



Author of "Osiris" and "Mandrake"

EVEN the most discerning person might be excused for failing to trace the connection between the report of a police inspector to his chief regarding the disappearance of a desired criminal, and an article in the newspapers concerning the mysterious absence of a noted professor of mathematics. Yet the connection existed and has come to light only now through a few disjointed notes in the dairy of Dr. Maurice Carrington and a letter received by the chief of police of Orland, a city in northern California.

Properly, the history of the affair begins with Inspector Bowman's report to Chief Conrad, and is as follows:

Acting upon your instructions, I started a search for "Professor" Parkes, wanted for burglary, and learned that since about a week ago he has not been seen in any of his usual hangouts. Those who know his habits believe he has jumped the town. I learn that he has been keeping fairly straight since he was released from prison a year ago. No job can be traced to him in that time. I have several men on the lookout and hope to have news shortly.

To the police, the clever crook operating under the name of "Professor" Parkes had been unusually successful

in his nefarious trade until apprehended and sent across for five years.

Emerging from his confinement, he had remained in seclusion, and the chief's desire to interview him had been with regard to another case concerning which Parkes was supposed to possess information. Incidentally, the title "professor" was one to which Parkes had been entitled, as he had served on the faculty of a small university for a time as an assistant instructor in mathematics. But poor pay and small opportunity for advancement had evidently started him on a crooked course.

On the same day that Bowman sent his report to the chief, the following "story" appeared in the daily press of the city and was flashed over the wires of the news services. It was headed:

WHERE IS PROFESSOR CARRINGTON?

In part the article read as follows:

Where is Professor Maurice Carrington? The police would like to know, and also the public, following a fruitless effort to locate the missing scientist, whose house was partially destroyed by fire at 3 o'clock this morning. The blaze evidently originated in the study and laboratory of Dr. Carrington on the second floor of his Main Street resi-

dence. It is presumed that chemicals of a combustible nature may have exploded while he was at work on some experiment, for he was a chemist as well as mathematician of high standing. Or it may have been spontaneous combustion. The cause of the blaze and the fire itself sink into relative unimportance beside the fact that Carrington has vanished completely. He was not a victim of the fire, for no trace of human remains can be found in the debris of the second floor. Except for one servant, Carrington has lived alone for years. This man, William Dennel, almost as old as his employer, who is about sixty, was away last night at the home of a sick relative. When he returned early in the morning he could give no explanation of the affair.

It is believed that Carrington is without living relations, and both he and Dennel ate at a near-by restaurant. A domestic who came by the day cared for the house.

Dennel said in answer to questions by the police:

"I left the house at 6 o'clock last night. He [Carrington] never goes out at night and told me he intended working in his laboratory until late. He has no enemies that I know of. I have no idea where he can have gone."

It developed that Dennel had never been in this laboratory and study combined, Professor Carrington having absolutely forbidden anyone's entrance. The woman never cleaned there.

The house was searched from cellar to garret without a single trace being found of the missing man. The most startling feature developing from the search, however, is that every possible means of entrance from without or exit from within was barred, locked or otherwise fastened. The firemen had been obliged to break a plate-glass window to gain entrance when the fire was reported.

How, then, did Carrington leave the house—and where has he gone?

After the usual follow-up stories, containing nothing in the nature of an explanation of the disappearance, the public lost interest and the affair was relegated to the category of unsolved mysteries. The house was ordered closed pending the search for the scientist's will, which a firm of attorneys had drawn some years before and which it was believed might have been consumed in the fire.

Meantime, Chief Conrad had given up as fruitless the effort to locate

"Professor" Parkes. And then, one day, came a letter which explained much of the Carrington mystery—explained, yet failed to explain. It was only when the tin dispatch box (hidden in a recess of the professor's study, hitherto undiscovered and untouched by the flames) was unearthed that the mystery surrounding both disappearances was in a measure cleared away and the gateway to the unknown opened—and closed.

THE box contained the missing will, which left most of the estate of Carrington to scientific bodies, and also a diary with random notes in the professor's crabbed chirography.

But first, the letter to the chief from Sydney Fox, formerly a close pal of "Professor" Parkes.

Dear Chief: I don't often take my pen in hand to write to a flycop, but I'm going straight now and haven't anything to be afraid of. I've done my bit and I'm as respectable as you, now. A pigeon was asking me about Parkes the other day but I wasn't able to tell him anything about my old pal. A few days later I got a letter from Parkes which he had left with a—well, never mind. It was written two days before that scientific bloke, Carrington, disappeared and his house burned. Well—this letter is too much for yours truly. I guess it won't do Parkes any harm, for as near as I can figure he and Carrington are both where not even a flycop can get 'em. Anyhow, here's the dope—and maybe you can get more out of it than I did, which I doubt.

Yours truly,

SYD FOX.

A somewhat bulky enclosure the chief, after reading, decided was the raving of a dope fiend, particularly as it was known that Parkes had occasionally used drugs. But when the diary in Carrington's dispatch box came to light, Conrad decided to submit the whole thing to the commissioners, who in turn handed it to the university, after which it became public property through the enterprize of an energetic reporter. So here it is. First a note from Parkes to Fox:

Dear Pal: I'm leaving this with Mrs. Burke to be delivered to you next time you go there. I'm not sure what is going to happen to me. If I don't show up within a reasonable length of time you can turn it all over to the police or anyone else.

THE following is the statement left by Parkes:

"I suppose if I were not educated or if my studies had not been along the line of mathematics I might put the experience I have had down as a mental hallucination. But, realizing, as I do, the possibilities that lie along the path of higher mathematics and allied sciences, and what a man with the learning of Dr. Maurice Carrington might accomplish, I am ready to believe that all that happened is not only possible, but that it happened to me. If the writing of this statement appears somewhat unusual, it may enlighten those who read, to know that I wrote it first *backward* and later copied it, so that it would read according to usual standards. Furthermore, I wrote it with my left hand, which was formerly my right. I am now hiding in Carrington's house. I shall leave it tonight, but *not* in the ordinary manner. Where I shall go, God alone knows. Now for the story:

"I have tried of late years to live straight. But recently I have discovered that the chances for an ex-con to gain a livelihood are most precarious. So I decided to try just one more coup and then strike out for the Antipodes. It must have been fate that sent me to the Carrington house. I knew him by reputation but had never seen him and had no idea where he lived. I had studied the place, saw that two old men were the only occupants, and when the one I took to be a servant left, apparently to be gone some time, since he had a valise, I determined to 'crack the crib', as they say in the vernacular. I waited till about 11 and the servant returned. It was pitch dark and there is no porch light. I kept out of sight, and as the servant

opened the door and went in, I went also—like a shadow. I dodged into a recess of the hallway, where I remained till I heard both master and man retire. Meanwhile, from a few words of conversation, I discovered the identity of the man whose house I had entered and wished it had been someone else's. But it was now too late, so I figured on going ahead, but that if it came to a personal encounter with the professor I would under no circumstances injure a man for whom I had a great deal of respect.

"I judged his study would be a likely place to pick up some stuff of value—probably there would be a cash box or safe. I went up the stairs and succeeded in getting into the room. It was dark as a pocket, but I had no hesitation in using my flashlight because I knew they were both abed, and in another part of the building.

"It was a long room, with windows high up. The inner side was occupied by a sort of laboratory workbench with shelves for chemicals and instruments. At the near end of the room was a desk and bookcase and, as I had expected, a small safe. But it was open and contained nothing of value. There were some interesting scientific instruments, most of which were familiar to me, but little that seemed to offer negotiable spoil.

"One thing puzzled me. It was what I might call a window, or at least an aperture, about four feet square and the bottom about level with my knees. It was in the wall at the far end, which faced the street or yard.

"But it was not a window—nor a door. I find it hard to make my meaning clear. Imagine, if you can, an opening apparently to the open air, but veiled with some substance impervious alike to light and air, a substance unlike anything within ordinary knowledge. It was not cloth, nor was it wood, glass, or any similar com-

position. Yet it quivered and vibrated with every breath of air, as if its component parts were disconnected and in constant circulation, so to speak, as indeed all so-called 'matter' actually is. In color this veil, screen—whatever it might be termed—was grayish-blue, like the sky on a winter morning.

"I pressed my finger into the veil and it penetrated the entire length of the member, as if there had been no limit to the depth or thickness of the obstacle between the study and the outer air.

"When I removed my finger, there was no visible orifice. I puzzled over the queer matter until I recalled my real purpose here and finally selected a few valuable small instruments (much as I disliked doing so) and laid them aside to take along. Then, drawn by a curiosity over which I seemed to have no control, I again turned to the mysterious aperture. I threw again the light from my pocket lamp upon the surface, which oscillated and wavered like the surface of a pond disturbed by a vagrant breeze. Yet it gave the impression of tremendous activity and vitality, as if, odd though it sounds, it were the seat of all motion. I know how ineffectual must be my attempt to make this clear, and all my similes are lame. Yet there are no words to tell just how this affected me.

"Some attraction kept me there, induced me to place first a tentative finger, then my arm through, or rather, into the veil. I followed with one foot—in another moment I had slipped through!

"IF I have had difficulty in expressing myself heretofore, what must be my dilemma now, when I attempt to describe what followed. After all, our vocabulary is woefully limited when it comes to the consideration of matters outside the ken of common knowledge and average minds. I had, so it seemed, entered a void, though

all about me was that impression, real or imaginary, of tremendous vitality and activity. I seemed to have gained an unwonted lightness, as if I had become a part of this great external and internal commotion. Also, I seemed to possess, at least to feel the possession of, superior power, as yet untested. I sensed rather than felt things, but instinctively I knew I had blundered into some strange state of existence, but that I was there *too soon*. I stretched my wings, metaphorically, like the fledgeling bird when its pinions are first given to the air. I felt the limitless, vast and untried reaches of my new world all about me and time had assumed new standards, if not altogether annihilated. I realized that, already, since my plunge into the unknown, I had lived centuries. They say hasheesh eaters sometimes experience these sensations—I do not know; that is one drug I have never tried.

"Then, as my perceptions became a trifle clearer, though as yet far from clear, I saw dimly, almost introspectively, if that is comprehensible, a great plain bordered by colorless skies, across which rolled great, vaporous clouds.

"Suddenly I was aware of sounds, many and indeterminate; sounds that came from nowhere and died away into nothingness. Now they rose to a babble of what might have been voices, though no words were distinguishable; again they were but subdued moans, sounding the very depths of anguish and despair.

"I moved forward, and vistas changed as if by magic. I realized that with one brief step I had covered inestimable space and that eons of time had passed me by. The landscape, if I may call it such when there was no land, became a vivid green with a sky of gold. Another step forward, and dull, overpowering blackness enveloped me. It was as if I had

(Continued on Page 177)

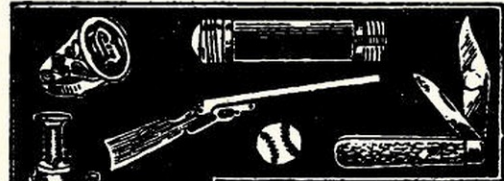
Into the Fourth

(Continued from Page 48)

entered the very home of chaos. A great wind buffeted me and with it came cery faces that peered and gibbered into my own. Trailing arms, like tentacles, clutched at me, slithered across my body; dank hair brushed my face like seaweed. Prehensile fingers strove to seize me, tentatively. I was in the midst of a great throng of disorganized, or half-organized forces; half human, yet possessing no suggestion of human companionship. Horror overcame me. I bent my head, covered my face with my arms and blundered forward.

"I succeeded in turning, and dashed madly in what seemed the direction whence I had come. And in a moment that was an eternity I fell, fell through ages of time, through interminable space, and found myself lying inert, supine, upon the floor of Carrington's study.

"For a time I lay staring with unseeing eyes, until at last my straying mind grew calmer and I rose to my feet to see once more the familiar things of my own life. Familiar? Yes and no. Everything seemed reversed. The hands of a clock on the desk ran backward; the door by which I had entered the study was now at the opposite end of the room, and when I essayed to walk, I found that I must walk backward. I thought I spoke in a low tone—I found myself shrieking. It was strange that the occupants of the house failed to hear me. A glimmering of the truth entered my brain and I experimented elementally. I spelled the word 'cat'—but I spelled it 'tac', with the letters running backward as in a mirror. I crossed the room, averting my gaze from that now hateful aperture behind which, or within which, such horrors lay. Leaving the room, I proceeded down the corridor and into what was evidently a sort of lumber room, and there I



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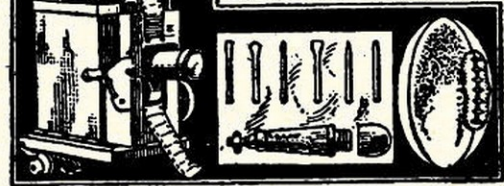
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sank down behind an old lounge to think.

"I remained there till light came, when, feeling myself secure from probable intrusion and discovery, I set myself laboriously to writing this record—backward.

"Afterward with much difficulty I copied the statement. But the writing, the formation even of the letters, is strange and unlike my own hand, as you will see. I mean to seal this statement in an envelope and address it to Mrs. Burke's place. I shall drop it from the window thus addressed, in the hope that someone will find and leave it for me at the house. It will bear your name also. Do as you wish with it, as I said in my note, which I have written and will attach to this. I don't expect you to understand it—I do not myself.

"I shall stay here, stealing food if there is any to be had. I cannot go out into the street like this—and oddly enough, I do not want to leave. *For I am going back!*

"Something is calling—calling. I know I will heed the call and I may never return. I do not care. Somehow, life could never be the same again. . . . Good-bye, Syd.

"ORLANDO PARKES."

THUS ended the remarkable statement, and when the notes by Carrington, despite their brevity and disjointed character, were found to more or less corroborate the account of Parkes' adventure, the chief and the learned faculty of the university were forced to give credence to the matter. The fragments that follow lend an air of finality to the episode.

"November 10.—Someone is in the house—someone besides William and myself; I mean an intruder. I am nervous, perhaps, lest something occur on this, the eve of my triumph.

"November 11.—Who says we have reached the limits of investigation in

any branch of science? If anyone makes such a statement he reckons without his host. There are no limits. I have proved this to my own satisfaction. It remains to prove it to the world. We are pigmies in knowledge—even I who am head and shoulders above the average student (nor do I say it boastfully) am a child when the potentialities of experiment and investigation are considered. The span of a man's life in this plane is inadequate to carry to its fullest extent (if there be any end) an inquiry into the great secrets of existence.

"For years have I studied the problem of the fourth dimension. It is an acknowledged fact, by some profound mathematicians, that it exists, not as an entity, perhaps, but as a point in the science of mathematics. There is nothing absurd in the conception, even if it be only hypothesis. If we can conceive of a two or three dimensional space, we cannot deny the possibility of a fourth. Suppose the investigators are baffled in attempting to define it. Who can define electricity or energy? A few have almost reached the secret. Witness the experiments of the German Von Schlegel, and even our own Paul Heyl. They have constructed solid projections of fourth dimensional structures. But I have overtaken and passed them.

"I stand at the threshold of the unknown—and I tremble. That presence in the house—who—what can it be? Perhaps—pshaw, I am growing fanciful! Why am I writing these notes—I who have always been the soul of method? Relaxation? Possibly.

"My deductions—all I have attained in knowledge of my theory—no—facts—facts—are embodied in the manuscript volume in my desk in the study. These I shall publish to the world—afterward!

"The gateway to the unknown!

". . . Someone is here—someone

or something. I have found traces of food (I keep material for an occasional light lunch in the pantry) scattered about. So the intruder is flesh and blood. Tonight William and I will go over every foot of the house—

“ . . . Great God—he has gone through!

“The vibrations tell me plainer than words . . . and he has returned. It was the vibratory motion following the second disturbance of the curtain that decided me. If he can go and come at will, I can do the same. I had hesitated, I admit it. The instinct of self-preservation is strong . . . I owe the intruder my gratitude. He had the courage I lacked.

“I saw him—it is a man. And he has gone back into the unknown. I saw him go! Saw him plunge through—and vanish. And I will follow.

“What shall I find behind the curtain? I might guess—but to guess is unscientific. This is the last that I shall write—unless I return. I will leave these notes and other things, such as my will, in the dispatch box . . . Tonight—”

THAT was all. The manuscript volume, sad to say, was lost in the fire, the origin of which will never be known. And the fatal aperture, “the gateway to the unknown”—is it sealed forever? Or will the mystery be solved as it was by Carrington?

Somewhere in the void, those two are drifting—the scientist and the burglar. Perhaps, even now, they are at our elbows seeking to communicate, silently petitioning us to open the door that will let them back again into the wholesome world of men. Will they ever return? Who can say? What one man has done another may do, and some day the gateway may again swing wide for those two poor souls who have passed through into the uncharted realms of illimitable space.

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