earth, probably only one-hundredth the diameter of the sun. One million such stars could be packed inside the sun and still there would be some spare room.

"Though it is slightly smaller than the Earth, it weighs one-fifth as much as the sun does. This means the average ton of matter is packed into the space of a cubic inch. We feel that matter is packed rather closely in the Earth, but the atoms in this star that is giving us so much trouble are packed to a density sixty-six thousand times as close.

"Much of this star—not all of it, but evidently most of it—is formed of this new element, number eighty-seven. Without doubt this star has powers which up to the present time have not been suspected. Evidently for millions of years it has radiated a queer sort of energy that exerts a serious effect on our instruments and observations. I do not know what happens to them, but we may know if any of us are alive when our space car gets to Venus or falls into the sun. For the truth is that our course is being diverted to the left, in other words toward the sun. That means that Venus will pass us before we get to her and unless we can check our speed, there will be nothing to prevent a plunge to the sun. No doubt we shall be simply a mass of incandescent metal before we hit!"

"How far away is this dangerous star?" asked one Co-ordinator.

"Probably many, many light-years."

"And Venus—?"

"Is about eight days away."

THE Aviation Specialist had spent many years of his long life in constructing the machinery of this space car. It was his child and he had faith in it. He spoke up now.

"Then we will fight this danger! We will put all the available power to work through the end rocket tubes and at the same time we will start as many of the steering tubes on the right side as necessary. I am not sure how much power we can develop in those side tubes, but at least we can try. I am going up to superintend the machinery personally. Keep me informed as to the progress we are making, for I don't want to use any more energy than is absolutely necessary."

And then began one of the strangest battles that time and space have known. On one side, a mighty star, ceaselessly pulling a little midget toward it; on the other, that little midget, the space car of the Conquerors, fighting minute by minute, hour following hour, to pull back from the threatening doom and hurl itself forward on its true course. Breathlessly the observers looking through the telescopes saw the heavens swing back and forth, as though they were on a pendulum. Long hours passed, yet each of those hours was bringing the voyagers nearer to Venus! At one time the pull of the star was so strong that the nose was pointed directly toward the sun.

The Director of Intelligence phoned down to the Governing Room, "Have you any more power?"

"Yes. I have two side tubes that I have not used."

"Use one of them!"

There was no appreciable change in the course. Eternities passed as the clock ticked off five minutes.

Then, "Use the other tube!"

If this failed, their last hope was gone.

But it was enough! Nothing to spare,

but enough! Slowly the heavens swung about, the nose of the car gradually turning toward the point where the meeting with Venus was expected. A whole day passed. Then, as an experiment, some of the side power was checked. It was found that it was no longer needed. Finally only the four end tubes were in use.

David had again won out in the age-long battle against the giant! The little space car had been able to resist the threatening doom and was once again safely on its path toward the "evening star."

Five days had passed unheeded in the struggle. During those five days the leaders had gone practically without sleep.

On the twenty-third day of the trip nine-tenths of the power was shut off. It would have been disastrous to enter the atmosphere of the "evening star" at the speed which the usual space body makes as it hurtles through infinity. Even with this reduced speed, the end of the day brought them so near their objective that the planet, veiled with mists, loomed to a third the size of the moon as seen from Earth. But now Venus was seen as a silver crescent. The sun's rays, reflected from this opaque mirror, came back with dazzling intensity through the windows of the car. The heat was growing more intense. Even the careful insulation planned by the builders was almost insufficient to prevent suffering. The air in the car seemed vitiated, hardly able to maintain life.

It was a period of the greatest anxiety for the three representatives of the Middle Men. The Conquerors met each new difficulty with their usual unemotional stare, but the Directing Intelligence confided to Percy Whitland that he regarded the next forty-eight hours as fraught with the greatest danger.

Through the telescope they could now see the great mountain peaks of the South Pole looming through the dark

mists. The spokes of the planetary wheel were visible through the swirling vapor.

"My suggestion," said Whitland, at the end of the twenty-fourth day, "is to slide into the atmosphere at the slowest possible rate of speed and at an angle as acute as possible. This will allow us to come close enough to the surface to obtain sharp geographic details

momentous instant was at hand when the car slid into the atmosphere of the unknown planet. Sliding sidewise into it, they were slowly enveloped in swirling mists, which hung around the car with long streamers as though trying to lure it down to an easy death. One mile—and two—and five—they descended, as slowly as possible, until at last they could see a wrinkled landscape some five miles below them—a parched, senile, atrophied land, swept clean as a parlor floor, polished with the dust storms of endless ages, a land on which nothing, not even one-celled organisms, could survive.

PROGRESS NOTE

PERSONS timid about air raids can be reassured by a new bomb window announced by Pittsburgh Glass. Even a close explosion will not blow these new windows into your face. They consist of three layers, the outer of glass, the middle of plastic and the inner of four triangular pieces of glass, like wedges of pie, meeting at the center. The center sheet of plastic comes past the glass and is fastened to the window frame to act as a hinge.

A heavy "shove" of air, which may break the outer glass, will push in the plastic and the pie segments will then open on their hinges like doors. When the pressure is removed, the plastic will go back to shape and the sections of inner glass can then be taped in place until the window can be repaired.

which we must have in order to select a safe landing place. Of course, it would be death to land anywhere on the dark side, and equally disastrous to fall into the desert. The only safe place is in the narrow zone of perpetual twilight, where the maximum amount of water is."

FOR many hours the gravitational pull of Venus had been drawing the space car toward her surface. The time came when all propulsive power was shut off and every rocket brake at the front of the car had to be turned on to counterbalance this pull. At last the

Whitland's calculations made him certain that the part of the planet on the sunward side of them was at that time swinging a hundred miles toward the sun in the peculiar movement known as oscillation. He concluded that the sunward side was the choice position for a landing. Propulsive power was slowly turned on, and the silvery visitor sped over the desert of death like a living thing frantically endeavoring to escape a certain doom. Slowly they saw a gradual change come over the details of the landscape. First came steaming mud flats, where the eternal conflict between heat and water was going on as it had been doing for eons past. In the course of a thousand miles more of travel these mud flats changed to rivers, banked on either side with green fields and later lofty forests. At last, as far as they could see, there were rivers, very wide and swift, and forests, dense and green. Visibility was perfect.

The adventurers were now a mile above the surface. Two problems had been claiming their attention; the selection of a landing place and the composition of the atmosphere. There was little doubt as to the presence of oxygen. If those great masses of green below them were trees such as grew on Earth, then they were constantly throwing off oxygen, and in that oxygen men could live. At the same time, it was felt necessary to determine its percentage, and ac-

cordingly, at five different times specimens of the air were obtained and examined. So nearly like the air of the Earth was it that when the car reached a position one-half mile above the surface, the windows were cautiously opened and the interior of the car ventilated. Instantly the new air restored the vitality of the passengers who had for days breathed chemically purified air. One of the dangers was thus passed, one of the questions solved. It was now definitely established that Venus's atmosphere would support animal life.

But where would the space car land? The answer was at hand. Slowly there loomed into sight a white spot, almost a perfect square, which later on proved to be a marble pavement. While the forests were dense on all four sides, vegetation had failed to obtain a footing on the tessellated floor. It offered a perfect landing field, so perfect that it seemed made for the purpose. Lower and lower swung the car, until at last it dropped like a feather and almost noiselessly came to rest.

The adventurers had reached their objective. That part of the journey, at least, was over! Man had once again achieved the impossible! Space, twenty-six million miles of it, had been conquered. The long journey was at an end.

Carefully the side doors were opened, ladders lowered, and a few of the passengers allowed to leave the space car. Meantime all was activity inside the car. Supplies had to be selected, weapons overhauled and prepared for any eventuality. It was impossible to tell what the life on this world would be like, and still more impossible to foretell whether or not it would be friendly. The Conquerors were determined to be prepared for any eventuality.

For defense they relied mainly on their electric torches. Sir Harry had his two revolvers and an adequate supply of ammunition. But the invaders hoped that there would be no need of fighting the life on Venus. They believed

that the intelligence of the race that had communicated with them would be so high, their type of morals so lofty, that an easy rapport could be established. This voyage was not one of conquest but of exploration. There seemed no reason to doubt the friendliness of the beings that had sent the two messages, one of advice and the other of warning.

OUTSIDE the space car all was calm. The gigantic forests grew on all sides of the platform, the trees rearing their individual heads so high that the marble area almost seemed like the bottom of a deep well of verdure. There was no sound, either of bird, beast or insect.

"This is the stillness of death," whispered Percy Whitland to Charlotte as they stood in the soft glow of the perpetual half-light.

Sir Harry, strolling up to them, overheard this remark. "My word!" he exclaimed. "It may be still, but I don't feel that it's safe. Whenever I was exploring new territory on Earth, I always dreaded a complete stillness. It always preceded an attack from the savages. When the native is happy and care-free, he is chattering and his tumult wakens all the little things in the forest; but when he is silently approaching to attack, his stillness seems to affect all the other forms of life and they keep still with him.

"Look at those trees! Like nothing I've ever seen—more like giant ferns than oak or pine. They could conceal ten thousand creatures and we would be none the wiser until they started to rush us. I've just had a talk with the Directing Intelligence. It's over eighty thousand years since a generation of Conquerors have been forced to fight for their lives. I'm not sure how much vigor they would be able to put into a real fight with the lower forms of life."

"But maybe there aren't any lower forms of life here, Harry," said the little white-haired woman.

"Lower or higher—it makes no difference. They're all dangerous till they're proved otherwise. Percy, have you noticed this floor we are on? It reminds me a little of the floor of a Maya citadel I once saw in Lubaantum. Only there you could see the joints between the stones, though they were fitted so closely together that I couldn't slip a knife-blade in between. But here there seem to be no joints. It appears like one solid mass of cement which has been highly polished by the continuous wind. Later on, when the water came, the forest grew, but the vegetation was never able to obtain a footing here; there are absolutely no crevices."

"What do you suppose it was for?" asked Charlotte.

"Hard to tell. Perhaps a place of worship, or a platform for astronomical observations. They may have used it as a foundation for a fort or even a landing place for aircraft."

The explorers at once realized that in their new surroundings there would be no darkness or night. The soft glow of the sun always remained of the same intensity. Orders were at once issued, setting aside a certain portion of the twenty-four hours for rest and sleep. A daily routine was established and each of the adventurers was assigned definite duties with the exception of the woman.

Miss Carter was completely ignored by the Conquerors. They never noticed her, never spoke to her, and seemed to have completely forgotten her existence. She never complained, but when Sir Harry was forced to spend more than the usual fraction of each day in consultation, she would address him as Sir Harry in a rather formal tone. Whereas she had been one hundred per cent scientist when she first met the tall Englishman, she was now rapidly changing to one hundred per cent woman.

She briefly announced her disgust with the entire situation one day. "If we were in an unknown territory on

Earth," she protested, "we would at once start to explore the surrounding country for at least a hundred miles in all directions. Instead of that; you men or creatures or whatever you are seem to be content to sit timidly here on this marble platform and wonder what lies hidden in that fern forest. I'm sick and tired of it! Nothing but plans and consultations and surmises. I'm going out and start something."

"Now, Charlotte! You're going to do nothing of the kind."

"No? When did you have the right to order me? How dare you order me! I'm on my way, and when you next hear from me I'll have some real news."

"But Charlotte! Do be reasonable! Who's going to darn my stockings for me if you go off like this?"

"I'm tired of darning your old stockings," cried the woman, as she walked rapidly to the edge of the snow-white platform, and disappeared among the shadows of the ferns.

Sir Harry looked anxiously at the place where she had disappeared, and then started to go after her. But he was too late. A shrill cry of fear rose through the forest, a single cry from a woman's throat—then silence. And this time the silence was all the more terrible because of the fact that it had been so completely broken, if only for a second.

The Englishman started to run into the forest, then thought better of it and ran toward the space car to get his revolvers. On the way he almost knocked down Whitland, who was in one of his usual arguments with the Directing Intelligence.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "What's your hurry?"

"Matter enough! Charlotte's gone into the woods and something has caught her! Didn't you hear her scream?" and he dashed up the ladder into the space car. A few minutes later he dashed out again, buckling his ammunition belt around him as he ran.

The Directing Intelligence turned his

body slowly, so he could follow the course of the running giant. He commented on the incident to Whitland. "I like that Middle Man in a way. He has been of some help to us, but I've never been able to understand his reactions to that thing he insisted on bringing with him on this trip. He evidently has no real need of her; yet he insists on having her around all the time. Now he's acting most peculiarly. Why not let her go?"

VIII

CHARLOTTE had gone into the fern woods with no thought of danger. She was angry. She kept on because she did not want to acknowledge that she was wrong or afraid. Hearing a noise, she turned, felt something fasten on her throat, screamed once, then lost consciousness.

When she came to, she had a feeling that during her period of stupor she had been carried many long miles into the depths of the forest. She had no way of telling how far she was from the space car, but she feared that she would never return. Glancing around at the strange living things that had captured her, she was more convinced than ever that she was hopelessly lost. She would have taken her chances with savages, or might even have had some hope of escape if she had been captured by animals, but these weird things that stood in irregular rows around her were neither man nor animal, were like no life she had ever seen before. In some ways they all looked a little like the men and women whom she had known on the earth, but they were different. Here a limb was so enlarged that the rest of the body seemed pitifully small; there a feature was entirely eliminated. Some were short and others drawn out to the thinness of a pole. Faces were changed, torsos distorted, duplicated, and even tripled. There were beings with duplicate faces, and others with no face at all, but simply a single eye star-

ing out of the chest, lidless and motionless. On one side stood a body on six legs, while near it stood a body with no legs, rolling as it moved over the ground with a certain clever agility. A thing that was certainly feminine held something to her breast with arms scaled like the trunk of a serpent. Close to Charlotte was a body beautifully formed with the head of a pig and only one leg.

Charlotte shuddered and shut her eyes. She shrank screaming as something touched her shoulder and passed over her face. "Venus?" she asked herself. "If these are the inhabitants, what a strange name for them! The Venusians should be like Venus, the goddess of beauty. Here nothing is beautiful. It's like a page from Dante's *Inferno*, the hallucinations of a man in delirium tremens. It makes me think of the description of the people Lucian saw in his fanciful trip to the Moon, Lucian who wrote about such things as neither are nor can ever be.'

"I am asleep!" she cried. "When I awake, I shall be back in my cabin—darning stockings—and Harry will drop in and tell me about the last consultation he has had with the Conquerors and Percy. I will tell him about my dream and he will laugh at me and say, 'My word! How odd!' and we shall both laugh because it was just a dream." Then she opened her eyes and screamed again, for a thing that was a man above and a long snake below had come up to her and was putting out a hand to touch her.

Once again merciful nature forced her tortured mind to rest in unconsciousness, and this time when she awoke she was alone. Someone had prepared a bed of fern leaves for her to rest on, and had placed near her some fruit and a metal vessel filled with water. As she ate her meal, quiet and cautious observation showed her that she was being watched by a hundred pairs of eyes.

The things could evidently move silently through the fern wood. It mat-

tered not whether they had no legs, one leg or many legs; they were noiseless if they wanted to be. But, even as she was thinking how quiet everything was, they all started to laugh, and that laughter was like the ghoulish shrieks of maniacs hurled over the mouth of hell. Far away the echoes resounded, making all the more terrible the inhuman shrieks of pandemonium at play.

Charlotte did not have to wait long for an explanation of this laughter. The things drove into that circle something that had once been shaped like a woman of the earth. But in every way possible that body had been cut and bruised and broken, without killing the individual or destroying her power of suffering. Not an inch of her body had not been tortured during her captivity. Now they drove her into the ring for the final act of the drama; and because of the anticipated pleasure they laughed, emitting shrill shrieks of explosive respiration that sounded more like the cries of hyenas. They closed in on the thing that had once been akin to humanity; closed in on her, and over her, till Charlotte could see nothing but a struggling mass of abominations; and when they slowly tore themselves apart and once more stood separate, the woman was gone, but blood dripped from the mouths of all who had been fortunate enough to partake in the feast.

Then, as though excited by their blood lust, they started to narrow the circle around the earth-woman. She knew what was going to come and she sent a prayer through the air. She knew the hopelessness of it, yet she sent it—to the only man she had ever loved enough to darn his stockings.

Just at the last second, when she knew there was no hope, a strange thing happened. The abominations started to drop! They dropped and died, moaning weirdly, perhaps as unable to understand the reason for their death as they had been unable to understand the why of their living.

And from that circle of death, an

oddly-shaped creature stepped forth and spoke to the woman in perfect English.

FOR the first time in his life, Sir Harry Brunton had undertaken an exploration into the unknown without proper preparation. But when he saw Charlotte striking off alone into the unknown without a companion, and realized that he was partly responsible for her action, he was beside himself with fear and anxiety. He regretted the moments he had lost in going back for his revolvers; yet in spite of his panic and haste, he knew that he ought not to go into the gloom without them. With the exception of these he took absolutely nothing with him.

He dashed into the depths of the forest. Although the sunlight shone mellow and warm on the marble landing-field, it was hardly sufficient to penetrate the thick, interlaced fronds of the gigantic ferns. More than once he

[Turn page]

stumbled over a root in the semi-darkness and came near being thrown to the ground. In some places the ground was smooth and hard; in others, the leaves of centuries formed a soft blanket into which he sank up to his knees. There was no noise except the constant rustling of the wind-swept fronds a hundred feet above the ground. He pushed on and on, pausing now and then to call the name of the woman whom he had loved and lost. Then he struggled on again. Finally he sat down breathless to rest. By force of habit he pulled out his watch and saw that he had forgotten to wind it. Then he laughed as he realized the meaninglessness of the old measure of time on this new world. The position of the sun was of no help either, for it shone with the same intensity continually. And then Sir Harry realized that it would be hard for him to orient himself by the compass and perhaps might be impossible for him to find his way back to the space car.

"My word!" he exclaimed to himself. "That's what love does to a man!"

He decided to wind his watch, start it at 6 P.M. and try to secure some sleep. He intended only to rest an hour. When he awoke it was six o'clock again, either twelve or twenty-four hours later. Cursing, he realized that those lost hours might have saved Charlotte if they had been rightly used. Drawing his belt tighter, he started out on his apparently hopeless search.

He pushed on at an uneven pace for some hours. Then, suddenly, he heard her calling him—not in a real voice, but vibrations impinging on his higher psychic centers. She was in trouble, in danger! Death faced her, and he could not help! He could not even be with her so they could die together. Frantically, he started to run—calling to her, telling her he was on his way, that he was near her; he ran till his breath came in great gasps, ran till fatigue forced him to walk, walked till he stumbled and fell into a great oblivion.

When consciousness returned, he saw that he was no longer in the forest. Above him sunlight fell through thick glass windows. Around him were tables and chairs, and the walls were lined with shelves. He felt around him with his hands and found that he was on a thick rug. Hastily he sat up and looked around the room. Marbled walls curved upward to join a ceiling composed of alternate segments of marble and glass. It made him feel as though he were at the bottom of a hemisphere or of a large inverted cup. The air was warm and pleasantly perfumed. On all sides the strange furnishings pointed to refinement and culture.

Then, as he continued to make a rapid inventory of the room and its contents, he saw something seated at a table. It required some moments of concerted observation to satisfy the Englishman that it was alive, and far more time than that to figure out just what form of life it was. Sir Harry had been accustomed to associating the highest type of life with the human body. His contact with the Conquerors had taught him that this human body could be changed in a thousand details, and yet, even as in the case of the Conquerors, be but an advanced type of the human race.

BUT this thing that rested on the chair seemed to be simply a sack, a sausage, covered with a thick skin. There was no head, there were no extremities. Thirty inches long, twelve inches wide, it was devoid of curves except for a gentle rounding of the top. At last Sir Harry satisfied himself that the entity exhibited a slight movement, a regular pulsation sufficient to cause an alternate enlargement and shrinking of the entire body. Slowly rising to his feet, the Englishman walked cautiously over to the chair. As he walked, a sphere budded on the top of the strange being; it swelled rapidly and in the process developed something that looked like an eye. At the same

time another bud on the right side grew into a pseudopodium* that might be considered to resemble an arm. Two more extremities burst forth at its base, and it jumped off the chair and spoke.

"Do you feel refreshed from your sleep?"

The words were English, the pronunciation almost perfect and the words rather softly intoned. The voice came from a slit in the thing that might be considered a head. Sir Harry looked at it in astonishment, for the moment too dazed to reply.

"My word, yes!" he said finally. "Have I been here long? Have you any idea how I came here?"

"My Master will tell you everything. I was to stay here till you awoke. Perhaps I will be your servant. All of the Old Ones have servants. You look like an Old One. It was the resemblance that made the Master dare to bring you here."

The thing moved out of the room, and as it did, the new arm shriveled until it re-entered the body, leaving no sign that it had ever been there.

Sir Harry wiped the sweat from his brow.

"New forms of life! My word! I should say so. That thing can move and talk and act like a faithful watchdog, and yet where does it fit into the scheme of zoology? Man, animal, or homunculus?*** First it is a sausage, then a headed cyclops without legs or arms, then an arm or two legs sprout, and at last no arm remains. That is *unusual* to say the least. I wonder what Charlotte would make of it?"

The thought of Charlotte recalled his recent hours of torture. He must go on. Now that he was rested he must again enter the fern forest to find his woman if alive, and bury her if dead. He must thank the person who had befriended him and then leave.

*A temporary projection of the protoplasmic substance of a cell, used for feeding and moving about.

**A very undersized man or manikin.

If Sir Harry had been forced to guess the shape and nature of this Master for whom he waited, he would have failed, for the sausage thing had prepared him to see something strange and unusual, something weirdly fantastic. To his surprise, however, he saw just another man!

But what a man! A Greek god come to life—a marble statue, carved by Phidias, filled with life, ensouled by a human being. Here was a beautiful body, with long, well proportioned limbs, a head lovely in its shapeliness, covered by a mass of tightly curled yellow hair. Blue eyes twinkled a friendly welcome. He wore golden sandals, purple shorts and a white sleeveless vest with a scarlet monogram worked on it. This was the Master! Sir Harry nearly lost his poise. The man was large, quite as large as the Englishman, but far more perfectly built in every way.

"Do you feel better now that you are awake?" the stranger asked, in English. "I presume you prefer to talk in your mother tongue, or would you prefer French, Latin, or Carthaginian?"

"I slept soundly," the Englishman almost stammered. "It was good of you to bring me here. I was all in, completely done for. You saved my life."

"Yes, it was fortunate that my servant found you. It was strange to find you there, and to observe that you resembled us so closely."

The Englishman smiled. "I guess we must look alike. Good of you to care for me, but if you could give me a bite to eat, I'll thank you and go on."

"Better stay. I have a lot of things to talk about."

"That is just why I must go on. It's just because I talked so much that I am here this minute, and my fiancée may be in need of help or even beyond help—dead. I talked too much and what she wanted was a little more action."

"Was your fiancée a 'white-haired woman?'"

"Yes."

"Well, you can become easy again. One of my race has sent out the message that he has her safe in his house. I don't know the details, but there is no doubt about her description."

Sir Harry walked toward the Venusian, almost shouting. "Wonderful! By Jove! When can we go and get her? Where is she?"

THE Venusian smiled at his eagerness. "I'm afraid you will have to be a little patient. We cannot do things quickly here. In fact, the effort to keep a race alive on this planet is a great deal more of a task than it may be on your Earth. Our race is nearly exhausted by the effort. It is many, many years since a child has been born in one of our families, and were it not for our servants, we should have been absolutely powerless to prevent utter destruction by our enemies. As it is, we are very few in number—not more than fifty at the most."

Sir Harry was perplexed at this sudden revelation. He showed it in his reply.

"Do you mean that there are only fifty persons living on this planet?"

"I said fifty of *our* race. There are millions of other forms of life, and there are our servants, and some races that live on the dark side of the planet, about which we know little. For thousands of years we have had to battle for our existence, and even now our enemies are occasionally able to capture one or two of us. A very dear friend had his mate taken away some years ago. We found out only yesterday that they had killed her in the usual way. I think that it's going to cause my friend to ease out of this life himself. To explain that, I might say that none of us ever dies a natural death, but now and then something happens that makes life undesirable, and when that happens we feel that there is no disgrace in suicide."

"Only fifty living?" repeated Sir Harry in astonishment.

"Yes. Probably only forty-eight now. Twenty-four men and twenty-four women in twenty-four homes like this. Some of us live great distances apart. The Old One who is now protecting your earth woman is my nearest neighbor, yet the dangers are so great that a journey can not be made without many time-consuming preparations. You must be patient and happy, knowing that she is safe. Suppose we have something to eat? Our food is no doubt different from yours, but it is very wholesome. Will you accompany me to the lower floor? My mate is there, waiting to assist in your entertainment."

"All this is just too fine of you," remarked the surprised Englishman. "May I compliment you on your excellent use of English and ask how you became so proficient?"

"That is easily explained. We have been in communication with your Earth for a long time. Many years ago we learned how to pick out from the endless roar of the music of the universe the sounds coming from Earth. At first these came as a confused conglomeration of vibrations, but gradually we acquired the art of selection. For hours and days at a time we would study one of the languages, Latin or Celt or Chinese. Many of the so-called dead languages of Earth are preserved only on Venus, as you call our world."

"There is another very pertinent question I should like to ask," said Sir Harry. "Your race sent messages to us by radio, in which you made use of many of the old languages. Didn't you know that those dead languages were no longer being used?"

"Not exactly. Our receiving apparatus has not been working very well. All that we were sure of was that for over one hundred years a race of Earth men had been planning to make an interplanetary trip. Their language was always different in some ways from all the other languages used on the Earth and, at times, it did not seem to be a spoken language at all. We believed

finally that the undertaking would soon be started. We wanted to help you to come here; for, frankly, we needed you. We therefore sent the first message. Even then we were not sure what language you used; so we sent it in all the Earth languages we had learned. Is that plain?"

"Oh, quite! At least, it all sounds interesting. What was that Number Eighty-five you mentioned?"

"That's the metal that forms the core of our planet. Many centuries ago, when we were much stronger than we are now, we prepared for just such an emergency. A large area of our mud desert was completely undermined with high explosives. Our idea was to blow the crust off a crater twenty miles in diameter, exposing the radio-active metal. It was our belief that the rays would be powerful enough to break their way through the fog that covers most of the sunny half of our world. After waiting many centuries, your planet finally developed an intelligence sufficiently great to plan an interplanetary flight. Then we felt that the time had come, so we blew off the mud crust. Our plan was very successful.

"We hoped that you would be like us. But—our disappointment was so keen when we saw your shipload that so far we have made no effort to form a liaison with your people. The small men with the big heads did not please us at all. For this reason we decided to let them be the ones to make the first advances. Who are they, and just what part do they play in your Earth biology?"

BEFORE Sir Harry could answer a woman entered the room. Only slightly smaller than the man, she was a splendid figure of health, vitality and beauty. There was a serene calm in her face that spoke wonders for her poise and personality.

"You men have been talking so long that I just had to come up and meet the stranger. You must excuse the Master," she explained to Sir Harry. "He is so

thrilled that one of the space travelers is like the Old Ones that he just cannot stop talking to you. Won't you come down stairs and have a meal with us?"

They went down a marble stairway, cut with exquisite precision in the rocky sides of the house. On the dining floor a table was set with some couches near it. Several of the peculiar servants were walking around giving the final touch to the preparations. Against the wall leaned a few more servants, but they were in the stage of collapse. To the Englishman they looked like nothing so much as sacks of flour, held in peculiar smooth bags.

The Master saw the look of surprise with which his guest inspected these servants.

"Are they new to you?" he asked gravely.

"New? My word, yes! I expected to be surprised during this trip, but not like that. I wish Percy were here," sighed Sir Harry. "He is so deeply interested in your planet that he would appreciate all of this. I am only an anthropologist."

"You mean that you study the races of mankind?"

"That's about it."

"Then," interposed the woman, "you certainly ought to be interested in the life on our planet. Some forms may be new to you."

"No doubt they are. But, so far, I have seen none of them. In fact, everything was so quiet around the landing field that we feared Venus had no animal life."

"I don't know why you were not wiped out," commented the Master. "You see, even *we* were afraid of the little men in your car. They talked a great deal about killing, and we surmised that they would not hesitate to kill us if they could. But that was not why the Monstrosities kept quiet. I think they were just trying to overcome their fear of something new. There have been many herds of them gathering. Evidently the news has spread

among them.

"When they overcome that fear, they will attack your car. We feel a certain responsibility about your people, for in a way we induced you to come by indicating that there was life on Venus. At the same time there is something about those little men that makes us wonder if the universe would not be better off without them. They seem to be devoid of emotion. Do they never laugh?"

IX

ONE of the servants ran into the room and whispered a hurried message to the Master. The words were spoken in a peculiar soft language that reminded the Englishman of the sound of a babbling brook. At once the man gave a sharp monosyllabic command in the same language. Immediately, the shapeless sacks leaning against the wall began to bud, throwing out pseudopodia which quickly developed into heads, arms and legs. In five minutes a dozen of the rapidly developed servants stood ready to meet any demands made on them.

The Master slowly rose from his couch, and gave commands with a sharp precision. Servant after servant ran out of the room in obedience to his orders. Again the two men and the woman were alone. The Master smiled at the interest of his visitor.

"It is nothing," he said. "At least, it is nothing to be afraid of. The Monstrosities are making one of their attacks on the house. They have done it a hundred times before and no doubt will do it as often in the future if they continue to live on; and as there are many hundreds of thousands of them, they are not likely to die out. Suppose we go up and look at them through the roof?"

He led the way up the winding stairs. Sir Harry allowed the woman to precede him. Once in the upper room he was surprised to note that it was almost dark.

"I thought the sun never ceased to shine here?" he commented.

"It's shining just as it always does," was the woman's reply. "But there are so many of the Monsters on the roof that they almost cover the glass windows. When they attack, they have only one idea—to go through the glass. They can see through and do not understand why they cannot get through. So they crowd over the window section of the roof."

"When our race first began to appreciate the fact that this menace would exist in the years to come, they started to build these houses. There were just as many houses built as there were couples to fill them. We are long lived, but occasionally accidents happen and the result has been that many of the houses are tenantless. The Monsters at once occupy the empty house. Of course, they have no concerted plan. Yet whenever they came upon one of these houses, they make a determined effort to break in. Then we simply let them crowd each other on the roof till they become tired and run off to some other amusement."

"Why don't you fight them?"

"We do, occasionally; but it seems so useless. They propagate faster than we can kill them, and so far we have never dared attack them in their breeding grounds. Someday, perhaps, we may do that. Would you like to examine some of them?"

"My word! You mean alive?"

"No, dead. I have arranged for my servants to attack at the proper time. They will be able to kill a hundred or more before the rest become frightened and run. I guess they have started now. There is more light from the windows. Will you come outside with me?"

He pressed a small brass knob, and a hidden door swung backward into the massive wall. The two men stepped through the doorway to a stone pavement. Around the dome there was silence, the stillness of death, while from the nearby forest came the whining of

frightened animals. Many of the servants were occupied in dragging dead bodies to a distance from the house and laying them in rows.

As Sir Harry looked at the things they were dragging, he swayed, wiped his eyes with his hands, and then looked again.

"Am I really seeing those things?" he asked anxiously.

"Are they new biologic forms to you? Haven't you anything on Earth like that?"

The Englishman pulled himself together, and smiled.

"Only in the deliriums of the drunkard or the dope fiend. This—this is all new to me. Should you mind my walking over and taking a closer look?"

"Not at all. The danger is over. I will go with you. Our method of killing is bloodless. We throw a ray into the beings and break up their life cells. They have a million little explosions inside them that tear their cells to pieces, while doing little damage to their bones and skin. So you'll get a very good idea of what they look like."

THE Englishman walked up and down the rows of dead bodies. Now and then he stood still in front of one that was of special interest. At last he could keep quiet no longer.

Whispering, as though afraid that the dead would hear, he said, "Are they all like this?"

"No, indeed. There are almost as many types as there are individuals. Each new mating produces new types. And there were thousands of variations to start with."

"One can't help feeling," Sir Harry said, slowly, "that every one of them has something about him that suggests they were once like—well, like the three of us."

"Certainly! You are right. They are what you call human beings. At least their ancestors were."

"What—what happened to them?"

"That's a long story. Are you through

looking at them?"

"Yes, I guess so. I have studied races of men all my life, but I never saw or heard of anything like these things. I wish that I had a camera. Take, for instance, that thing over there without a head, or that other one with at least a dozen heads, and that one with a tail where the feet should be, and the two-headed thing and—let's go back in and shut the door! I feel nauseated."

"All right. If you are ready, we will go in. I will have these bodies destroyed. We burn them, and then, when it rains, everything is washed nice and clean again."

They were back in the domed room. Once again the sunlight was streaming in through the glass windows. The Englishman sank back on a cushioned chair and covered his face with his hands.

At last he shook himself and asked, "Are you *sure* that their ancestors were once men? Real men and women, like you and your mate? Because if men can change like that on Venus, they can change that way on Earth. *If I thought that a fate like that could ever befall my people, I would stop fighting and let the Conquerors kill them now.*

"How did it all happen?" he asked the Master, finally.

"It's a long story," began the Venusian. "In the first place, it will be necessary to go back to the early history of our race on this planet. Gradually our life span lengthened. I believe that the temperature had something to do with it. It was a common thing for our individuals to live for five thousand years. Naturally there was the problem of overcrowding. For years this problem gave us concern. There were endless discussions. At last it was decided that the only way to save the race was to produce artificial sterility in the great majority of our females.

"The scientists of that time thought they could use radium to produce sterility. They had data which they felt furnished sufficient proof of that. A careful testing of all the women was

made, and a hundred of the most beautiful with their men were set apart to develop future generations of the race. All the rest, men and women, were treated with radium.

“**F**ORTUNATELY for our race the two hundred exempt individuals were carefully segregated on this side of Venus. It was at that time that these dome houses were built. All the rest of our race were placed by themselves in wonderful cities. Their pleasures were provided for. Free from the cares of life, they were supposed to enjoy life indefinitely.

“We did not know at that time that radium has a two-fold action. Certain doses sterilize, while other doses simply change the chromosomes.* In the case of these women and men, the chromosomes were altered. When it was too late, it was discovered that instead of being sterile they were giving birth to monstrosities. We believe that the first generation of children were not so seriously deformed as the generations since, but their deformity was sufficient to seriously affect the mental condition of the mothers.

“Think of it! For thousands of years our children had been born beautifully perfect. Now an entire generation of deformed but healthy children were produced. Maternal love, which had hitherto been pre-eminent above all other emotions, was now mixed with horror at the sight of these unfortunate little ones. The older generation became mentally unbalanced through their misfortune. You understand that I am telling you something that no sane person witnessed, and which we can only imagine? None of the two hundred segregated ones knew about it till it was too late.

“The two hundred who had been placed apart from the rest of the race had promised not to interfere in any way with the thousands who had been

placed in the Cities of Pleasure. So we never knew anything about it till it was too late! They kept on producing monsters. In their disordered mentality they permitted their children to mate, and with each intermating of monsters the deformities grew greater. They became worse than animals, and they now roam by millions through the livable portions of our planet, while we, the Masters, with our women, live in our domed houses and wage a slowly but surely losing battle against the monstrosities of our own production. I am sure that nothing so stupid could happen on your Earth.”

“I am not so sure of that!” replied the Englishman. “By Jove! We are doing the same thing you did. We let our insane and feeble-minded and epileptics marry and produce weaklings and degenerates and cripples, and only here and there exists a man brave enough to advocate the sterilization of the unfit. Our hospitals and charitable institutions are crowded with mental monsters that are perhaps as horrible as those outside. Perhaps we are heading toward the same end.”

“At least you are doing it openly, while we were in ignorance of what was happening till the first wave of these products of our misguided scientific zeal struck us. In a week over a hundred of us were killed and eaten, for these animals had reverted to cannibalism. Ever since then the remainder of our race have been engaged in a battle for existence. This tragedy all happened in the days of my great-grandfather. Today, according to my latest knowledge, there are just forty-eight adults left and at the most four children. Intermating produced a real sterility. The end must come soon, unless we can devise some means of destroying the race we helped to propagate. Even then, free from danger and able to go freely through the fern forests, we feel that our existence will soon end, because there seems to be nothing further to live for.”

*The particles in cells of living things that determine the species and sex of an embryo.

X

THE Englishman paced the floor in agitation. Finally he shot over his shoulder, "You might be interested in knowing that they are fooling with radium on Earth."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I read a lot about it some years ago. Scientists did some work on insects and produced what they called insect monstrosities, with unusual numbers of legs and wings, two heads, and duplex bodies. Why, they are doing with insects experimentally just what you did unintentionally with your fellow men and women. By Jove! It must be a rotten, bally mess you people are in."

"It is all of that!" interrupted the woman. "And that was one reason why we were so anxious to have you Earthmen visit us. We thought you might be able to help save us, since we are so much alike. That is why, when you finally came, we were so terribly disappointed to see those little men, and only one woman. We could not determine just where you and the woman came into the scheme of their social life. We felt that the woman was akin to us. And you are like our men, only you look old; and though many of our men are over five thousand of your years old, none of them shows the signs of age as you do. Perhaps you are much older?"

"No. I am not sixty years old yet."

"That is remarkable. And the woman?"

"She is under fifty."

"And white-haired? It is hard to understand—as hard as are the little men in command of the space car. But perhaps you want to stop talking and rest a while?"

"I want one thing," said Sir Harry, in a most emphatic manner. "Is there any way you can send me to the place where Miss Carter is?"

The Master pondered. "Perhaps it might be better to have her come here. Of course, there is danger either way,

but I suppose you will want to go back to your companions in the space car."

The woman crossed the room and entered into a lengthy whispered conversation with the Master. He at first shook his head, then nodded assent.

"My mate suggests that you and your woman be given the dome house of the map who has just died. I understand that it is in perfect condition and that there are over a dozen servants. You and the woman could live there and form a part of our social order. We would welcome you and do all we could to make your life a happy one."

"That is fine! I'll do it!"

"If you really want to go to the white-haired woman, I will send you," announced the Master, "but I warn you—it will be dangerous."

MEANWHILE life in the space car was going on as usual. The Conquerors had witnessed the departure of Miss Carter and Sir Harry with their accustomed emotionless calm. The exit of these two members of the interplanetary expedition made little difference to them. The value of Sir Harry was completely overshadowed by the acquisition of Percy Whitland. They were sure that the astronomer was one of their race, while Sir Harry never was and never could be anything but a member of a race greatly inferior. He had gone into the silent fern forest after that enigma of all ages, a female. Of what use to worry about their absence or to send out a searching party!

Whitland did not comment on the absence of his friends. He realized the uselessness of doing anything to help them. Alone, he could not go into the eternal shades of the fern forest.

It was on the third day of the absence of his friends that the Conquerors caught their first specimen of Venusian animal life. They first saw it walking on the edge of the landing platform in the shade of the outer row of fern trees. They were able to watch it for some minutes without its seeing them, and

when at length it did see them it did not exhibit any fear. A dozen of the Conquerors walked out to the thing and stood around it, and still it showed no fear. It was only when they seized it and started to drag it toward the ship that it began to howl and fight. One of the dwarfs rendered it unconscious with an electric shock, and after that it was a simple matter to carry it to the space car and tie it securely with ropes.

The Conquerors had always been first-rate anthropologists. Although they had destroyed entire nations they had at the same time preserved many remnants of the eradicated peoples in their colonies on the Earth. They felt that this living thing was in some way human. Yet it was different from any human being they had ever seen. It had no language, only inarticulate grunts and screams. One ear, greatly enlarged, occupied the usual position on the left side of an abnormally small head, while the other side was perfectly smooth. Six arms flourished instead of two, and the trunk ended in what looked like a single leg but was actually two legs fused. If this was a sample of life on Venus, it certainly was different from anything they had expected to find.

They examined it and studied it for a whole day. Their Specialists took blood specimens and made X-ray pictures. They discovered two sets of bones in the lower single terminal of the body. When they had found out all they could about the thing alive, they proposed to kill it and dissect the body. Their Specialists in Anatomy and Pathology said rather coolly that the study could only be completed by an autopsy.

The decision galvanized Percy Whitland into action. Deformed, and with an inferiority complex resulting from that deformity, he had the greatest sympathy for the oppressed and weak. He saw that this thing, this representative of life in Venus, was only an animal, perhaps lower than an animal; yet there was something in the way the eyes looked at him that appealed.

The monster was horrible enough, to be sure. Every time Whitland looked at that combination of horrors grouped together to make a single body, he became nauseated. But when he looked at those eyes, he felt a great pity surging over him. There was something in its eyes that made him feel that long centuries ago the ancestors of this thing had been the possessors of souls. When he heard the final decision to kill the captive, he became furious. He at once sought out the Directing Intelligence.

"I would advise you to let it go!" he cried. "Having liberated it, you leave matters as they were. If you kill it, you may bring down on your head thousands of its race, bent on revenge."

"That is really what I want to do," announced the leader of the Conquerors. "If we liberate this one, he will disappear and we may have to hunt for days to find another, but if we kill this one out in the open where they can see us, they may lose their caution and attack us. That is just what I want. If we can kill several hundred of them, they will be so afraid of us that we shall be able to travel anywhere in safety. We have found that the only way to be safe with lower races is to make them fear us."

"But suppose they don't know what fear is?"

"So much the worse for them and so much the easier will it be for us to destroy them."

"But why do you want to destroy them?"

"That is our plan of action. We have done it for eighty thousand years and we shall keep on doing it. We may take some of them with us when we return to the Earth. But why let the rest live? Of what use are they?"

"Frankly, I don't know. But I have always opposed useless and unnecessary bloodshed."

THE Directing Intelligence looked at him calmly, as though trying to read his mind.

"At times, Whitland, you seem to re-

act more like a Middle Man than a Conqueror. Had I not personally seen that you had ichor in your veins instead of blood, I would feel that you were simply a misshaped Middle Man instead of a member of our advanced race."

"You can consider me any way you wish," replied the astronomer coolly. "You asked me to join you, and I came because of that invitation. It was you that suggested that I was more of a Conquerer than a Middle Man. I have been of help to you in making this adventure a possibility and I think you should listen to me. Do not kill this unfortunate animal you have captured. Let it go. That is my advice!"

"But all of the Specialists are in favor of dissecting it."

"Then all of you are wrong."

"We are superior to any form of life that ever existed. How can we be wrong? I tell you again that we are going to exterminate this form of life, and perhaps the killing of the specimen will act as a bait to draw the rest of the herd to us."

"And when you go back to Earth you will go on with your program to kill all the Middle Men?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"But why should you? There seems to be room enough for both of the races."

Again the Directing Intelligence looked with unwinking, staring eyes at the astronomer.

"But we have always destroyed civilizations when we felt they had become useless," he at last replied, as though he were trying to explain to a child something that was very simple.

For the first time Percy Whitland was brought face to face with the full significance of what it meant for an entire community to be without emotion. Up to this time the Arizona astronomer had respected the Conqueror's intellectual attainments; now he was forced to acknowledge that intellect without emotion was like a bird with only a single wing—a positive

without a negative force to balance it—leaving personalities that were sterile and barren so far as usefulness to humanity was concerned.

He was one against many. Failing in his argument with the Directing Intelligence of the Conquerors, he felt the uselessness of renewing it with the Coordinators or any of the Specialists. There was only one thing to do.

It was the decision of a brave man, ending in the conduct of a fool. Because of his sympathy with a captive that was nothing but a degenerate Monster, the greatest astronomer of his age walked slowly into the fern forest to a certain death.

XI

WHEN Charlotte Carter saw the Monsters die like so many flies sprayed by lethal vapors, she gave one look at the thing responsible for her rescue and fainted. She was by no means a woman of the Victorian age, one of those hoop-skirted damsels who lost consciousness at the least provocation. She had withstood the dangers of the year in Reelfoot Crater and the trip to Venus without once betraying that she was frightened. But to be saved by such a strange creature was just one straw too much for the camel's back.

She regained consciousness to find herself in a large domed room, the exact counterpart of the one in which Sir Harry had awakened. While the furniture and draperies were of strange materials, there was a harmony, a symphony of shape and color that was extremely restful to her tired senses. A tall, beautiful, almost god-like man was resting near a table that had on it an exquisitely shaped glass vase. A stillness filled the room that was greater than any quiet she had ever known.

"I am very glad my servant found you," the man said quietly. "We were hunting for my mate. We came just too late to help her, but fortunately in time to save you from a like fate. Are you

the woman who came with the Earth people in the space car?"

"Yes, I'm Miss Charlotte Carter."

"It was very foolish of you to venture into the fern forest alone. We never go except in force. Of course, our servants can kill many of them, but at times, when they come by thousands, even our servants are overwhelmed. This time there were only a few of them, and when I saw that you were in danger I ordered my servants to rescue you. We brought you to the house of one of my race. My own home is too distant."

"And the peculiar-looking thing that saved me was your servant?"

"Yes. There he is over against the wall."

Miss Carter looked over but saw only a sack-like body leaning against the side of the room.

"But this thing that killed those horrid animals had arms and legs and a head!"

"I know. He was active then. Now he is in the resting stage."

"What is it? I must confess that I never saw anything like it."

"That is because you are from the Earth. Many years ago we had a terrible catastrophe, during which our race nearly became extinct. We were left so few in number that we decided to try to supply the lack of man power by mechanical servants of some kind. It occurred to us to try the intensive development of some of our plants. The more we studied them, the more we became convinced that the main difference between animals and plants was the presence of a higher mental consciousness on the part of the former—what is called in your language, the soul. By selection and intensive breeding, we developed a species of plant with a highly organized nervous system.

"To make a long story short, we had at last a plant which, dormant, measured nearly three feet in height, a foot in thickness and a foot and a half in width. By a system of pneumatic sacks, this dormant plant could throw out

pseudopodia which we gradually developed to look very much like the human extremities.

"Of course, all this took time. There were discouragements—many of them—especially when we tried to secure co-ordination between the mouth slit, the air sack in the upper body, and the nervous system. But at last we had a plant that could talk and that could even learn a vocabulary in other languages.

"But here come the Master of the house and his mate. They will want to greet you."

Charlotte arose to meet the newcomers. She was astonished by their perfection of body and the clear calm of their faces. She shyly expressed this wonderment.

"How kind of you to offer me the shelter of your home! We were so anxious to meet some of you, but when you did not come near us, we had to come to you. We had no idea you were so lovely and lived in such perfect houses."

THE woman smiled. "You are lovely yourself. Your name? Miss Carter? What does the Miss mean?"

"I am not married,"—then seeing that the word was not understood, she hurriedly added, "I mean that I have no man."

"You poor thing," cooed the woman. "At your age and no man? Why, all of the woman of my race are mated. Have you no one?"

"Yes, there is a man, but we have never found a minister. Sir Harry wants to marry me and we are both foolish over each other, but we can't marry without a minister."

"Is this Sir Harry the big man of your party?" asked the woman's mate.

"Yes. He is as big as your men, but not so young."

"He must be the one they picked up in the fern forest. He evidently came into the fern forest hunting for you and lost his way. But he is safe with

some of our people who live some distance from here."

At this point the Venusian whose servant had rescued Charlotte interrupted.

"If your Sir Harry is safe, why not live together? I have a dome house three days' journey from here. I offer it all to you, Miss Carter. You and your man can live there in comfort. I believe that you and the man you call Sir Harry would be far happier in that dome-house by yourselves than if you were to remain with the dwarfs."

Miss Carter was visibly embarrassed. "You are very kind—but we simply can't do it. I tried to explain to you that we are not married."

"We can't understand that word. We live together."

"Well, we simply can't do it. It's lovely of you to offer us a home, but I will thank you just as much if you will make it possible for us to return to our cabins in the space car."

The Venusian who had lost his mate stood up.

"If that is your decision," he exclaimed, "then I will assist you. First, we will join the big Earthman and then travel to the car."

Just then the Master of the dome-house walked over to a little red box and picked it up in his hands. He held it tensely, with eyes shut. When he placed it back on the table he looked worried.

"I'm afraid you will never be able to go back to the car. The Monsters are

gathering around it from all parts of our land. The members of our race report that our enemies in large numbers, thousands and hundreds of thousands, are passing the dome-houses, going in the direction of the space car. It would be useless to return till the danger is over. We might possibly fight our way through to the dome-house that is sheltering the big Earthman, but our united strength would not be able to win through to the dwarfs. The Master who is looking after the big Earthman says that he is well. I think that we had all better stay here till the tide of Monsters passes."

"So, my dear woman," exclaimed the lady of the house, "suppose you try to be happy in the thought that your man is safe. Come with me and let me see if we can't shorten some of my clothes so you can wear them. You'll feel so much better after you are bathed and have on clean clothes. I am so much interested in all you say that it will be a constant delight to have you stay with me for a while."

The unhappy Venusian widower took the hands of the other man.

"I am going. I will take a few of my servants with me and leave the rest with you. I have nothing much to live for, and perhaps it would be better to die fighting than to kill myself. Someone ought to warn those dwarfs of the danger."

"I am afraid it will be too late," commented the other man, as he said good-

[Turn page]

by. "Still, if you feel that your time has come, no one has the right to stop you."

XII

HAVING decided to make a thorough study of the animal they had captured, the Specialists lost no time in going ahead with their undertaking. The Directing Intelligence had been unable to follow the argument set forth by Whitland against the killing and dissecting of their captive. They had always killed and experimented as they wished.

They were not deliberately cruel. But their ideal was efficiency and their one great aim was to add as much as possible to the intellectual attainments of their nation. Whenever they took life, they believed that it was for the advancement of the unit which they were pleased to call their national soul.

So they went ahead and studied this degenerate being whose ancestors had once been beautiful gods. They studied him in every way they knew how, gathered around him on the stone-platform. In spite of his cries and howls they kept on; and when he died, they continued the study till there was nothing left except a great many specimens to add to their pathological museum.

Nothing happened—at first. But in reality, there were hundreds of eyes watching, hundreds of ears listening to the cries of their fellow animal and the shrill comments of the Specialists as they went ahead with their observations. Then from the dark recesses of the fern forest came a throbbing, a rhythmic pulsation, and all through the forest the Monsters heard it and started to reproduce the sound. On and on it traveled, through the narrow belt of forest, the living place between the frozen dark and the heat-tortured light of Venus. It traveled till it had traversed the entire globe.

And as each Monster, as every group of horrors, heard that sound, they started to run towards its source. On

one leg and two legs and many legs they ran along, some rolling along on no legs. They ate as they ran, they slept when they had to; awakening, they started to run again. Animals would have run for an hour and then forgotten; monkeys would soon have stopped to dig for ground nuts or scratch for fleas; but back of every Monstrosity, far back, there was a consciousness of the solidarity of a human race. One of them was in trouble and they must help.

They had been killed before. They had killed each other. Death was a familiar end, but death had always come with the speed of the wind, the swiftness of an avalanche. The Old Ones killed quickly; there was no time to howl. There was hardly time for even one piercing scream. For some reason now one of them had died in a different and entirely new way. Something had to be done. So they ran ahead to do it.

As they ran they paused now and then to shake a fern tree, which agitated, gave out a peculiar, pulsing, throbbing noise that was different from the sound made when the wind blew. All through Venus the Masters holding their little red boxes, picked up the sound, knew its meaning and realized that the Monsters were gathering around the space car.

Sir Harry and Charlotte, guests in different dome-houses, knew it too. Percy Whitland, walking angrily through the forest heard the sounds in the trees and dimly realized that the scene was being set for a titanic struggle. Every living thing on Venus knew that something unique in the history of the planet was going to happen; every living being with the exception of the Conquerors!

There was nothing unusual in the appearance of the fern forest as yet. The day after the killing of the captive, everything was still quiet. The Directing Intelligence decided to hold a meeting of the entire nation to decide on future plans. They gathered out on the landing platform, for only there could

all come together at one time. The leader briefly reviewed the events following their arrival on Venus. They had made a study of their immediate surroundings, had made one captive of a peculiar animal and studied it thoroughly; and they had lost three of their group, Sir Harry Brunton, his woman and Percy Whitland. He asked the different specialists to express themselves as to what the next step in exploration should be.

A CO-ORDINATOR arose to speak. But what he said was lost in the sound of a cry from the edge of the fern forest. This cry was followed by another and by a third, till all around the landing platform there was a pandemonium of sounds, all the more terrible because of the complete silence that had been broken.

Then, as though obeying a preconceived signal, the Monsters leapt out of their hiding places and ran toward the gathering of dwarfs on the platform. The platform was large and the Conquerors had gathered only a short distance away from the space car. Had they been active men, accustomed to physical exertion, it would have been an easy thing for all of them to be saved. But they could not run. Their enlarged heads, the seat of their massive intellects, made anything but a balanced walk impossible.

On their side of the car there were four doors, but each of these doors had to be reached by ladders. Around the base of these ladders the Conquerors gathered. While some started to go up the ladders, others prepared to kill. Their electric discharge would kill easily, but it was selective; only one victim could be stopped at a time. Even though the Conquerors seemed small and helpless compared with the strange animals, they had no fear. They had always killed those who opposed them, and they could kill again.

With the animals, it was different. They had learned to know the plant

people, the harmless-looking but deadly servant of the Old Ones. Experience had finally drilled into their dull minds that it was best not to venture an actual conflict with one of these servants. But if a Master or his woman was caught out alone, there was only one ending; he was captured and killed. When the Monsters rushed out on the landing platform, they saw a number of the little people who looked as though they might be the children of the Old Ones. They were sure of their victory—and rushed on.

By the time they reached the bottom of the ladders, over half of the dwarfs had reached safety. The ladders were full and around the bottom of each one stood a guard, waiting, ready to kill. And kill they did. From every dwarf who stood on the landing platform darted the deadly Jovian bolt, and for every bolt a Monster stumbled and died. But those around him never knew it. They simply rushed on, up to the Conquerors and over them, and even started to climb up the ladders to the doors that were still standing open.

But the doors suddenly closed—closed even in the face of a few Specialists who had not reached the tops of the ladders. And once they were closed, those Conquerors who had passed in were safe behind thick walls.

The Monsters were vegetarians by necessity and meat eaters by choice. In the world they lived there was food in abundance, but it was not the kind they craved. Occasionally they caught and killed an Old One; sometimes they fought among themselves and ate the bodies of the slain. But this day, as the result of a short battle, they had at their disposal the bodies of fifty dwarfs and over two hundred of their own kind. And the one impressive fact that reached the higher consciousness of the Monsters was this: In that peculiar house there were many more things that could be killed and eaten. All they had to do was either get inside or have them come out.

So they waited. . . . And as they waited, more came. From the North they came, and from the South, through the narrow belt of fern forest, and as they gathered around the car in thousands, they made the place horrible with their unearthly cries. They did not mind waiting—they had nothing else to do. It was satisfactory to know that inside that hut was an abundance of meat—and the meat was not protected by deadly plant servants.

From the windows of the car the Conquerors looked out and made further studies of the new type of life. But this time the studies were made through thick panes of glass.

AS A disaster the experience was unique to the Conquerors. In all their history they had never known defeat, had never been blocked in any of their undertakings—and now in a few minutes they had lost over a quarter of their strength. But with their usual efficiency, they at once started to apportion the duties of the dead men among the living of the expedition.

The next work undertaken was the discovery of some means of destroying the Monsters. Plans were discussed, not from the standpoint of hatred and revenge, but rather from that of efficiency. There was work to be done, and nothing and nobody must be allowed to interfere.

The council of war decided to take advantage of the evident hatred of the thousands of animals milling around the side of the car. They believed the Monsters would follow the car if it moved slowly over the tops of the fern trees. The Conquerors planned to come down to the ground now and then, and in tantalizing manner to allow the Monsters to again surround them. They were going to take the entire race of horrors westward.

It was time for the astronomical phenomenon known as oscillation, to plunge the western strip, one hundred miles wide, back into the utter dark-

ness and intense cold for a four month period.

The Conquerors planned to drift slowly westward in their space car, confident that the Monsters would follow. On and on they would go to the place where the fern trees grew smaller and at last became moss an inch high. Out there in the open spaces, the animals would gather around the car; and there they would be killed by the scientific weapons brought from Earth for that purpose. The Conquerors would kill all they could, and would then drive the frightened remainder in front of them into the darkness. The planet would swing around; for a hundred miles the zero of utter darkness would come—and with it, death from the irresistible cold. Then, with these inhuman enemies out of the way, the Conquerors determined to drift to the east side of the planet for another period of study.

It was a beautiful piece of strategy, taking into consideration every known fact involved, and giving correct values to each. And it worked exactly according to all calculations.

They slowly swung the car upward, and then pointed it westward. Its bottom just cleared the delicate tops of the fern trees. Ropes from it brushed through the branches and were caught at by the infuriated animals who were rendered all the more ferocious through the fear that they might lose their prey.

FORTUNATELY the propulsive mechanism of the car worked perfectly. The psychology worked just as well. At the end of fifty miles of travel westward, the Conquerors found just what they were looking for, another large, white platform. They allowed the ship to settle slowly down on this smooth surface. At the end of a few hours the platform and even parts of the space car itself were covered with the blood-hungry animals. At every possible crack, long, hungry fingers tried to enter and pull off pieces of the

car. Each failure produced greater rage and more noise. Pandemonium of beastly shrieks filled the forest.

Another fifty miles were traversed—and now the fern trees were no longer giants of the forest; they were small three-foot plants. It was no longer difficult to make out the various Monstrosities as they stood among the little ferns, howling their rage and fighting with each other.

A few miles more brought them to the limit of vegetation. There had been

in studying and classifying the dead things and adding still more to the already great knowledge of their race.

Gradually they allowed the huge car to rest on the mud. Then they waited till they were reasonably sure that all their victims had arrived. No refuge was possible now in the fern forests, no hiding behind the trunks of giant trees. The fight was out in the open; but it was not going to be a fight this time—it was to be a slaughter. The conquerors had learned their lesson and they were going to teach one now to these misshapen creatures.

From every window, out of every door, were thrust the long ray tubes of the car. Slowly they were swung to and fro, and where they landed they killed. Not till half of the victims had died did it gradually seep through the dull brains of the living that this was something to fear. At last they decided to run, but when they did so, they found between them and their former home a long line of dwarfs, each with a ray tube in his hands and murder in his heart. The only place of retreat was the snow-capped mountains, beyond which lay the land of eternal night.

The survivors started to climb the mountains. A few turned back to die at once, but the others, panic-stricken, climbed into the death-dealing snow.

Five hours later the dwarfs, exhausted but victorious, returned to the space car.

But something stupendous had happened. For thousands of years the dwarfs had taken no exercise and performed no muscular work. They had lived and moved, but so slowly that only a minute amount of toxin was formed in the course of the day. Their eliminative organs had adjusted themselves to this small amount. Now, without physical preparation and in spite of their great intelligence, they had flung themselves violently into the task of destroying the Monsters. For five hours they had walked over the plain, carrying their ray guns and relentlessly pursuing

MIRACLE DRUGS

THE wonder of miracle drugs is sometimes only matched by the amazing speed of their obsolescence. Cortisone and ACTH, the only important aids to the treatment of arthritis, are already threatened by a new discovery. As a matter of fact, this is a logical development. Cortisone itself was discovered through the observed fact that women gained relief from arthritis during pregnancy. From this to a development of a serum from the fluids recovered after childbirth would seem to be an inevitable step. Called post-partum plasma, the new drug is said to have no serious side effects, as is true with both cortisone and ACTH.

but little warmth to the sunlight here. Far in the distance loomed the gigantic peaks of everlasting snow, still melting slowly, but almost ready to gain another four months' victory over the glorious sun.

Over all this plain, barren except for moss, still muddy from the thawing glaciers, spread the Monster race of Venus. And the Conquerors, looking eagerly through the glass windows of the car, promised themselves that after the slaughter they would spend some time

the unfortunate, terror-stricken things to their doom. Muscular work and desire for revenge had generated poisons in their organs in far too great amounts to be eliminated.

The dwarfs did not die, but they returned to their space car the victims of acute auto-intoxication. They shut the doors and, falling on their beds, started to sleep. It was the slumber of intoxication, a coma, a stupor so profound and so prolonged that it closely resembled death.

During that sleep many changes were going on in their highly sensitive bodies. They awoke at last, to be sure, but never did they fully regain their former towering intelligence. They were able to think, but not to perfection; they were no longer demi-gods.

XIII

THE OLD ONES of Venus knew that something stupendous was going on, that an important part of the history of their planet was in the making. They realized that their eternal enemies, the Monsters, were migrating, but they were not sure of the cause behind the mass movement. For the first time in their experience, the Monsters seemed to be animated by a common cause.

The Masters started to communicate with each other. As the hours passed, it seemed more and more evident that a large proportion of the misshapen animals were gathering together. The territory for many miles around the original landing of the space car had become safe for ordinary travel. The Master who had lost his wife wandered through the fern woods for many hours without meeting danger of any kind.

At last the Venusians listened to Charlotte's pleadings and decided to assist her to make the journey necessary for reunion with Sir Harry. This had to be accomplished quickly or not at all. The four months of bitter cold, blizzards, and dark night were near at hand for the western strip of the planet. Dur-

ing these four months it was customary to remain in the dome-houses and wait for the next shifting of the planet. It was nearly time for the oscillation to occur; in fact the movement was slowly beginning already.

So, without delay, the Master and the woman who had been taking care of the white-haired Earth woman started with her on the short trip to the dome-house that was sheltering Sir Harry. The journey was without interruption.

Sir Harry and Charlotte greeted each other with very little external show of emotion. Great as was the depth of their love, they treated each other quite demurely in the presence of strangers. The two Masters and their women looked on the behavior of the visitors with ill-concealed interest and amusement. They could not understand why this man and woman should act so if they loved each other.

The chief topic of discussion was the migration of the Monsters and the disappearance of the space car.

"All that we are sure of," admitted one of the Masters, "is that the car left its first landing place and started to go westward. That was after the battle in which so many of the dwarfs were killed. From observations made by members of our race, it appears that the car was going due west at a low rate of speed, and not very far from the ground, and that the Monsters were following it."

"Have you any way of telling whether our friend, Percy Whitland, was in the car when it left the landing platform?" asked the Englishman, anxiously.

"No. We were able to pick up some snatches of conversation which indicated that he had an argument with some of the small Earthmen, but after that we lost touch."

Miss Carter looked concerned. "You must not get the impression that all human beings on the Earth are like those dwarfs. I think that Sir Harry ought to tell you about that race and everything that happened, leading up

to this journey through space."

"My word, Miss Carter, I can't do that. I'm not an orator. Why, you make me feel like wilted lettuce merely suggesting such a thing!"

Nevertheless, he yielded to her pleading, and for three solid hours the Englishman talked, giving a brief but comprehensive account of the development of human life on the Earth and the ascendancy of the Conquerors.

"That is very, very interesting to us," said one of the Masters. "It is especially so when we realize that our race is directly responsible for all of it. You see, we are so much older than you are that many years ago we tried an experiment. And this experiment of starting life on other planets evidently worked out successfully."

"My word!" exclaimed Sir Harry. "You surely don't mean to tell me it was you people that planted life on our Earth?"

"Yes, I do mean precisely that. Answer me one question. Have any of your scientists any positive knowledge as to how life started on your planet?"

"No. Lots of theories, but nothing that we can be sure of."

"Then I will tell you. Of course, it all happened very, very long ago. We who are now living are very long-lived, yet our life is but a breath compared with the vast ages of life that preceded us on this planet. We have written records engraved on tablets of gold that date back many millions of your years. I have read them, and I think I could teach you and your woman to read them."

SIR HARRY paced the floor in intense excitement.

"Wonderful!" he almost shouted. "Let me see them! If all this is true, I don't care whether I ever go back to Earth! If our people on Earth are safe, relieved of the threat of the Conquerors, all I want to do is to stay here and read those gold plates till I die."

"Is that *all* you want to do, Harry?"

asked Charlotte, smiling.

"Well, of course I want you to be here to read them with me, but if you can return to Earth, perhaps you had better do so, for your own good."

"But who would sew on your buttons and darn your socks if I left you?"

"Why, bless my soul, I never thought of that!" He turned back to the Master.

"Tell me about the start of it. Are you sure the people on this planet started life on the Earth?"

"That has been our tradition. I have read some of the very early gold plates, and it seems that our ancestors took the credit for it even if they did not deserve it. Here is the story.

"Go back five hundred million years of your time. We were then a highly intelligent people, scientifically inclined and interested in all the problems of nature. When you visit our museums in the dead cities, you will judge for yourself just what our culture was in those early ages. Of course, we are a dying race now, unable to die and yet equally unable to reproduce ourselves. We live in the past, in dome-houses built eons ago, and surrounded by objects of culture made by dead hands. Even our servants, wonderful as they are, were brought to their height of perfection by remote generations.

"Our astronomers watched the Earth with a great deal of interest, for it was our nearest important neighbor. Of course, Mercury was near us, too, but we felt that we could never become biologically interested in that planet; it was entirely too near the sun. So our ancestors kept on studying the Earth, waiting patiently for the time when there might be a chance of successfully planting life there.

"Your planet had gone through the various stages. First it was simply a large mass of superheated gas, twirling on its center and constantly growing smaller and cooler. Planetesimals in great numbers fell on it, enlarging it and helping the molten mass to form a crust. Titanic mountains rose and fell

again; an atmosphere collected, and from this atmosphere rain fell. The first drops of water were torn into steam before ever touching the earth. But other drops fell. It was the eternal conflict between fire and water. When the heat had abated somewhat, the Earth's surface was covered with huge ponds of water and gradually the oceans developed.

"The oceans and the endless tides! Water pulled into waves by the moon, and waves pulled back into the womb of the sea by the fighting Earth. And when we knew that the water was there, we felt that the time had come for our great adventure.

"I am not a scientist. Some of the words used in the early records are hard to understand, but apparently my ancestors made a study of the phenomena of the single-celled life. Some of these cells were almost ultra-microscopic. While our biologists studied these, other scientists built hollow cylinders and spheres capable of existence in the spaces between the planets. It was all experimentation, but back of it was a desire to start life—our life—on other planets.

"The scientists of Venus kept on, and at last they filled thousands of spheres and cylinders with closely packed little cells. These vessels, containing millions of little lives, they shot out into the uttermost voids of space. For centuries they kept on, hoping against hope that some would fall into the atmosphere of the Earth—would explode there, and liberate their little passengers so that the cells could find a watery home in the oceans of a new-born world.

“WE COULD not be sure, but we felt that some had landed. Eons passed and out of the water, life must have crept up on the sea-beaches of your world. And when that life started to live on the land, the little nervous system of that infant life looked towards the stars and had vague dreams of what it might be in the ages to come.

"The eons passed. Age after age of my ancestors lived and watched hopefully only to die without any assurance that they had succeeded in their undertaking. We had most delicate instruments with which we hoped to hear the transmitted language of the first life.

"At last we heard it—confused roars, snarls, yells of the hunter and the hunted! At last we thought we could pick out something that sounded like speech. Fifteen thousand of your years ago, we heard those first differentiated grunts of what you have called the Dawn peoples. After that the progress of speech was rapid.

"We met with discouragements. We would spend years learning one of your languages, and then suddenly it would cease coming to us. We know now that the particular race had been destroyed by the people you call the Conquerors, the dwarfs that had the intelligence to finally win a victory over space and come to Venus. We knew of their plans, and, as you are well aware, we tried to aid them with our knowledge.

"By this time there were just fifty of us left, just twenty-five couples of the Old Ones. Can you imagine the breathless anxiety we felt as we watched that space car wing its way through untrodden reaches of space, and at last land on our planet?

"We saw the ultimate descendants of the germs we had sent out, returning of their own accord—and what were they? Dwarfs, asexual, ugly—intelligent, but devoid of those emotions which constitute the greater part of happiness. You have told us that they know neither love nor hatred, fear nor passion, pride nor shame. You say that they have made progress upward by stepping on the corpses of inferior nations.

"We cannot feel that such a race should claim kinship with us. We are the Old Ones! We have lived for beauty, for the finer arts of life, the culture and refinement of the soul. You, Sir Harry, are like us. Your woman is like us, in

spite of her peculiar ideas about man and woman and the odd ceremony she calls marriage. We feel that the two of you are in sympathy with us. I believe it was the hope of our ancestors that the Earth would some day be peopled with men and women like you, similar to ourselves in ideals. Could they have looked ahead and seen these one-sided Conquerors, all head and no heart, I feel that they would have left the Earth untenanted!"

"A most remarkable tale," commented Charlotte. "But there is one question I want to ask you. Do these gold plates explain how life started on your own planet?"

"That is something that we do not know," replied the Master.

XIV

IT HAS been said that God preserves children and fools. While Percy Whitland belonged to neither class, he was, in some miraculous manner, saved during the first two days of his wandering in the fern forest. He was either overlooked by the traveling tribes of Monsters or they could think of nothing else but arriving at the gathering-place of the race. He made no effort to conceal himself, but walked on through the fern forest with the same calmness with which he would have walked through the streets of Flagstaff, Arizona. He had only two thoughts in his mind. One was to try and find his friends, Sir Harry and Miss Carter; the other was to cut himself free from any further companionship with the Conquerors. He was no longer willing to live as a member of a race which knew neither love nor pity for lesser members of the biologic world.

Despite his outward calm, Percy Whitland had a feeling that something demanded his attention. Suddenly, like a flash of lightning, it came to him. He stopped walking, sat down on a pile of dried fern leaves, took a pencil and some paper out of his pocket and began to do

some calculating. Mathematics was a necessary part of his life as an astronomer. For thirty years he had peered through a telescope at night and solved problems pertaining to the arithmetic of the Universe during the daytime. Few things in life gave him a greater thrill than filling a sheet of clean white paper with rows of staggering figures.

Working out this problem, he lost sight of the fact that he was hungry and sleepy and worried about his friends. He simply knew that there was a problem involving figures that demanded his attention. All else, for the time being, was blotted out of his consciousness.

He filled a page, placed it carefully on the ground and started another one. Several odd-shaped things came near him silently, but he did not seem to see them. Something else came near, so large that the shadow from it fell on the piece of white paper and made it hard for Whitland to see the lead pencil marks.

His gaze was still on his paper when in front of him he half-saw something that looked like human legs, and cried irritably, without looking up, "How do you expect me to finish this problem if you insist on standing in my light?"

NOT TILL he had said the words did he realize the peculiarity of his request. He looked up and saw the shadow-thrower. It was a large man, as large as Sir Harry, but far more beautiful, wearing clothes like the ancient Greeks. Back of him were several odd-shaped creatures. The astronomer remembered that he was first of all a gentleman. He jumped up and started to apologize.

"You must forgive me," he began. "I was so interested in my calculation that I lost sight of everything else for the time being."

"Are you one of the dwarfs?" inquired the stranger.

"No! A thousand times no! They tried to make me think that I was, but

when it came to the acid test, I could be nothing but a plain human being like my friend, Sir Harry."

"So, he is your friend?"

"He is, indeed. He has been that for many years."

"Then you will be glad to know that he and his woman are safe. I just left them a few hours ago in one of the dome-houses. You have been fortunate. At any other time you would have been killed in a few hours, but here I find you absolutely unconcerned, sitting on the fern leaves and doing some sort of problem."

"It is a very interesting one. I am trying to determine just how soon the phenomenon I call oscillation will occur."

"What do you mean by that word?"

"The slight shifting of Venus from east to west and then, four months later, back to east again. I have an idea that the next swing of the planet is going to start at any time. That is what I am trying to determine, but I am afraid I have lost a few days somewhere."

"I can tell you about that. It has begun. In fact, that is why I am out here in the forest. Within not so many weeks all this land will be under a heavy blanket of sleet and snow. These giant trees will be leafless and covered to their tops with ice. For the width of

over a hundred miles all will be bleak desolation. That is why I am here."

"I don't follow you. What has that to do with your being here?"

"Some time ago my mate was captured by the Monsters who infest our forests. They killed her. In truth, they did worse than that. Life is no longer worth the living. So I have decided to die. My first thought was that my servants and I might meet part of the migrating hosts and die fighting them. But they seem to have completely disappeared. So, when I found that there was no chance of dying in a fight, I decided to stay out here in the forest till the period of utter darkness and desolate cold should come and I should be buried under a pall of solid snow."

"I am so sorry your woman died," sympathized the little man from Arizona. "I realize that the loss of a loved one must be a very sad blow. From what you say, you expect the change in temperature to come very soon?"

"Yes, in fact it has begun. The western edge of our planet is already swinging into the shadows. Some of my race—we call ourselves the Old Ones—travel from side to side of the planet as the seasons change, but others seem content to live on in their dome-houses, buried under the mantle of snow, until the sun releases them from their frozen prison."

"Do you realize how interesting all this is to me?" asked Whitland. "I was the only living astronomer on the Earth who believed that such a movement of Venus took place. Now, I am actually here, think of it! And the real facts are just what I said they were, and when I stated them I was twenty-six million miles away!

"I don't want you to die. I want to go over to the other side of Venus. I want to see what happens when the sun strikes those mountains of ice and snow. You are the only one who can take me there. You will, won't you? I am an old man, and you seem to be so young and wonderfully strong. It would be such a simple thing for you to do. Isn't there some kind of flying machine you can use? If we stay here, we shall both die of cold. I don't mind death—everyone must die sometime—but I do want to see the final proof that I am right before I die, and the only way that I can is to cross over to the east side of Venus. *Please take me!*"

IT WAS a strange sight, the little old man clinging in his eagerness to the robe of the fair godlike Venusian. The giant looked down at the pleading face of the astronomer, and said simply, "But I want to die."

"All right! But first take me across the planet. Then perhaps we shall both

be ready to die. Perhaps I shall be so happy that I shall die of joy!"

"I guess that I shall have to let you have your way," at last decided the Master. "There is only one possible chance, and that is a slim one. Some distance from here lies one of our old cities. Long ago, when our wonderful race was in its prime, we lived there. I think that if we go fast enough we can reach it before the darkness comes. We shall have to go very fast. I think I will have my servants carry you to make faster time."

He whispered something in an odd tone and at once two of the plant servants picked up Whitland, slung him on their arms between them and started at a smart trot through the forest, the Venusian and the other servant following.

On and on they went, resting only when they were utterly wearied. Day after day passed. Meanwhile, it grew slowly darker, there came a chill in the air, and now and then falling snow. Evidently there was no time to lose. The planet was swinging westward faster than they could run eastward.

The footing was now becoming hard. The fern leaves were slippery and wet with snow. The wind blew cold, chilling the astronomer, who was not able to keep warm by exercise. He shivered

[Turn page]

and wondered just how much longer it would be before they could reach a warm place.

Just in time they reached one of the main doors of the city. The weather was bad. The sky was dull gray and out of it came pelting pellets of frozen rain. The temperature had fallen to below the freezing point.

The Master pushed against the knobs on the door, first the upper one, and then the third from the bottom, and at last the one on the extreme right—in the ring. That knob, with the ring round it, looked a little like the great All-seeing Eye. The door swung open and the Master almost fell in, sliding on the marble floor. The servants, carrying the now unconscious astronomer, came next. Just in time the Venusian arose, slammed the door shut, and dropped from fatigue.

They were in the City of the Dead, but the winter was upon them. They would be fortunate to live through the next four months till the recurrent sun would liberate them from their snow-bound home. Meantime the blizzard raged over the ancient city, a place of domes, that rose on each other like gigantic soap bubbles. Only a few days before those domes had arisen in the sunlight, their glass walls glistening golden and crystalline in the glory of the perpetual beams from that central furnace of radiant light. Now the domes were encrusted with snow. Another day would bury the city completely under a thick blanket of dead white snow.

But in that city, under that snow, two men lay sleeping off their fatigue, and three plant servants, shrunken to their dormant condition, leaned against the wall, awaiting their Master's voice.

XV

THE OTHER dome-house, sheltering Sir Harry, Miss Carter and their hosts, was also covered with the deep blanket of snow and sleet that was swiftly making the extreme west of Venus a silent

white grave. The darkness and the cold had come with a rapidity that was startling to the explorers from the Earth. To the Old Ones it was a part of their routine existence.

They explained it all to their visitors: that the dome-house would be covered a hundred feet deep by the storms, but that underneath, they would remain snug and warm, thanks to the perfect architecture devised by their ancestors many millions of years ago.

"That is all right for you Masters of the evening star," commented Sir Harry, "but how did the Monsters survive during all those centuries?"

"So far as we know, they just kept moving towards the sun. As their land became covered with snow, they kept going out into the heated desert. No matter how bitter the winter, there was always the edge of mud, the region where the sun continued its constant fight against the cold. Perhaps some of them would cross the continent, going around the poles, but most of them lived a miserable existence out on the hot mud flats till the sun started once again to melt. The change is extremely rapid. In a week the torrential waters are refilling the old river beds. In another week new branches start from the tops of the fern trees. In still another week part of the ground is bare. Then the Monsters have always come back, thin, worn, and not so numerous. They ate the tender sprouts of the ferns; we thought also that they ate each other, the old ones of their tribes. Then came the time for their spring festival and their matings. Something like that happened every year. Of course, it was hard on them, but they survived."

"But what will your friend do?" asked Sir Harry, "—the one who went into the forest knowing of the danger?"

"Don't you know? He went out there because he wanted to die."

Miss Carter looked up from her sewing, suddenly. "I wish we knew what has happened to Mr. Whitland, Harry. If he is alive, it seems as though he

would try to communicate with us. And where is the space car?"

"I am going to answer some of your questions," interrupted the Master. "We have a rather fine receiving apparatus. It picks up the sound waves and transforms them into vibrations that can be appreciated by the nerve-endings of our fingers. Of course, we only use this machine for short distance work. When we received sounds from the Earth, we used amplifiers. Suppose I try to communicate with some of our race and see what I can learn? If your friend, the one you call Percy Whitland, is with any of our race, we shall be able to have you talk to him."

He picked a little red box off a table and placed it on his knees. Then he placed his hands on either side of it, holding it lightly with the pulps of his fingers and thumb.

Sir Harry and the white-haired woman watched him with the greatest interest. At times he looked slightly worried, at other times he smiled. At last he took his fingers off the box.

"It is all very interesting," he commented. "There seems to be no doubt that a large number of the Monsters migrated in an unusual manner. Our western winter is in full blast and most of our race are shut in for the next four months. There are a few couples who live on the eastern habitable strip and of course they are just beginning to thaw out for their four months of summer."

"We can answer your question concerning your friend, the astronomer. The Master who left here to die in the storm found him and took him to one of our dead cities. They reached it just in time to escape from a frozen death. The Master says that they are both ill from exposure, but they feel that it is nothing serious. Would you like to talk to your friend?"

"My word! Yes!" exclaimed Sir Harry. "That would be a remarkable experience. How shall I go about it?"

"Simply hold the box with your finger

tips and ask him a question. Then wait for the answer."

SIR HARRY picked up the little box. He was accustomed to the television apparatus in use by the Conquerors, but this mode of conversation was a trifle more weird and inexplicable.

"Hello, Percy! Where are you?" he asked.

And then he waited. His face was anxious. At last he looked at the host and said in puzzled voice, "It seems that something in my brain answers, '*I am in a City of the Dead.*' Shall I go on talking?"

"Certainly."

"Why did you leave the space car, Percy?"

And again something seemed to answer, inside his brain: "I could not stay with them, Harry. They were too cruel."

"Are you sick, Percy?"

"A little. But we are comfortable here and I think I am going to have a wonderful time studying the culture of past ages."

"But you are an astronomer, Percy, and not an archeologist or anthropologist."

"I know. But for the first time in my life there is no sky! My friend tells me that above us are a hundred, two hundred feet of frozen snow. Here all is light and comfortable, but there is no sky. I have to keep my mind active, so I am going to study for four months in their museums. They have every part of their past culture saved. And gold plates, Harry, with the past history of millions of years! The man who saved my life has promised not to kill himself till the summer comes, when he can bring you and Miss Carter here to be with me."

"Extraordinary! But where are the Conquerors?"

"I don't know, but I know this: I am through with them. Is Miss Carter there?"

"Yes, indeed she's here."

"Give her my best regards. Tell her I have something in mind concerning her. It will have to wait till this winter is over."

"Good-by, Percy, old top."

"Good-by, Harry, dear lad."

THE Conquerors had become great through establishing the principle that the nation was greater than the individual. For eighty thousand years there had been no such word as "failure" in their national vocabulary.

In their first contact with the Monsters they had lost heavily from the ranks of their most important Specialists, because they had not properly protected themselves against the element of surprise. They had been on the offensive for so long that they had by now forgotten the technique of a proper defensive. The surprise over, they had coldly plotted the annihilation of a race that was more animal than human, and had relentlessly carried out their plan.

We know that the Conquerors returned to their space car exceedingly fatigued after their victory over the Monsters, but well satisfied with the results of their campaign. They had lost many of their number, but the Monsters had been exterminated. They could rest now, secure in the thought that they had followed an eighty thousand year tradition and destroyed an inferior race.

The space car lounged safely in the soft mud. With all the doors shut, there was nothing now to fear. The Conquerors slept on . . .

When at last they awoke, they saw through the windows a sky that was unusually gray and overcast. An open door showed that it was snowing hard and was turning very cold. The scientists realized at once what had happened. During the hours of sleep the Evening Star had turned a little westward. Oscillation had begun. The land that the space car rested on was slowly going into the shadow that would end in the total darkness of the long night.

But even then they did not fully real-

ize just what that meant. They felt that all they had to do was to start a few of the rocket tubes, very gently shoot the car a few hundred feet into the air, turn it directly around so the nose would point east instead of west, and then sail over the heated desert to the eastern strip of sunshine and warmth. There they were sure that living conditions favorable to life would be found.

The Directing Intelligence gave the order and power was gently applied through the lower rear rocket tubes. Every dwarf was at his place, every condition was satisfactory. The nation of Conquerors were ready for another step in their interplanetary adventure.

Nothing happened.

The long cigar-shaped space car, its silvery sides glistening grayly in the gathering gloom, remained immovable.

In the pilot cabin the Directing Intelligence, one of the Co-ordinators, and the Specialists sat waiting for the flight to begin.

Still nothing happened.

Far to the rear of the pilot cabin the throbbing of the power in the tubes could be heard. The space car began to tremble under the stress of power that was unequal to moving the burden in front of it.

When the Directing Intelligence felt that tremor of the ship under him he cried to the chief mechanic of the ship, "Turn the power off!"

Then he slowly moved his head till he looked directly into the eyes of the Aviation Specialist, seated near him, and asked, "What is the matter?"

"I do not know."

"Then find out. If Percy Whitland were here, he would have an idea."

For the next hour every part of the machinery of the space car was carefully investigated. It appeared to be perfect in every detail. It was still the brilliantly constructed machinery that had so safely made the interplanetary journey from Earth to Venus. Directing Intelligence received the various reports in silence. At last he ordered the power

started again.

Nothing happened.

Meanwhile it was growing darker, the wind was increasing in violence, the storm was throwing thousands of tons of hail and snow upon the strip that was so rapidly moving into a hell of dark desolation.

A GAIN the Directing Intelligence looked at his Specialists. It was now so dark that lights had to be turned on in the pilot cabin. There was nothing in the ruler's face to indicate fear. But in his eyes, way back in his large unblinking eyes, there was an expression of doubt.

Then he said, after some moments of thought, "This is what has happened. I should have known it would happen. If I had stayed here in the space car and not joined in the slaughter it might have been prevented. Had Percy Whitland been with us, he would have warned us against it."

One of the Co-ordinators now did an unprecedented thing. He spoke without being asked! "What happened?" he questioned. "And how could it have been prevented?"

"This is a very large car," answered the Directing Intelligence, "and it is very heavy. When we made our final stop, we did not have a marble platform for it to rest on; instead, we made a landing on the ground. That ground was mud, rather stiff and capable of bearing our weight, but still soft enough to give somewhat under the weight of the space car. No doubt the car sank down into the mud a little. How far, I do not know. When we returned to the car after the slaughter, we were so tired that all we could think of was going to our cabins and securing some sleep. That is what happened."

"But what was it that happened?" insisted the Co-ordinator.

"We slept! Too long. And while we slept oscillation started. And the part of Venus we rested on, in the mud, slowly passed out of the sunlight into

the night. That is all that happened."

"But why can't we start?" again queried the dwarf.

"Because the temperature fell! When we came back to the car, it was exactly fifty-five degrees. Now we are in the middle of a blizzard. It is probably zero outside."

He paused. "*The space car is frozen in the mud!*"

"If that is all," declared the Co-ordinator, "we can tear ourselves out."

"We can if we have sufficient power," acknowledged the Directing Intelligence.

"Well, if that is all, we need not worry," commented the Co-ordinator. "Power? Why, we control the greatest power that the intelligence of man has ever been able to conceive of. We had power to shoot us through Earth's atmosphere and from Earth to Venus in a little more than half a month. Power? Certainly we have power. After the demonstration of power that this space car has given it is ludicrous to think that we would be stopped by a little mud frozen to the bottom of our car. *All we have to do is to use that power.*"

His confidence swept in a contagious wave over all the pilot cabin. What he said was in harmony with the spirit of their national life. They had never failed to use their power. They had never been willing to acknowledge that anything or anybody, power of the gods, feeble effort of men, or super-human forces of subterranean demons, could stop them.

Accordingly, without further thought, without the delay of a minute, the Directing Intelligence gave the order:

"Turn the maximum power into the four rear tubes."

THE mechanic pressed several buttons in rapid succession. The space car shook like a wounded pre-historic worm, and then, with a mighty roar that sounded through the darkness, tore itself out of its ice bed and hurled itself straight into the pitch-black of the

Venusian night. It raged onward through the storm like a comet riding on the wings of Death.

And back of the car, alongside of it, all around it was the arctic blizzard, the hurricane, storming at a hundred miles an hour, but hopelessly left behind in the race with the snow-encrusted monster from the skies, the beautifully formed greyhound that had come so triumphantly from the Earth.

There was a gleam of triumph in the eyes of the dwarfs in the pilot house. Once again they had won a victory, this time over the elements! Again intelligence applied through machinery had triumphed over the brute strength of even Nature herself.

"It was easy!" cried the mechanician.

"And we did it without help," chimed in the Co-ordinator. "If Percy Whitland had been here, he would have been given all the credit."

But the Directing Intelligence was peering ahead into the darkness as though he had failed to hear them. He suddenly spoke and in such a voice as to make them all turn toward him. His words were: "Stop speed and prepare to turn!"

It was his last order. One moment the car was dashing on through the darkness at the speed of a thousand miles an hour. The next moment there loomed just ahead a dense black mass. The Directing Intelligence saw it, but too late. Head on, the most beautiful product of man's intelligence struck the boundless ice mountain!

There was an ear-splitting shock as though worlds had crashed together. The car crumpled as if it were made of cardboard. Seams were ripped apart, machinery torn, furniture hurled far over the sides of the crippled Conqueror of Space. One second it had been defying time, space, and the gods; the next, it crashed to the ground, where it lay broken into a thousand splinters.

And the mountain of ice that had remained sleeping for millions of years, that had passed an eternity of waiting

for something new to happen—that mountain of ice, unchanging and unchangeable, was struck by the space car and *never knew it*. If it had possessed the power of thought, it would, at the most, have concluded that a larger crystal of snow than usual had landed against its lofty sides.

Down into the crevasse the storm drove the snow and sleet, inch by inch, foot by foot, until the car was buried deep to remain there in the everlasting night. And before many hours had passed a clean white layer of even snow covered the place where lay the space ship of the Conquerors. Not a trace marked its grave. One more nation had come to its end, a race of Supermen had reached its final doom.

XIV

MONTHS passed. For the Old Ones buried under the snow in their warm dome-houses it was just another winter of quiet meditation. But to the interested visitors it was an opportunity to learn. Though both Miss Carter and Sir Harry had left the landing platform ill-prepared to write a history of their peculiar adventure, their hosts were not at a loss to supply them with writing material.

So the long hours passed, Miss Carter on one side of a table and Sir Harry on the other, both writing as hard as they could on a peculiar sheet of white metal with a pencil that made a very distinct black scratch. Long conversations would be held with the Master and his woman, covering every phase of Venusian life, and then the two anthropologists would start writing again, page after page of their monumental work on the history of the social development of the Venusians.

Percy Whitland was having an even more wonderful time with his rescuer in the City of the Dead. His mind had been trained for years in the making of accurate observations concerning things that were millions of miles away. Now

shut off from his beloved heavens, he turned that keen power of observation on the little things that were right at his elbow. At times his keen interest and constant questions almost drove the Master frantic. It seemed that in his search for knowledge the little man was insatiable.

It was in the records concerning the development of radian energy and the study of rays that Whitland found the greatest pleasure. Former generations of Venusians had made elaborate studies of astronomical matters and committed their knowledge to the gold plates which formed the library of the City of the Dead. The words were different, but the conclusions closely harmonized with the studies that Whitland had made.

Percy Whitland, when he found these astronomical records, felt that he was among friends. Here had lived and died men who, under more favorable circumstances, would have made the finest kind of companions for him. He marveled at the accuracy and minute details of their work, and voiced that marvel one day.

"I do not see how they had time to do it all. I have worked at a killing speed for thirty years, and I have been able to do only a fraction of what there is to be done."

His host laughed. "You forget that those ancestors of mine were long lived. In those days it was no uncommon thing for a man to live to be ten thousand years old, and now, with our system of hygiene and dietary precautions, there is no death from disease. Those old people had all the time they needed for their study."

"That must have been wonderful. I have enjoyed these months with you as my teacher, but do you know, I am just realizing how selfish I have been. For days I have not so much as thought of my friend, Sir Harry, and have even forgotten the lady. When shall we be able to see them?"

"In another month the swing of the planet will begin again. After a few

days of sunshine we shall be liberated. Of course, everything will be wet for a while, the river beds roaring torrents and all the ground soggy with water. The frost will come out of the ground and make the walking very bad. Two weeks after the sun starts to shine the fern trees will put out new leaves, and that is usually a sign that we can start to visit each other. I will take you there as soon as I can, and then I shall have to leave you."

AT THIS the astronomer came over to the chair of the godlike man. With almost childlike timidity he took hold of his hand.

"Marco," he said, "you have been very kind to me all through these long months. I have learned to love you. Now, with the summer at hand, I shall be very happy to be with Harry again, but it will make me more happy if you stay with me. I know that you still grieve over the loss of your lady and that it will never be possible for you to forget her, but I do wish that you would promise me to keep on living. Please promise me that you will stay with me, and continue to tell me about the wonders of this old planet."

The Master looked down at the little man. Then he took his free hand and laid it on the astronomer's head. His face became serious.

"That is a hard request to make of me, Percy Whitland. I would not consider it from any other living being—but you have been so considerate of me and my feelings, you have shown such interest in the history of my race and such intelligent appreciation of the grandeur that was once ours, that I have to consider your feelings, and—well, I will promise you that I will not end my life till you give me permission, or, perhaps, until after you have left the planet."

The astronomer looked ahead of him. For some minutes he could not trust himself to speak. Then, with a catch in his voice and tears in his eyes, he

replied, "Thank you. That is awfully fine of you. Now suppose we arrange to leave here and join the others as soon as we can?"

They had to wait another week, and most of another. Then the Venusian announced that their liberation was at hand.

"The sun is shining on the city," he announced, "but we cannot see it, because between the roof and the sunbeams lie a hundred, perhaps two hundred feet of snow and ice. Yet, right at this moment the snow is melting as fast as though it were in an oven. The hour will come when we shall hear the crackling of the melting ice and then in a little while the sunbeams will again stream through the glass spaces of our domes. Soon after that we will start to join our friends. In the meantime, I think you had better start talking to them now and then. You have been so interested in your new investigation that you have not thought of doing that."

"They don't want to talk to me," laughed Whitland. "They have each other and their new studies and I am sure that they gave me very little thought once they knew that I was safe for the winter."

"That may be true, but I would talk to them anyway. They were an interesting couple. Frankly speaking, I could not understand just what the relation between them really was. Were they mated?"

"No. Not in your sense of the word. They were in love with each other and thought the world and all of each other, but they were not mated."

And then he started to explain to Marco the theory of marriage as practiced on the Earth. He knew a lot more about the stars than he did about human relationships, but even the few facts that he told were sufficient to make the Venusian feel that somehow or other the average man and woman on the Earth were not so happy as they might be.

Finally the time came for them to

leave. Rather regretfully the astronomer saw the door closed behind them leaving all those lovely treasures shut up till sometime in the far future chance and fate would again uncover them.

At the end of their journey they found their friends waiting for them.

THE International Astronomical Society was holding its triennial meeting at Flagstaff, Arizona. The meeting was held there out of respect for the lost and presumably dead member, Percy Whitland. It was not a very large association, but the membership was exclusive and particularly intellectual. At the last assemblage Percy Whitland had been elected president. Between meetings he had mysteriously disappeared from his observatory and had never been heard from since. The remaining twenty-four members felt that no more fitting memorial could be paid to him than to hold the regular meeting near the observation made sacred by the long residence of one of the most remarkable astronomers the world had ever produced.

On the second day of the meeting John Youngland, who for over fifteen years had been closely associated with the late astronomer of Arizona, but who, in spite of those long years of student life, was not considered erudite enough for full membership in the International Association, asked the new president for the privilege of the floor.

"Gentlemen," he began, "as you well know, the chief work of my master and teacher, Percy Whitland, was to prove definitely and beyond a doubt that life existed on other planets besides the Earth. There is no need for me to go into those ideas which originated in his wonderful mind, for all of you have heard him talk, seen his photographic plates, especially of Venus and Mars, and I know that most of you differed from him.

"He not only was sure that life existed on these planets, but he was confident that some day we should be able

to communicate with the inhabitants of these planets. He even dreamed of the time when he might be able to go to one of these planets and see for himself how close his fancies were to the real facts. He went so far as to give me a code which he would use in sending radio messages to me from one of those far off worlds.

"After his disappearance from the observatory, I and a few of our students constantly worked with our radio. We kept on experimenting with every possible wavelength. Some time later we picked up two messages which came in a great assortment of languages. A paper on those two messages was read by Funcan Forsythe before the International Association of Radiographers. He reached the conclusion that they were the work of an unidentified expert who was deliberately trying to fool the entire world. Perhaps you will recall what those messages were. I will refresh your memory. They were:

*Follow Number 85.
Protect Against 87.*

"I am forced to admit that these messages meant as little to us in this observatory as they did to anyone else. But, in spite of our inability to understand their meaning, we kept on trying to receive other messages. *Last night they came*, and to my astonishment, they were in the code which Percy Whitland had so often told me he would use! We caught the message first when it was nearly over, and almost died of grief when we realized how much of it we had lost. But as soon as it ended it began again and we heard the same words in code four times more. As the code is difficult, I translated it into English and placed it on a phonographic plate.

"I am going to ask you to close your eyes and try to fancy that it is the voice of Percy Whitland, late president of your association, speaking to you. Please listen:

"Fellow members of the Internation-

al Astronomical Society, this message is from Percy Whitland. I am on the planet Venus, having come here with the nation known as the Conquerors in company with Sir Harry Brunton and Miss Charlotte Carter. We came here on a space car. I want to tell you that Venus is inhabited by a race very similar to ours. Geographically the planet is very much as I described it in my paper on Venus before the Society in 1923. I have witnessed the phenomenon known as oscillation. Brunton wishes to inform his Government that he believes the danger from the Conquerors is over for the present. Impossible to return to Earth now, but will communicate occasionally. Trip started from Reelfoot Crater. This message being sent from the Venusian Observatory on peak of mountain South Pole Venus. If received, send answering signal. Will closely watch the Earth through three hundred inch telescope for one week. Would advise that Mallory Wright and John Ormond of Eight Sixty-three West Ninety-fourth Street, New York City, guide a group of scientists to Reelfoot Crater to make a thorough study of the underground world of the Conquerors and prevent any possibility of those remaining on the Earth ever becoming a menace to our race in the future. Brunton suggests that all the colonies be located and studied. We may be able to return, but this is doubtful. Remember that the human race can never be safe till all the dwarfs are destroyed.

(Signed) Whitland."

It is only fair to say that the associates of the International Astronomical Association remained silent till the end of the message. Then they raised a riot that was remarkable, considering the fact that it was made by twenty-five men, most of whom were old, withered and anaemic specimens of manhood, despite their intellectual capacity. They crowded around John Youngland, they shouted at him, shook their fists at him and just stopped short of man-handling him. They shouted "Liar," "Fool," and

"Scoundrel!" It was some time before they quieted down sufficiently for the President to express the sentiment of the Association. Quivering with rage, he turned on the young man who had had the temerity to present such a complete hoax to a distinguished gathering of scientists.

"If you think, you young fool," he shouted, "that you can make us believe any nonsense like that, you certainly are a moron. We liked your teacher, the late Percy Whitland, although we always thought that he was a little mad. We do not know where he is, but we hope that he is dead rather than in a home for the mentally afflicted, where you ought to be."

HE WENT on with, "Your whole message is a cunningly concocted fabric of foolish lies. You are a disgrace to your teacher and to the scientific world. I am going to ask the secretary to expunge your name and your speech from our records and not to put one word of it in our year-book. I am going to ask everyone here to keep silent about the entire affair, for if it found its way into the public press, we should be the laughing stock of the world. Shame on you! Shame for trying your April fool jokes on us! Now, gentlemen, the meeting will come to order and we will listen to the next paper on the programme, entitled, *An Electromagnetic Study of the Cavity Radiation of Certain Stars in the Nebula of Andromeda*, by the Honorable Whitley Stonecrop, of Edinburgh University."

John Youngland left the building and returned to the observatory. There he was joined by a group of young men who had been students of Whitland. Their reaction was quiet, in spite of their anger.

"That is just the way things go in life, boys," commented Youngland. "A man spends his life doing a fine piece of work and finally succeeds in it. Then no one is willing to give him credit.

There is just one thing to do, and that is to wait for more messages. The time will come when we shall be able to write a book about all this, and when we do, those old fossils will be sorry they called the whole message a hoax. We will some day show them that we were right and that Whitland really sent it from Venus!"

"But how about the signal?" asked one of the workers. "He told us to send a signal if we received and understood the message. What are we to do about that?"

"We can't do anything now. He wants some kind of a flare sent up, but we are not able to do that by ourselves. A fire sufficiently large to be seen on Venus would have to be arranged for by a nation. All we can do is to wait for other messages and, in the meantime, trust our master."

Youngland waited that night till the observatory was quiet. The perplexed, grief-stricken man, the favorite pupil of Whitland, slowly climbed the little ladder leading to the roof of the observatory. Step after step he went till at last he climbed out onto the little platform at the very top. Beyond him were the depths of space, deep calling to deep, and star to star. Far away the Evening Star shone in its delicate beauty. The man stretched out his arm towards Venus and cried:

"We heard you, master. *We heard you!* And we believe in you. We want you to know that we have your message!"

He repeated it several times. It seemed to satisfy him.

Of course, the occurrence of the next half hour was a coincidence. It was one of those peculiar coincidences that lead to so much misunderstanding. A supposedly dead volcano in the Bad Lands of Dakota selected that very time to break forth into a terrific activity that shocked the entire western world and covered several states with ashes. The flames from a three-mile crater flung tongues of red heat thousands of feet

into the air.

Youngland read a full account of the bursting of the Dakota volcano. He instantly appreciated the fact that a flame of this size might be seen from Venus through a three-hundred inch telescope. He also realized that his master would believe that it was an answering flare, sent up for no other reason than to inform him that the message from Venus had been received.

"I am glad for his sake," Youngland mused to himself, "that it happened just when it did. Had hell broken through the crust of the Bad Lands a week earlier, the master would have paid no attention to it, perhaps would not even have seen it. Well, no doubt he is happy. The thing for me to do is to hunt up these two New York men and give them the message. I wonder who they are and what it all means. No doubt they will understand. And who is Brunton?"

A week later, Youngland in New York located the two men and their wives. They understood only too well the advice contained in the message from Venus. Taking Youngland with them they made a hurried trip to Washington, where they had a long secret conversation with the President. It was thought best to ask the British Empire for co-operation, since Sir Harry had come to America as the direct representative of that nation.

After a delay of some months, made necessary by the complicated details of outfitting an exploratory group of scientists, the expedition started to Reelfoot Crater. Meantime the combined armies, navies and air forces of the two great nations of the Earth held themselves in readiness to render aid in this final effort to free the human race from one of the greatest perils that had ever confronted it.

XVII

THE Old Ones of Venus had gathered for a national conference on the

topmost peak of the Southern Mountains. Here their wonderful observatory was located and from here they had sent the messages to the Earth and also received through the centuries the confused babble of noises and voices.

They had yielded to the entreaties of Percy Whitland to try for a two-way communication with Earth. Their experience with the Conquerors made them feel that it would not be wise to directly invite any more Earthly visitors, but they sympathized with the astronomer and agreed that it would be interesting to determine whether communication could be established. Some future generation, either on Earth or on Venus, might need the knowledge that such aerial transmission was possible.

Percy Whitland had been happy in the City of the Dead. But now on the Southern Mountain, high above the steam that rose from the heated desert, seated so he could look through the three hundred inch telescope at Earth, he was more than happy. He was intoxicated with joy! The Masters followed him around, happy in his happiness, for all of them had learned to love the little deformed man with the scholarly mind. Sir Harry and Miss Carter, completely overshadowed by the greatness of their friend, kept still, pleased beyond measure to find that after all these years of doubt and disappointment he was at last supremely satisfied with the results of his labor.

After making a thorough examination of the giant telescope and familiarizing himself with its mechanism, Whitland was conducted to the transmitting room and placed before the recording and sending plate. The Masters and their women, Sir Harry and Miss Carter, stood around while Whitland was lifted to a chair so his mouth would be on a level with the center of the microphone. Then he started to deliver the message in a code language, clearly, even though his voice trembled. He repeated it four times. Then

he turned around to his friends.

"This message is timed in a most peculiar manner. I did not realize the fact till last night. For years I have kept a careful diary, and since I started on this trip I have tried to keep oriented so far as Earth time is concerned. Last night I did some calculating and realized that this message was sent to the Earth at the very time the International Astronomical Association is meeting. They were to meet in Arizona at my observatory. Of course, I cannot tell what change my absence made in their plans, but I am sure of one thing. When I was working in Arizona, I told my first assistant, John Youngland, that if I ever had a chance, I would talk to him in this code. I trust him. Up to the time of his death he will be on the lookout for the message from me. If he is alive today and caught the message, he will signal to us. Some way he will let us know that he had heard us."

Then he asked the Venusian Master who had charge of the telescope to go with him to the observatory and assist him in watching the far away planet, Earth for a possible signal. The rest of the nation left them alone and started to discuss matters of general importance. They felt that a search should be made for the space car; that a more vigorous and concerted effort should be made to find and exterminate the Monsters and make the planet safe for their own nation. And finally, they decided to adopt the three visitors from the Earth and make them real members of the Venusian commonwealth.

DURING those hours no one paid any attention to the receiving apparatus in the radio room. Had some one been there, they might have heard the pathetic message cried by John Youngland from the top of the observatory in Arizona. But the sound sped through space, unrecognized and unnoticed.

But it was not necessary. Whitland was at the telescope. The Earth, ordinarily visible from Venus simply as a

brilliant star, was greatly magnified by the enormous telescope. It was possible to make out dimly her continents and oceans. Suddenly a little pin-point of flaming red shot up from the Earth, shot up into the outer reaches of the atmosphere and hung there like a jet of burning gas. Percy Whitland saw it, gasped and yelled to his co-watcher:

"The signal! The signal!"

And thus the coincidence of the sudden activating of a supposedly dead volcano made one man happy for the rest of his life.

He was still beaming the next morning when he talked the whole matter over with Sir Harry and Miss Carter.

"You have no idea what all this means to me," he explained, enthusiastically. "I worked a lifetime on this sort of thing, and my fellow astronomers all laughed at me. Now I have shown them that I was right. At last I am on Venus and I sent them a message; and they have shown me that they received and understood it. I have accomplished everything that I want to accomplish."

"My word! That must be a fine feeling," exclaimed the Englishman, glumly. "Now I cannot feel that way. You see, Miss Carter—well, what's the use of talking about it?"

Percy Whitland took his friend's hand.

"You know, Harry. I have been a selfish brute. I have been so interested in this adventure that I forgot all about you and your happiness. I would determine to tell you and then something would happen and I would forget all about it for days at a time. But I am going to tell you now. When I was a young man, just after we parted at Oxford, I became a minister. Yes, a regular ordained minister. That was before I became interested in astronomy. But, once ordained, always ordained—so, if you and Miss Carter really want to be formally married I can marry you, and I am sorry I didn't think to tell you sooner. Will you forgive me?"

The Englishman picked him up and held him at arm's length in the air.

"Forgive you? My word! How can I ever repay you? Charlotte! What do you think? Percy is a regular minister! He is going to marry us!"

The little white-haired woman almost ran up to the two men.

"That's wonderful, Harry," she whispered, "but we can't marry just now. You know I haven't a trousseau."

"My word! What has that to do with our marrying? I will speak to the other ladies about it. We are going to be married in about six hours and—why, you make me feel like wilted lettuce! You run on and find what the ladies here wear when they marry, and I will speak to the men and arrange for a real wedding supper."

That evening Sir Harry and his bride were looking into space. It had been a wonderful wedding, and though the ceremony was a new one to the Venusian ladies, still they had dressed the bride in an ensemble that brought out all her delicate beauty. The banquet had been a complete success.

Percy Whitland had secretly explained some details of an Earthly wedding to the Venusians and they

had tried to make the ceremony truly an Earthly one. Presents had been given, old shoes thrown and the bride had been thoroughly kissed by all the men.

While a wedding journey was, for the time, impossible, nevertheless arrangements had been made for the new couple to occupy one of the dome-houses as a gift from the entire nation.

So that evening Sir Harry and his bride were out on the mountain, gazing into space.

Cuddled in his arms, the little white-haired bride whispered, "Aren't the stars beautiful, Harry? See! That star there. What is it?"

"I believe it's Earth, my dear—our old home."

Sir Harry's bride sighed.

"Our old home! Shall we ever go back?"

Sir Harry held her at arm's length. He spoke soberly. "Do you want to go back, Charlotte?"

Charlotte gazed wistfully into the night. "Perhaps," she said, with an enigmatic smile.

And with this typically feminine reply, she crept closer into her husband's arms.