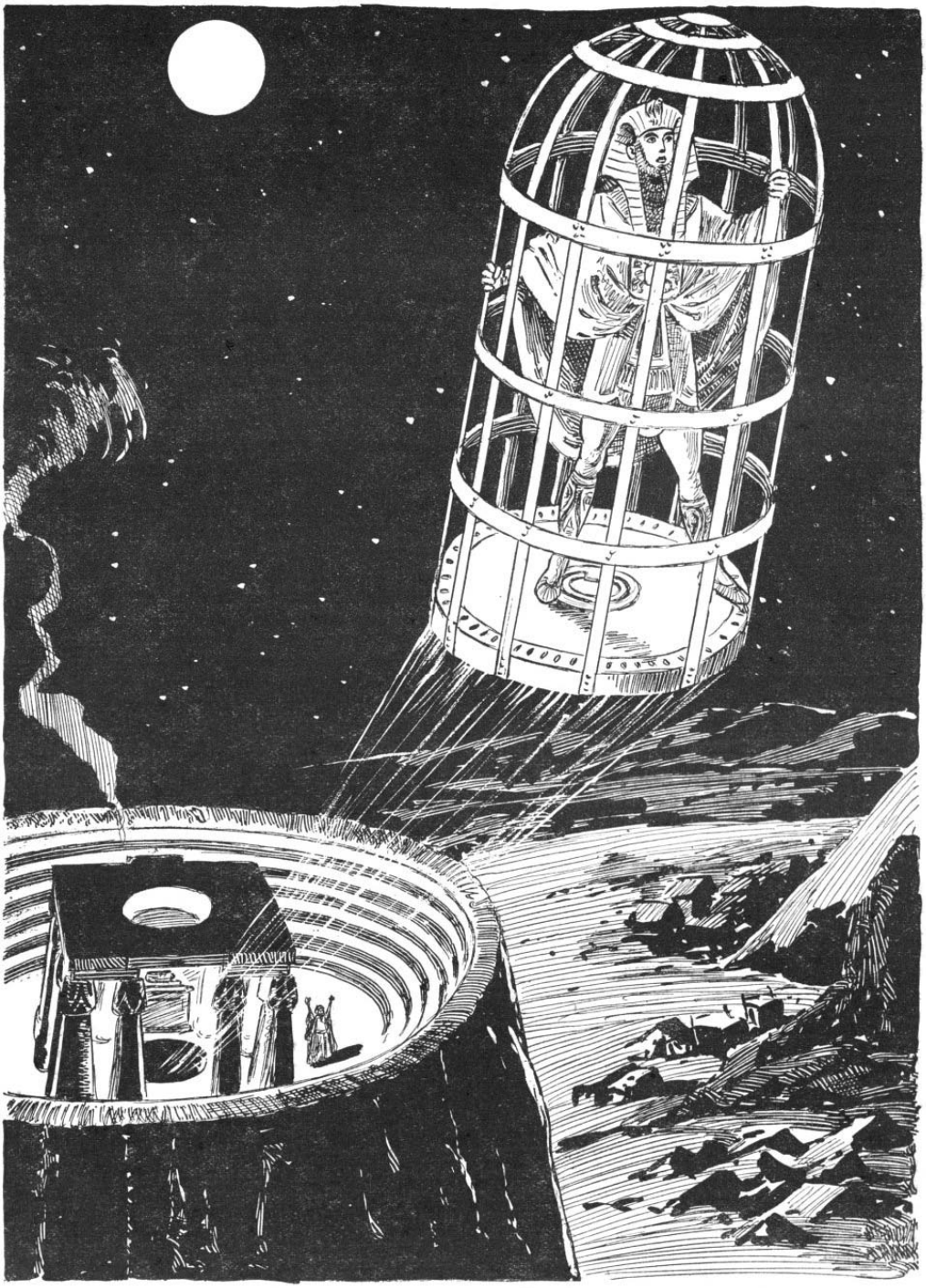

When it started from the bottom, it traveled very slowly until it reached the mouth, level with the floor of the temple. Then it flew off, not vertically, but horizontally, just skimming the floor.

The Face of Isis

by Cyril G. Wates

CHAPTER I
The Golden Gasket

ELLIOTT COURTLAND swung into the driver's seat, his face aglow with pleasure. He stepped on the starter, threw in the gear and released the clutch. There was a crash as the little roadster backed violently into a portly and dignified limousine, which was reposing pompously at the curb a few feet behind us.

"Damn!" ejaculated Courtland, "That's as bad as Old Waddles and the Face of Isis!"

MANY years before, Courtland and I were classmates, but after our graduation we drifted apart and I had not heard from him for a long time. At last, business called me east. The morning after my arrival in Boston, I left my hotel and turned down Boylston Street. As I was standing at the corner of Washington, waiting for the traffic signals to change, I received a violent blow between the shoulder blades and wheeled around to behold my old schoolmate.

"By the Pyramids of Egypt!" he roared, "If it isn't Pete the Polliwog!"

"You seem to be in some doubt about it," I grumbled, wishing that elbows were double jointed, so that I could rub my spine, "How do you know I'm not the Emir of Afghanistan in disguise?"

"Good old Pete!" cried Courtland, pumphandling my arm like mad, "I'd know that homely frog face if I saw it in the Aquarium. Where are you bound? It doesn't matter, anyhow; you're going with me. Come on, Leicester's in the next block."

Unheeding my protests, he hurried me along to where a rather dilapidated sporting car was parked.

"Jump in! Jump in!" he cried.

"But where is your friend?" I asked, doubtfully, Mr.—er—Mr. Lesterter?"

Courtland roared with glee.

"Leicester! This is Leicester. Got tired of Lizzie. No name for a bachelor's car. So called him Leicester. You know, Queen Lizzie's best beau. Earl of Leicester."

Courtland all over. Rattle-brained as ever. And then, in his excitement, he threw the gear shift into reverse instead of low and brought about the collision which railed forth his cryptic remark.

"That's as bad as Old Waddles and the Face of Isis!"

I thought it wise not to interrupt him in his duties at the steering wheel, to demand an explanation. Waddles I knew. It was the popular name for Dr. Myron Wadsworth, Professor of Inorganic Chemistry under whom Courtland and I had learned our first smattering of the mysteries of spectrum analysis. I remembered the little man vividly, with his faultlessly trimmed Vandyke beard and gold pince-nez, hurrying across the Campus with that peculiar waddle, which, in combination with his name, had been responsible for the cognomen "Old Waddles." He always carried a cane, not to assist his faltering steps, for it never touched the

ground, and besides, he was extremely active, but to keep his hat on! He invariably grasped that cane like a billiard cue and rested the crook on the crown of his grey felt hat. It made no difference to Waddles whether the wind blew a hurricane or a zephyr, that cane was used for one purpose only—to hold his hat on!

Yes, I knew Old Waddles, but Courtland's reference to the "Face of Isis" left me completely in the dark. It sounded like the name of some heathen idol. Persian or Egyptian. Egyptian, that was it. But what an Egyptian God had to do with Waddles, and what they both had to do with a broken down car, was beyond my power of imagination.

Presently we escaped from the thick of the traffic and were clattering up Commonwealth Avenue bound for the Cambridge side of the Charles. No longer in imminent danger of sudden death, I ventured to ask for an explanation, sensing a possible story for my newspaper, out West.

"Oh! that!" exclaimed Courtland, "The Face of Isis! Quite an adventure! Poor old Waddles, he was mad as a wet hen! I'll take you out to the shanty and my Jap'11 get us a snack. After dinner, I'll tell you the story, if you care to hear it."

THAT evening, in Courtland's cosy den, with our pipes lit and drawing well-and our feet stretched out on the fender, I reminded my friend of his promise. Courtland puffed thoughtfully for a few seconds.

"Know anything about Egyptology?" he asked, abruptly.

"Not a thing. Why?"

He rose and went to a large cabinet and returned bearing a metal casket about a foot square and perhaps half as deep. He handed it to me and I exclaimed in surprise as I felt its weight.

"What do you think of that?" asked Courtland. "It's solid gold, you know. Fifth Dynasty. King Kutamen-Pash. That's his cartouche on the corners."

The casket, which must have been immensely valuable, was a marvel of the goldsmith's art. At the corners were four female figures, each bearing in uplifted hands, a scarab inscribed with the king's name and titles in the customary hieroglyphics. On the head of each of these statues was a curious crown like a globe with two curved horns.

The top of the casket bore a design in bas-relief, representing a bull with its forehoofs resting on a crescent and the brow of the animal bore another scarab inscribed with the royal symbols. The sides of the box were closely covered with rows and rows of hieroglyphics. I turned the massive casket over and on the bottom, which was otherwise perfectly smooth, was a deeply incised pattern.

"This looks for all the world like a working drawing for some kind of machine," I commented.

"You're not far wrong, at that," replied Courtland, as he took the casket from me and set it on the table. And then he told me the promised story. I cannot attempt to reproduce Courtland's jerky, emphatic speech, or the graphic gestures, with which he filled in the gaps in his narrative. The whole story was so improbable that I should have doubted Courtland's veracity, but for the dumb witness of the glittering golden casket on the table. Professor Wadsworth is dead, so his evidence is not available. Courtland has given me permission to publish the story, so here it is. Take it or leave it!

CHAPTER II
The Mountains of Morocco

DURING his last two years at school, Courtland was one of Professor Wadsworth's

favorite pupils, not on account of any special aptitude in chemistry, but because the professor discovered Courtland in the school library one day, absorbed in a book on ancient Inca civilization. It happened that archaeology was Old Waddles' special hobby and he had devoted much time to the theory that the Aztec culture was an offshoot of that of the ancient Egyptians.

In Courtland, he found a devoted disciple and the friendship which developed as the result of a common interest, continued after Courtland left school and entered Harvard. It came as no surprise to Courtland, therefore, when, shortly after his graduation, he received a letter from the professor, inviting him to act as his assistant in an expedition to the west coast of Morocco, where Waddles hoped to find evidences of an Egyptian migration to Mexico.

Courtland, who was under no material necessity to work for his living, snatched at the opportunity for adventure, and after hurried but thorough preparations, the last week in October found him embarked with the Professor on the S. S. *Glaconic,* bound for Southampton. Here they trans-shipped to Havre and thence journeyed by train through France and over the border to Cadiz on the southern coast of Spain.

At Cadiz they succeeded in chartering a small sailing vessel with a villainous looking captain and a still more disreputable crew.

And five days later they and their belongings were put ashore at Ifni, a Spanish port on the coast of Morocco.

Courtland explained to me at considerable length Old Waddles' reasons for believing that if relics of an ancient Egyptian migration existed at all, they would be found in the vicinity of the southern branch of the Atlas Mountains, which come down almost to the shore line at Ifni, but as this explanation has absolutely no bearing upon the remarkable events which arose from the expedition, I will omit it here and refer the curious reader to Prof. Wadsworth's monumental work, "History of the Egyptian Migration in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties."

Although the travelers were now within a few miles of their destination, their difficulties had only begun. They sought out Captain André Guilemont, the French Consul, with whom the professor had been in correspondence, and by him they were introduced to Signor Ostora, the Spanish governor of Ifni. They finally succeeded in persuading the governor that they were neither treasure hunters nor American brigands, and after much shrugging of shoulders and many Spanish expletives, he agreed to assist them in organizing a transport train to take them into the interior.

And so, ten days after their arrival in Morocco, a motley procession wound its way through the outskirts of Ifni and plodded across the sandy waste beyond. First came Achmed Idrees, the guide, astride a raw-boned nag and looking very patriarchal in his kaftan and tarboosh. Next in order were Courtland and Professor Wadsworth, on ponies, the professor presenting quite an oriental appearance in a red fez, which he held on by means of the crook of his inseparable walking stick; then came a train of donkeys and camels, laden with tents, bedding, boxes of food, water-skins, spades, picks, and all the mingled paraphernalia of an exploring party. As they wound their way amongst sand dunes and over dried watercourses, they could see the snowcapped summits of the so-called Anti-Atlas range, glistening in the blazing sunlight, far to the northeast.

The professor had told Achmed that they wished to go to the mountains, but that he would decide upon their exact destination after they left Ifni. They had been traveling for two hours, when the guide reined in his steed.

"You tell Achmed where you want go,

Sidi. Achmed take. Take nenyplace. You tell where."

The Professor, who had been scanning the jagged outline of the mountains through his binoculars, pointed to a deep notch, on either side of which rose mighty peaks.

"Do you see that notch, Achmed?"

"What mean 'Nosh,' Sidi?"

"The opening in the mountains."

"Yes. Me see. Me know. Dat called Djibel el Sheetan. Same you call Debil Hill. You want me take?"

"Yes, that's the place. How long will it take us to get there, Achmed?"

"One, two, t'ree day, Sidi. Country lot rough. Rocks, mountain, no much water."

Achmed spurred his horse.

"Yallah, halluf!" he yelled.

"If I am not wrong in my surmise," remarked the professor, "that notch is the only pass through which the Egyptian explorers could have reached the coast when traveling by the route which I am confident they followed."

"But wouldn't there be a better chance of finding traces of their passage on the coast itself?" suggested Courtland, "Shipyards, stone causeways, workmen's dwellings and that sort of thing."

"You are undoubtedly correct that such engineering works existed in great abundance, Courtland, but it would be useless to search for any traces of them now. The western shore line of Africa has been sinking for many centuries and the Egyptian shipyards are sunk fathoms deep in the ocean. If any buildings remain above the water, the Moors have torn them down long ago and used the material for other purposes."

"But why should we have any better luck in the mountains, Professor? It seems to me that the Egyptians would have merely camped en route. Just tents and shacks. No permanent remains."

"That's because you are thinking in terms of modern exploration, Courtland. You must remember that the ancients traveled very slowly and in large parties, establishing themselves step by step, more or less permanently. The journey from Egypt to the coast of Morocco was a matter of years, perhaps of generations. Besides, the crossing of the mountains must have been a very laborious undertaking, so it seems logical that they would erect their permanent dwellings and storehouses at the foot of the pass, rather than at the coast. However, we shall see when we get there."

That night the party camped at a well, surrounded by scraggy palms. The following day they began to enter the foothills and the mighty peaks, which flanked the pass, rose higher and higher on each hand as they advanced. Courtland's attention was especially attracted by an extraordinary pinnacle of rock which dominated the entrance to the pass. It towered up to a height of perhaps eight hundred feet above the surrounding terrain, and its sides were so smooth and vertical, that it gave the impression of a monolith erected by the hand of man.

"Dat Djibel el Sheetan." Achmed replied to Courtland's question. "Igrament feller say Debil lib on top of he. Achmed no believe dat."

THEY made camp on the third day on a broad expanse of level ground west of the great rock tower. Beyond rose the precipitous walls of the gorge leading to the pass and in the misty distance shone the sea, like a silver shield.

The scenery was grand and wild beyond description, but the professor displayed no interest in the beauties of nature when Courtland called his attention to them. His mind was entirely taken up with certain rounded humps which broke the even level of the plain at intervals. As soon as the tents were pitched and a meal eaten, the

archaeologist started off on a tour of investigation. He was confident that treasures were to be found in the mysterious mounds; treasures which would put the far famed "Valley of the Kings" utterly in the shade. Already he saw the name of Professor Myron Wadsworth in glaring headlines on the front page of all the principal newspapers.

The following day the men were put to work excavating one of the mounds which the professor had selected. Courtland superintended the digging, while the professor waddled from place to place, very much excited and very much in the way. Nor was his enthusiasm abated in the slightest as days passed into weeks without anything more valuable being found than rocks and sand.

The workmen moved from one mound to another, sinking a vertical well in the top of each to the level of the base, but without results. Courtland was fast losing hope and even the professor was becoming discouraged. Then, one day, came a discovery of such unquestioned genuineness, that their spirits were raised to the heights again.

There was one very large mound which actually touched the beetling cliffs of the Djibel el Sheetan. The exploration of this had been left until the last. The Moorish workmen were turning over the rocks at the top of the mound in preparation for digging, when Courtland's eye caught the glint of something metallic in the loose gravel underneath. In a moment he was on his hands and knees burrowing and he extracted a peculiarly shaped object which he handed to the professor, who was jumping up and down with excitement and thumping the crown of his fez with his cane.

The article which Courtland had found was apparently of solid gold, encrusted with the dirt of centuries. It consisted of a flat bar bent into the shape of an elongated horseshoe. A handle was affixed to the narrow end and there were five thin rods running cross-ways through holes in the sides of the horseshoe.

On each of the bars were a number of rings which tinkled like little bells when the thing was taken by the handle and shaken.

"A SISTRUM! AN UNDOUBTED SISTRUM!" shouted the professor.

"A cistern?" queried Courtland, puzzled.

"A sistrum!" reiterated the savant. "If we don't find anything else, our case is proved." And he hopped up and down in his excitement, while the Moors stood in a circle staring and muttering Arabic exclamations, evidently convinced that El Tebib Sidi, as they called Wadsworth, had taken leave of his senses.

"But what is it?" asked Courtland.

"Musical instrument! Fifth Dynasty!" panted the professor. "Used in celebrating rites of the Goddess Isis!"

How long the professor might have continued his gyrations of delight will never he known, for his attention and that of the others was attracted by a purring sound coming from the direction of the pass.

A moment later an airplane shot out from between the sides of the gorge and swooping gracefully downward, landed on the level surface near the camp.

The Moors had become too well accustomed to having their soldiers attacked by French aviators to display any emotion save that of curiosity at the sight of the plane, but the two Americans were at a loss to imagine what any pilot could be doing, flying across the Atlas Mountains. Could it be that the French authorities at Tangier had got wind of their expedition and had sent a plane to put a stop to any further excavations? That would have been a bitter pill to swallow after their recent find!

Courtland and the Professor hurried down the slope, the latter still clasping his precious sistrum to his breast. Half way to camp, they met the pilot, a tall, slender fellow

with a little sandy moustache and a most woe-begone expression on his countenance.

"Little bit of luck, what? Finding you chaps here. Forced landing, you know. Engine trouble, just as I got through the mountains."

"Darned lucky you didn't have to land up in the gorge," remarked Courtland. "Come far?"

"Cairo. Trying to make a non-stop flight to Tangier. That confounded valve settled my hash."

"You are a long way south of your direct route, sir," said the Professor.

"Yes, worse luck!" the pilot replied. "Big sandstorm over the Sahara. Had to turn south or I shouldn't have made it at all. You fellows starting a mine of sorts, what?"

Courtland introduced himself and Professor Wadsworth and explained that they were archaeologists. Their visitor returned the compliment by giving his name as Roderick Ainsley, pilot for a big English aviation company. The explorers extended him a cordial invitation to lunch.

"By Jove! I shall be jolly glad to put on the old feedbag!" exclaimed Ainsley. "Expected to make the trip in five hours or less and didn't carry any fodder."

LATER, after a hearty meal and a good cigar, Ainsley began to display interest in the activities of the two Americans.

"So you're archaeologists. Must be jolly interesting, hunting for dinosaur bones and fossils and what not!"

The Professor explained the difference between geology and archaeology, and proudly displayed the golden sistrum.

Ainsley fingered it and looked thoughtful.

"So this doo-dad was used by priests, eh? Of course it would be lying close to the temple, wouldn't it?"

"That is what we hope," said the Professor, "and with this remarkable discovery to encourage us, we shall continue our excavations until we find it."

Ainsley puffed at his cigar and looked still more thoughtful.

"If I were you fellows, I wouldn't bother doing any more digging." he drawled. "You don't need to if you don't want to, you know."

"What do you mean? Why don't we need to?" cried the two explorers in a breath.

"Because I've seen the temple, you know. Regular Egyptian, like the one at Philas," replied the Englishman simply, quite unaware of the bomb he was exploding.

"Where? Where?" cried the Professor.

"Just over there," replied Ainsley, pointing to the west.

"But that's the way we came!" sputtered the Professor. "There's nothing over that way except the Djibel el Sheetan and the foothills."

"So that's what they call it. Devil Mountain. Appropriate name, what? Bally temple's on top of it."

"On top of the rock! How can there be a temple on top of the rock? We can see the whole of the pinnacle from here and there's no sign of a temple!"

"Saw it as I came over the pass," said Ainsley. "Top's hollow and the temple stands in the middle. Thought you chaps would know all about it."

The Professor's excitement was unbounded and Courtland was equally astonished. No wonder they had found the sistrum close to the foot of the pinnacle. Some priest had evidently dropped it from the parapet and had been unable to find it. The golden trinket had lain where it fell for over two thousand years. The mound at the foot of the tower probably represented the debris from the building on the summit.

Professor Wadsworth was all for rushing off to verify Ainsley's astonishing discovery, but Courtland reminded him that

their first duty as hosts was to assist the aviator to repair the damage to his machine. Fortunately the trouble proved to be a small matter and before sunset repairs were effected. The Professor suggested that Mr. Ainsley might take them up to the temple in his airplane, but the pilot pointed out the sheer impossibility of landing a plane on a space only about fifty feet in diameter, and the archaeologist reluctantly abandoned the idea.

Courtland and the Professor got little sleep that night. The latter tossed and turned on his camp cot, his mind a whirl of joyful anticipation of what the morrow might bring forth. Courtland's thoughts were equally wakeful but more practical. How could they ever reach the aerial temple? By what means could they hope to scale those awful cliffs?

But Ainsley's mind was free from either worry or anticipation. His beloved plane was repaired and he slept the sleep of the tired aviator, while the others listened enviously to the even flow of his breathing.

At the first peep of dawn they were up and eating breakfast. Ainsley shook hands and wished them luck with their explorations. He clambered into the pilot's seat and presently the roar of his engine echoed from the cliffs as he taxied across the level ground and rose into the clear air.

The plane swept in a wide circle around the mysterious summit of the Djibel el Sheetan and Ainsley waved his hand, encouragingly as he set his course to the north.

CHAPTER III
The Hidden Temple

AS soon as the purr of the engine passed out of hearing, Courtland and Wadsworth started for a thorough examination of the rock pinnacle with a view to its ascent. They circled it repeatedly, looking for the slightest crack or ledge by which they might hope to worm their way up the sheer precipice, but were obliged to confess that they could see no means by which they would be able to climb even part of the distance to their goal. Courtland, who had considerable experience in the art of mountaineering, decided that the rock-tower was unclimbable.

At last Courtland suggested that they should abandon their search for the present and walk part way up the slopes of one of the peaks adjoining the pass, in order, if possible, to get a glimpse of the hidden temple through their glasses. They had walked about a mile from the base of the tower, when the Professor, happening to look back, was struck by a peculiar marking on the rock and called Courtland's attention to it.

"Yes. I see what you mean," said Courtland. "Dark line. Absolutely vertical. Runs from base to summit. Vein in the rock, probably."

"I'm quite sure we should have noticed any such vein if it existed," replied Wadsworth. "Let us go back. Who knows? It may be a crack we have overlooked. You see, it terminates at the bottom just to the left of the mound."

They hurried back, but as they approached the pinnacle, the dark line gradually faded until it vanished completely. A careful inspection at the place where the line had been seen, failed to reveal any explanation of this peculiar phenomenon. At last Courtland suggested walking back to the spot where the mark was visible and examining it through a telescope.

At once the mystery was cleared away! The line consisted of a series of notches or steps at intervals of about twelve inches. The upper side of these notches was sloped off gradually to allow room for the leg and knee of a person ascending them. This explained their invisibility from below, for the steps blended into the rock when viewed from this

position. A more careful inspection revealed the fact that the lowest step came within about twenty feet of the ground level. It was evident that a ladder had been used to start the ascent or that the ground had been lowered in the course of centuries by the process of erosion.

The Professor was exultant. They had only to build a short ladder, set it against the rock, walk up the steps and the summit with its ancient secrets was theirs.

And this they actually did. Late that night the ladder was completed. The following morning it was carried over to the Djibel el Sheetan and set against the rock at the point they had marked. Wadsworth insisted that he should be the first to make the ascent, but Courtland finally succeeded in persuading the old man that his youth and slender build gave him the advantage, to say nothing of his previous experience in Alpine climbing. So Courtland it was who tied one end of a light line to his belt and started up the ladder.

Eight hundred feet. Eight hundred steps. It was the task of half an hour at the most. And yet, if Courtland lives to be a thousand, he is never likely to forget the horrors of that fearful climb! It was one thing to make some perilous ascent in Switzerland with a trusty guide ahead to hold the rope secure in case of a slip. It was quite another matter to crawl up the face of this obelisk of polished granite, where the slightest misstep meant a sudden and awful death.

As he got higher and higher, a sense of terrible loneliness oppressed him. What if he should tire before he reached the top? What if cramp should seize him? He could do nothing but simply allow himself to fall; to fall hundreds of feet through the warm, life-giving sunlight to a horrible death on the cruel rocks below.

Up! Up! Up! How heavy the rope was becoming! Would its accumulated weight finally pull him backwards from his holds? How his fingers ached with the effort of clinging to the edges of these cursed, rough-hewn steps!

AN eternity passed. The steady reaching upward of hand and foot had become a mere mechanical repetition, a treadmill over an abyss. And then, he reached his hand for the next hold and felt—nothing!

The shock almost sent him flying into space. Then came the realization like a breath of Paradise, that he was at the summit. A moment and he stood on a wide circular platform looking down into a depression like an artificial crater carved in the top of the pinnacle. And in the center of the cup was the temple, just as Ainsley had described it.

A few feet below him, Courtland discovered a huge boss of rock like the capstan on a ship. To this he attached the end of his line and then, returning to the edge of the parapet, signaled for a heavier rope to be coupled on. When this had been hauled up in turn, the Professor tied the lower end around his waist and commenced the terrible ascent, while Courtland drew in the slack of the rope, belaying it around the knob which was now serving for the first time in perhaps twenty centuries, the purpose for which it was designed.

What the professor lacked in physical strength he more than made up in stoutness of heart, and it was not long before Courtland saw his red fez appear over the edge of the parapet and the two explorers, once more united, stood where no human foot had trod since the days when Cleopatra’s navy fled in disorder, leaving her lover to his fate.

The entire summit of the Djibel el Sheetan was hollowed out to a depth of forty or fifty feet, the sides being carved out in a series of steps which ran all the way round, giving the effect of a miniature stadium, with a diameter of a hundred feet. The floor of the bowl was perfectly level and in the center of this circular platform stood the temple, a gem

of Egyptian architecture in perfect preservation. The building was square, measuring about ten yards each way. The roof of stone slabs was supported on four rows of exquisitely graceful columns. The floor was slightly raised above the general level and was as smooth as glass.

For a long time the two men stood spellbound. For Courtland this amazing discovery was the climax of a great adventure. The realization that he was looking upon a sight which no human eye had beheld for nearly three milleniums wiped out the memory of the terrible danger he had braved. His imagination pictured the little temple as it had been when swarthy priests in flowing white robes, celebrated their mysterious rites amongst those silent pillars, while rows of bowing worshipers filled the seats around.

Professor Wadsworth's emotions were different in kind but no less intense. For him it was the culmination of a lifetime of study, the fulfilment of a lifelong ambition. The world, or at least his world, the world of science, would acclaim him in no uncertain voice. He would take rank with the greatest archaeologists of all time.

But they were only at the beginning of their discoveries. Greater wonders than any they had yet seen were to come. When they walked down the flight of granite steps, or seats, and approached the central temple, the Professor gave voice to an exclamation of amazement.

"Great Heavens!" he cried, "this is even more marvelous than I had realized. Do you notice anything especially strange in the structure of this building?"

"Well, no, I can't say I do," replied Courtland, "unless you mean the masonry. Those old workmen must have been wonderful stonecutters. Can't see the joints at all."

"Exactly!" agreed the Professor. "But the reason you cannot see the joints is because there are no joints to see. This entire structure, the steps, the pillars, the roof, the polished floor, all have been hewn out of the living rock. What modern achievement of engineering skill can compare with this? To what perfection must those ancient designers have carried their art to carve this gem of architecture from the solid granite, when one error, no matter how slight, would have spoiled the whole?"

By a flight of three steps, they gained the floor of the temple. The first thing that caught their attention was a large circular hole piercing the roof exactly in the center.

"This temple must have been dedicated to the Sun God," remarked the Professor, pointing to the opening. "There was probably an altar in such a position that the sun's rays would strike it exactly at noon."

"There's the altar," said Courtland, pointing to a huge square block of stone on the opposite side of the temple. "And there's the priest, if I'm not mistaken," he added, indicating a pile of bones lying in front of the altar.

In a moment the professor was waddling across the floor to submit this new discovery to examination, when Courtland with a cry of warning, rushed after the little man and seizing him unceremoniously by the collar, jerked him backwards so violently that the Professor sat down on the floor with great suddenness.

"For Heaven's sake, be careful, sir!" Courtland cried, "I thought you were done for!"

"Why! What!" sputtered the Professor, "What's the matter?"

Courtland pointed to the floor directly under the circular opening in the roof.

"You almost stepped into that!" he panted.

The even surface of the granite floor was broken by a round hole like the mouth of a well, about six feet in diameter. Its highly

polished sides dropped away into impenetrable gloom.

They lay on their faces on the floor and peered down into the gulf which had almost proved the end of Professor Wadsworth's career. The rays of Courtland's flashlight failed to reveal any bottom to the pit. An empty cartridge case was dropped and the professor's stop-watch showed the interval before a faint tinkle announced that the bottom had been reached.

THE Professor made a rapid calculation in his notebook. "Allowing for the speed of sound and using thirty-two feet per second for the acceleration of gravity, with proper allowance for the resistance of the air," he announced, "the pit is about eight hundred feet deep. That would make the bottom practically level with the ground."

"Why, the pinnacle is like an enormous cannon!" exclaimed Courtland.

"More like a great elevator shaft," amended the Professor. "Ever since we arrived I have been puzzled as to how the ancient priests reached their aerial place of worship. The steps by which we made the ascent are too perilous and laborious for every-day use. They were evidently designed for an emergency."

"Well, if this is an elevator shaft," commented Courtland dryly, "they must have left the car at the first floor. I don't see any push button, so I guess it's the steps for us!"

"It is probable that the car was operated by means of a rope running over a pulley on a wooden framework spanning the hole in the roof," the Professor elucidated. "The woodwork has long since rotted away and followed the car into the shaft."

"But how did they get out when they got to the ground floor?" asked Courtland. "There's no sign of an opening in the rock outside."

"The outlet is probably closed by a skillfully concealed door," said the professor. "Well, there is nothing to be gained by looking down the shaft. Let us examine the altar. There may be an inscription which will throw some light on the purpose of the temple."

They carefully skirted the mouth of the well and approached the place of sacrifice. The altar was a perfectly cubical mass of granite, hewn, like the temple, from the solid rock. It bore no inscription and was unornamented save for a globe and crescent, the latter with its horns turned upwards, rendered in bas-relief.

"The symbol of the goddess Isis," remarked the Professor. "One of the great trinity of deities who dominated the religion of Egypt during the Fifth Dynasty. This building closely resembles the famous temple of Isis at Philse and it is possible that it was constructed under the supervision of some priest from that temple."

"And perhaps this is the old codger himself," said Courtland, motioning to the heap of bones which lay at their feet.

Although the ligaments which united the bones had long since mouldered away, they could still trace the outlines of the skeleton of a man of large stature. A golden sistrum, the duplicate of the one they had found at the foot of the rock, lay close to the left hand, while the right arm was bent under the body and a dagger with a bronze blade and golden shaft lay among the ghastly ribs.

"Do you see what has happened?" asked Wadsworth in a low voice. "He was the last living soul in this awful place and he offered himself as a sacrifice to the goddess."

"Poor old Buffer!" said Courtland. "Perhaps he was left alone up here, and he couldn't work the elevator and killed himself rather than climb down the outside. Don't know that I blame him!"

While Courtland was philosophizing, the Professor walked around to the rear of the

altar. Suddenly he emitted a tremendous shout, which startled Courtland out of his reverie.

"The Stairs! Eureka, the Stairs!" yelled the Professor.

The altar was nothing but a shell! The whole back was hollowed out, for all the world like a miniature subway station, and a flight of steps was visible descending into darkness. A huge slab of granite which had formed the back of the altar, lay on the stone floor. The aged priest, if such he were, had apparently lacked the strength to replace the slab, after making his last ascent.

The Professor was in a frenzy of excitement. He could hardly wait until Courtland had made sure that he had a spare bulb for his flashlight, before rushing down the tunnel. They started, Courtland in the lead. The steps led steeply downward, sweeping round in a great spiral.

Round and round they went, Courtland counting the steps aloud. The flashlight gleamed faintly on the rough-hewn walls and roof of the tunnel. They had long since lost all sense of direction, but they knew that they could not get beyond the confines of the pinnacle.

At last, when Courtland had counted just over a thousand steps, he came to a sudden halt.

"The bottom!" he said.

The Professor plodded down the last few steps and stood beside him. They were in a tiny room, hardly six feet square, and facing them was a door which gave forth a metallic gleam in the rays of the electric light.

The door, which was of solid bronze and bore the globe and crescent of Isis, hung on massive hinges. Courtland put his shoulder against it and swung it open with little effort, revealing a passage through which came a dim light. This must be the entrance from the ground level. But if so, where was the bottom of the shaft? And what was the object of the shaft, since the spiral stairway did away with the Professor's rather fantastic theory of an elevator? Was it possible that the shaft was nothing more than an oubliette, a pit of death like those in old French castles, into which unfortunate victims were cast, as a part of the mysterious rites of the goddess?

SOME of these questions were soon to be answered. The explorers passed through the door, walked down a short passage and emerged, not into the open air, but into a large chamber, perfectly circular, at least forty feet in diameter, but barely six feet in height. In the center of the floor was a circular spot of phosphorescence, a ghostly shimmering glow as though a concealed source of light were shining through a slab of opal glass.

The mysterious light was reflected from the low roof and dimly revealed the limits of this rock-hewn chamber.

"What a weird place!" exclaimed Courtland. "What do you suppose it was used for? And what is that uncanny light?"

"This was probably the burial place for the mummies of the priests," said the Professor. "We may find their tombs carved out of the rock walls. As for the light, it must be due to some radioactive substance in the rock. Let us examine it more closely."

As they approached the uncanny spot of light, Courtland noticed that its surface was not perfectly uniform but was broken at one point by a small, dark object. Suddenly he burst into a shout of laughter and running forward, picked up this object and exhibited it to the Professor.

It was an empty cartridge case!

"One on you, Professor!" he chuckled. "Radioactive substance in the rock! It's the light coming down the elevator shaft and shining on the floor."

So it was nothing very mysterious after all. They stepped into the circle of light, and looking upward, they could see a tiny disk of

blue sky, visible through the hole in the temple roof, eight hundred feet above them.

It was Courtland who drew the Professor's attention to the fact that there was no debris of any sort at the bottom of the shaft.

"So that disposes of the idea that it was used as an elevator," he said. "But the question still remains, what was it used for?"

"The most puzzling thing," said the Professor, "is he extreme smoothness of the walls of the shaft. They are polished like the surface of a mirror. If it were merely intended to transmit light or air, the builders, or rather excavators, would hardly have gone to the trouble to polish the sides like that."

"My original notion may be right after all," laughed Courtland. "It may be a cannon and this is the breach we're standing in! Well, let's see if they've left any gunpowder."

Courtland turned the rays of his flashlight on the walls of the circular chamber. At one point a large alcove had been carved out, the roof being raised so that it formed a semi-circular room like a chapel. On the back wall of this alcove was an immense bas-relief representing a bull with its forehoofs resting on a crescent. On the brow of the animal was a scarab inscribed with certain hieroglyphics and on the floor below stood a massive sarcophagus or coffin cut out of a solid block of granite.

The lid of the sarcophagus also bore the design of he bull and crescent. Wadsworth eagerly examined the cartouche or signature on the scarab.

"My dear boy!" he cried. "This discovery is far more important than we have realized. This sarcophagus contains the mummy of no petty priest. It is he burial place of one of the mightiest Pharaohs of he Fifth Dynasty, Kut-Amen-Pash. Here we have proof, not only of the early settlement of Mexico by the Egyptians, but that the expedition was actually led by Pharaoh himself. Let us attempt to open the coffin."

After tremendous exertion, the two men succeeded in raising the heavy stone lid and sliding it to one side. Courtland flashed his light into the interior. It was empty!

No, not quite empty, for where the head of the mummy should have been, was a golden casket; the casket which Courtland had shown me in his house at Cambridge.

Courtland reached in and laid hold of the casket, but in spite of its small size it took all his strength to lift it. He set it on the floor and the Professor seized the flashlight and began eagerly examining their find.

The lid was secured by a simple bolt. When it was raised, the reason for the great weight of the casket was revealed. It was filled to the brim with a fine powder, apparently of a metallic nature. When Courtland took some of it in the palm of his hand it seemed heavier than any known metal. It was bluish in color with a prismatic sheen, almost like mother-of-pearl.

The hieroglyphics upon the casket were the first, and in fact the only inscription which the explorers found in any part of the hidden temple. Professor Wadsworth was wild to get at the work of translating it, confident that it would open the way to new and more marvelous revelations. He wanted to start the return journey at once, but Courtland pointed out that they had still to decide whether some outlet existed from this chamber to the open air at the foot of the Djibel el Sheetan. So, leaving the golden casket by the empty sarcophagus, they started to examine the walls of the circular room.

Their investigations were at once rewarded. Diametrically opposite the passage by which they had entered was another bronze door, opening into another passage through which, came the unmistakable gleam of daylight. They hurried along it. Fifty feet from the door they were brought to a stop at an archway, blocked with masses of broken rock. The daylight they saw, was seeping through

the interstices between the rocks and they could hear the excited voices of their Moorish workmen discussing the probable fate of the "Christian Pigs" who had dared the wrath of the Devil by violating the secrets of His Satanic Majesty's special mountain.

Courtland shouted and there was instant silence. After considerable persuasion, he convinced Achmed that the Sidis were unharmed but in need of assistance. At last, guided by Courtland's voice, the Moors pulled the rocks away and the two explorers stepped forth at the top of the mound where they had found the first sistrum. They had been in the bowels of the Djibel el Sheetan for over five hours!

CHAPTER IV
The Secret of the Casket

THE Professor's first care was to translate the hieroglyphics on the golden casket. For two days he shut himself in his tent and refused to be disturbed except at meal times; even then he turned a deaf ear to Courtland's enquiries.

"Wait until I have finished," was all he would say.

Courtland spent the idle hours while the Professor was closeted with the precious casket, in exploring the interior of the great pinnacle. It seemed strange to be able to go and come at his pleasure to the aerial temple which it had almost cost him his life to reach the first time. He found other subterranean chambers, some of which were evidently the living quarters of the priests who had served in the temple above, but nowhere did he find any sign of human occupancy.

Gradually the feeling grew upon him that this ancient structure had been used for only a short period and then vacated. What could have caused the builders suddenly to desert the place of worship which it had cost them such labor to produce, he was unable to guess, but from the temple roof to the bottom of the chamber of the sarcophagus he found no remnant or remains of human life, save the pitiful bleached bones before the great altar of Isis.

Late in the afternoon of the second day of Professor Wadsworth's seclusion, Courtland was sitting on the natural coping which surrounded the summit of the Djibel el Sheetan, absorbed in visions of those far distant days when this silent spot had been the scene of human activity. He looked across the miles of desert to the horizon where the Atlantic shone in the westering sun like a sea of blood, and pictured the Egyptians, the forgotten forerunners of Leif Ericsson and Columbus, setting sail for their great adventure.

His reverie was broken by the sound of hurrying steps. The Professor came scrambling up the tiers of seats waving aloft some sheets of paper. He sank down beside Courtland and struggled to regain the breath he had expended in his ascent of the long, spiral stairway. He gasped, he puffed, he wheezed, he tried in vain to speak. It was plain that he was under the stress of tremendous excitement. He had some unprecedented discovery to reveal, but his vocal chords refused to obey the dictates of his will. His eyes seemed about to fly from his head.

At last he thrust the sheets of paper into Courtland's hands.

"Read!" he exploded, and then subsided into another fit of wheezing.

So Courtland read the words which had been carved on that golden casket by the hand of the man whose bones lay before the altar.

"Kut-Anten-Pash, the mighty Pharoah, King of Kings, Lord of the Upper and Lower Lands, wearer of the Double Crown, Prince of Ethiopia, Emperor of Syria and Persia, at

whose tread the Evil Ones tremble, at whose smile the Doers of Good are rewarded, by the hand of his servant Osrah, Chief Astrologer and Magician, High Priest of Isis, the divine Mother of Horus.

"*The all-powerful Pharoah, who consorteth with Ra in his courses and setteth his foot upon the face of Isis, having departed from the sight of his servant, to establish a new kingdom, therefore I, Osrah, am left desolate and being desirous of waiting upon my Lord, purpose to offer myself a great sacrifice to the divine mother, Isis, who has taken the Great One into her all-embracing arms.*

"*Now in the time past, by virtue of my skill in magic, I found in the mountains of Ethiopia, a certain strange mineral, whereof the remnant is within this casket, and by whose power the Mighty One has been enabled to go hence. When I revealed unto the Pharoah the marvelous thing which I had discovered, he would fain make trial of its power in his own person. My dissuasions were in vain, neither would he permit me to accompany him, but commanded that I should use my skill in astrology to bring his desires to fruition.*

"*With a sad heart, therefore, I came to this place, whereof I already knew, and, with many slaves, carved out this temple in honor of the divine Mother, that all things might be done in due order. When all things were ready, the Mighty One came hither and departed hence to his kingdom.*

"*Now whether the Great One hath reached that kingdom or whether the dog-faced Seth hath utterly destroyed Him, I know not, but being far on in years and weary with waiting for my King to return, I go hence to join him.*

"*Let him who would follow, read within."*

"FUNNY mix up!" commented Courtland, when he had finished perusing this remarkable document. "Don't see that it adds much to what we had already guessed."

"My dear boy," panted the Professor, "that is exactly what I thought when I first translated it, but I have changed my mind. We came here looking for traces of an Egyptian exodus to Mexico and quite by accident we have made the most extraordinary discovery in the history of mankind!"

"Don't quite get you, Professor," said Courtland.

"Evidently not!" chuckled the old man. "Before I explain my meaning, I want you to tell me your interpretation of this paper."

"It seems to me quite simple," said Courtland. "This old codger, the high priest, discovered a mineral, and put a sample in the box. This mineral was useful for something connected with ship building. Kut some-thing-or-other, the Pharoah, used the mineral for building his fleet and when he sailed for Mexico, he left old thingummy behind. After waiting for a few years for the king to come back, the old priest gets fed up and kills himself in the temple."

"That, in slightly more formal language, was what I thought at first," said the Professor, "and then I began to notice certain curious phrases which did not seem to fit in with this simple explanation. For example, 'who consorteth with Ra in his courses.' Ra was the Sun God. 'Who setteth his foot upon the face of Isis.' Not a very respectful thing to do to the great Goddess Mother of the Universe!"

"It's all Greek to me still," said Courtland.

"Nonsense! Nonsense, my dear boy," cried the Professor impatiently. "It's as clear as crystal. Isis was the divine mother. In other words, Nature. Her symbol was the moon. Just as the Romans used the name Diana indifferently for the goddess and for the moon which was her symbol, so the Egyptians spoke

of the moon as Isis. ‘Who setteth foot upon the face of Isis.’ Now, do you understand ?”

Courtland stared at him stupefied.

“Well—but—Good Heavens! Surely you don’t mean—this old Egyptian king——”

“Exactly!” cried the Professor, triumphantly. “He used this metallic powder and went to the moon! No wonder he wouldn’t take the high priest along. There wasn’t room.”

Courtland was dumfounded. Faint suspicions entered his mind that the strain of the last three days had been too much for the Professor’s brain. Or perhaps that little red fez was not sufficient protection from the heat of a tropical sun. His face must have revealed his thoughts, for the Professor burst out laughing.

“No, my dear Courtland, I am not crazy. Now listen, and I will tell you my idea of what took place. The high priest accidentally discovered a deposit of some mineral substance which, under certain conditions,” had the power of becoming opaque to gravity.”

“Like cavorite in Wells’ book,” interjected Courtland.

“I have not had the pleasure of reading the work you mention,” said the Professor. “However, the priest told his master of the discovery and perhaps suggested to him that it might be the solution of aerial flight. The ancient Egyptians were no fools in scientific matters and the Pharoah became ambitious to experiment with this mysterious substance. He decided to attempt to reach the moon. The ancients had a marvelous knowledge of astronomy but had no conception of the distance separating the heavenly bodies. Pharoah probably thought the moon was about twenty miles away and that he could go there and back in a few hours.”

“Be that as it may, he ordered the high priest to find some secluded spot and prepare for his flight into space. The priest organized an expedition to the west coast of what we now know as Morocco and carved out this temple, probably to propitiate the goddess, whose symbol the Pharoah was intending to violate. When everything was ready, Pharoah came here and departed for the moon. I fear it is exceedingly unlikely he ever arrived!”

Courtland was silent. He was at a loss for any reply to the Professor’s fantastic theory. The whole thing was so ridiculously impossible. That an Egyptian King who had lived and died nearly thirty centuries ago, could have actually solved the problem of interplanetary flight was too wild an idea to be entertained, and yet he could find no arguments with which to refute the Professor’s line of reasoning.

“After all,” he said at last, hesitatingly, “we don’t know that your interpretation of the inscription is the correct one. Perhaps it has quite a different meaning; a much simpler meaning. The ancients were rather given to flowery language, you know. All this stuff about the ‘Face of Isis’ and ‘Ra in his courses’ may be just for rhetorical effect.”

“I thought you might say something like that, my boy,” said the Professor, “and if I had nothing but this inscription upon which to base my theory, I might agree with you, but I have other evidence which will convince even the most skeptical. First, have you thought of the possible connection between my theory and the great shaft?”

“Why, no. I can’t say I have,” replied Courtland.

“Poo! Where’s your imagination, boy? That shaft is just what you jokingly suggested it might be; a cannon! Only instead of a bullet there was a hollow cage and in place of explosive, they used this anti-gravitational powder. The Pharoah probably waited until the moon was visible through the shaft and then started. Just as one would point a gun. That’s why the shaft is polished so highly. The slightest friction would have been fatal.”

"You have an answer to everything," said Court-land, "but—somehow I can't seem to see the thing as you do. It all seems so outlandishly impossible. And another thing: If this metallic powder is antigravitational, why doesn't it fly off into space of its own accord?"

"Do you see the last words of the inscription?" asked the Professor. "'Let him who would follow, read within.' I have read within."

"Do you mean that there's another inscription inside the casket?" cried Courtland.

"Precisely!" exclaimed the Professor, producing a second sheet of paper. "Read this," he said triumphantly.

Courtland read aloud:

"Let him who would follow the flight of the omnipotent Pharoah, make for himself a chariot of brass like unto the design upon the bottom of the casket. And the floor thereof shall be of cedar. And it shall be placed in the pit that is beneath the floor of the temple.

"And when the Divine Mother unveileth her face at the full, let him fast and purify his heart and offer sacrifice at the altar. Let him do these things from the going down of Ra to the sixth hour thereafter. Then let him enter into the brazen chariot and strew upon the floor thereof, the powder that is within this casket.

"And when the face of the Divine Mother looketh down upon him through the roof of the temple, let him take the fleshburner and pour it upon the powder which is upon the floor of the chariot. Then shall he be gathered unto the Divine Mother, Isis; even unto the mighty King, Kut-Amen-Pash, who hath gone before."

"Well, are you satisfied, my boy?" said the Professor, when Courtland had finished reading. "Do you wonder that I said we had made the greatest discovery in the history of mankind?"

"For the future I'm ready to believe anything!" Courtland replied. "But what about this design he speaks of?"

"There is a drawing," explained the Professor, "incised in the bottom of the casket. It represents a cylindrical cage of metal strips, with a circular wooden floor. Of course the Egyptian astronomers knew nothing about the cold of space, or the absence of any air, so they simply built a lattice cage. I am afraid that Kut-Amen-Pash was dead within ten seconds of leaving the earth."

"The usual fate of the pioneer!" philosophized Courtland. "But what about this fleshburner he refers to?"

"AT first that puzzled me too," replied the Professor. "Then I realized that since the powder has no gravity screening properties in its normal state, it must be necessary to submit it to the action of some reagent. As the result of the chemical transformation which takes place, a compound is produced which has the property of being opaque to gravity. That is no more surprising than the familiar phenomenon of two transparent liquids which, when mingled, produce an opaque precipitate."

"Then you think the 'fleshburner' is some kind of chemical?"

"I have no doubt of it. Furthermore, there is one class of compounds notable for their power of burning flesh; the acids. It is probable that sulphuric acid, one of the most active substances of which we have any knowledge, is the reagent that was used."

For a few seconds Courtland sat silently considering the Professor's revelation. Suddenly he sprang to his feet and began to execute a wild dance, in dangerous proximity to the edge of the cliff. The Professor watched his antics in amazement.

"My dear boy, do be careful!" he exclaimed. "Whatever is the matter?"

"Why, don't you see?" cried Courtland, slapping the Professor on the back, "if old what's-his-name could go to the moon, so can we! We can build an air-tight chariot, stock it with food, sprinkle the powder on the floor and we're off! Hurrah for Wadsworth and Courtland, Interplanetary Explorers, Limited!"

It was the Professor's turn to be amazed. To him the discovery of the golden casket and the astonishing revelation of the hieroglyphics had meant nothing more than that he, Professor Myron Wadsworth, had taken his place with the greatest archaeologists of all time. That there was any material value in this mysterious powder, anything that could conceivably affect his personal life, had never entered his mind.

And yet, why not? If this thing were indeed so; if this powder really did what the old high priest claimed; if the Pharoah had really been shot out of the shaft by virtue of some unknown force and had never returned; why should not modern man, with all the resources of modern science at his command, harness this force and actually extend his kingdom to other planets.

To be Professor Wadsworth, the man who discovered the proofs of an Egyptian migration to Mexico, was much. To be Myron Wadsworth, the man who took his life in his hands and reached the moon—why, that was more, infinitely more! Look at Lindbergh! He flew a mere three thousand miles and became, almost overnight, the most talked of man in history. But to fly to the moon and back; that was equal to more than a hundred times the distance from New York to Paris!

The chemistry class at Blantford College would have been much amazed to see their dignified, if somewhat portly professor, dancing "ring-a-round-a-rosie" with a former pupil on the summit of a pinnacle eight hundred feet high in the Atlas Mountains and shouting at the top of his voice:

"Hurrah for Isis!"

CHAPTER V
The Chariot of Isis

TEN days later, the two adventurers were aboard a steamer, en route from Liverpool to New York. Their excitement at the prospect of their insane adventure had increased, rather than diminished, with the flight of time. They discussed it endlessly from every conceivable viewpoint.

In London, Courtland had bought every available book of fiction dealing with imaginary flights to other planets. On board he read them aloud to the slightly contemptuous Professor.

"It won't do any harm to get other people's ideas sir," said Courtland in reply to a particularly violent snort from the Professor, as the result of the account of Cavor's departure into space.

"I am not objecting to the ideas, but to the lack of them," grunted the Professor. "These space flyers all go in the same way—straight up! Whereas, if you cut off the effect of gravity upon a body, that body will not go up, at all!"

"Not go up!" exclaimed Courtland. "Then where will it go?"

"*Along* of course!" said the Professor.

"Along! I don't understand."

"Let me ask you a question," said the Professor, sitting up in his deck chair. "Suppose you mounted an electromagnet on the edge of a large wheel and caused a piece of soft iron to adhere to one pole of the magnet. When the wheel is rotating, in what direction would the piece of iron move, if you suddenly shut off the magnetizing current?"

Courtland thought for a moment.

"Why, at a tangent to the rim of the wheel, I suppose," he offered, finally.

"Exactly! And when we shut off the force of gravity between our car and the earth, it will move away from the earth tangentially, not straight up."

"Well, but," said Courtland slowly, "the shaft in the Dibel el Sheetan pointed straight up."

"Quite true," said the Professor. "That was because the High Priest knew nothing about the reason for making it any other way. As a matter of fact, the Pharoah's chariot or coffin, whichever you like to call it, never went through the hole in the temple roof, at all."

"Never went through the hole?" queried Courtland doubtfully.

"Certainly not!" snapped the Professor. "When it started from the bottom, it traveled very slowly until it reached the mouth, level with the floor of the temple.

Then it flew off, not vertically but horizontally, just skimming the floor."

"But in that case," objected Courtland, "it would have crashed against the sides of the stone bowl."

"Undoubtedly it would have done so, but for the speed attained in the shaft, which was probably sufficient to lift it above the edge of the bowl. For this reason we should build our car on level tracks on the top of a hill. There is a hill near my home in New Hampshire which will be perfectly suitable."

Upon Courtland devolved the work of designing their "Chariot" as they always called it. The Professor was wrapped up in the theoretical, the scientific end of the enterprise. He spent the days in the study of his cottage in the New Hampshire hills, gushing forth, like a scientific fountain, a steady stream of formulae, curves, graphs and drawings.

Meanwhile Courtland rushed back and forth from Boston with a truck they had bought and which he drove himself. Secrecy was essential. If once word of their plans leaked out, they would be overwhelmed by reporters and curiosity mongers of all sorts. That was the kind of thing they wished to avoid. Once the journey was an accomplished fact, they, or at least the Professor, would welcome all the publicity in the world. As for Courtland, it was the adventure which appealed to him. He cared nothing for the fame it would bring.

The work was carried on by foreign workmen, brought from Boston. First Courtland and the Professor selected a suitable spot in the middle of a dense clump of trees at the summit of a low hill. A roadway running east and west was cleared and the tracks laid part way down the slope, although the Professor anticipated that the chariot would leave the ground within a hundred yards of the starting point.

The chariot was to be long and streamlined, to reduce friction while passing through the atmosphere. It was to be shaped like a torpedo cut in half lengthwise, so that the bottom was practically flat. Courtland suggested and carried out a new method of construction, consisting of many layers of very thin sheet steel, alternating with asbestos. These layers were built on a rough wooden framework, and held together by rivets, none of which passed entirely through. This was to reduce the heat-conducting powers of the sides.

WHEN the asbestos-steel body was complete, the wooden framework was removed and the chariot was ready for its inner fittings.

During the evenings, the two adventurers had long talks. One of the first things Courtland wanted to know was how long the journey would take.

"The motion of the chariot on leaving the surface of the earth," elucidated the Professor, "will be entirely due to the rotation of the earth on its axis. The surface of the earth in "this latitude is moving at approximately 600 miles per hour. At that

velocity it would take us seventeen days to reach the moon."

"That seems pretty slow traveling compared to the interplanetary journeys in fiction," objected Courtland.

"You must not overlook the fact that there is a second factor which will greatly increase our speed. From the moment we leave the earth, that body will cease to exist, so far as any effect of gravity upon the chariot is concerned. We shall fall upon the moon with a continually accelerated velocity, just as any free body in space would fall. Our speed at any moment will be the speed of a free, falling body, plus six hundred miles per hour, which is our speed due to the centrifugal force of the earth's rotation."

But how shall we know the exact moment to start in order to hit the moon?" asked Courtland. "With so many factors to consider, it seems a frightfully complicated problem. What with the rotation of the earth, the earth's movement in its orbit, the moon's movement in its orbit and the attraction of the moon, our chances of making connection with the Face of Isis seem pretty slim."

"The complication is only apparent," replied the Professor, "because all movement is purely relative and we are only concerned with the movement of the chariot in relation to the moon. All we have to do is start at moon-rise, when the moon is full, with the chariot pointing east; that is approximately at the lunar sphere. The chariot, affected only by its initial movement and by the attraction of the moon, will follow a curve and fall to the surface of the moon. Accuracy of aim is not a prime requisite at all."

More than once Courtland ventured to raise doubts as to the wisdom of expending so much effort without first conducting some preliminary experiments with the contents of the casket. He also suggested the advisability of calling into consultation some great authority on Egyptian hieroglyphics.

The Professor was adamant. Once convinced of the correctness of his translation, he adhered to it rigidly; neither would he tolerate the wasting of one grain of the precious powder.

"Authorities! Experiments!" he sputtered. "My authority is sufficient and experiments are unnecessary. We will stake our all on the one great experiment."

So the time passed until at last, the chariot stood ready upon its rails. It measured only sixteen feet in length and about six in diameter. The outside was painted dull black, to enable it to absorb as much heat as possible from the sun's rays. There were a number of small portholes, one of which was made removable to enable the travelers to enter, after which it could be made secure by means of bolts and a rubber gasket.

In the interior were stored the various supplies required for the trip. There was food for two months, a special form of gasoline stove for cooking and heating, together with all sorts of scientific appliances. The pointed ends of the chariot were partitioned off and filled with oxygen cylinders. There was an apparatus which the Professor had designed for purifying the air, to keep the content of carbon dioxide to a breathable percentage.

Penetrating the sides of the chariot were four curved tubes. The inner ends of these tubes were provided with airtight breeches, like torpedo tubes, into which charges of slow-burning explosive could be introduced for the purpose of controlling the movement of the chariot in space. As the Professor pointed out, when they reached a predetermined point in their journey, it was only necessary to rotate the chariot more or less on its longitudinal axis, in order to reduce its speed to any amount desired. They would land on the moon "upside down," so that the gravity screen would not counteract the attraction of the lunar mass. When they wished to return, they would simply roll the

chariot over on its base, and they would be off.

Most important of all was the equipment for handling the anti-gravitational powder itself. There was a false floor in the chariot and under this were a series of flat trays containing the powder. A most ingenious arrangement, designed by the Professor and carried out by Courtland himself, allowed the trays to be flooded with sulphuric acid by simply closing a switch. Thus the gravity screen would take effect over the whole floor uniformly and there would be no danger of an upset at the start.

On March 27th, just five months from the day when they had set sail on their voyage to Morocco, all preparations were complete. Everything that human ingenuity could devise to insure the success of the undertaking had been done. There remained only one thing. Would the mysterious powder acquire the properties they believed? Or was the old high priest playing a joke on them?

Courtland was for trying their fate at once, but the Professor urged that they should wait until the night of the full moon.

"The moon will be full on April 1st," he said. "By waiting until then, the moon, earth and sun will be in line, and there will be very little chance of the superior attraction of the sun diverting us from our course."

"Well, I'm not particularly keen to investigate the solar granulations at close quarters." Courtland said, "But it seems like tempting fate to start on a day like that. I'm not superstitious, but April 1st! I suppose we're a couple of fools, but that seems like rubbing it in!"

The fateful day dawned clear and bright, a glory of blue and green and gold. Nature went about her business as usual, quite unperturbed by the threatened invasion of her planetary sanctuaries. When Courtland walked up the hill to make a last inspection of the chariot, he tried in vain to conjure up sentiments appropriate to the occasion. He thought of the dramatic effect, with which Verne described the emotions of the three adventurers shut up in the projectile, as they waited for the pressure of a button to blast them into space. He felt that on the eve of such an unprecedented adventure, he too, should experience a great spiritual uplift or depression, a flood of anticipation or fear.

He tried in vain to bring his mind into the state which all writers of fiction regard as indispensable to such a time. But somehow, it wouldn't do! His reason told him that in less than twelve hours he would be hurled into space, but his instincts simply refused to believe his reason. This day was just like any other. The sun shone, the birds sang, the wind whispered in the leaves. Everything was as usual except the gloomy shadow among the trees on the hill top, that black mass crouching like a devilish insect, or like an overgrown and misshapen slug.

CHAPTER VI
The Flight of the Chariot

AFTER lunch, the two men made their final arrangements. No one knew of their rash plan- The Austrian mechanics had returned to town three days before. The Professor had given his housekeeper a few days holiday to visit her daughter in a near-by village. All personal matters had been arranged with a view to the possibility of disaster. Neither Courtland nor the Professor had any near relatives to mourn them if they should never return.

At five o'clock they left the house and walked to their chariot, the vehicle in which they hoped to accomplish what their ancient Egyptian forerunner had attempted so many generations ago. Courtland helped the Professor through the open porthole and followed him. They swung the heavy glass-

door into place and secured it with the bolts provided for that purpose. As Courtland tightened the nuts, he found himself wondering if he would ever loosen them again or whether another hour would find the chariot bearing two more corpses into space to join the frozen body of Kut-Amen-Pash.

The Professor started the oxygen apparatus and the carbon dioxide absorber. There was nothing more they could do. Their preparations were complete to the smallest detail. Nine minutes had still to elapse before the moon rose.

They took their places side by side in the center of the chariot. Two heavy handles were bolted to the sides, to be gripped at the moment of departure, thus counteracting any possible shock, although the Professor believed that no such shock would be experienced.

Through the front port, Courtland could see a little circle, the upper half, sky, crimson with the reflected light of the setting sun; the lower half, the hazy green of the distant horizon. It struck Courtland that this semi-circle of green was perhaps his last vision of the earth.

Suddenly the upper edge of the green was cut by a tiny dot of gleaming silver. It was the moon, keeping her tryst with her would-be explorers. They would wait until the horizon bisected the disk. Slowly the Face of Isis was unveiled to the gaze of her modern worshipers.

Sixty seconds more. The Professor turned and met Courtland in a long handclasp. Then the two men grasped the handles. The Professor's left hand rested on the switch which would release the acid and start them on their flight. Courtland's eyes were on the swinging chronometer and he counted off the seconds aloud.

"Six. Five. Four. Three. Two. One. GO!"

There was a slight hissing as the sulphuric acid flooded the trays beneath the floor. For an instant nothing happened. Then there was a rending, crashing roar. The chariot rocked and trembled as if under the impact of a terrific bombardment. Courtland was hurled to the floor. His head came into violent contact with a box of supplies and he lost consciousness.

When Courtland came to his senses, it was with a terrible feeling of physical oppression, unlike anything he had ever experienced. He was lying on his face and for a moment he thought that something must have fallen upon him from above; some tremendous weight which had pinned him to the floor. He struggled vainly to raise himself to his knees.

There was no sensation of movement, but he knew that there would be no such sensation if the chariot were flying through space, no matter what the velocity. He wondered whether this pitiless pressure that was crushing him was due to the swift acceleration of their fall toward the moon.

He managed to turn his head to one side and saw the outline of the Professor's body lying where he had fallen.

"Hello, Professor! We seem to have started. Are you all right?"

There was no answer. Courtland struggled to pull himself along the floor but finally gave up the attempt in exhaustion. He felt no pain, but his entire body seemed paralyzed.

The interior of the chariot was dark, save that a faint light filtered through the portholes on one side. Courtland determined that he would make one mighty effort to raise himself to the level of the nearest opening. Bracing his muscles, he succeeded in getting to his hands and knees. For a few seconds he maintained this position. It was as though he were Atlas struggling to uphold the world on his shoulders. His brain swam with agony.

Then his straining muscles gave way,

and he was hurled forward once more into unconsciousness.

WHEN he came to himself for the second time, it was to hear the Professor giving voice to a most choice and unscholastic assortment of profanity. The little man was stamping up and down the floor of the chariot, cursing everything and everyone from Osrah the High Priest to the entire cosmic universe.

Courtland sat up and stared at the Professor in amazement. The mysterious paralysis had departed and so had the darkness. The little room was flooded with sunlight and lurid with expletives.

"Why, Professor, what on earth's the matter?" stammered Courtland, "have we missed the moon or something?"

"Matter? You may well ask what on earth's the matter!" raved the Professor, furiously. "Everything on earth's the matter! Missed the moon? No, we haven't missed the moon ! We've never had a chance to miss the confounded thing! We've never started!"

"Never started!" yelled Courtland, jumping to his feet and rushing to the porthole.

He looked out, not on the empty abyss of interplanetary space or the barren wastes of a frozen lunar landscape, but on the gracious verdure of a New Hampshire hillside. The sun shone, the birds sang, the wind stirred amongst the leaves as it had done on the day before. The chariot still rested on its rails at the summit of the hill! Everything was unchanged.

No, not quite everything, for the clump of trees which had surrounded and hidden the interplanetary vessel, was levelled to the ground as though by a mighty hurricane. The chariot was almost buried by a tangled mass of trunks and branches. It was only due to the staunch construction of laminated steel and asbestos that the two adventurers had not been crushed to death by the falling timber.

So their high hopes had ended in failure. The magic powder in the golden casket was nothing but a huge fiasco, a practical joke brought to its conclusion after three thousand years, on the first of April! And yet the powder must have possessed some strange properties, after all. *Something* must have occurred when the acid mingled with it in the trays. What was it that had hurled them into unconsciousness? What was it that had produced Courtland's extraordinary paralysis? What had uprooted those great trees and flung them down upon the chariot?

To these questions and many others like them, they could find no answer. Afterwards, when an analysis of the residue in the trays revealed nothing more mysterious than magnesium sulphate, they were no nearer a solution than before. The white, crystalline contents of the trays might serve mankind in homely ways, but as an aid to the conquest of the universe, were valueless.

Professor Wadsworth, crushed and crestfallen, buried himself in his studies of the Mexican Settlement. Courtland returned to Boston and devoted himself to business. A year later Courtland received a heavy express package, which on being opened, was found to contain the golden casket. In the casket was a thick manuscript and this letter:

My dear Courtland:

To you, my favorite pupil and companion in adventure, I am sending the manuscript of my book, "A History of the Egyptian Migration in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties." This work, the carefully thought-out result of my investigations and studies, I beg that you will publish. I have placed a sum at your disposal sufficient to cover the cost of publication. Should any profits accrue from the sale of the book, you will place the same at the disposal of the Peabody Museum for the purpose of improving the Egyptian and Mexican collections. May I impose upon your

friendship to do me this last favor?

I am sailing for Mexico tomorrow. While there, I hope to find traces of the landing of that expedition which, I firmly believe, set sail from the Moroccan coast, ninety generations ago, leaving behind the body of the High Priest to guard the temple whence their leader had departed on his ill-advised attempt to set his all-conquering foot upon the Face of Isis.

Do I still believe the truth of the inscription on the casket, you ask? Yes, most emphatically I do! My clear boy, I have a confession of weakness to make. Only two months after our miserable failure, I discovered the explanation of what took place. It was I, I alone in my self-satisfied ignorance, who was responsible for casting away the greatest opportunity ever vouchsafed to man. But what is the use of crying over spilt milk?

As I was saying, two months after we parted, I was visiting Dr. John Plattmore in New York. Dr. Plattmore, as you know, is the greatest living authority on Egyptian hieroglyphics. One evening, while we were discussing the probable extent of chemical knowledge in the Fifth Dynasty, I happened to mention solvents and particularly sulphuric acid.

"But, my dear Professor," exclaimed Plattmore, "the inorganic acids are a comparatively modern discovery. It is quite certain that nothing was known of them at the period we are discussing."

I drew the symbols which I had read as "sulphuric acid," in translating the inscription on the casket and asked the Doctor how he would interpret them.

"Literally, of course, they mean 'The fleshburner' or 'that which destroys the flesh,' but there is no doubt that they refer to one of the caustic alkalies; the hydroxides of either potassium or sodium. The Egyptian priests must have been familiar with, these substances and the methods of extracting them from wood ashes and sea-weed."

With the Doctor's words came a flood of enlightenment. I realized the cause of our failure, and the reasons for the extraordinary phenomena which accompanied it. As you are fully aware, acids and alkalis are directly opposite in their chemical reactions. Presuming that the powder in the casket acquired antigravitational properties by the addition of an alkali, what would take place as the result of adding an acid?

Why, the area covered by the powder would become tremendously permeable to gravity, just as the presence of a piece of iron increases the permeability of a magnetic field. In simple words, the force of gravity would be many times multiplied. Our weight, increased from its normal value to, perhaps, half a ton or more, crushed us to the floor and rendered us helpless. The trees which stretched their branches above the chariot were unable to resist the strain of their own weight and came crashing down upon us, rending their roots from the ground.

You will ask, my dear Courtland, why an analysis of the residue failed to reveal the presence of any strange substance. I have no doubt that the original powder was a compound of magnesium with some unknown element. The latter, which should have been rendered opaque to gravity under the action of an alkali, passed off in gas by combination with the hydrogen of the acid. So long as the gas remained in the trays our weight was enormously increased, but during our period of unconsciousness, this gas leaked away and its effect was destroyed.

I should have told you this long ago, but in my fallen pride, I was ashamed to admit that our failure was due to my unwillingness to consult a higher authority than myself. Forgive me if you can, but believe me, my dear Courtland, your old friend and fellow student,

The Face of Isis

MYRON B. WADSWORTH.