

Amazing Stories, October, 1926

# BLASPHEMERS' PLATEAU

By Alexander Snyder



I.  
A Difficult Place to Get Into

“IS he expecting you?” asked the hack driver hopefully, extending a gnarled hand for the bag of the elderly newcomer who had just alighted from the late afternoon train.

“Not exactly,” Mason informed him, relinquishing the bag. “I just wrote I’d ‘drop in on him’ one of these days, and receiving no answer to that, I supposed it would be all right for me to come on. Why? What is it?” noting the driver’s air of disappointment.

“We can’t do business then, I guess, Mister. Leastwise, ’twouldn’t be right for me to drive you up there and then have to bring you right back; now would it?”

Mason eyed the shabby old fellow of the delicate scruples with surprise.

“Do you mean to tell me I can’t get in unless I’m expected?”

The driver nodded. “Not after dark you can’t, Mister. It’d be that by the time we covered the four mile’ to his place.” He jerked a thumb in the direction of the crow-bait standing dejectedly between the shafts of an ancient vehicle. “The old gray mare, she ain’t what she used to be,” he apologized.

“You’re right,” agreed Mason, glancing at the horse. “She’s no descendant of Pegasus, to judge by externals. Well—what am I to do then, if you’re so positive there’s no use going up there tonight? Where shall I stay? There’s no sense taking the next train out, that is, supposing there is one before morning.”

The driver appraised him swiftly. “Well, now, Mister, you could stop up to The Travelers’ Hotel for the night, and travel on up in the morning. How’d that suit you? Hotel’s a mile in the other direction.”

Mason shrugged his shoulders resignedly, “Needs must, when the devil drives’—Oh! I beg your pardon! I meant

nothing personal,” he amended, at the driver’s laugh. “All right, then, The Hotel it shall be.”

He climbed into the hack agilely enough for one of his apparent years, and settled into the seat next the driver’s, while the latter untied the looped reins from around the stock of the whip, resting in its socket, slapped them up and down, and clucked to the mare.

“Are you a native here?” asked Mason, as they backed away from the station and lurched into the road.

“I be’n born and brought up here, Mister,” responded the driver, glad of an opportunity to while away the trip ahead.

“Then you probably know Doctor Santurn?”

**Mysterious Sounds—A Secret Menagerie**

“NO sir! I can’t say I do—nor does anyone else ’round about. He’s been a mystery here since he built, up on the Plateau, nigh onto ten year’ ago. Beats all how he keeps to himself. Folks do say though—” he stopped apprehensively.

“Go on!” said Mason encouragingly. “You won’t offend me. If it’s the truth, then that’s that; and if it’s a lie, I’ll get him to nail it when I see him tomorrow.”

“Well—where’d his menagerie come from?” blurted out the driver, turning half around toward his seat mate.

“Menagerie! Do you mean to say he has one?”

“Yes! An’ a ’quarium too!” declared the driver emphatically. “He had the cages and tanks built apart from the house ’fore ever he moved in. An’ the funny part of it is—where’d the animals come from? An’ the fish? We never did see even one crate come in by way of the railroad station, nor anything that looked like a cage loaded on motor trucks neither. ’Course, there’s be’n two or three of us be’n inside the gates on business—repairs an’ sich, quite a while ago, an’ they saw

plenty. An' now'n then there's city visitors like yourself; but they never bring nothin' but small boxes or a handbag. Once in a while, come to think of it, there's heavy machinery comes by freight; but folks t'other side of The Plateau say there never was a load of critters brought in that way neither."

Mason frowned. "What's the difference how they arrived? They probably came by night in covered motor trucks. Don't you know the Doctor is a world-famous biologist? He knows more about animals and what makes them tick than the next best half dozen put together. Get on with you, man! Are you trying to build a mystery around him?"

"No, no, Mister!" protested the driver. "There's funny doin's goes on in those buildings of his'n up there on The Plateau. An' he never shows himself a'tall. He just sends his Jap man down with a little car for mail and supplies, an' keeps to himself year in an' year out, 'cept for three or four men 'round the place. There! We're nearing the Hotel. 'Nother half mile or so an' we'll be there. Whoa!" drawing on the reins. "Hear that?"

"Music? Faint music?" asked Mason.

"Giddap! Yes, Mister. Something like music. Ruther it's radio noises from a tremendous big horn on the roof of the Doctor's tower. We kin hear it just at this point when the breeze's like 'tis now. Funny! Sometimes it sounds like a giant cricket, 'n' then again it sounds like a 'Katydid' or a tree toad. The sound carries most as fur's a locomotive whistle."

Driver and passenger completed the ride in silence, each immersed in thought.

"Well, here' we are, Mister!" said the driver as Mason climbed down and paid his fare. "Do you want I should call for you in the morning?"

"Do you want a 'peek' at the place?" smiled Mason. "Very well; make it nine o'clock. Good night!" He turned and entered

the small frame building that boasted the title of Hotel, and was heartily received by the rustic proprietor.

"Sure, now, Mr.—Mason" (glancing at the ancient register in which the newcomer had inscribed his name) "I'll be glad to put you up for the night. I'll show you to your room so's you can freshen up a bit, and when you come down there'll be a snack of supper on the table for you."

### What The Local In-Keeper Said

IT was rather cool and gusty outdoors, for early summer, and the dark and rutty roadways lacked appeal for an after supper stroll for Mason who contented himself with sitting in the "parlor" with his host. He recounted what the driver had told him.

"S truth!" said the innkeeper earnestly to his solitary guest. "Ben warn't lying. You try an' get in on The Plateau after dark, an' you'll look down the mean end of a sawed-off shotgun. There's a night-watchman at the gate, an' the wall's high an' studded with broken glass. The watchman won't listen to no talk whatsoever. An' while you're turnin' around preparin' to come back, you'll maybe hear some funny noises from beyond the wall."

"Pardon my asking," interrupted Mason, "but does the Doctor owe anything in the village?"

"No."

"Anybody miss anything?"

"Not so's I've heard," said the innkeeper.

"Anybody disappear without a trace?" ironically.

"I see what you're gettin' at, Mr. Mason. Sort of a polite way of askin' why don't we mind our business if he does no harm? There's not much to do in these parts, though, 'cept to speculate on other folks' business. An' I do admit the Doctor's fair

game for the curious.”

“Fair enough,” admitted Mason. “I haven’t seen him in years myself; but from what I know, he likes seclusion and doesn’t care for a strange audience, particularly when he’s performing some experiment.”

“Tain’t vivisection.” ventured the host, “How do you know?”

“The cages get fuller, ’stead of emptier, an’ the critters ain’t breedin’ ’cause there’s only one of each. Carpenter knows. He was up there a month ago to reinforce a cage, an’ he says a big monkey a’most grabbed him ’tween the bars.”

The evening waned rapidly as the innkeeper detailed the petty gossip of the village centering on the “doings” that occurred up on The Plateau; and when Mason climbed gratefully into the huge four-poster with its generous patchquilt, shortly before eleven, he lay wondering what the morrow held in store. Despite his deprecations and attempts to dispel the air of mystery with which the Hotel proprietor had invested the Doctor, some of the village’s superstition attached itself to him and disturbed his sleep.

### Getting Into the “Blasphemer’s Plateau”

AFTER a leisurely breakfast, Mason settled his account, bade the innkeeper adieu, and climbed, for the second time, to his seat in Old Ben’s hack, which the garrulous driver had brought around on time.

Jog-jog, talk-talk, jog-Jog. Then the labored breathing of the old horse as she hauled her burden along the stiff upgrade. The scrunch of wheels overriding the edges of the ruts; the clop-clop of hoofs on the level stretches; the cool, fresh breezes of early summer—all these various little sounds combined in a pleasant, unobtrusive symphony that lulled the tired senses of the elderly passenger, and soothed him into a state of peaceful, care-free, reverent happiness.

Beyond lay The Plateau, a flattened knoll of some five acres in expanse, toward which the road wound in tortured undulations between other and lesser knolls. As they neared their destination, driver and passenger became aware of a high stone wall completely surrounding the estate on The Plateau; and when they had approached closely to the entrance gate, they saw that the top of the wall itself was prickly with broken glass set in cement.

The main port of entry appeared to be a tall, iron door set flush in the wall, and Ben sought the bell affixed to the wall next to it. He pressed the button, and then drew back a trifle nervously, and stood abreast with Mason, who waited to be admitted.

Almost at once a small wicket, head high, was drawn back from within, and a stolid face with heavy lidded eyes appeared in the opening and regarded them passively.

“Well?” challenged the watchman belligerently, “What’s your business?”

“I’d like to see the Doctor,” said Mason, passing his card through the wicket. “Take him my card, please.”

“Wait!” said the guard, and closed the wicket in the door.

“See!” whispered Ben triumphantly. “What did I tell you? At night you’d get no answer a’tall, ’less you tried to get over the wall, ’n’ then the answer’d be buckshot most likely.”

There was the sound as of an iron bolt withdrawn, and the heavy door swung inward.

“Come in!” said the guard, taking Mason’s bag. “The Doctor’ll see you at once!” And to Ben, who would have followed, “No! You can’t come in! See the sign ‘Private’?” He closed the door in the face of the disappointed hackman.

The residence was set back at some little distance within the gate, and as Mason traversed the gravel path to it with his guide, he glanced with interest about the enclosure.

By now, a thousand questions had sprung to mind, elicited by his unusual reception, by that forbidding wall and medieval gate, by the strange-looking buildings just beyond the residence, and by the house itself, drab and repellent in the bright sunshine of the summer morning.

He followed the guard up a short flight of four steps, and then, at a gesture from the man, preceded him through the vestibule, and stopped on perceiving the subject of his visit.

### A Good Reception From Dr. Santurn

ON the threshold of a low-raftered sitting room, which was sumptuously furnished around a principal color motif of mahogany, stood Doctor Santurn, with hand extended. "Gary!" he exclaimed delightedly, hurrying forward to shake Mason's hand and pat him on the shoulder. "You're more welcome than I can say. When did you arrive?"

"Last night," said Mason dryly, "But they told me—"

"Enough!" cried the Doctor contritely. "Hoist by my own petard! This red tape with which I am forced to surround myself seems to have snared me badly if it deprived me of your company last night. Of all the people I've longed to see! How much time have you?" he broke off.

"All there is," declared Mason leisurely. "My last book is now on the presses, and I'm at 'loose ends' for a while." He regarded his old friend closely.

"I'm just 'sizing you up,'" he said, "to see what ravages the years have wrought."

"And you find—?" asked the Doctor.

"Few. You're still slight. You always were more ethereal than physical, I recall. Those spectacle lenses are just a trifle thicker—a natural thing for a bookworm. Same amount of hair, nearer white than gray," patting his own thinned out crop ruefully, "and the same old world-defying twirl to those

distinctive moustaches of yours. On the whole, I should say the years have treated you kindly."

"And you, too," rejoined the Doctor, "I'm more overjoyed every second, that you can make a long visit with me. I'll have you settled all ship-shape and proper in short order."

He picked up a felt hammer and smote a huge gong with the mallet, the mellow, booming note instantly summoning a bland and imperturbable Japanese.

"Suki," said the Doctor, "you will prepare the south bedchamber for Mr. Mason and make him so comfortable that he won't want to leave in a hurry. Take his bag up now."

A mirthless smile appeared and disappeared so quickly on Suki's face that Mason almost doubted he had seen it.

"If you can withstand the pressure of your curiosity," said the Doctor, "save your questions until later, until you orientate yourself. I suppose you'd like to make the rounds with me?"

"Surely!" said Mason. "Is that the library beyond?"

"You scent books as unerringly as a setter its quarry," smiled the Doctor. "Very well. First the library." He drew Mason to the door at the far end of the sitting room.

"Here are some thousands of volumes," said the Doctor, "and every one earns its keep. Your own archaeology series has its own niche of honor, and is exempt from the rules for a book's admission here."

"Rules?" asked Mason, puzzled.

"Certainly. We have no room for any but book's of science here, and new books, at that. As soon as a new volume comes out that supersedes or disproves an old one, out goes the old! With one other exception—Ah! You've come to it!" as Mason, who had been browsing at random among the formidable array of tomes stopped before a section in the

far corner of the room.

“Why, what’s this, Oliver?” cried Mason in astonishment. “Books on religion! The ‘Koran,’ ‘Holy Bible,’ ‘Oriental and Occidental Beliefs,’ ‘Superstitions,’ ‘Agnosticism,’ ‘Bhuddistic Philosophy.’ I’m quite astounded! I had no idea that you were so interested in theology and religion generally.”

Doctor Santurn’s eyes gleamed oddly behind the shielding lenses of his heavy spectacles.

“So much so, Gary, that all my work revolves about my personal beliefs. I am attempting to throw new light on Immortality and the Resurrection via the laboratory route.”

### **Going Through the Laboratory and Meeting the Assistants**

MASON was conscious of a twinge of fear for his old friend’s sanity, and scrutinized his face closely, hopefully seeking the clue to some jest; but finding the Doctor in serious mood, he forced himself to speak casually.

“What luck, Oliver?” he asked.

“Some,” confessed the Doctor. “Considerable. In fact, almost more than you will be able to assimilate or credit for some time. But enough of this mysticism! We can return here later. Come with me, if you will, and acclimate yourself to the atmosphere up here on The Plateau.”

He led the way through a short hallway, passing the foot of a staircase which ran to the upper floor.

“Living quarters are upstairs,” he explained. “The kitchen is back here, to one side, where Suki reigns unmolested. The main laboratory is in the rear extension on the other side. We’ll leave that until this evening. Just now let us visit the individual workshops.”

They left the house by the front way, following the gravel path around the side and to the rear, to the first of three squat, gray

buildings. This one was surmounted by a cylindrical brick tower, fully thirty feet in height, and this, in turn, was topped by a sixty-foot mast, carefully braced, and guyed to cement blocks set in the ground itself on either side of the edifice. A similar mast rose from the ground a hundred feet away, and between the two, depended the strands of a cage type of radio antenna.

“This is the electro-physical laboratory,” explained the Doctor, as he opened the door and led the way, in.

“Hello Stevens!” he said, “what are you up to now?”

A pleasant-faced, clean shaven man of middle age, with a scholarly stoop to his shoulders, rose from the laboratory stool on which he had been perched, intent on his work. He kept his hand on a knob-like contrivance connected with a peculiar type of galvanometer and some other, unfamiliar apparatus, and shut off a small, almost noiseless alternator, the armature of which continued to turn for almost a half minute after the circuit had been opened, so great had been its speed.

Doctor Santurn performed the introduction.

“You can speak freely in front of Mr. Mason,” he advised.

“I am progressing rapidly,” reported Stevens, “but I feel somehow that the plasma is contaminated. The vibratory rate is lower than I expected. There’s resistance somewhere.”

“I’ll see that Bridges makes up a fresh supply for you,” the Doctor assured him. He turned to Mason. “We’re just arriving at the responsive vibratory rate of blood plasma,” and, seeing the archaeologist’s look of incredulity, he continued, “No. We’re not delirious. Come along.”

The second building was a replica of the first laboratory, externally; but it lacked the tower and radio mast. Doctor Santurn

rapped at the door.

"All right, Bridges?" he called. "Sometimes he resents intrusion at a critical moment," he explained in an aside before the door opened.

A bald, wizened and swarthy individual in a grayish smock appeared in the doorway and glanced at their feet immediately.

"You're all right, Doctor; but I'll have to get a pair of rubbers for this gentleman." He acknowledged the introduction to Mason, excused himself for a moment, and returned at once with a heavy pair of rubbers. Mason put them on, wondering at the thick, cushiony, spring-rubber treads.

"Unlike the other mosques," explained the Doctor with a curious little laugh, "we require you to put on footgear before entering at this shrine of Bridges!"

"Move lightly!" cautioned the little man. "Going in!"

### Description of the Work

ROWS on rows of kegs and vats lined the walls, huge containers of chemical reagents from which the smaller stock bottles in their racks were evidently replenished. The glitter of glassware, grotesquely shaped flasks and tubes, the sheen of lacquered brass, scores of test tubes in serried array in racks, an indefinable odor of commingled gases, gave to the room the atmosphere of a Merlin's retreat.

"We do things in a wholesale way," explained Bridges. "We can perform almost any sort of biochemical experiment here, from the infinitesimally small to those requiring a hundredweight or more of materials. There's a bacterial incubator in that corner, and a refrigerator in this—duplicates of those in the 'zoo.'"

"Electrically controlled," supplemented the Doctor. "Most of our heating and all our lighting comes on those

wires strung on the poles you passed on the road coming up here. The town beyond supplies us with current, and keeps the meter at their end of our private line, so that the total current consumption is recorded there, no matter what new devices we hook on here. It keeps inspectors from coming up here constantly, and incidentally excludes them from a glimpse of affairs that do not concern them. Naturally, I pay well for the privacy."

He approached the workbench whereon reposed the bulkiest microscope Mason had ever seen. It rested under a glass bell on a rubber pad.

"How far have you gotten, Bridges?" asked his chief.

Bridges waved a hand at a row of stoppered test tubes containing various colored fluids.

"The solutions are still settling, Doctor. That is why I wanted to have you avoid all unnecessary jarring. The qualitative analysis is completed. 'Quantitative' will be finished by this evening. When Stevens checks up with me tonight, I'll make a leukocyte for you!"

Mason gasped audibly, and Doctor Santurn turned to regard him with a self-satisfied smile.

"Are you astounded?" I assure you we're not trying to 'pull your leg.' To paraphrase old Shakespeare, 'There are more things on The Plateau,' Gary, 'than you ever dreamt of in your philosophy.'"

"I don't believe what I've heard!" vociferated Mason stoutly. "How can I? Such things are preposterous! Do you mean to tell me—?"

"Not a thing!" said Doctor Santurn. "Tonight you shall see. At present I want you to steep a bit longer. Let us go over to see Johnssen."

### What the Village Says About It All

EXCEEDINGLY bewildered, a trifle loathe to leave the fascination of the bio-chemical laboratory, Mason followed after the Doctor, and with him kept to the path, to the last of the three one-room buildings that lay to the rear of the residence.

“Here we are!” said the Doctor, passing with Mason through the door. “This place houses our menagerie and aquarium.”

“Then it’s true!” exclaimed Mason, recalling the innkeeper’s story.

“What is?” asked the Doctor.

“One of the rumors the village is circulating about you.”

“Is it a crime to possess a private collection?” asked the Doctor, ironically.

“No-o.”

“Here’s Johnssen,” interrupted the Doctor.

A huge man approached them—a man perhaps fifty years of age, yet whose full head of ash blond hair, unlined, ruddy face and keen, sea-green eyes gave the impression of a remarkable state of preservation.

“What is new here?” asked the Doctor.

“We need a new thermostat for the primate’s cage,” said Johnssen, the words rumbling slowly and deeply in his throat. “Our youngster coughed once or twice last evening. It was chilly, if you remember, and I’m afraid he caught a cold. The old thermostat sticks, somewhere around seventy, and I’d like to get up to about ninety-five for emergencies.”

“Are you referring to that orang?” asked Mason.

“Yes,” said Johnssen, “the devil! For a two-year-old specimen born and brought up in captivity, one would think he’d be up to the usual monkey tricks. Not he! He sits there quietly and watches, watches—”

“Born and brought up here?” asked Mason of the Doctor.

“That is correct. He’s always been an orphan.”

“Cryptic, as most of the things I hear,”

retorted Mason, a trifle impatiently. “I simply can’t contain myself much longer. What is this all about?”

He leaned over the guard rail built around a huge tank set into the floor, and partitioned off into numerous smaller sections, each of which contained a fish or small amphibian. He waved a hand at the cages set about the walls, the orang being the largest of the various occupants.

“Where are the lions and tigers? The ones the villagers claim to have heard?” asked Mason.

“So long as they didn’t claim actually to have seen them,” said the Doctor, “my faith in the yokels is unshaken. They merely hear the sounds of certain local insects and birds amplified and sent out through the horn in the tower in order to test the attraction of the sounds for similar species. We occasionally use a radio decoy, so to speak, in testing our transmitter. Also, we convert various forms of radiant energy into ‘radio’ equivalents, and try them out too, and much noise results. We have actually transmitted the equivalent of radium, ‘gamma’ rays, the various waves found in polarized light and in X-rays, as well as the usual radio waves at the other end of the scale, which reach into the thousands of meters.

“To get back to this collection, however,” he continued, “I tell you truthfully that every one of the specimens you see here was born on the premises!”

“That python?”

“Almost three years ago, and he’s as big as the usual forty or fifty year old specimen,” the Doctor assured him.

“The badger, the lemur, and that brown toad?” persisted Mason.

“Everyone of them!”

“I give up!” confessed Mason.

“You had better, until after luncheon, Gary,” advised the Doctor. “Come along, Johnssen! It’s time to eat.”

The three men left the miniature zoo

and aquarium, and strolled back to the house together, where Stevens and Bridges joined them shortly.

### Synthetic Snakes

SUKI served them deftly and silently while they conversed about the topics nearest to their hearts. The talk was most amazing to Mason, who was reluctant to appear gullible.

"Mason, here, is an old college chum of mine," explained the Doctor. "After dabbling in science, he commenced on theology, and then, by easy stages drifted into archaeology in order to substantiate for himself some of the beliefs he had picked up. As for me, you see how I have departed from the paths of 'goodness.' You needn't hesitate to speak frankly before our friend here. He'll get the general import of your remarks. He's kept up with events in the scientific world—the known scientific world," he amended.

Stevens began.

"Have you ever heard of a radio wave measuring one meter?"

"Surely!" said Mason affably.

"One of a millimeter?" persisted Stevens.

"Not in radio work, though probably some of the radium wave emanations are shorter than that."

Have you ever heard of a quadrillimeter or a pentiliimeter?"

"Get on with you!" said Mason with some asperity. "There are no such words or measurements. You're making game of me!"

Doctor Santurn smiled, the swarthy, wizened Bridges chuckled, and Johnssen rumbled mirthfully.

Bridges took up the cudgels.

"Will synthetic gin produce the 'D.T.'s', to your knowledge," he asked slyly.

"Very likely," snapped Mason, on guard.

"Then a man who has taken sufficient

synthetic liquor over a long enough period of time should see synthetic snakes and animals, shouldn't he?"

"Clever!" jeered Mason. "Synthetic snakes! Fancy them!"

"No. Don't fancy them. They exist. You've seen one yourself."

"What! This is too thick for me!" cried Mason; but they gave him no mercy.

"It's your turn, Johnssen," said the Chief.

"Do you remember the ancient myth about Minerva springing forth full-fledged from the head of Jupiter?"

"Yes—well?"

"Of course it's a myth," conceded Johnssen, "But it's not so far from what might be possible."

Mason extended his cigar-case around the table.

"The cigars are 'on me', gentlemen. I assure you they contain no hasheesh or other substance calculated to encourage your fabrications. Munchausen himself would feel abashed in your presence.

His table-mates laughed in good spirits at his incredulity as they rose to go back to their separate tasks, and to Mason there was something forbiddingly convincing in the fact that not one of them had attempted to bolster his argument for argument's sake.

### The Nitrogen Cycle

THE sun had descended through its arc during the afternoon, sending, through the red, stained-glass panels of the westerly windows of the library, queer, bloody mottlings on the backs of the books that lined the walls, as Mason and the Doctor discussed the work on The Plateau.

"Gary, do I appear rational to you?" the Doctor had asked.

"Your question implies some self-doubt as to your own sanity, I presume.

Judging from externals, and as a layman, I can truthfully say you appear nothing out of the ordinary. Your manner of speech, however, has disturbed me somewhat; but on the whole I'd say you'd pass as nothing worse than slightly eccentric."

"Ah!" the Doctor had said. "But after I have proceeded a little, you'll think differently, no doubt. Shall I start with fundamentals?"

"Do!"

And then the biologist had entered on the weirdest and most unforeseen harangue that it had even been Mason's lot to attend.

"Have you ever heard of the 'nitrogen cycle,' where the element nitrogen, 'fixed' by bacteria on grass roots, is ingested by cattle, turned into proteins, eaten by humans, and returned again to soil and air, and so on ad infinitum?"

"Surely," said Mason, "That's elementary."

"That's Immortality!" corrected Doctor Santurn. "Nitrogen immortality, and just as demonstrable in every element.

"Nitrogen will always be nitrogen so long as the orbits of the electrons in its atom remain undisturbed. A change or a disturbance of the electrons will transform it into something else; perhaps into heavier or lighter nitrogen, perhaps into an entirely different substance. I know that to be true of every element.

"Now we take a big jump, and consider a human, being just before 'death' occurs.

"The blood courses through the vascular system, nourishing the tissues. Then the vital impulse ceases. The circulation stops. The tissue cells, starved for oxygen and nourishment, begin to disintegrate into their inert, protoplasmic elements.

"Electronic activity in the individual atoms, however, goes on forever, despite the gross dissolution and decay of the body. The

elementary matter of which the body is composed is indestructible no matter what form the body ultimately attains in the process of disintegration.

"That's Nature's method of analysis, of reducing a body into the individual and original elements which compose it. Does she waste these elements?"

"She does not! Of course not! She borrows a few carbon molecules here, a little calcium there, perhaps some sulphur and hydrogen elsewhere. Then she combines them in proper proportion, kindles them with the magic wand of radiant energy, and presto! A new living organism is in our midst—perhaps an amoeba, or one of the yeasts, mayhap bird or beast, or even a new human being!"

"You mean," said Mason intensely interested, "That Death merely disarranges the atomic composition of a body by interfering with the vibratory rate of its electrons, and then, by a rearrangement of the chemical elements of the deceased, and a new vibratory impulse, Nature creates a new form of life from the old?"

"Essentially, yes!" agreed the Doctor. "Only your definitions of Death, Nature, and Life mean separate things to you; whereas to me they mean God. Now, right here, I am about to utter what may sound like blasphemy to those ears of yours which drank in too much in those theology lectures of long ago, when you were just a plastic and impressionable boy.

### The Doctor and His Visitor Disagree

"IF *I* can do these things—if *I* can reduce an organism to its components and then rearrange them with life, will I not be God myself?"

"I see," said Mason, his voice bitter with disappointment. "'*Me und Gott*' as the Kaiser once remarked. You're a megalomaniac,"

"Your reactions do you credit, Gary," said Doctor Santurn, shrugging his shoulders apologetically. "But don't misunderstand me. I am not, I have no desire to be—Divine. I am just an inchworm measuring its length against the unknown end of Science's yardstick, in an attempt to reach a certain goal."

"A non-existent goal!" snorted Mason disgustedly.

"I desire to prove," continued the Doctor, "that spiritual Immortality does not exist, because physical, atomic Immortality precludes the possibility. And that goes for Resurrection, too. A man's body dies, disintegrates, and his atoms are used again to build other forms. His 'spirit' is merely the vibration which stimulates the electrons in their orbits."

"Yes?" sneered Mason skeptically.

The Doctor flushed, but continued in the same, pedantic manner.

"In radio work there are two sorts of waves we recognize; the 'damped,' or extinguished type, and the continuous or undamped variety.

"Mortal life is subject to damped impulses. The damping of vibrations may take place in a single cell in an hour; in man, a vast collection of cells, it may require 'threescore and ten', or, in the case of our old friend Methuselah, nine hundred and sixty three years. Barring accident, and applying a proper, continuous vibratory impulse to man, we should be enabled to keep him going indefinitely.

"I am not interested in that aspect of Immortality, my friend. It would interfere with the economic scheme of things. But I am desirous of showing that there is no 'spirit' that persists beyond man's dissolution. Death merely damps his vital vibrations, extinguishes the impulse, so to speak. Only his molecules, atoms and electrons live on forever."

He fell silent, lost in reverie; and

Mason wrapped in horrified speculation, did not disturb him. At length he broke the silence.

"And when you demonstrate your thesis to Mankind, Oliver, what do you expect to accomplish?"

Doctor Santurn brought up his wandering thoughts with a jerk, recollected time, place and adversary, and formulated his answer.

"Ah! Gary! I want to wipe out religion, the curse of humanity! I want men to live their years with the knowledge that what they waste here cannot, by any form of expiation, be made up in the 'Hereafter.' That 'Heaven' holds no greater reward than they are capable of achieving right here in the one existence; and that 'Hell' is a consciousness of error. When there are no barriers of religion between man and man, such as differences in faith now present, then the Brotherhood of Man will have arrived."

"You forget one thing," interrupted Mason, "Man's tendency to turn for assistance in time of stress to a Higher Power."

### The Doctor Not An Atheist

"MAN is a worm!" retorted Doctor Santurn. "Do you actually believe God guides the destinies of every individual bit of living protoplasm? He does, yes, in a wholesale way. He leaves the inconsequential details to the community. He endows us with knowledge sufficient for our well-being, and with a sense of ethics for the sake of society. He gives us the rudiments, the formulae for successful living, and then washes His hands of us, knowing that our neighbors will reward or punish us as we deserve."

"You are not exactly an atheist," said Mason, puzzled, "And yet—"

"I? An atheist? Hardly, Gary. I do believe this much: that a Great Power created the earth and all that is therein. But He or It

merely supplied the crude elements that might still be found to-day if all living matter were reduced to its lowest common components.

"Then He planted a cell here, another there, and gave them the Initial impulse that made them instinct with what you call 'life'. The rest He left to Evolution, which adapted them to changing conditions and environments through the aeons."

"If I understand you correctly," rejoined Mason, "Evolution, Nature, call it whatever you will, is the only true minister of the Deity?"

Doctor Santurn nodded, pleased.

"Call it that, or call it a physical, chemical, or a mechanical force, so long as you leave out all reference to the spiritual."

### **The Effect On the Visitor, Mason**

SOMETHING clutched at Mason's heart then, perhaps the memory of his father, long ago on a Thanksgiving Day saying grace over the festive board of the little New England farmhouse. He thought too, of his mother, laid away to the accompaniment of a clerical assurance of her spiritual persistence; of his own wedding and the old phrase, "Whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder"; and of the same dear wife's promise, just prior to her decease, to wait for him on the 'Other Side'.

But Oliver Santurn would deny these blessed things to mankind, he thought bitterly. He would rob humanity of the fruits, and leave them the husks.

It was all too preposterous, of course! Neither the Doctor nor any other man could compass these wild visions and bring them to fruition; every wailing soul, outraged, from the time of Cro-Magnon on downward through the ages, would frustrate them.

It did serve to show him, however, a cold and sinister picture of one whom he had thought of warmly as a friend for almost forty years,

### **Some of the Wonders!**

DOCTOR Santurn's main laboratory in the extension to the rear of the residence was brilliantly illuminated by searchlights set well away in the corners, so as to be non-interfering magnetically with the delicate apparatus assembled on the insulated table in the center. The clear, white beams were directed against a cluster of parabolic reflectors, suspended from the domed ceiling, which focused the light upon the table below.

The room itself was somewhat of a composite of the three Mason had visited in the morning, and was reserved for the purpose of correlating the separate facts ascertained in the individual departments, and applying them in actual experiment.

The Doctor and his assistants were garbed in sterile white surgeons' garb, gauze-masked and rubber-gloved, and they had provided the visitor with a similar outfit. He now stood listening attentively to the Chief's remarks.

"The slide is sterile, as you see, having been carefully subjected to heavy, moist heat pressure in the sterilizer for thirty minutes. The microscope shows it to be free from organisms. The instruments Bridges is using have also been carefully sterilized. Watch him carefully as I call off rates and quantities!"

Under what appeared to Mason as the central lens of a quadruplex microscope, Bridges placed another sterile glass slide, and to it transferred an infinitesimal speck of some element. The little man now bent to a stereoscopic eyepiece, and with a delicate stylus tapered down to the invisibility of a Wollaston wire, teased and crushed the speck until Mason could no longer discern it.

"He is breaking down that particle into its basic crystals," murmured the Doctor in explanation. "It is an easier method—arrived at by us after considerable research—to use

separate and individual crystals whose atomic weights we know, than to add or subtract via the scales method. We used to, at first; but now we have listed the exact weights of basic crystals."

He turned towards Bridges. "Three!" he ordered.

At Bridges' invitation, Mason peered through the eyepiece, and taking the fine probe in his unpracticed fingers, saw what appeared to be a telegraph pole prodding at a great pile of small, white, granular boulders. There was a deep valley beyond the mass, and across the gap lay three of the small builders by themselves.

Again and again the Doctor called off substances and quantities, until at last the requisite number of various crystals had been assembled in an inert mass on a fresh slide, a drop of clear blood serum added, and the whole surrounded by an incredibly thin iridium washer, and sealed by a cover glass.

Mason looked again through the quadruplex microscope and felt reassured that the mass was actually inert, a mound of chemicals in a puddle of clear fluid.

"Your turn, Stevens!" called the Doctor. "Have you found the rate?"

"Yes, Doctor, The wave is one hundred and five pentillimeters for human leukocytes. Various harmonics will produce mammalian, piscatory, or serpentine varieties. Shall I proceed?"

"By all means," urged the Chief.

### 24 Steps of Amplification

A BANK of twenty-four vacuum tubes, somewhat resembling those used for radio purposes, had been arranged at the end of the table opposite the microscopical and chemical apparatus; and to a metallic slab in their midst, Bridges now carefully transferred the slide with sterile tweezers.

Stevens then turned a milli-vernier

lateral clamp so that its edges made contact with the flat iridium washer under the coverglass on the slide.

"With twenty four cascaded steps of radio frequency amplification ahead of it," explained Stevens, "and the contents of this slide acting as the grid of the detector, a tremendous electronic impulse can be imparted."

He stepped to a corner of the room and wheeled into position a squat carriage from which a heavily insulated cable ran back to a special socket in the wall. Upon the carriage rested a box-shaped piece of apparatus the size of a large trunk, which Stevens referred to as a "neo-split-wave radio transmitter."

"It's just the reverse of the heterodyne principle, you know," he explained. "It steps the wave down as far as we want it, and we do need a very short wave to compete with and surpass the gamma rays of radium. Now we're ready," he said, focusing the wave director toward an almost invisible loop aerial on the receptor, and adjusting his controls.

"Six and eighty two hundredths of a second should be sufficient exposure," he remarked, setting the electric, split-second automatic stop.

"Stand back, please!"

As the little group moved slightly to one side of the path of the ray, Stevens closed the primary circuit of the transmitter.

A weird, horrific screech filled the room, as though an invisible Twentieth Century Limited express train had applied its brakes suddenly to screaming steel rails. All the Jinnis of Hell together could hardly equal the terror of it, thought Mason.

### The Swan Song of a Vacuum Tube

AND then silence descended, broken only by the faint, rattling, tinkle of broken glass falling somewhere inside the box on the carriage.

Stevens smiled.

“That was the swan-song of the transmitting tube. Tubes always collapse under the strain when used for a full exposure. We exhaust their three years of possible usefulness in a few, hectic seconds, and their elements shriek in protest as they disintegrate.”

“Hurrray!” interrupted Johnssen. “Bring the slide back before our subject freezes to death. I’ll have to warm it with a light bath and give it oxygen.”

The slide was immediately and deftly transferred back to its seat under the microscope lens, and treated to a bath of light directed at it laterally, and the cover glass lifted for an instant.

“You shall be the first to look, Gary,” directed Doctor Santurn. “I think you know from observation how to focus the microscope. It is simply the old type worked out to almost absolute perfection.”

Mason’s eyes were affixed to the stereoscopic attachment, the milli-vernier adjustment screw turning slowly between his fingers.

Back and forth, back and forth, he turned the adjustment screw, raising and lowering the tube columns until the field cleared. Then Mason’s hand drew slowly away from the super-microscope.

He gave a startled cry.

“Good God, Oliver! Something’s moving! Skimming about here and there in the drop of fluid! It can’t be—it’s impossible!”

“Is it?” asked the Doctor testily. “I thought you inspected every step of the process yourself.”

“I did—I did!” cried Mason excitedly, still watching the unicellular bit of life moving about in its element “Only this—” he turned and looked at the silent group, with his arms stretched to them appealingly.

“This is no hoax, gentlemen? It isn’t an elaborate farce at my expense? It’s true? Is it?”

One by one they gravely nodded affirmation of the genuineness of what he had seen, and at last he faltered a little, and breathing with difficulty turned to the Doctor.

“I—I’m not well, Oliver. I’d like to rest a bit. This thing has struck me all of a heap!”

### More Scientific Miracles Told Of

IT seemed incredible to Mason that only twenty-four hours’ earlier he had been seated with the proprietor of The Travelers’ Hotel in the village, laughing and conversing light-heartedly over the whimsical absurdities, suspicions and superstitions of the natives, as related by the host.

That was another world, another existence as far as the Poles away from this atmosphere of deadly, calm, fixity of purpose with the destruction of mankind’s beloved and familiar beliefs as its goal.

Again in the library, resting from the shock of what he had witnessed in the laboratory, Mason sat tête-à-tête with the biologist and listened with strained absorption to his friend’s remarks. (“Friend? I’m not certain!” thought Mason.)

“What you saw performed, this evening,” the Doctor was saying, “was the achievement of a goal we have already reached by a slightly different and easier method. You saw a single cell created. We have gone further—much further.

“Every one of the fish and mammals in Johnssen’s care was born in a similar manner. Only we didn’t create them cell by cell. We merely obtained the unfertilized fish roe, or reptilian eggs, or mammalian ova from various private aquaria and zoological collections all over the country, wherever a female specimen had freshly expired or been killed.

“It is easier to start with the unfertilized primary cell, actuate it in the

laboratory, and permit its gestation and growth thereafter in a natural manner.

"Again—we have gone beyond even this. We know the composition of the eggs and ova of more than fifty varieties of organisms. We have duplicated them successfully and actuated them with vibratory impulses equivalent to the fertilization and germination processes of 'Nature'. We control the sex at will by limitation of the chromosomes of the primary cell. In most respects, this method is the simpler of the two we have worked out.

"The other method, of which you saw an example tonight, is a step toward creating the individual tissues of the grown body. We have already duplicated the main, or parenchyme elements of several varieties of connective tissue—namely, areolar, fibrous, elastic, reticular, and the like.

"Blood, however, presents a difficult problem, and is taking longer to duplicate, because of the various cellular elements in it which exist in changing proportions. We're getting there, though!"

"And if you do?" asked Mason, hanging on each word of the highly technical description of the Doctor's work.

"And when we do, you should have said." rejoined Doctor Santurn.

"When we do," he continued, "we'll use the human ovum now in Johnssen's incubator, *and artificially create a human being!*"

"Damn your matter-of-fact confidence!" thought Mason.

"Just now," resumed the Doctor, "we want to be able to duplicate every variety of human blood we encounter in order to prepare for any emergency we may encounter that may arise after the birth of our subject. Transfusion, for instance."

Mason shivered slightly.

### A Discussion in Theology

IN his reverent delving into the archives of the past, 'midst African sand dunes and buried Greek and Roman cities, he had come across the records of unspeakable practices, horrific and revolting; but never had he sensed so sinister an aura as that which surrounded the quiet-voiced, mild-mannered scientist who droned of his hopes and accomplishments.

If only he had the desire to dedicate his brilliant discoveries to the cure of disease, to the alleviation of suffering, to the elevation of Mankind and the Glory of God!

But no! His purpose was to render null and void all that had inspired faith in spiritual reality since the dawn of human life on the earth.

"Your work is monstrous, Oliver!" he said.

"No matter how good your intentions may be, you are preparing to foist on humanity something that they will abominate!"

Doctor Santurn spoke with a tinge of sarcasm in his voice, which was pitched slightly higher and sounded somewhat strained.

"Since when are you a moralist, Gary?"

"Since this very moment, Oliver! You'll knock the props from under civilization and offer cold consolation in return. The sort of Immortality you believe in is no solace to the average man, even if your theories are entirely correct—which I am not prepared to admit."

"Stuff and nonsense! Do you really suppose, if you should die this minute, you'd go to a 'Hereafter' clad in celestial habiliments, but still appearing your present age—wrinkles, bald spot and all? Have you ever thought seriously of it Gary? What age would you be if you died and went to 'Heaven'? Would you dwell through Infinity agelessly, awaiting Gabriel's saxophone to

clothe yourself again in the mortal clay you had left behind?

“You wouldn’t find it, Gary! Not on Resurrection Day. You’d find that while you had strayed off, Nature had borrowed some of your very material molecules and employed them elsewhere in a most; useful manner.

“Then the only recourse left you, if there should be a ‘You’, would be to appropriate unto yourself the Oriental belief in reincarnation, find yourself a new organism about to be horn, and crawl into swaddling clothes for a new start—perhaps as a sacred cow, or a cat!

“Stuff and nonsense, Gary! How could you bring yourself expediently to believe in a ‘heathen’ doctrine?”

“Stop—stop it!” cried Mason, feeling as if some roiling hand had stirred up the mud of doubt on these very questions which had always secretly troubled him.

“On the other hand,” went on the Doctor, as though Mason had not spoken, “Consider these benefits: Men and women born free of any taint—physically free from blemish, and psychologically exempt from the age-old inhibitions and fears that hamper them to-day. ‘Religion’ is responsible, basically, for most of these psychic handicaps.”

“Will they all be soulless automatons?” interrupted Mason, rallying again to the attack. “All of one level of mediocrity or genius? All with the same tastes, desires and capabilities?”

“Granting your so-called ‘benefits’, what becomes of man’s age-old desire for perpetuation in the traits of his children? What of his innate urge for perpetuation after he ceases to walk among the living?”

“Instead of a soul, you claim he becomes a completely damped impulse in the ether. Try and tell men that, and see whether reason or instinct prevails!

“At your peril attempt to ram your ‘Brotherhood of Man’ scheme down their

throats in the manner you propose.

“Oh, yes! Just try!”

But the Doctor merely laughed, refused to be drawn into further argument, and prepared to retire.

### A Feeling of Repulsion Begins to Grow

TIME stood still, up there on The Plateau; and the absence of newspapers, even of calendars, had its effect on Mason who lapsed quickly into the routine of the place.

Repelled by what he saw and heard, yet, nevertheless, fascinated by each step forward in the monstrous work, he spoke in a half-hearted manner of taking his departure, only to comply with the Doctor’s cynically veneered proposal that he “stick it out.”

What he had witnessed during the first few hours following his arrival had created within him a deeper repugnance than he had believed himself capable of feeling. Gregarious by instinct, tolerant of the foibles and failings of the genus homo, and even indulgent of some of them personally. Mason brought to bear his best arguments to turn Doctor Santurn aside from the accomplishment of what he finally termed “Hellish desires.”

The biologist had indulged in another of his mild laughs at that; but if he had proclaimed his intention at the top of his voice, it could not have served better to convince Mason that wordy interference, would be futile.

For the first time the archaeologist became aware of his own duality of nature. Ordinarily frank to the utmost, more comfortable as donor than as supplicant, there rose from his inner consciousness the knowledge that he would travel devious and subtle routes, if need be, to circumvent the Doctor. He was no longer in doubt as to the man’s ability to create at will, many varieties of organisms.

Johnssen's charges became more numerous day by day, and whatever had once been animated in the laboratories on The Plateau was jealously guarded and nurtured.

Each day had its definite assignment to be completed, the schedule being laid down on the preceding evening; and as Mason contributed an apparently eager curiosity, the Doctor and his staff soon grew used to his appearance in this laboratory or that. They even found amusement in directing him to push this button or throw that switch, and watching his amazement at the results.

They were playing with the Higher Science, and it is doubtful if they could have recalled the rudimentary principles upon which their discoveries were based, so accustomed had they become to manipulation of their super-devices, and the performance of their intricate experiments.

On the surface, Mason was apparently reconciled to the projects which he watched grow to fruition, from day to day. Within, however, his submerged nature was slowly gaining the ascendancy.

Calm, rational, well-balanced mentally, ordinarily, he nevertheless felt at times a desire to seize some convenient bludgeon and smash—smash to atoms these unbelievable devices which were to bring grief to mankind. At such moments there seemed to ring in his ears the cry,

“Sodom and Gomorrah! There are no righteous here!”

### **Mason's Mind Begins to Be Affected By What He Has Seen**

HAD he been possessed of an explosive, under the stimulus of his hidden impulse he might have been prompted to sacrifice himself as a martyr for Humanity's sake by reducing the laboratories and occupants into the particles to which the Doctor was so fond of referring. There was no opportunity for this,

however, or rather, at best he might be successful in destroying Bridges' laboratory alone, for inflammable material in bulk was stored there.

Johnssen's charges—especially the python and the giant orang—came to mind as Mason pondered on the possibility of using them as active instruments of mischief; but no satisfactory method of employing them as Frankensteins occurred to him. He discarded the idea, for while he might account for the artificial specimens in the zoo, and possibly eliminate Johnssen, there would be left the other laboratories, and the Doctor, Bridges and Stevens with whom to reckon; to say nothing of Suki and either of the watchmen.

Stevens, the youngest of the scientists, was possessed of so many likeable qualities, despite his sacrilegious work, that he was a thorn in Mason's conscience when the thought of murder came to him.

But again a voice seemed to cry in Mason's ear, “Slay! Smite them hip and thigh! Spare not one of the blasphemers!”

Mason began spending much of his time in the electro-physical laboratory, where he came to be accepted by Stevens as a sincere searcher after knowledge, and, as an intimate of his Chief's, entitled to every courtesy and consideration.

Soon Stevens was permitting the older man to assist in some of the work, and as time fled by, and almost a month had elapsed since his arrival, Mason came to acquire a fair working knowledge of the operation of the equipment, without in the least attempting to ascertain the underlying principles.

As each step was checked up here, Stevens would demonstrate to Mason before presenting his findings to the Doctor.

“You know,” he once remarked, placing on the laboratory table a live rabbit that had been snared by one of the watchmen, “that what is true of a theorem can often be demonstrated conversely. For instance, if we

can create by one method, we should be able to destroy by a diametrically opposite and related method. We have made blood of many varieties with this neo-wave-generator.

“It is equally possible to destroy the blood and tissue elements by reversing the wave polarity by means of this change-over switch.

“This experiment is *entre nous*, if you please. I don’t think the Doctor would altogether approve; but I should like to demonstrate to you what I mean.

“Observe this white rabbit—the fine, shell-like pink of its ears, due to the coursing blood. I am going to use a negative and reversed harmonic for rabbits’ blood haemoglobin. Watch!”

With Mason behind him, intent on his slightest action, he closed the circuit with the director focused on the rabbit.

### **Instantaneous Production of Anemia By Rays**

THE loud, metallic screech, now familiar to Mason, commenced and ceased almost instantly, and now the rabbit gained his attention.

To his amazement he saw its pinkish ears grow paler, blanch to an opaque white, to the white of a fish’s belly—to leprous white. The animal seemed to shrink slightly, to breath with difficulty, all within the compass of a minute.

“The subject,” announced Stevens in a satisfied manner, “is dying of pernicious anaemia. At least, I have employed a ray destructive to haemoglobin—the red blood cells. If you were to take a specimen of this rabbit’s blood over to Bridges, he could show you under his microscope that practically all the red blood corpuscles had been destroyed. I’d rather you’d take my word for it and refrain from asking him, as this side line is a little secret of my own.”

Not again was Mason permitted to view a demonstration of the powers of the destructive wave; but his eyes wandered often to the wave-changing device on the switchboard of the transmitter, as Stevens busied himself with innumerable tasks.

Another week elapsed, during which time the concerted efforts of the scientists were devoted to a duplication of the various principal cells of the nervous system and brain. They worked with amazing speed and accuracy, did these men.

“It wouldn’t do, Gary,” Doctor Santurn remarked, “to bring that human ovum to life next month, only to have it turn out an imbecile. I am going to make sure there’ll be the nucleus of a sound brain within its cranium, after we bring it into being.”

Mason smiled, despite the impulse to rend and tear.

He could not, however, look into the Doctor’s eyes for fear of disclosing his true feelings, as he murmured false phrases of approbation.

Mason had learned to dissimulate.

### **The Horror Of It All Grows**

WORN and haggard from the conflict of forces which raged within him, the elderly archaeologist gave up all thought of the outer world, his every desire centering on accomplishing the destruction of the work and workers of the Plateau Laboratories.

He almost screamed aloud in horror at the artificial birth of the baby, which took place in Doctor Santurn’s main laboratory a month later.

The ovum, which had been subjected to activating treatment under the ray months before, and had been in Johnssen’s incubator all this while, was now a full-term foetus and needed but the final exposure to the action of the ray to bring to life a lustily bawling youngster.

Before Johnssen, with almost maternal solicitude, rushed it off to its incubator—the same, as a matter of fact, that the orang had once occupied— Doctor Santurn examined it carefully.

With an air of disappointment he finally turned to his assistants and remarked, "There has been some slight error of calculation. The infant is a cretin. We shall be delayed with its brain development until we have subjected it to radio-glandular therapy for a while."

Then, against his inner loathing to be present on several succeeding occasions, Mason had witnessed the delicate treatments which transformed the hideous creature into a seraphic-faced, physically perfect specimen of babyhood—like the forced growth of some ugly bulb under hothouse methods into a blooming orchid of rare beauty.

Doctor Santurn, however, would not declare himself satisfied until he should have implanted a section of brain tissue into the child's cranium, for subjection to rapid growth by means of neo-wave stimulation.

Mason had by now passed the bounds of rational reasoning which might have led him to perceive the valuable by-products of the biologist's experiments, the means for eradicating many of the woes and much of the suffering of the peoples of the world. He nursed his fear assiduously, on the Doctor's oft-repeated statement that he meant to use his discoveries, not as a relief measure for "miserable humanity," but to destroy their "erroneous belief" in the Divinity of Creation, and in Spiritual Immortality.

Helplessly, desperately, Mason strove to stem the tide of this blasphemy, but no opening presented itself for favorable action by him.

A bit of the Doctor's irony recurred to him again and again. In commenting on the birth of the child, Johnssen had said, "We ought to name it."

And Doctor Santurn, head bowed in deep thought for a few moments, had looked up and replied,

"We shall call it MacDuff. Like his namesake, he was not born of woman!"

### Playing With a Human Mind

A MILD, Indian summer's evening in late September was declared favorable by Doctor Santurn, for the final brain treatment that should transform MacDuff's mentality from mediocrity to precocity.

Mason stood by, in sterile garb, and watched the preparations that centered about the anterior fontanelle of the infant's cranium.

Trembling, hardly daring to speak for fear of betraying his emotion, he managed to subdue his excitement, and asked to be allowed to participate in the experiment.

"Ah, Gary! I'm delighted to see you running up the 'white flag' at last, after all your opposition! I knew you'd come around in time to the proper way of thinking if I kept you here long enough. Stevens! Kindly set the controls for Friend Mason, and we'll have him close the circuit that will make of this infant a genius."

Grouped on either side of the swaddled infant, intent on its proper placement by Johnssen, stood the Doctor and his assistants. They instinctively moved back a step, through force of habit, as Stevens called, "Ready?"

"Quite ready!" croaked Mason, standing by the controls. He would have to work rapidly with the thirty six seconds of exposure which the apparatus was set to deliver.

"Go!" called the Doctor, intent on the prone infant.

A metallic shriek pierced the quiet of the domed room as Mason threw on the current, and drowned the slight click of another device on the switchboard, which he suddenly shifted without having been bidden

to touch it.

With desperate haste he pivoted the wave generator, raised its focus, and swept it slowly across the heads of the unsuspecting group that stood apparently intent on MacDuff.

His actions had been accomplished within fifteen! seconds, and then, with a sob, Mason broke the circuit with a hand switch, and let quiet fall again in the laboratory.

Had he failed?

He did not know as he peered intently, fearfully, at the immobile faces of the scientists. They stood so quietly—almost like petrified men!

He shrank back in terror as the Doctor raised his head suddenly and pointed an accusing finger at him.

“Gary”, said the Doctor bitingly, “you have abused the most sacred canon of hospitality in planning the destruction of your hosts. Don’t attempt to deny it!” he barked, as Mason raised a trembling hand.

“If we had been in proper relation to the receptor, we’d have been idiots by this time. The ray you directed at us would have destroyed our brain tissues. You’ve been carefully watched, you bigoted would-be murderer, despite the fact that you appeared to be free from observation!”

Mason, still white and shaken, was stung to retort by the sharpness of the Doctor’s tone.

“Hospitality be hanged when Humanity’s happiness is at stake! I’d do it again, if I had the chance!”

“You would?” asked Doctor Santurn, his voice silken with an ominous threat.

“Assuredly!”

“Then listen to this:”

A few whistled notes issued forth incongruously from the lips of the elderly scientist.

“Do you recognize the quaint little air, Gary? It’s from Gilbert and Sullivan’s

‘Mikado’. To refresh your memory, I’ll quote the words. ‘To make the punishment fit the crime, the punishment fit the crime!’”

He paused for a moment to let his meaning impress itself on Mason’s mind, and then continued,

“In simple, unadulterated English, my good man, you’ve asked for a taste of your own medicine!” He nodded to his assistants.

### Almost a Riot in the Laboratory

THERE was a wild threshing and straining and heaving of bodies as Mason fought to evade his captors. He reviled and cursed them and spat in their faces as they secured him to the table from which the infant MacDuff had been tenderly removed. Finally, when he perceived the futility of struggling further, he lay quietly, and just before they focused the transmitter on his head he prayed aloud, not for deliverance, but for the destruction of his captors.

Stevens had replaced the disrupted tube with a new one, and the horrendous screech that now arose as he closed the circuit seemed almost to have something human in its terrible protest.

Within a quarter of an hour from the time he had attempted the lives of the scientists, Gary Mason, the one-time brilliant archaeologist had become metamorphosed into an adult with the mentality of a three year old child—a sleepy child, at that. Doctor Santurn called for Suki to put him to bed.

“Now, gentlemen,” he said to his dishevelled assistants, “Science can proceed unhampered by fanatics. It is perhaps fortunate that our guest knew nothing of the mines placed under our buildings, nor of the bombs charged with Bridges’ gas which is as deadly as Lewisite. Our knowledge is to be devoted to one great purpose, and rather than let our achievements fall into the hands of lily-livered gentry who might convert it to their

own maudlin aims, I repeat our pledge to destroy, should it become necessary, the Plateau and all its houses. Remember, I—I—”

He paused, his face distorted by a spasm of pain.

Swiftly he ripped his surgeon's gown from his body and bared his torso to the gaze of his startled assistants.

“What do you see, Bridges?” he asked in a low tone of alarm. “Quick!”

Bridges, pressing his own face as if in pain, peered intently at the Doctor's neck.

“There's a peculiar enlargement under the angle of the jaw,” he said. “Why! It's swelling as I watch!”

“Quick! Trace down the lymph nodes in the neck,” the Doctor commanded, his face contorted.

Bridges did so. “Swelling too,” he announced, “They're like marbles. It's almost like—I should say like—”

“Go on, man!”

“Like metastasis in cancer, when the infection spreads.”

“Good Lord!” blurted forth Stevens, inconsistently calling on One he had long scorned, “We never thought these currents would act like X-Rays! Simple high frequency! Who'd have thought—!”

### Dr. Santurn Acknowledges Defeat

“DAMN your ignorance!” said the Doctor bitterly. “Ordinarily cancer takes up to a couple of years to kill, and here you've saddled me with an unknown hothouse variety that's killing me in minutes! You gaping fools! Haven't you ever heard of the cumulative effect of Roentgen Rays and Radium Rays? Well, now you know the Neo Wave is similar. Oh, yes, now you'll know! Mark you my lads, I'm going fast, and I know it; but you'll follow soon yourselves!”

“You, Johnssen! What're you looking at on your arm? What's the trouble with your

face, Bridges? Nose seems badly off center. Hi, Stevens, you blighted nincompoop! Do your feet hurt? Poor Trilbys!” He laughed ironically.

With faltering steps he dragged his pain-wracked body to the far corner of the room, and pressed against the wall next a hexagonal panel set invisibly in the tiles.

Bridges was running about like one blinded, futilely wringing his hands.

Johnssen gazed with terrible fixity at his forearm, feeling the chain of nodes that were swelling, up to the arm pit.

And Stevens was crying, frankly and unashamedly as he clutched at his ankle.

“Boys,” said the Doctor in a sibilant whisper, “We're beaten! We have no remedy for this sort of venom. If we'd have studied diseased tissues for the sake of Humanity, as our friend Mason might say, there'd be a fighting chance for us. Oh, well! It was fun while it lasted; but something's beaten us.

“Something? Is there a Something?”

The hexagonal panel was open, and deep into the recess in the wall the Doctor inserted his arm. Summoning his waning strength, he managed by a tremendous effort to force a raucous croak through his contracted larynx.

“*Allons! Mes enfants!*” he called to the heedless trio absorbed in their own separate purgatories. “A short life, and a merry one!”

His arm, sunk to the shoulder in the wall recess, turned slowly.

### The Inn-Keeper's Last Words

THE proprietor of the Travelers' Hotel in the village, growing talkative, occasionally, to some favored guest these days, may point toward the Plateau, just as nightfall enshrouds it, and describe it as a place beloved of the Devil.

“Nothing but ruins are standing there since the night of the big explosion,” he

explains.

“Two men who went up to investigate, dropped in their tracks the moment they entered the gate, and the rest of us at a distance held back a good ways. No one ’ud dare go near the place. Finally the War Department sent an expert. He said the Plateau was chock full of some sort o’ poison that’d settled down and blighted everything. ‘Nothing can live there for years,’ says he.

“So we went and put up a high wall with plenty of warning signs, clear around the old wall; but ’tain’t necessary, really. Ha! Try an’ get some one who knows to go there for love’r money!

“Would *you* like to explore,” he asks pointedly, “Where no green grass grows, nor

no vines cover the ruins? Where birds never rise no more once they light there? Sure you wouldn’t! The place is damned and haunted, I tell you!”

And then the genial proprietor grows thoughtful.

“There was a kind of elderly fellow stopped here on his way up there, ’most a year ago. Said his friend up there on the Plateau was perfectly all right and aboveboard. I wonder what happened to that there feller?”

He shivers slightly.

“Let’s go in an’ turn on the light,” he suggests.

“The durn subjec’ gives me the creeps!”