

CHAPTER XVIII

Suspended animation is nothing new, not alone in the vegetable world and in the lower forms of animal life, but in the highly evolved, complex organism of man himself. A cataleptic trance is a cataleptic trance, no matter how induced. From time immemorial the fakir of India has been able voluntarily to induce such states in himself. It is an old trick of the fakirs to have themselves buried alive. Other men, in similar trances, have misled the physicians, who pronounced them dead and gave the orders that put them alive under the ground.

As my jacket experiences in San Quentin continued I dwelt not a little on this problem of suspended animation. I remembered having read that the far northern Siberian peasants made a practice of hibernating through the long winters just as bears and other wild animals do. Some scientist studied these peasants and found that during these periods of the "long sleep" respiration and digestion practically ceased, and that the heart was at so low tension as to defy detection by ordinary layman's examination.

In such a trance the bodily processes are so near to absolute suspension that the air and food consumed are practically negligible. On this reasoning, partly, was based my defiance of Warden Atherton and Doctor Jackson. It was thus that I dared challenge them to give me a hundred days in the jacket. And they did not dare accept my challenge.

Nevertheless I did manage to do without water, as well as food, during my ten-days' bouts. I found it an intolerable nuisance, in the deeps of dream across space and time, to be haled back to the sordid present by a despicable prison doctor pressing water to my lips. So I warned Doctor Jackson, first, that I intended doing without water while in the jacket; and next, that I would resist any efforts to compel me to drink.

Of course we had our little struggle; but after several attempts Doctor Jackson gave it up. Thereafter the space occupied in Darrell Standing's life by a jacket-bout was scarcely more than a few ticks of the clock. Immediately I was laced I devoted myself to inducing the little death. From practice it became simple and easy. I suspended animation and consciousness so quickly that I escaped the really terrible suffering consequent upon suspending circulation. Most quickly came the dark. And the next I, Darrell Standing, knew was the light again, the faces bending over me as I was unlaced, and the knowledge that ten days had passed in the twinkling of an eye.

But oh, the wonder and the glory of those ten days spent by me elsewhere! The journeys through the long chain of existences! The long darks, the growings of nebulous lights, and the fluttering apparitional selves that dawned through the growing light!

Much have I pondered upon the relation of these other selves to me, and of the relation of the total experience to the modern doctrine of

evolution. I can truly say that my experience is in complete accord with our conclusions of evolution.

I, like any man, am a growth. I did not begin when I was born nor when I was conceived. I have been growing, developing, through incalculable myriads of millenniums. All these experiences of all these lives, and of countless other lives, have gone to the making of the soul-stuff or the spirit-stuff that is I. Don't you see? They are the stuff of me. Matter does not remember, for spirit is memory. I am this spirit compounded of the memories of my endless incarnations.

Whence came in me, Darrell Standing, the red pulse of wrath that has wrecked my life and put me in the condemned cells? Surely it did not come into being, was not created, when the babe that was to be Darrell Standing was conceived. That old red wrath is far older than my mother, far older than the oldest and first mother of men. My mother, at my inception, did not create that passionate lack of fear that is mine. Not all the mothers of the whole evolution of men manufactured fear or fearlessness in men. Far back beyond the first men were fear and fearlessness, love, hatred, anger, all the emotions, growing, developing, becoming the stuff that was to become men.

I am all of my past, as every protagonist of the Mendelian law must agree. All my previous selves have their voices, echoes, promptings in me. My every mode of action, heat of passion, flicker of thought is

shaded, toned, infinitesimally shaded and toned, by that vast array of other selves that preceded me and went into the making of me.

The stuff of life is plastic. At the same time this stuff never forgets. Mould it as you will, the old memories persist. All manner of horses, from ton Shires to dwarf Shetlands, have been bred up and down from those first wild ponies domesticated by primitive man. Yet to this day man has not bred out the kick of the horse. And I, who am composed of those first horse-tamers, have not had their red anger bred out of me.

I am man born of woman. My days are few, but the stuff of me is indestructible. I have been woman born of woman. I have been a woman and borne my children. And I shall be born again. Oh, incalculable times again shall I be born; and yet the stupid dolts about me think that by stretching my neck with a rope they will make me cease.

Yes, I shall be hanged . . . soon. This is the end of June. In a little while they will try to befool me. They will take me from this cell to the bath, according to the prison custom of the weekly bath. But I shall not be brought back to this cell. I shall be dressed outright in fresh clothes and be taken to the death-cell. There they will place the death-watch on me. Night or day, waking or sleeping, I shall be watched. I shall not be permitted to put my head under the blankets for fear I may anticipate the State by choking myself.

Always bright light will blaze upon me. And then, when they have well

wearied me, they will lead me out one morning in a shirt without a collar and drop me through the trap. Oh, I know. The rope they will do it with is well-stretched. For many a month now the hangman of Folsom has been stretching it with heavy weights so as to take the spring out of it.

Yes, I shall drop far. They have cunning tables of calculations, like interest tables, that show the distance of the drop in relation to the victim's weight. I am so emaciated that they will have to drop me far in order to break my neck. And then the onlookers will take their hats off, and as I swing the doctors will press their ears to my chest to count my fading heart-beats, and at last they will say that I am dead.

It is grotesque. It is the ridiculous effrontery of men-maggots who think they can kill me. I cannot die. I am immortal, as they are immortal; the difference is that I know it and they do not know it.

Pah! I was once a hangman, or an executioner, rather. Well I remember it! I used the sword, not the rope. The sword is the braver way, although all ways are equally inefficacious. Forsooth, as if spirit could be thrust through with steel or throttled by a rope!