

CHAPTER I. MYSELF.

Professor Hafed Gorgensen, spectacled, round-shouldered, very bald, and past threescore and ten, wheeled his squeaking chair round so as to face my mother, who, in her timid way, believed in the startling theories of the dogmatic crank, and who, with a feeling of awe, had brought her little boy—myself—for him to pronounce upon.

"Yes, madam," he said, his thin lips moving with a peculiar energy, which showed the single snag in his upper jaw, "any man with common sense who will devote three minutes' thought to the matter will not dare dispute it."

"I always believed what you said, professor, but my husband—"

"Puff! Your husband is a fool, like all husbands."

I looked sideways at mother, wondering how she would take this reference to my father. She said nothing in the way of protest. Perhaps she did not catch the full meaning of the words. Possibly she caught and believed them.

"It's as simple as that two and two make four. In round numbers there are 1,500,000,000 of people in the world. They have all been modeled after the same image. The average length of life is 33 years, so this 1,500,000,000 is renewed three times a century. Since the Creation, 6,000 years ago, it has been renewed 18,000 times."

"But," ventured my mother, in a quaking voice, "there have not always been 1,500,000,000 of people on the earth. You know that at first there were only two—Adam and Eve—and a good many years must have passed before the number became as great as it is now."

The professor's jaw dropped, and his little gray eyes twinkled behind his spectacles. He was overcome, for the moment with admiration for this timid woman that had dared to throw an obstacle in front of his juggernaut of logic.

"Madam, you're not a fool, which is more than I ever said of any other woman, but if you had held your tongue a minute longer you would have heard the qualification of my first statement. Of course many generations came and went before the population of the earth reached 1,000,000,000. I've figured it all out. Making allowance for all this, the total population of the world since the Creation has been about 10,000,000,000. Do you realize it?" he demanded, leaning forward, with his hands on his skinny knees and glaring through his spectacles.

"Oh, yes, of course."

"Well, then, all I have to say, madam, is that you're an infernal sight smarter than every person ever born into this world. All the people that I have known find it rather hard work to grasp the full meaning of 100. When they strike 1,000, they begin to get hazy. Beyond that it is all a mass of terms, with nothing tangible in the way of understanding. Astronomers talk about the distance of heavenly bodies, the velocity of light, the speed of comets, and all that, without any more real comprehension of what it all means than that little freckle-faced boy by your side knows about pons aselorum."

"I didn't mean—that is, of course, I don't understand—but—"

"Never mind," broke in the professor, with an impatient wave of his attenuated fingers. "The self-evident truth is this: Every man and woman born into this world has, with few exceptions, two eyes, a nose, mouth and features and form of the face modeled after one image. Now, while we see a marvelous variety among the faces which we meet on the street, never encountering two that are exactly alike, it is still evident that there must be a limit to this variation. It is not infinite. Do you follow me?" suddenly thundered Professor Gorgensen, in such excitement that my poor mother gave a slight start and exclamation, while I looked round for some way to escape.

"Oh, yes; oh, yes; certainly I understand you."

"Puff! I doubt it. But you know as much as any of your sex. I have figured the whole thing out. I have made a mathematical demonstration of it."

The professor glared at my mother as if challenging her to dispute his assertion, but the frightened woman remained silent and expectant.

"Now and then," he continued, "we meet two persons so alike in appearance that their most intimate friends cannot tell them apart. Nevertheless, there is a difference which manifests itself, after a time, if not in their looks, in their disposition, but what I am striving to impress upon your understanding is that this variation has its limit. When a certain number of human beings are modeled after the one image, a point is finally reached when all possible variations are at end. The work must then go back to the beginning and repeat itself."

"My! And you have figured it all out, professor?"

"I have," was the impressive answer. "I am the only person that has done so. The vanishing point is at the number 128,645,328. In other words, that number of men and women can be born and may grow up with enough variation in their looks and disposition to be distinguishable from each other, but when one more individual is added to the number he must be a reproduction of one of the vast multitude I have named."

My mother showed a surprising aptness in following the amazing theory of Professor Gorgensen.

"Then there are a good many people living to-day who are exactly the same in every respect?"

"Precisely."

"But what about the different races—"

At the two reproductions of each other being to different races—

"They would not be exact reproductions. You missed the finest point of my beautiful and exact theory. My calculation includes colour, race, and all previous conditions of servitude. Now, applying the truth I have discovered, it follows that at all times every man and woman in the world has 10 or 11 perfect doubles somewhere else in the world. These are at this moment somewhere among the Caucasian race fully ten women exactly like you in looks, age, and disposition. Your own husband or that stolid-looking urchin at your side could not distinguish them from one another."

"Oh, my!" grasped my mother, looking apprehensively around. "I hope none of them will move into my neighbourhood."

"It isn't likely that you will ever meet in this world. Have no alarm. Following my reasoning, all these doubles are but repetitions of doubles that existed a generation ago, and so on through the past centuries."

"Then thousands of years since there were persons living who were exactly like me and some who were exactly like you?"

The professor nodded his bald head. He was pleased that one woman could appreciate the wonderful symmetry of his logic.

"If we could only know about those persons," she added, inauspiciously.

To some extent we can. Of course the majority died and passed away without leaving any record behind them, but we have the history of some of them."

A strange smile lit up the wan face of my mother.

"As for me—"

"There is no record. All such women were too insignificant to say or do anything that entitled them to remembrance."

"And with you?"

"It is different. It did not take me long to find out the historical personage who is reincarnated in me."

"Dare I ask, professor?"

"You read your Bible, I presume?"

"Daddy."

"When you go home, turn to the twelfth chapter of II Samuel, and in the twenty-fourth verse you will find the account of the birth of the man who is reproduced in this nineteenth century in myself. Of course our environments are different, and our lives necessarily vary, but my features, my frame, my brain, my disposition—indeed, everything in our nature and looks is the same to the shadow of a hair."

"Wonderful, wonderful!" exclaimed my awed parent. "I will be sure to look it up as soon as I reach home. But, professor, I brought my son with me."

"What for?"

"I wish you to tell me what person of the past he resembles."

Those spectacles, like twin locomotive headlights, were now focused upon me with a strange, hypnotic power. I could see the small gray eyes twinkling like points of fire, while he seemed to look me through.

"Come here, sir," he growled, without stirring limb or feature.

I slid off the high chair, and, summoning my courage, sidled up to him.

"What's your name?"

"Harmon O. Westcott, sir."

"How old are you?"

I hesitated a moment, during which my mother announced that I was in my eleventh year.

"I want the exact date of his birth."

She gave it. He reached out his right hand, and the thin, cold, claw-



"What's your name?"

Like fingers rested on my crown. Staring straight into my eyes, he turned my head back and forth, first to the right and then to the left, while my body remained motionless. While doing so he muttered something which must have been in a foreign language, for I could not catch the meaning of a word. I was too young to suspect it at the time, but those tiny, penetrating eyes noted everything. My soft, dark, curly hair, my strong, regular teeth, my clear complexion, slightly freckled, the shape of my face, the features, all were observed with the keenest possible scrutiny.

Then he pinched my arms and legs, doing so with a persistency that caused me more than one twinge of pain.

"Now you may take your seat."

The big chair creaked round on its pivot, and the professor faced his vast desk, covered with huge volumes, whose backs were worm-eaten and whose pages were yellow with time. He took down the middle volume, and opened and fumbled it for a few minutes. I saw his gaunt forefinger running along the lines and down the page, while the scrawny neck and bent shoulders stooped forward as he peered at the written words before him.

Suddenly the claw stopped. He had

found the right page. I could see his lips moving, as some persons do when reading to themselves. My mother and I silently watched him, afraid to speak. I stealthily sought her hand and slipped mine within it. The warm, hard fingers closed affectionately over the chubby ones of her only son, as if she would shield him from some vague, shadowy peril.

Finally the professor slid each hand, palm upward, underneath the covers of the open volume, and, with a quick flit, closed it, wheeling on the instant so as to face us.

"I found it," he said, shutting those thin lips together as if to imprison the all-important knowledge.

"And who is he?"

"Before answering your question," he said, impressively, punctuating each sentence with a dip of his forefinger, "let me warn you, young man, to keep this knowledge a secret so far as you possibly can. You are going to have, if you have it not already, a most remarkable gift, but you must not exercise it except in case of necessity. If you do, it will probably pass from you. Mrs. Westcott, when you go home, you will read the thirteenth chapter of Judges, and in the twenty-fourth verse you will find a statement


of the birth of the man of whom your son is to be the exact reproduction. All that is known of that famous character is told in the following three chapters. That's all. Good-day."

Notwithstanding my mother's anxiety to learn my horoscope, as it may be considered, she first sought out the reference which bore upon Professor Gorgensen himself. I think she suspected it, for she was smiling when she glanced down the page of the well-thumbed Bible to the verse the professor had named and which told of the birth of Solomon, the son of David.

The she hunted out my own in the second book of Samuel.

In me was born once more Samson, the strongest man that ever lived.

(To be Continued.)



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