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Environment



by William Holloway

IS man really civilized? Or is his apparent civilization but an artificial cloak that hides the primitive savage underneath, and which, in time of stress, he flings aside?

Dillon Weston, who had soulful blue eyes, and hair of the exact shade of gold which most women rave over, always answered the first question with a positive affirmative. These declarations were generally made while sipping tea amid a group of feminine admirers of all ages from debutantes to bachelor girls, and were invariably received with rapturous applause. There is nothing the average woman likes better than to be assured of her absolute divorce from the primitive.

And then fate shuffled the cards of life anew and rang in on Dillon Weston what

can only be described as a cold deck of the very coldest kind. The Eastern College, in which he held an assistant professorship of geology organized an expedition to make certain scientific investigations in the northern section of the Hudson Bay region. He was chosen to play an important part in the work, which included a study of glacial action in the north in those far-off days when Labrador and the New England States groaned under the weight of an ice-cap more than a mile high, and to his credit be it said that he performed his duties well enough to melt the stony heart of fate had that organ been susceptible to emotion.

But fate was ready, just then, to deal from the aforesaid cold deck. Exactly ten days before the expedition was scheduled

to sail for home, Dillon Weston received his new hand.

They were examining the northwestern slopes of Hudson Bay, in that far region where the northern section of the Barren Grounds begins to stretch an arm, through unbroken desolation, across the Northwest Passage to the Pole. Trees, even the stunted willows that cling to lowlands, had vanished some distance farther south, and the tundra, the gray-brown of its rocky surface flecked with light-green lichens and the faded remnants of red and blue summer flowers, stretched forbiddingly before them. Everywhere was evidence of glacial action in the denuded slopes of hills and in the chiseled scorings of rocks.

During the preliminary examination the members of the expedition were accustomed to scatter in order to obtain a general outline of their surroundings as speedily as possible. So it came about one morning that Dillon Weston found himself alone at the half-concealed entrance of a cave, where the strata he had been observing were more than usually interesting.

He was in the presence of an appalling ancient catastrophe. At some time in the far past a folding of the hills that could only be described as tremendous had taken place. Mighty mountain masses seemed actually to have buckled together, and in the throes of settling down to have flung huge masses of stone about like feathers. This had evidently occurred at the end of the Glacial Period, for parts of the upheaved strata bore no trace of the action of ice.

Within the cave his powerful electric flash-light showed a wide, lofty chamber, winding indefinitely into the semi-darkness, and displaying on its rocky sides some unusual geological "faults." He took a few steps toward the rear; then a few more; presently, growing interested in his work, he found himself descending the sandy floor of a wide cavern, which ran steadily but gently downward, and which was dimly lit as he afterwards discovered, through crevices high up on the mountain-side.

The temperature was below freezing,

which was only to be expected in a cavern in that region of the world, but it was so far below freezing as to cause him to resume his heavy gloves rather hastily. From the walls his flash-light struck vivid gleams from crystalline schists. He was some yards below the surface and an eighth of a mile from the entrance when the cavern ended in a solid wall of ice, the remnant, evidently, of an ancient glacier!

There could not be the slightest doubt about it. Caught and imprisoned between folds of the rocks, weighed down by millions of tons of dead weight, the ice had been preserved in that Arctic climate until his coming, and would doubtless last while the world stood.

It was all a fascinating spectacle for a geologist, yet Dillon Weston paid it scant attention. For there, plainly visible in the encircling ice, natural as they had been in that far-off day when they had fallen to their death upon the glacier, were the bodies of two gigantic, maned and shaggy elephants, which he knew to be not elephants but mammoths.

For a moment he was too dazed to do more than gaze at the extraordinary spectacle. The bones of the mammoth, the enormous prehistoric ancestor of the modern elephant, are to be found in almost every great museum. The dullest school-boy would recognize those mighty curved tusks, which could toss a present-day cow as easily as the cow takes vengeance on a troublesome dog. But the mammoth himself, in all the glory of his flesh and blood, has been found once only by man; in 1903, in the frozen soil of Siberia. And here was he, Dillon Weston, gazing at two absolutely perfect specimens, through a thin wall of ice!

For a moment his breath came in gasps and his face paled. He had won one of the greatest prizes in his chosen profession. Presently, he knew, his name would run like wildfire around the world, and he would become famous beyond the average scientist's wildest dream. Which means, though Dillon Weston did not realize it, that if you canvassed a crowded meeting in Madison Square Garden you would find at least two men who could recall his name.

He enjoyed the little walk back to his chief, more than any other walk he had ever taken. And then fate, judging the moment propitious, dealt him a hand, right from the bottom of the pack, that made him gasp.

The work of removing the mammoths from the cave involved the widening of it at certain places and the installing of powerful hoisting apparatus. It would probably require two months at least, working in shifts—and navigation was even then closing!

"You'll have to stay all winter, Dillon, to see that nobody—none of those Eskimos, I mean—destroy your find," declared Professor Smithers, the head of the expedition, with an air from which there was no appeal. "It's by long odds the biggest thing the old college has ever done, and we can't afford to take chances. We'll build you a cozy cabin and leave you plenty of coal for your stove, and I'll have the carpenter double sash your windows. And as soon as the ice goes out of Hudson Bay next spring, we'll be back." He thought an instant. "The men have all shipped for the voyage, so I can't leave one of them, and the rest of us are all married. So I suppose you'll have to make out alone. Don't mind that, do you?"

"Not the least bit in the world," lied Weston cheerfully. "I've always thought it must be pleasant to try a bit of primitive life."

"Don't try too much of it, Dillon," advised Professor Smithers with ponderous jocularity. Then he smiled. Assistant Professor Weston, with his soulful blue eyes, his clerical father and grandfather, and his eminently decorous outlook upon life, was not apt to become very primitive. And Dillon Weston smiled in return; not in the least, because he felt like smiling, but because it was so eminently the proper, decorous thing to do, considering that the head of the expedition was making the joke.

And then the vessel containing his colleagues steamed away and he was left alone in a comfortable cabin with a good stove and enough coal to last two winters if necessary. He had also a very satisfac-

tory supply of provisions and an excellent working library. On a shelf above the stove he ranged the portraits of his father, mother, and grandfather, the two men in clerical garb, his mother wearing the black silk he associated with meetings of the Dorcas Society, while on the wall he tacked up a program of geological investigation to be pursued before winter settled down in earnest.

The first night loneliness bit deep. Then, too, he had trouble with the hanging lamp which swung from the roof-tree. When it had been put in order, and he had washed his blackened hands, he looked out upon the vastness of the starry night, listened to the wind amid the boulders, and realized, for the first time, the desolation that lay about him.

He was alone in a gameless wilderness, which had lain empty and sullen beneath the sky since the dawn of time. That he could ever make friends with the monster seemed preposterous. But, whatever happened, he must not allow it to master him; that meant despair, madness, death, the commonplace trio of Arctic winters.

September was a very pleasant month. Frost was comparatively light, and the snow confined to one or two scanty falls, so that he was enabled to do some valuable work in his special department. The long walks across the tundra gave him a tremendous appetite and began to broaden his shoulders and put muscle everywhere upon his tall body.

In October snow interfered with his geological work, but not in the least with his outings. He began to go about on snowshoes and, in order to save the battery supply of the powerful electric flash-lights—specially constructed for the expedition—of which he had several, he installed in the cave a complete lantern service with a plentiful reserve of oil. For, of course, it goes without saying that he visited the cave each day to gloat over his wonderful discovery.

There was something fascinating about these daily visits. The gigantic forms of the slain mammoths—killed, evidently, by a fall from a cliff while fighting, and buried in the slowly forming glacier—awed him

by their very vastness. They had been subjected to immense pressure, as was evidenced by the clearness of the ice, and in the remote past had probably traveled many miles from the scene of their fatal quarrel ere the mountains had imprisoned their section of the glacier forever.

Their huge tusks were fortunately uninjured, so that he was able to admire their tremendous sweep at his leisure. Those of one of the animals were bloodstained, evidently from clotted blood which soiled the other's shaggy mane, mute evidence of the ancient battle. So much, the perfect outline of the massive bodies and tusks, was plainly visible; but even the powerful flash-light was unable to bring out the details of the picture. It was as though these monsters of the prehistoric world were still shrouded in the gloom of unnumbered centuries.

With the coming of November the cold grew more intense and the grip of winter was unrelaxing. The days were growing very short now, so that most of his time was spent indoors, where he busied himself with the writing of articles for scientific magazines and with a serious attempt at a book.

The wilderness now began to exercise insensibly upon him that dangerous charm, which to so many lonely men has spelled madness. The stars blazed with strange brilliance until the aurora dimmed them with its vivid coloring, when Weston spent hours watching the play of the mystic lights. Then there were the unaccountable optical illusions of the north: the apparent movement of rocks that he knew to be solid as the rock of Gibraltar, and which presently, he knew, would settle into their places again; the stars that seemed to fall with a hissing noise into the frozen mass of Hudson Bay, the animation which, at times, appeared to possess the most fixed objects of the landscape, causing them to circle about the cabin with a movement full of threatening meaning.

In this time of stress it was the practical, undoubted fact of his discovery that held him to the line of safety. Each day he paid a visit to the cavern, and each day came away with a firmer resolve that the

world should not be deprived of these strange treasures even if he had to spend two winters in the north instead of one. And then, one morning in February, when he least expected it, the door of his cabin was opened from without as he sat writing, and a tall, fur-clad figure, followed by a shorter, very broad-shouldered one, appeared upon the threshold.

"Well, I'm damned!" cried the taller of the two, with a quick stare about him. "Double-sashed windows! Some joint, this!"

Dillon Weston welcomed them with a puzzled air. The nearest white men, as he well knew, were hundreds of miles to the south. Yet here were two calling on him in the most casual manner in the world. "Come in and shut the door," he said hospitably.

The shorter of the two, a dark man, with a black, ice-crusting beard, closed the door and came forward to the stove, where he stood combing the ice from his beard with mittened fingers.

"You probably heard of me before," he began. "I'm Sam Powers, the fur-trader, that owns the schooner Lucy. And this is my first cousin, Pete Ryan, who sails the Lucy for me."

The tall man, Ryan, who had now uncovered a hard-bitten, blond face, marred by an ugly scar diagonally across its right side, nodded confirmation.

"The Indians know us from the Little Whale River on the Labrador side, down through James Bay and round to the Nelson. We have the best outlaw trade in the bay. But now—" he shrugged his shoulders expressively—"oh, hell!"

"Stayed too late for once," Powers explained. "Got caught in a storm, driven over to this side, and frozen in about thirty miles to the south."

The eminently proper professor of geology, who was listening with eager interest, formed a striking contrast to his rough and ready visitors. Owing to the heat of the room he had pushed back the capote of the single-piece fur garment that enveloped him from head to foot. The capote made a strange, pendulous excrescence across his broad shoulders, above

which his neatly brushed hair gleamed like the yellow nimbus of some misseled saint.

"Crew still on board?" Weston asked quickly.

"Three men and the grub-slinger," answered Powers. "I filled in as mate and took one watch, and Ryan here the other. She's pretty small, you see, and it's a business where too many cooks spoil the broth."

Into Weston's mind, as he listened, came some stray scraps of information regarding the Lucy and her unsavory reputation. When the Indians go into the bush in the fall to set their traps they take with them a winter's provisions for their family, to be paid to the Hudson Bay Company in the spring in the shape of furs. The business of the Lucy it was to anchor in a convenient harbor and buy from the Indian hunter for cash or provisions the very furs he owed to the great company. It was an unpleasant business, based on the red man's broken pledges, and as such properly looked down upon.

Ryan, meanwhile, was gazing about him at the large microscope which stood upon the table, beside a portable typewriter and a pile of books; at the little slabs of roughly polished rocks, mounted upon tiny, wooden bases and ranged upon a shelf; at the pasteboard drawings of strange strata that lined the walls. "Some joint!" he said emphatically.

Weston smiled as he began to prepare his midday meal. Now that the surprise was passing away, he was conscious of a feeling of profound content at once more hearing the sound of a human voice. What he was not conscious of was the sharp glances which the newcomers fastened upon his store-closet when his back was turned, and the curious gleams of satisfaction that appeared in their keen eyes.

Half an hour later, as they sat over mugs of almost boiling tea, Powers hinted the real object of their visit. On the table was a tin of snow water, which Weston had melted that morning, but which, at a distance of ten feet from the red-hot stove, was slowly turning into a solid block of ice. The fur-trader tapped it roughly with his knife. "Rotten climate to be living in, isn't it?"

Weston nodded. "I had seventy below for three days straight last week," he remarked. "I had lots of coal, and I kept the stove blazing to the limit all day and all night, but things froze as soon as I took them off the fire."

"Got lots of grub, too, haven't you?" asked Powers.

Weston shook his head. "I took more than I thought to need by a good deal, but, looking it over yesterday, I found enough until June, and maybe a little over. I suppose I have about eight hundred pounds; that's all."

"On the Lucy," said Powers curtly, "we haven't any at all."

Weston laid down his fork. "Haven't any?" he cried. "Do you mean—"

"Mean!" interrupted the fur-trader roughly. "I mean we are starving. Do you get that? Starving!"

"Oh!" cried Dillon Weston, greatly shocked. "That's terrible!"

He was silent an instant, his blue eyes clouded. The thought of starvation in that iron wilderness was too awful for words. And the worst of it all was that he could not help.

"What are you going to do?" he stammered.

The black eyes of the fur-trader, which in their day had looked over many a tricky bit of fur, now bored into Weston's face as though in search of a hidden weakness he knew must be there.

"It's what you are going to do that counts, isn't it? I'm waiting on you."

"I'll give you what I can spare," cried Dillon Weston hastily. "But that isn't much." He thought an instant, estimating how he could curtail his daily allowance in order to help, and realizing the hopeless inadequacy of his assistance. "I'll give every ounce I can spare," he added, turning toward the store-closet.

"Spare!" broke in Ryan with a laugh. "Spare! Hear him say it! Hell!"

"There are six of us on the Lucy," snarled the fur-trader. "Do you think we want any of your damned charity? You haven't been long in the north, stranger, or you'd talk different. Up here it's man to man, and no favors, and the weak go to

the wall. D'ye get that? The weak go to the wall." He turned to his friend and barked a command. "Watch that side, Pete!"

Ten minutes later the host of the small dinner-party awoke from what seemed ages of slumber. There was a lump on his head where he had fallen on the edge of his bunk, and a generally bruised feeling throughout his body. From a cut on his forehead a tiny stream of blood ran saltily into his mouth. His visitors were engaged in making two huge packs of the choicest of his provisions.

"Why, look who's here!" cried the fur-trader pleasantly. "Hanged if our little friend ain't woke up to say 'good-by.' I call that a classy, high-brow thing to do."

Dillon Weston lifted his aching head and stared earnestly at the speaker. "Where are you going with my stuff?" he asked hoarsely.

"Ain't teaching grammar in the college you was telling us about," remarked Ryan plaintively. "Else you'd say 'going with your stuff,' seeing that this chow has changed hands."

"As to our sailing directions," remarked Powers, "you can be sure we're not heading for the Lucy. There isn't enough chow for all, so we'd only be waiting round, watching each other die. We're going to make a sled out of some of your gear and then beat it down south on snow-shoes about seven hundred miles to an Indian camp we know."

He bent over to his work, then suddenly straightened up at the crunching sound of snow-shoes on the frozen snow without. His face had grown pallid. "God! Petey! It's the boys!" he whispered.

Ryan sprang toward the door, hesitated and turned backward as it was flung open in his face and four fur-clad figures hurled themselves helter-skelter into the room, a huge, red-bearded fellow, with a yellow, woolen scarf about his neck, in the van.

Not a word was exchanged. Silently, with a savage malignity that was all the more impressive from its entire absence of speech, the newcomers leaped upon the owner and captain of the Lucy. And, as silently, the others fought back.

Looking on, Weston could see a blur of surging forms, that swept across the overturned table and battled savagely, ferociously up and down the interior of the cabin. The large microscope, with which he did so much of his work, was flung on the floor beside his shattered typewriter; the shelf of mounted specimens was torn from its place and his trophies hurled helter-skelter on the floor; and still the fight raged on, as though some savage animals had been struggling for supremacy in the heart of the jungle.

Presently, however, there came a lull. Powers and Ryan, bleeding from a dozen cuts, stood together beneath the window, one grasping the broken leg of the table, the other swinging aloft the arm of a shattered chair, while facing them were their assailants, leaning forward ready to spring.

"Suppose we talk this thing over, boys?" said Powers, and even in the midst of his losing battle Weston noted the ring of courage in the man's voice. Whatever else he might be the fur-trader was evidently no coward. "I got something to say. If 'twasn't for me you fellers wouldn't be here at all."

"Ah, hell!" said the red-bearded sailor shortly. "We know you met some Eskimos that was going south because the walrus had quit on them, and they told about the collidge feller being here. That's all right. And then you up and says th' on'y thing to do is to come up here and git grub. All right, too. But what ain't all right is fer you and Pete to beat it up here alone and grab it fer yourselves."

"It's this way, boys," went on Powers earnestly. "I figured the young feller wouldn't have enough for the bunch, so I put it up to Petey that him and me would get chow enough to last us down the coast till we struck White Bear's tribe. You remember White Bear that give us those black-fox skins last summer? Well, I cal'ate we could git grub and dogs there and come up for you, whilst if we all tried to make it we'd die in our tracks. That's the truth, s'elp me!"

"Truth! Hell!" cried the red-bearded one. "I see ye going, but not a coming back."

"Aw, shucks!" cried Powers indifferently. Weston, watching, could see him wetting his dry lip with his tongue as he played his last card. "Wouldn't we have to come back before the ice took the Lucy out in the spring? Say, wouldn't we?"

"That's gospel truth, Jack," one of the newcomers cried; and Weston could see that the trader had made an impression. "It sounds good to me," declared a second.

"What I say is this," Ryan broke in. "Let's cut out all this funny business and draw lots who's to go south. Two has got to go. Sam and me 'll stand aside and let you boys choose among yerselves if ye want it that way. Then the rest stays here till help comes."

"Some shack!" cried one of the four, looking about him. "It listens good, Jack," added another. "Anyway we've got Sam where we want him," said a third.

The red-bearded giant nodded agreement. "All right, Sam," he said gruffly. "Chuck down your club; and cooky, you get busy and let's have the best you got. Rustle some bacon first thing!"

"Righto," was the answer of the dirtiest and most villainous of the four as he stepped forward. "Got th' best uv everything, boys," was his awed remark, as he surveyed the packs which Powers and Ryan had shoved in the corner at the approach of danger. "Some chow, believe me!"

As Dillon Weston stood beside the stove the whole affair seemed both real and unreal, like one of those strange dreams in which the dreamer appears to awaken even while the dream runs on. The sunlight streaming through the window threw the interior of the cabin and its occupants into relief, with the clearness of a stereopticon. Surely this could not be the peaceful room in which two hours before he had been writing up his journal? The thing was incredible. In a sudden gust of anger he stepped forward.

"Where do I come in?" he demanded.

"Nowheres," answered the red-bearded man sharply. "And if ye give any talk"—he lifted a huge fist—"I'll show ye what o'clock it is." He laughed quietly. "Ye don't come in anywheres; we ain't got

enough to go round as 'tis." He turned to the others. "What 'll we do with him, boys?"

Dillon Weston, to do him justice, was no coward. When the fur-trader and his ally had attacked him he had been too dazed to do more than gaze at the astounding spectacle of their treachery. Now he had recovered his self-possession; moreover, he was angry in a cold-blooded way that made him dangerous; he struck him of the red beard a blow that echoed through the room.

Dillon Weston was a man of unusual physical strength; in addition, he had, as gymnasium work, taken lessons in boxing not many years before; so that the contest should have been fairly equal. But fighting, as practised in the rough corners of the world, is a very different thing from what the prize-ring knows as fighting, as John Morrissey once had the misfortune to prove.

As a boxer, red-beard would probably have made a wise audience laugh itself to death; as a rough and tumble fighter in a cabin in the Arctic, he proceeded to prove in a class by himself. As Weston, bleeding and defeated, lay upon the floor of the cabin, he felt an odd feeling of admiration for the man who had beaten him; an unwilling tribute to an enemy, but still a tribute.

"Game enough!" was red-beard's verdict as he stanchd his bleeding face. "Question is, what to do with th' fool. There's not enough grub to go round. I say croak him."

"An have the college people come back next summer and raise the whole country up!" protested Powers. "I'm fer giving him a mite of grub and turning him out doors. Say he dies; somebody's got to die afore spring; maybe more than one," he ended darkly.

"And if he dies, it's only starvation," cried another. "We can say he got dippy and wandered away; lots gets batty up here, everybody knows that."

So it came about half an hour later that Dillon Weston went into exile from the cabin in which he had fought his losing fight; went into exile with his furs and

clothes, some cooking utensils, a small bag of flour, a few beans, and some pilot biscuit. He had plenty of tea, an article which the sailors despised, but not a trace of meat or fat. One of the men had proposed allowing him a tin of lard, but the suggestion had been frowned upon, lard being recognized as too great a delicacy to be lightly parted with.

That night he sat in the shelter of the cave, thinking over his misfortunes. Above him, suspended from a jutting rock, was the lantern he had kept in the cave to save his flashlight; in a hollow below him was a small stove, originally intended for the cabin, but discarded as too small, which the rascals had allowed him to take; in a pile beside him was a supply of coal, which he intended to increase next day, an agreement having been reached by which the overabundant store of fuel should be divided in equal shares. The lantern swung fitfully in the gusts that drove in from the desolate tundra, and the stove smoked.

That afternoon he had found a crevice in the rock that apparently led through a tiny hole to the outside world, for watching closely, it was possible to detect a faint glow of daylight. With a little work he would be able to make an excellent chimney of it. Meantime, his stovepipe was not long enough to reach into the crevice, and the stove smoked persistently.

These, however, were minor discomforts. What mattered really was the unpleasant fact that he was now face to face with starvation as it is known in the north.

In that wide, desolate land he was quite alone. No animal life existed on the frozen wastes of the tundra; no bird crossed the gray sky; not even a walrus lifted a tusk in that awful stillness. Wherever he looked a white death seemed to wait mockingly, both for himself and the men of the Lucy. Left to himself he would have passed safely through the winter; the advent even of one more would have spelled disaster; while the intrusion of the six meant a quick death for all concerned.

Had the fur-trader and his companion escaped southward with the bulk of the provisions, it was barely possible that they two might have won to safety; that they

would have been able to bring back aid, even had they been so minded, he did not in the least believe; as the situation now presented itself there was nothing to look forward to but death by starvation.

The provisions he had lost would not keep the crew of the Lucy alive much more than a month at most; after that—Dillon Weston shrugged his shoulders with supreme indifference. He would not be there to see; so what matter?

Next morning he awoke at daylight and began the tiresome task of removing the rest of his coal supply to the cave. Powers, who stood beside the cabin, watched him carelessly as though he had other things to think of; from the interior of the cabin came the sound of loud voices, that of the red-bearded man more strident than the rest; evidently the inmates were not quite satisfied with the situation.

Later in the day, when he had packed the remainder of his coal to the cave, he set to work to make the place more habitable. The entrance was fairly narrow. Now he built a snow rampart in front of it, with a tortuous winding passage, leading by a narrow doorway into the cave itself. The twistings in the passage would break the force of the wind and help to make the cavern warmer.

With snow and water he fashioned a long tube that acted as an excellent continuation of his stove pipe and did away with the smoking that had annoyed him. And, having thus put his house in order, Dillon Weston sat down to wait for death.

He did not blink the fact. It was something to be faced. Neither did he blame the men of the Lucy. After all, life was a struggle in which the weak went to the wall. All right! He could do it without useless whining! And as a preliminary he decided not to go near the cabin, no matter what happened. If he had to die he would die by himself, as the old cavemen crawled off to their dens, when their time came.

A couple of weeks passed, and, despite the strict limits he imposed upon himself, his supplies were practically at an end. Hunger was gnawing at him as in violation of his resolve, he walked slowly across the tundra toward the cabin.

Suppose it were possible to regain possession of his stores? The idea startled him; then he put it aside as absurd; one man does not overcome six except by a miracle. From the cabin, as he approached, came a faint, far-away odor of frying bacon, infinitely enticing. His body was trembling, as he walked away, with the effort it had cost him not to abandon his last shred of self-respect and beg its inmates for food.

To change the current of his thoughts he returned to the cave, and, taking up the lantern, went into the recesses of the cavern to gloat over the huge bulk of the mammoths, which he hoped would become known to posterity as the "Dillon Weston Discovery." So much had happened since the arrival of the fur-trader that he had not once visited his prize. Now, as he stood before the strange monsters, coeval, as he knew, with primitive man, he became slowly conscious of a change.

The gigantic, shaggy-maned animals were no different from what they had been when his startled eyes first fell upon them: wonderful, scientific treasures at which the scholastic world would wonder.

The change was in himself. His sense of values was different. The bitter arctic waste, the barren tundra upon which wind blew the snow in huge drifts that were full of strange runic lines, the long nights when the walls of the cabin cracked from frost with the report of a rifle, the slow starvation which was weakening him each day—all had combined to give him a newer, more primitive view-point.

Far off in the old life he had left so long behind, the mammoths had a scientific and educational value. Now, as he stood in front of them, he was conscious of them only as a cave-man would have been—as food! For the animals, killed by their fall upon the ice, and buried under snow and ice in the unbelievable cold of the Glacial Age, represented thousands upon thousands of pounds of fresh meat! And the man, muffled in furs to the eyebrows, who gloated over the sight, could have told you that meat was more than raiment, and a good deal more than all the colleges in the world.

He was staggering from weakness as he returned to his quarters for an ax. The fore-shoulder of one of the animals was within a few inches of the surface. A few minutes' labor freed it from ice, after which came the difficult work of cutting through the tough hide to the frozen flesh beneath; nearly half an hour's exertion was required before a huge piece of meat, dark as that of the walrus, lay in his hands. Two hours later, Dillon Weston could have told you that mammoth steak was the finest eating in the world, and, what is more, he would have believed it.

Two weeks went by in storm and tempest. Snow drifted into the pathway to the cave until it was entirely covered, and he was compelled to keep the lantern burning continuously, until he hit upon the expedient of making candles out of the tallow of the mammoth meat.

Thereafter he reserved the lantern for his visits to the far end of the cave, and did his cooking by the light of a pair of the strangest candles in use since time began. Then the storm ceased, and he dug his way out of the cave to the light of a perfect winter day.

But for his snow-glasses the glare from the white surface of the tundra would have been blinding. Far and wide endless slopes of dazzling snow reflected the light from a myriad crystals; the frozen surface beneath him creaked under his snow-shoes; as he walked toward the cabin he was conscious, more than ever in his life, of the joy of living.

A silence brooded over his old home, that was not dispelled as he drew near. Pushing open the door, he found the owner and crew of the *Lucy* huddled around the fire. Evidently they had been unable to spare food to send two men south. Powers looked up, stared in surprise as though he had seen a ghost, swore softly under his breath, and was silent. The red-bearded sailor, who sat on the edge of Weston's bunk, spat savagely upon the stove as he growled an oath; but no one offered a remark.

"I've finished all that stuff I took away," Weston began. "Can you let me have a little more?"

"More? Hell!" exclaimed red-beard. "There's one pilot biscuit left. And we're going to draw lots fer that."

"I say divide it," said Ryan huskily. "Then every man 'll git a taste."

"Ah, what's a taste!" scoffed Powers. "Let's draw. Then the one as wins gets a couple of real mouthfuls before he cashes in."

There was a little murmur of assent, and red-beard began assorting several slivers of wood. Weston stepped forward. "I'm in on this," he said sharply. "It was my biscuit in the first place."

Red-beard looked at him out of inscrutable eyes. "I told the boys you were a game bird," he said slowly. "Now you're showing it." He stroked his flaming beard with a monstrous hand. "When a man has a chance to live," he went on, "he sometimes has ter be hard; but when he's going ter cash in—hell! What's th' use. I'm willin' ef th' boys is."

"All right!" barked Powers, and the rest nodded assent. "Give the guy a chanct fer a last bite!" advised the cook. And the drawing began.

A minute later red-beard handed to Dillon Weston the prize he had won. Then he leaned back against the bunk and spat upon the stove. "Ye won it fair, young feller," said he briefly. "Now git t'ell with it."

As Weston walked rapidly homeward, the pilot biscuit in his hand, he recalled the scene in the cabin. Not a hand had been raised to stay his departure, though he had noticed more than one pair of shoulders quiver. Rough, hardened as the men were, they had stood true to their code—which is all that can be said of any man.

Two hours later he staggered into the

cabin again, and flung a heavy burden on the table. And that night six men beyond the pale of law, and one erstwhile decorous member of a college faculty, ate fresh meat in a cabin where a red-hot stove was unable to keep water liquid five feet away, and found the room too warm; while the arctic atmosphere vibrated with the melancholy roaring of ancient chanteys. And in this manner did the wilderness take Dillon Weston to itself.

Even the complete loss of the mammoths did not upset him. Two tons of meat and fat had been removed and stored in the cave when the ice split asunder and the animals vanished beneath a projecting ledge, taking with them a funeral mound of thousands of tons of ice. But there was food enough to keep the little group from starving. And that, and not curio seeking, was the essential thing, as Weston could have told you.

Professor Smithers, on his return in June, accepted the disappointment with scientific self-possession. "You're looking well, Dillon," he remarked pleasantly. "And I hope you didn't get too near the primitive when I was away."

Thinking of the six rascals, gone three weeks before, for whom he would always have a warm spot in his heart, Dillon Weston shook his head. He had, of course, no intention of mentioning his visitors. "Maybe I'm not of primitive type."

Professor Smithers looked down at his own neat rubbers. "Of course not, Dillon. You and I have left the primitive stage of evolution thousands of years behind. We could not possibly return to it."

Dillon Weston gazed across the gray-green surface of the tundra and smiled an inscrutable smile.

And one by one the revelers approached them—men with haggard faces; women seeking with tense and quivering hands to clutch about them their gorgeous raiment, grown now into mantles of shame; dancing girls, the little nymphs of latter-day life, gone silent, their vapid chatterings hushed, whispering the fancy names of their calling to Johnson and Haddon, wide eyed.

So they passed—the last of the inmates of that Temple of Euthanasia, as I was yet to learn the place had been called—and passing left behind them the group of hairy Ainus and the giant black on the dais, kneeling beside the body of the false priestess, his mistress, whom they had slain.

“Semi,” I said as the last of the guests disappeared through the brazen door. Toward the last I had drawn closer to him.

And as I spoke Johnson approached with Haddon, and the former added his voice to mine, jerking a hand at the Ainus and the negro.

“What shall we do with them?”

Dual raised his head. He had been sitting with it supported on a hand. “The

black is a half-wit; let him be cared for. As for the others, I think Mr. Haddon will see them deported,” he said. “Enough. I am weary, my friends. For days I have compelled my spirit to tolerate what sickened it, filled it with loathing, to accomplish a certain end. And now that it is accomplished, I return to my abode.”

“But, Dual,” I stayed him as he rose slowly and Johnson turned away to bring in some of his men and take the negro and the Ainus in charge; “how about Miss Vance? We can hardly call this ended until her position is disposed.”

He looked me full in the eye and, despite the terrific strain he had been under and the weariness it had induced, he smiled.

“For her is a new beginning. I was not forgetting,” he replied. “Hence, when a new dawn brings with it the hopes of a new day, you will instruct Edwards to call for her at the prison and lead her forth from its gates, shriven of all suspicion, her former task accomplished, to take up with him her greater mission as a toiler in the workshop of the world.”

(The end.)