

# Purgatory

THE blazing sun shouldered aside streamers of mist as it blossomed inexorably from the sea. Higher and higher it rose and pursued the gloom. Deeper and deeper it drove the lingering shadows into the indifferent water, but one shadow remained.

As the sun mounted higher above the waves it revealed the impertinent shadow to be man-made. Not only was the shadow man-made, it also contained man. At least they might have been men at one time. Now there was little left but skin, bone and souls. Perhaps these were not men at all, but only souls. Certainly they did not look or act like men, but if they were souls, they were not beautiful souls. Perhaps a soul is only beautiful when it can hide behind a glib tongue and a full belly.

Three souls, partitioned between death from too much water and death from too little water, by a fragile shell of plank, saw the sun and cried out, mistaking it for the face of God.

"God forgive me for my sins, for I have always loved You and spread Your gospel," said one.

"God let me live and I will shout Your glory to the world," said another.

And "Damn you, sink back in the sea, and let our fires burn out in the dark," said the third.

The sun burned on toward the meridian and eventually the souls cried out again.

"God let me live and I will shout Your glory to the world," cried the first.

"God, take care of my wife and child," cried the second.

And "Damn you, give me strength to use my knife, and I will drink their blood," cried the third. The frail craft rose and fell sluggishly with the greasy swell. The sun burned its way toward the western horizon, and the souls cried out for the last time.

"God save me," cried the first.

"God save my family," cried the second.

And, "Damn you, search for me in Hell," cried the third.

A far-flying gull spied the lonely coffin and swooped to investigate. There was no motion to frighten him away, so he landed and stared impassively at the three things who had been cast in

the image of God, born free and equal, and masters of their environment. He pecked curiously at a protruding eyeball. The lid did not flutter.

The sun moved on toward the west and sank into the jagged horizon. As the sun sank there was no steam . . . Only fire behind the man-made mountains.

—Robert J. Avey, Sci. Sr.



## An Old Man's Fancy

**U**NMANNED devils—little beasts,” he said, glowering at the children playing in the park. “You’ve got to watch them, Henry, or they’ll throw you right over. The parks just aren’t safe anymore with these little animals being allowed to scurry about so. Simply no regard for others . . .”

“What can you expect, Charles?” his elderly friend asked. “This is Spring, you know. Or haven’t you realized?”

The other continued grumbling as they walked. He nodded his head up and down and from side to side in the manner typical of people of his age. With his head down, he appeared to be watching every step his unsure legs made as they carried him hesitatingly along the cobbled path.

“I’m quite aware it is Spring.”

“Then look about you. See! The day is glorious! You barely lift your face from the ground.”

Charles snorted angrily as two youngsters, shouting wildly, tore between them, chasing each other. “Little beasts,” he muttered, “ought to be leashed and muzzled . . .”

“Ah, but they’re so carefree — you can’t tie children down. And when they have such a good time of it — well, I can’t understand your point of view. Why, Charles, if I were even half my age I think I’d be right out there jumping around with them.”

“Hummmph — ha!” Charles snorted. “Somechow, Henry, I can’t see it.”

“Well, laugh. But seriously, I can’t help thinking how completely without anxieties they are. No responsibilities. No wor-