MISSIONARIES from the SKY

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

CERTAINLY one of the greatest, if not the very greatest science fiction novel ever written was Gulliver's Travel by Jonathan Swift. The medium of science fiction lent itself so remarkably to satire that one would expect a large body of work in that category. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Only two important satirists were ever developed in the science fiction magazines, Stanton A. Coblentz and L. Sprague de Camp.

Stanton A. Coblentz made his initial appearance in AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY for Summer, 1928 with The Sunken World, a novel of Atlantis. The story was an instant success, because Coblentz never became so involved with his message that he forgot he was writing science fiction. The science was not only sound it was prophetic, including descriptions of atomic submarines and atom-powered surface ships.

The appearance of After 12,000 Years, a second novel in AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY for Spring, 1929, lifted Coblentz among the top science fiction writers of his day. A scathing satire at the senselessness of war, After 12,000 Years, also delved into the practicality of vitamins in capsules and automobiles with engines in the rear.

Coblentz became one of the mainstay novelists of AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY which always featured a novel of 50,000 to 80,000 words in each edition. His Blue Barbarians in Summer, 1931, a devastating mockery of the worship of money, transferred to the planet Venus and The Man From Tomorrow,
Spring-Summer, 1933, a withering attack on the morality of modern civilization by a man from the future, were among his finest efforts.

Missionaries from the Sky represents one of the few short stories written by Coblentz which successfully captured the flavor of his novels. This one is particularly unique inasmuch as it is a spoof at the satirist, at Coblentz himself! In his various novels Coblentz had presented at great length and with far-from-subtle pen the vices and evils of the world. In Missionaries from the Sky, a scientist stumbles into communication with an advanced race on Mars who are capable of correcting all the ills that Mr. Coblentz deplores, all they need to do is some basic information from him. What he decides in the showdown is

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what makes this a particularly delightful work.

Stanton A. Coblentz began professional writing as a reporter for the SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER in 1919. He moved to New York in 1920 and earned his living writing book reviews, poems and articles for THE NEW YORK TIMES and THE NEW YORK SUN, supplemented by general freelancing. In science fiction he has seen The Wonder Stick, When the Birds Fly South, The Sunken World, After 12,000 Years, The Blue Barbarians, The Planet of Youth, Under the Triple Suns, The Runaway World, and Next Door to the Sun in hard covers.

These represent only part of the more than 30 books Coblentz has had published including Marching Men, The Decline of Man, Villains and Vigilantes and The Literary Revolution.

Coblentz's chief interest in recent years has been poetry. He is editor and publisher of the country's leading magazine of verse, WINGS and has had many volumes of his own published. In this regard, fantasy readers will be particularly interested in a collection of weird, fantastic and science fiction poetry compiled by Mr. Coblentz in 1949 titled Unseen Wings and published by Beehurst Press, New York.

Perhaps once every fifty or a hundred years, it is given to some brilliant or favored individual to perform some act that will alter the destiny of mankind. Sometimes a statesman, sometimes a general, sometimes a dextrous worker in words, will have the sudden opportunity to shape the future; sometimes it is a scientist that assumes control, and in such a case the change is likely to be startling indeed.

Not more than half a dozen scientists in all history have found themselves in such a world-shaking role. One thinks of James Watt; one thinks of Edison; but, at the same time, there are some of whom one emphatically does not think. Among these, I may mention Dr. Ira Rand, possibly the least known of scientific geniuses, yet in some respects the most remarkable of them all.

There are not many persons who know of the discovery made by Rand, and of his phenomenal opportunity. There are not many who are aware of the extraordinary decision which it fell to him to make, and of the rare courage with which he submerged his fame and fortunes.

Had Rand chosen otherwise, his name would rank beside those of Einstein, Marconi and Curie, among the great scientific discoverers of all time. And the earth today would be a vastly dif-
ferent place—but possibly less pleasant to inhabit.

Now that Rank has made the unalterable step, it is only fair that the world should learn of his accomplishment—and that it should recognize the self-abnegation of the man. He himself is likely to remain mute; hence I, who served as his right-hand assistant, have taken it upon myself to make his story public.

There are, of course, many who know that Dr. Rand—as manager of the laboratories of one of our great radio manufacturers—has given much time to experimentation in methods of wireless transmission. His Prismatic Bifocal Television Lens, His Magnetic Tonal Purifier, His Heterodynamic Radio Amplifier, are only a few of the devices by which he has commended himself to attention. Yet, original as these contrivances are, few persons look upon him as more than a clever technician, or suspect the vastly greater achievements of which he is capable.

It was during a period of confusion in the world of radio that the great opportunity came to Dr. Rand. There are none of us who do not recall how, only two or three years ago, owners of radio sets began to complain of unaccountable disturbances, which in some cases became so severe as to preclude normal reception. Not all wave lengths were affected; but there was a certain area, between 220 and 235 meters, which was continuously subject to attack. The noises, which rarely ceased for more than a few minutes at a time, did not resemble static, nor any form of electrical interference; it was as if a heavy, husky voice were calling from the invisible—a voice that spoke no known language!

So loud as to drown out all except the most powerful stations, the tones throbbed and wavered and vibrated with such living accents, that one would have sworn that some actual being was speaking. Yet there was nothing to support the theory that some unlicensed station was interfering. Not only could no trace of any such station be found, but hearers were unanimous in testifying that the sounds represented no known tongue. Moreover—and this was the most astonishing fact—the disturbances were equally prominent in all parts of the earth. Radio owners in South Africa and Siam joined their brothers in America, Europe and Australia in the chorus of complaints; it seemed as if the very atmosphere of our planet had been affected and as if some new and previously unknown influence were convulsing the ether. But scientists, even while hesitantly advancing this hypothesis, could not reconcile it with the
fact that the wave-lengths beneath 220 meters and above 235 remained untroubled.

SIMULTANEOUS with this manifestation, a strange although minor annoyance had been observed on television screens. Every now and then, inexplicable shadows would flash across the receiving apparatus; dancing points of light would be seen; wavering forms would appear and vanish, or cloudy apparitions present themselves before the eye. Always these images would be small—in many cases no larger than a silver dime; always they would be blurred and flickering, and would speedily disappear; sometimes would seem to form fantastic patterns; but in no case did they show more stability than leaping foam, and in no case could their origin be determined.

There was one fact, in particular, that caused much interested speculation. Like the mysterious sounds on the radio, the images were world-wide in their occurrence; they were as prominent in Peking as in New York, as noticeable in Rio de Janeiro as in Melbourne and London. What hitherto undetected influence was agitating the atmosphere of the earth?

Many were the theories that were advanced and rejected; but, for a long time, no observer traced a connection between the unknown television lights and shadows and the enigmatic radio disturbances. It remained for Dr. Rand to identify the two as manifestations of the same phenomenon—and thus to open the way for his master achievement.

In the beginning, Dr. Rand himself did not observe the connection. He was interested chiefly in the aberrations of the television screen—and from the first, he harbored a theory which bears testimony to the intuitive powers of genius. The nature of that theory long remained a mystery even to me, who spent my days in close contact with Rand; but I was not slow in noting the eagerness that had come into his eyes, the excited haste with which his lean, nervous figure went bustling about the laboratory, the enthusiastic ring in his voice and the absentmindedness that was overcoming him—most of all, the air of world-excluding preoccupation, with which he would bury himself for hours on end amid a mass of wires, lenses, batteries, electro-magnets, and foul-smelling chemicals.

That he was working at some new invention was evident—but how guess the purpose of that invention when he persistently refused to answer my questions, or else testily advised me to "mind my own business"? At times, to be sure, I did secure...
peeps at the apparatus which he was slowly putting together; but the complicated array of wires, mirrors and vacuum tubes told me nothing beyond what I already suspected. With a sigh, I was forced to dismiss the matter, and to decide that Dr. Rand would let me into the secret only when his whim should dictate.

It was long before his whim did dictate. Days went by, weeks went by, and in my absorption in other matters I had almost come to forget Dr. Rand's experiment. When now and then the thought of it recurred to me, I would dismiss my doubts with a shrug, concluding that probably the invention had failed. And since I had been called temporarily to another part of the laboratory, where I could not watch Dr. Rand at work, I had no longer any visible reminder of what he was attempting. Hence the eventual announcement found me unprepared.

I still had no inkling of the truth when, greeting me one morning with a dancing light in his eyes, he jovially invited me to his private laboratory. "I have something to show you, Denison," he said, in suppressed tones beneath which I seemed to read a veiled eagerness. "Something I want your opinion about."

As we started away together, he stroked his bristly brown beard thoughtfully, and in his eyes the dancing light gave place to one of shrewd anticipation.

Yet I observed nothing to justify that anticipation when we had reached our destination. Before us, attached to a television receiver, stood a weird-looking device reminding me of an enlarged X-ray machine. I could see that, within a long central tube, there was a series of queerly arranged crystals and lenses; I could see various prisms and mirrors, and I could observe that wires, attached to a wall socket, were running through the whole. But all this gave me little hint as to the nature of the contrivance.

"You behold here a Micro-Crystalline Televisor," explained Rand, surveying his invention proudly. "The first of its kind ever created."

"Micro-Crystalline what?" I gasped.

"Micro-Crystalline Televisor. It is designed to enlarge and clarify images beyond the range of the ordinary television receiver."

"You mean—it is a receiver of exceptional power?"

"It is that—and more than that. You see that there are two screens." Here he pointed to two wide strips of white cloth, placed at opposite sides of the room. "The first receives an image in the manner of an ordinary television apparatus. The second takes
the image reflected from the first, after it has been magnified and refined by lenses, much as the leg of a flea or the wing of a gnat will be magnified by a microscope."

“What is the principle behind it?”

Rand smiled, and stroked his beard as if in self-congratulation. “Nothing except a fresh application of laws already well known. Simply the laws of the enlargement and clarification of images by means of lenses, and their transmission to a screen. You see it in operation daily in the motion picture machine. To be sure, in that case the enlargement is made from a film; but I have secured the practical equivalent of a film by means of careful refraction from mirrors and well placed crystals. An image, obtained from the first screen, is transmitted to the second, purged of imperfections and magnified between ninety and a hundred and fifty diameters. Do you wish a demonstration?”

I nodded.

“The peculiar dancing lights and shadows on the television screen were what gave me the idea,” continued Rand, as he carefully focused the machine and pressed an invisible button. “It was an inspiration—I am elated to see my theory confirmed.”

No sooner had he spoken than he snapped off the electric lights and the room was plunged into darkness. There came a queer whirring sound which told me that the machine was in operation; there came a sizzling series of blue sparks—but that was all. The screen remained blank; and, as I watched in bewilderment, it seemed to me that Rand’s experiment had failed.

“You must give it time,” boomed the husky voice of the inventor, as though he had read my thoughts. “I am not trying for any ordinary television reception. I want to show you the mysterious lights and shadows. If you will wait a moment, they are certain to appear.”

Fortunately, my patience was placed under no strain. Even as the words left Rand’s lips, a minute, slowly moving image leapt up on one of the screens, blurred and irregular in outline, and of a mottled gray hue. Being of a kind which I had frequently seen, it caused me no surprise; but what did surprise me—indeed, what startled me so that I gaped like a man gone mad—was the reflection that instantly appeared on the second and larger screen.

Even to this day, when all that happened then is an old and often repeated story, I find it impossible to describe my consternation, my blank and comprehending amazement. Certainly, this was the weirdest sight I had ever seen! Or was it the weirdest?—
Not less unearthly spectacles were to follow, but none that left me so dazzled, so stupefied, so altogether nonplussed.

Across the ten-foot reaches of the screen, there flickered what I might have taken for a motion picture projected by some fabulous and superhuman operator. It seemed to me that I was gazing upon a forest, rank with a wild and monstrous vegetation; it seemed that snake-like slimy tendrils were threshing and swaying along the ground like gigantic arms seen in delirium; it seemed that, roofing in these animate and convulsive masses of creepers, were huge mushroom-like plants, whose columns were thick as a man's body, and whose gracefully curving domes stood edge to edge, as though placed in harmony by some master artist.

But these were not what held my attention. Much more startling, much more incredible, was the huge beast-like shape that burst through the thicket, and stood in the center of the screen as though posing for its portrait. Was it really beast? Or was it man? Surely, it seemed as much like the one as like the other! Of gigantic stature—it must have been more than eight feet in height—it came bounding to view in the manner of a kangaroo, leaping with ease and agility upon its enormously developed hind legs. Its fore limbs—three in number—ended in crab-like tentacles which gave it a most repulsive appearance; its coat was of some dark hairless substance reminding me of a close-fitting uniform; its chest was extremely broad and capacious, its abdominal parts narrow and contracted; while what struck me most of all was its huge and unusual head.

This alone it was that gave the creature its human appearance. Preternaturally large in proportion to the size of the body, it was a sagacious oblong in shape, and seemed more than half forehead. The eyes were mere glittering points beneath the hairless brow; the face was flat, and a small round opening showed where the nose should have been; the mouth was almost invisible, and there was not even the suggestion of a chin. Yet, despite its atrociously ugly appearance, the face was ruffled with deep lines and furrows that gave the unmistakable impression of intelligence.

For a moment I stared at this outlandish thing with the feeling of one who has seen a ghost. Though never subject to hallucinations, I was willing to believe that this was some delirious vision that would swiftly vanish. But the seconds went by, and it did not fade. The fantastic man—or fantastic beast—continued to gaze at me from the screen as
if to inquire, "Well, friend, what do you think of me?" And I continued to return his glance with a sort of stupid speechlessness.

It was the murmured words of Rand that restored my senses. "What do you say, Denison? What do you say now? How do you like my telesvisor? Is it a success, do you think?"

"Success?" I blurted out, still unable to collect my thoughts. "I—I don't quite understand. What—what can it mean? Have we both gone mad, Dr. Rand?"

Heartily the laughter of the inventor rang through the room. "Mad?" he echoed, as if relishing some secret joke. "Mad? No, I don't believe so—though you're likely to see enough to unbalance any man. You think this image extraordinary, do you?"

Again he laughed, though still for some reason that I could not understand.

"Extraordinary is not the word! It is unbelievable!"

"Nothing is unbelievable," he dogmatized, "when you are looking at another planet."

"Another planet?"

"You certainly don't recognize anything on this planet, do you?" he went on, suavely. "You are viewing a typical scene on Mars."

Breathlessly I gaped at him. My heart seemed to stop short; the word Mars came to my lips, trembled there, and died unuttered.

Not waiting for me to recover from my amazement, Rand fluently continued, "The images on the screen only bear out what I suspected long ago. The disturbances in television could not be explained by any earthly influence; therefore I concluded that their source was extraterrestrial. It was in the hope of messages from outer space that I experimented with my telesvisor. For a long time, evidently, Mars has been trying to communicate with us. I have been the first to catch the messages."

"How do you know it is Mars? I demanded.

Rand smiled as one might smile at a child who has asked some preposterous question. "Because the surface conditions, as I observe them, correspond with those on Mars and on no other known planet. You notice, for example, how large the men are, and how easily they move about. That is because, the planet being smaller, there is less gravitational pull to restrain them—"

"You might also say that of Mercury—and of the moon," I objected.

"So you might—but there is other evidence. Suppose, however, we do not argue. After you have had a few more peeps, we may be better able to talk."

A few moments passed in silence. The image of the huge,
big-headed creature fled from the screen; and in its place other images appeared. So startled was I that many of them quite eluded me, and I cannot begin to enumerate them all. I do recall, however, that I had glimpses of sandy plains covered with a scraggly, fungus-like vegetation; of wide, straight waterways bordered with gelatinous weeds; of cloudless heavens in which shone a sun smaller than ours in appearance, and two minute moons; of fields of spiny grasses in which six-legged mice-sized creatures leapt with the agility of grasshoppers; of strange octagonal towers, open at the top, through which sprang queer man-like beings such as I had already seen; and of little flying cars, scarcely bigger than wheelbarrows, by means of which these beings projected themselves high in air, now floating gracefully with the motion of a breeze-blown leaf, now restlessly circling and spiralling like a gyrating fly, now shooting straight upward and descending with a rocket-like precision and speed.

I had no longer any doubts. "Dr. Rand," said I, taking both his hands warmly, while my eyes, I fear, grew dim with emotion, "Let me congratulate you! You have made a miraculous discovery! You have accomplished a scientific—"

Dr. Rand smiled gravely. "Thank you, Denison," he interrupted. "But let us not be premature. Wait till you have seen all. I am working at a still more remarkable discovery. When that is completed—then, if you wish, you may be enthusiastic."

Press him as I might, he would not explain what he had in mind. He merely nodded cryptically, and bade me be patient; then abruptly turned aside, and signified that the interview was at an end. But the time was not far off when I was to learn that he had been making no idle boast.

ONLY a few weeks later, he again called me excitedly into the laboratory. Once more I found myself face to face with the "televisor"; once more I saw the blue sparks flashing, and viewed fantastic images on the screen. But, on this occasion, there were some new instruments present—a microphone and a powerful radio receiver, of the type designed for long-distance reception. "Now I want you not only to watch carefully, but to listen," prompted Rand, his gray eyes a-glitter with an eager light. "See if you do not notice something unusual."

So speaking, he switched off the current, and the images on the screen vanished. Then carefully he adjusted the radio dial and set the machine into opera-
tion; and, at the same time, he renewed his activities with the “television.” I was interested to hear once more those strange noises that had puzzled listeners for months; I was interested to note that the “television,” operating intermittently, exhibited pictures of bare snow-plains, of hills covered with weird castle-like houses, and of strange octopus-like animals that sidled across the land like living nightmares. But at first I did not observe the vital fact.

“Well, you see?” inquired Rand, expectantly, after I had followed the exhibition for a moment.

“I see many queer sights—” I started to confess. But the wry expression on his face cut me short; I knew that I had been guilty of a stupid reply.

Hence I continued to watch and listen—soon a striking discovery flashed upon me. The peculiar noises on the radio occurred simultaneously with the images on the screen! When the one ceased, the other was resumed! Not once, but a dozen times, this occurred; the appearance and cessation of the two synchronized absolutely! Mere chance could not be the explanation; no series of coincidences could work out so perfectly; the relationship between the radio and the television pictures was demonstrated beyond question!

But what did that relationship imply? So I inquired of Rand, as I turned to him with bewildered exclamations. “Did the radio noises also issue from Mars?”

“Yes, the noises do issue from Mars,” he declared, in matter-of-fact tones, but with a twinkle of undisguised enthusiasm. “They too represent part of the attempt to communicate with us. Both by sight and by sound, the Martians wish to impress us.”

“But how—how did you find it out?” I demanded.

“Merely by accident. One day I happened to have the television and the radio in operation at once—and I would have had to be blind and deaf not to notice the connection. What astonished me is that no one has discovered it before.”

“Perhaps others have discovered it,” I suggested. “After all, what good would it do them?”

“What good would it do?” He flung back my words with an angry vehemence; for a second he stood regarding me in surprise and indignation. “What good would it do, my dear man? Do you mean to tell me you don’t see? Why, it is the Rosetta Stone of science! It is the key to the most baffling of enigmas! It holds the secret of world-to-world communication!”

Blankly I stood regarding the inventor. “To enter into world-to-world communication, Dr.
Rand," I protested, mildly, "one must not only receive messages, but send them—"

"And who says I can't send them?" he flung back, not waiting for me to finish. "For heaven's sake, Denison, what do you think I've been working at all these weeks? After all, the problem is not so difficult. Knowing that the Martians have a powerful transmitting apparatus, it is reasonable to conclude that they have equally powerful receivers. Given sufficient electrical energy, it has long been possible to send messages anywhere on earth; given sufficient increase of power, there is no barrier to flashing our words through the ether even across a distance of many light-years, since the ether, being a conductor of heat and light, would also convey the Hertzian waves—"

"You mean you have succeeded in connecting with Mars?"

"Exactly. Remember this: at its closest approach to the earth, that planet is but thirty-five or forty million miles away, and even at its farthest is separated from us by little more than two hundred million miles—a mere stone's throw, as astronomical distances go. Now, considering the sensitiveness of the Martian instruments, a power of one thousand kilowatts, which I have applied to the radio and television transmitters—"

"Is it sufficient to enable you to say 'How-do-you-do?' to the Martians?" I finished for him.

"More than sufficient. I have already exchanged a few elementary ideas with them—and have found the results quite edifying."

"Doubtless," I commented, not quite certain whether Rand were serious or were but trying to test my credulity. "Of course, you understand the Martian language by intuition—"

"No, but I am taking a course of instruction."

This statement Rand made in the simple and unpretentious manner of one who announces that he is studying French or Spanish.

"By this time, I am an advanced student," he continued, while I smiled skeptically. "When the Martians intercepted the first television images I sent them, and so found that I had caught their messages, they were eager to give me lessons. It is not really difficult. Want to see how it is done?"

"Seeing is believing," said I.

Immediately Rand turned to the microphone, and bellowed out a long and unintelligible drive! While I was wondering if excessive experimentation were not driving him mad, he took out his watch, carefully noted the time, and remarked, "It will be a little more than eleven minutes before we can get our reply, for Mars at
present is more than sixty million miles away, and the ether waves, making the round trip at the rate of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second—"

"Yes, I understand," I interposed. "No doubt I can wait the eleven minutes."

None the less, I had never thought that time could pass so slowly. Conversation lagged; Rand and I alike did nothing but consult our watches; and the watches as if ruled by some tantalizing demon persisted in crawling at a worm-like pace. What was I to see when the time had expired? Frankly, I expected nothing at all, yet, as the minutes dragged past, I could not check an eagerness which was gradually taking possession of me.

At last the specified period had elapsed. "Time!" announced Rand, snapping the watch back into his pocket. And, as promptly as though regulated by clockwork, the demonstration commenced.

It was really nothing very spectacular, yet it was as extraordinary a thing as could be imagined. On the screen before me there appeared one of the big-headed, five-limbed creatures that I knew to be a Martian man; and behind him was the same moving, snake-like foliage that I had already seen. Simultaneously, slow and distinct sounds, like human speech, began to issue from the radio; and I saw that those sounds harmonized with the motions of the man, and that he was acting as would an instructor addressing a class. First he would bend down and tap his knee, while over the radio the word "Molab!" would come to us clearly; then he would touch his thigh, and we would hear, "Darg! Darg!" then he would indicate his breast, and "Habort! Habort!" would burst upon our ears; then he would refer to various other parts of his anatomy and to the features of his surroundings, proceeding always with a care and deliberation that made his intentions obvious.

"Better take down the words, Denison," advised Dr. Rand. "This is all for your especial benefit. I notified him that a newcomer would be here. Personally, of course, I am already far beyond this stage. I have a vocabulary of more than two thousand Martian words—which, moreover, I can combine into sentences. Besides, I am teaching the Martians English."

While this announcement left me stricken speechless, and while the demonstration on the screen still continued, Rand delved into a drawer, and drew forth a notebook lettered with crazy-looking hieroglyphics. "I have the Mar-
tian words noted down here," he informed me. "Also, I have a record of everything the Martians have said to me, and of all that I have said to them. Already I have gathered information enough to take the world by storm."

"God in heaven! Why not do so?" I exclaimed.

"I shall. I surely shall—in time. But I do not want to be premature. When I have my story complete, the effect will be much more shattering. Meanwhile, would you like me to read you some of the results?"

To this question, of course, there could be but one answer. After Rand had switched off the "televisor" and the radio, I sat down to listen to his reports.

"The Martians appear to be a curious people," he assured me, by way of preliminary. "They do not seem to look at things as we do. Of course, there are gaps in my knowledge of their speech, which I have had to fill in by guesswork. But here is what they seem to think of us."

And slowly he read, "Our earthly brothers, inhabitants of a younger and weaker world, it is with great joy that we greet you across space. For thousands of years we have known that your planet was populated, but we have long debated whether it was populated by intelligent beings. The accepted opinion was in the negative; none the less, from time to time throughout the ages we have attempted to send you messages. But they were never acknowledged until now, leading us to conclude that you knew nothing even of so primitive a device as wireless. To the argument that this proved you mere crawling beasts there was apparently no answer. Of course, it was argued that you were but an infant race, having at most a few hundred thousand or a few million years of wisdom, when yours were fishes squirming in the salt waves. Even so, we were disappointed at your lack of progress. But now that we have learned that you are on the threshold of civilization, we are delighted to exchange ideas with you, and to offer that aid to be expected of elder brothers."

Rand paused, and looked at me with a quizzical smile. "Rather interesting, don't you think?" he inquired.

"Rather presumptuous, I should say. The Martians seem to look down on us from an almighty distance. But how did you succeed in getting so complete a message?"

The inventor regarded me thoughtfully, and slowly replied, "Interspersed with the Martian, there were some English words, which our friends up there were remarkably quick about picking up. For the rest, facial expres-
sions, gestures, charts and pictures aided me to understand. Of course, it has taken months of preparation. . . . Do you want to hear more?"

I grunted in the affirmative.

Rand turned the pages of the note-book with a doubtful expression. "Now here is something curious," he stated at length. "A while back, I sent them a television image of myself, but did not mention who or what it was. Their response is refreshing. Just observe what they think of me."

"Our earthly brothers, we were amazed at the picture of the strange two-legged animal. How unspeakably ugly! Is it a domestic beast? It looks harmless but stupid! What is the peculiar pointed swelling in the middle of the face just below the eyes? And what is the mat of hair at the bottom of the face? Even our domestic animals have had no hair for thirty million years. A committee of scientists, called in to observe the exhibit, believe that it represents some primeval form which should have been wiped out ages ago—"

Rand ended in mid-sentence; my laughter cut him short. "Perhaps the remarks are justified! he declared, joining me in hearty merriment. "Well, these are the least ludicrous reports I could read you. You had better wait a while before hearing any more.

I am about to send the Martians an account of our ways of living, accompanied, when possible, by television pictures."

My curiosity being whetted, I attempted to coax further information from Rand. I urged him to read me more of the Martian communications; I pleaded with him to give the results of his inquiries immediately to the world; I entreated him to take me deeper into his confidence, so that we might conduct immediate inquiries in partnership. But to all my appeals he turned a deaf ear. Never had I met a man more doggedly bent on following his own way! Not only did he pledge me to secrecy, but he was determined to reveal nothing more to me for the present, and to keep his results from the world until his findings were complete. And I, while feeling unbounded admiration for the genius of the man, was disturbed in unaccountable ways by his secretiveness, as though I had some indefinable intimation of evil to come. . . .

F rom time to time, during the weeks that followed, I attempted to wrest from Rand some word as to the progress of his experiments. But though I encountered him daily, there was little information I could obtain. He would answer my inquiries by asserting that everything was
“going splendidly” or that he had just “received a new message,” but he would not enter into details; and all the while he was obviously preoccupied, and was changing in ways that alarmed his other associates no less than myself. Habitually he was coming to wear a far-away, abstracted expression, as of one who dwells in some other universe; he was growing absent-minded, and would be as likely as not to forget whether or not he had adjusted his cravat or eaten his breakfast; he would pass us sometimes without a nod, not because he wished to be rude, but because he actually failed to see us; he was becoming emaciated and thin, and his eyes were aglow with a frenzied, almost fanatical fire, while now and then he was heard muttering to himself, as if in a secret ecstasy or dread.

It was three months before he again called me into his laboratory, and signified that he had a revelation to make. His face on this occasion looked strained and worn, as in the case of one who has endured some intolerable worry; his cheeks were almost cadaverous in their pallor, but in his eyes there was the brilliant flame that had been there so often of late. “Well, Denison,” he exclaimed, as he sank wearily into a chair beside the “televi-

sor,” “I don’t know how much longer I can keep going. My re-

searchers have been eating away at me like a disease. It is time that I take someone into my confidence. The burden is too much for me to bear alone.”

“What burden?” I demanded.

He looked at me wistfully, and shook his head slowly, as if but half decided on his course. “I do not know, Denison,” he ruminated, “if it is fair to make you share the responsibility. The weight of the whole world rests upon my head. I have it in my power, if I will, to change the course of history.”

Wonderyingly I stared at him. Was not the explanation that the man had gone mad?

“Queer things have happened since I spoke to you before,” he stated. “I have received startling messages. A momentous decision lies in my hands. A final message, which I expect this afternoon, may determine my choice.”

“You speak in enigmas,” said I.

“Events make me speak in enigmas. But the greatest enigma is that which lies unsolved before me. Oh, God, that I may have the wisdom to decide rightly!”

Abruptly he arose, and, clenching his fists, went pacing about the room in the manner of one distracted.

But after a moment, he re-
sumed his seat. Becoming more settled he confided, "The messages I have received of late, Denison, place me in a fearful dilemma. You must not mind my actions; they are merely my efforts to retain a grip on my sanity. Sometimes I wonder whether I have not been dreaming... Let me read you some recent messages."

He fumbled for his note-book, which displayed scores upon scores of pages packed with hieroglyphics. Momentarily he hesitated; then mumbled, "Here is something typical," and began to read:

"Our earthly brothers, we cannot decide whether what you tell us is serious or in jest. But it must be in jest. You say that your world is divided into many nations—have you not learned to uproot narrowness? You say that, within those nations, some persons have wealth to squander while others starve—can it be that justice is unknown in your land? Worst of all, you declare that the nations permit wars in which hundreds of thousands or even millions of citizens are slaughtered—is it then that your planet is a madhouse? No, our earthly brothers, we will not believe so. You must be jesting. On our world, no nations have existed since our emergence from barbarism tens of millions of years ago. In all that time no Martian, except an occasional victim of mental disease, has lifted his arm against another Martian. It must be so with you too, our earthly brothers, for are you not also civilized?"

Rand paused, and looked up with a grim smile. "This is only one message out of many," he declared.

"Well, what of it?" said I. "The Martian views may be a little peculiar, but that is no reason to go to pieces and let your hair turn gray."

"Not in the least. But you do not understand," he continued, while his thin fingers nervously toyed with his untrimmed beard. "We have created a consternation on Mars. When the people there found that I was not jesting, but that we really do have nations and warfare they expressed their pity and dismay. They concluded that we were savages in need of intelligent guidance, and started a movement to remake the earth. They have the spirit of the true reformer, I believe, for they want to model our world on the plan of theirs."

"Well why not let them try?" I suggested with the attempt at a laugh. "At their distance, they are not likely to prove dangerous!"

"Yes, but they can overcome the distance!"
SUDDENLY Rand's manner became alert, decisive, fiery; and it was with a startling energy that he proceeded. "They can overcome the distance! They are a million years in advance of us scientifically! They can cross the void to earth! They have actually flown through space to certain of the asteroids, millions of miles away! If we will let them, they will come to the earth! It is all for me to decide, for me to decide!"

Filled with the vehemence of this announcement, Rand again shot to his feet. His whole frame was quivering; his movements were abrupt and violent as he once more began to pace the floor.

"Calm yourself, Dr. Rand," I urged, springing to his side and taking his arm. "Calm yourself. Tell me, just what is for you to decide?"

"For me to decide whether the Martians will come here!" he burst forth, flinging himself free of my arm. "For me to decide whether they will come as missionaries! Whether they will give us their ways of thought, of living, their civilization. The Martians want to convert the earth! It is all, all for me to decide!"

Disregarding my entreaties, he continued to storm back and forth like a man out of his wits.

At first, of course, I did not take him seriously. In spite of the earnest, glittering fire in his eyes, the obvious explanation was that the poor man had taken leave of his senses. Hence I did my best to humor him, to console him, and to pretend to give credence to his erratic notions.

"The fact is," he went on to explain, when finally he had been somewhat sobered, "that the Martians would completely transform life here. Being in command of unlimited mechanical power, they would control us as we control the cattle of the fields. They would take up the reins of government in all lands; they would make the laws; they would batter down social distinctions; they would re-distribute wealth, level away inequalities, prohibit warfare, and abolish national differences."

"In other words," said I, still not taking Rand seriously, "they would convert our world into a Utopia!"

"Yes, but into a Utopia without freedom. We would no longer fight, cheat, bicker, and destroy—but we could no longer go our own way! We would have to act as the Martians saw fit! Would we be better off? Would we be better off? I keep asking myself. Would the gain equal the loss?"

"My dear Dr. Rand," I protested, observing how the inventor, frenziedly raking his hair, was still pacing the floor, "I feel sure that you exaggerate. How
can the Martians do all these things? Certainly, you are making a mountain out of an ant-hill!"

Rand turned to me with contempt staring plainly from his eyes. "It is evident that you do not understand," he exclaimed. "Well, then, perhaps you will see for yourself! The time has come for more television messages! Your own eyes will inform you!"

Hastily he turned to the "television," and after a moment the sputtering blue sparks began to appear, and images flashed once more upon the screen. Multitudes of the huge, five-limbed Martians darted before us, their noseless faces hideous as goblins. Some were clothing themselves in queer balloon-like suits ten times their own size; others were wielding long syringe-like tubes from which foggy vapors issued in spurts; still others were flying through the air in their odd little cars, or else springing along the ground in frog-like leaps. Truly, they made an impressive, a frightening assemblage; they struck me as things horrible, inimical; I was alarmed, though I knew that they were sixty million miles away; I shuddered as at the vision of a ravaging army.

"See them getting ready to invade the earth!" exclaimed Rand, in wild eagerness. "Those balloon-like devices are vacuum gar-

ments with which they may counteract the Martian gravitation and reach the earth. Look how they are all ready to set out! Notice those syringe-like machines! They will discharge gases to paralyze our will-power and make us unable to resist! The expedition is all ready! The missionaries will come, will come—if only I give the word!"

"Why must you give the word?" I gasped. But just at that moment the radio, bursting into action, uttered deep-pitched series of Martian phrases. And Rand turned to his note-book, and began to scribble with frantic haste.

Even as he took down the words, he translated them in excited tones for my benefit.

"Our earthly brothers, the expedition is ready! We will go to you in your need, and elevate you to Martian standards! We will wipe out all earth-made laws, and replace them by Martian codes; we will rule you for your own good. At last, our earthly brothers, you will rise above the barbarism that has engulfed you!

"But before we can come to your aid, we need some assistance from you. We must know the exact chemical composition and density of your atmosphere, so that we may adjust ourselves to it; we must be directed to some flat and open stretch of
land, so that we may not fall into the sea or be lost among the high mountains. Tell us these things, O, our earthly friends, and twenty thousand missionaries shall set out this very day!"

The message stopped short. Rand, flinging down his pencil, sat mopping his hair in the manner of one gone mad. "Shall I tell them?" he kept repeating. "Shall I tell them? The temptation is so strong! They will come here, and will create a different world! There will be no more wars! No more social inequality! All will have plenty, all will tolerate their neighbors! But we will no longer be free then! Oh, shall I tell them?"

"Calm yourself, Dr. Rand!" I cried for the twentieth time, coming over to him and taking his arm. "Calm yourself! There is no reason for such agitation—"

Suddenly he seemed to get beyond control. "There is more than reason!" he shouted, leaping to his feet. "There is more than reason! I—I cannot take the chance! Let me—let me put the temptation away! Let me put it beyond me!"

As he uttered these words, he seized his note-book, and violently ripped it from cover to cover; then, with maniacal fury, tore it into scraps, and set a match to the ruins.

"Dr. Rand! Dr. Rand!" I yelled, darting forward and striving to deter him. "Dr. Rand, what are you doing? All your notes! All the messages from Mars! All—"

He did not seem to hear me. Like one filled with a lust of destruction, he was bent upon a still more disastrous work. Seizing a heavy steel rod from the laboratory table, he rushed like a madman toward the "television," and began to deal blow after heavy blow upon the delicate apparatus. Crash followed crash in bewildering succession; shattered glass and twisted steel fell in a rain of ruins to the floor; while I, standing helplessly by, cried out in horror and dismay, "Dr. Rand! Dr. Rand! Your invention! Your great invention! You are wrecking your invention! Stop, stop, Dr. Rand! Stop! Stop!"

But he would not stop. Still, with insensate frenzy, he beat and beat at the ruins, until soon nothing remained but a mass of splintered lenses and battered tubes and wires.

Then, all at once, every atom of energy seemed to leave his body. He sank wearily into a seat; the distracted look on his face gave way to one of utter listlessness; he sighed, and his voice was blank with despair as he moaned. "It is done, done, done! I had to do it! My inven-

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As I accepted the invitation, and as, with shaking fingers, I took the cigarette he offered me, I had the feeling that he had performed a greater deed in destroying his invention than in creating it. Yet that mass of torn metal and broken glass, lying twisted and ghastly upon the floor, seemed to stare at me like a silent reproach, and I groaned inwardly to think that Rand's prodigious achievement should have perished before the world had had a chance to marvel and applaud.

THE END