

THE OBSERVER

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EDITOR AND OWNER.

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♦♦♦♦♦
♦ **ATOM OF VAPOR.** ♦
♦ A Biography. ♦
♦ J. D. Gillilan. ♦
♦♦♦♦♦

My origin may be no greater than that of any one of my many affinities, or acquaintance I say acquaintances, for I find out that almost everything around the whole earth loves me, seeks me and is so insistent upon my very heart-life that it dies unless I agree to join it. Yet so far as that is concerned it is only one of the many, many mysterious things hard for so brainless an atom as myself to comprehend. In fact, I am so slow to learn, I seem to have been very old before I remembered anything. I was gray with age or something else when knowledge first became mine; and I was high up in the sky herding with millions and millions of others so like myself, I am sure none but our mothers could have told us apart. There were indeed clouds and clouds of us. It was a summer day, such as they have in that country, and as I now recall it, we had risen from the earth somewhere in Tibet; I think it was Tibet, for although I have been in that country about ten million times since then, I never saw the exact spot again; and we were rolling and tumbling about and jostling each other in all kinds of jolly style, first on the back of one gust of wind and then another, when we saw at a immense distance from us a big bunch of bunches just like ourselves. They got caught in the arms of the winds and were rushed toward us and we toward them till we were black in the face. We wiggled and twisted and squirmed till we became so hot the blazes began to fly in every direction. We were just so mad we lost our way and the very first thing we knew we had gotten to the border of the upper air close to the earthless land where Jack Frost is king, and he captured the whole lot of us and squeezed us in his frozen fists till we were the most beautiful six-sided crystals you or anyone else ever saw.

Then King Jack gave us a puff with a breath so icy we all were glad to scamper off in any road to get away from him; he blew us over the Chang-la-Pod-la, or main watershed of the Himalayas and dropped us into one of the deepest, coldest canyons imaginable. We had not been long there in his ice-prison when he sent a lot of others who just jumped on us and tramped us all out of shape and tied us tight in the arms of a hard-hearted old glacier where we stayed, oh, I suppose about a thousand years, I do not really know, for the sun shone so little up there that we could not keep track of the months, let alone years; for it is winter there even in summer time.

But, any way, after what seemed the longest time to us we were at last freed from that prison; (my, how cold it was!) and we found ourselves in a stream of water that was running from the lower end of a canyon. I was so glad that I organized a glee club among us and we sang and danced and jumped and splashed and romped till we got away down to where the water was clean enough to wash ourselves in; for, oh, how dirty we were!

Two or three times the sun came down at me just as I was getting warm on a blade of grass that was growing near the edge of the stream in whose hard bed I was riding, but a friend jumped and caught me away from him and off we went in our noisy frolic till we came to one of the soberest fellows I ever saw; they told me his name was Pool; and he frowned at us and told us to keep still. We did not like that, so we quietly edged around his lonesome old house till we saw a chance to slip out with some fish that were going that way. Once in a while we stopped to leap up in the spray and play in the colors of some of the many rainbows that play in beautiful silence in the far-away nooks of the unhabited world.

This was the river Brahma-putra that gets bigger and wider all through its distance of 1500 miles down to the hot Indian ocean. As we reached lower levels we saw more and more evidences of warmer lands, and many gauzy-winged flies dipped down among us very often. Watching my chance, I leaped out of the current just as one of those fine fellows made a dash at us and I lighted on his wings; he did not seem to notice me at all, but, horrors! a few minutes afterwards a trout jumped for him when he came too near the water and grabbed him and me and down he went. I was not long in finding out what to do, for when the fish opened his gills in breathing, out I scampered. I wanted no more experience like that.

For days and weeks, I guess, we went on, on, on, down through the weirdest, wildest canyons, over mighty falls, through underground passages where no human being has yet ever been, and into India and then out to the great salty ocean. We had no sooner reached that great world of water than a typhoon came along and picked up hundreds of millions of us at one whirl and carried me (and I suppose the others of us, although I became separated from the rest of our crowd) away up in the air toward the high mountains of the upper Ganges. In a thunderstorm I went back to the soil and seeped through among the roots of some bamboos reaching the nasty Ganges. That is one of the trips I never care to mention to my friends. It was not so bad then as now since so many people live there for the river is now worshipped as a god and the millions who infest its shores are indescribable in their filth.

I have had some experiences that the mere thinking of would make me grayer than I am if that were possible. They were worse than that adventure with the trout up in the Himalayas. I will tell you one; this one

is a real scare. It was so long ago I cannot even count back.

After traveling around the world in clouds that are visible and in vapors invisible, and having been up and down the earth in sea-currents and driven by waves, and having seen almost all the lands by means of their creeks and rivers, I got an experience in Egypt that I really thought was going to be the end of me. In fact I was gone so long, and had such a hard time getting free, the world did not look at all as I remember it. I was somewhere under the equator near the coast of Africa and a zephyr caught me and lifted me into one of those invisible aeroplanes that have been running ever since creation and I was driven by an air-chauffeur over the blazing sands of Sahara desert past lake Tchad up into the heights of Kilima-Njaro. So soon as I could do so, I slipped down that old mountain's back and got over into the head waters of the Nile. After a long time of it I finally reached Lower Egypt and was quietly resting after the tiresome journey, when most unexpectedly I was dipped up in a vessel carried by a slave attached to the mortuary chamber of the chief of embalmers to the king's household. As we approached the place, a few of the knowing ones jumped out, but I did not so escape. One of the greatest Pharaohs was dead and his coffin, called a sarcophagus, which he had kept on hand for a long time, had to be cleansed and reappointed for his funeral. I was used in assisting in this process, but I was continually fearsome that I might be left in that regal coffin; so, when the opportunity came, I clung to the hand of the servant who washed the casket and was watching for an occasion to escape on the back of some air-current that might slip in; but everyone that came avoided me. When they picked up the body to lay it in the great stone box, in some manner I slipped off his hand and became entangled in some of the wrapping of the corpse, and before I could disengage myself I heard the stone lid scrape into place, and a sudden chill seized me.

How long I lay in that darkness I never could find out; for they took that huge stone coffin to one of the gigantic pyramids and after climbing down the longest, darkest, windiest stairways you ever and never heard of, they placed it in a place called a crypt and sealed all the doors leading to it, and there were many of them, too. Poor me! As I said, I never knew how long I stayed there. The first I recall was that some dry air of the Sahara came in and became busy awaking us all and driving us out; it made threats about extermination and annihilation and some other swear words which I never did understand, but must be something dreadful. So, after a time, so long I could not see back to the beginning of it, I began to work and twist my way in some direction, but I could not see, and knew not which was the way out. So the first thing I knew I was through the wrapping and next to the clammy body of the old monarch. Ugh, but that was ghastly! After a little, a few years maybe, I reached the side of the sarcophagus and wormed my way through it to the wall of the pyramid. Ages went by. How many of those granite layers I pierced I'll never know.

When I finally emerged there was a zephyr waiting for me and I joyously

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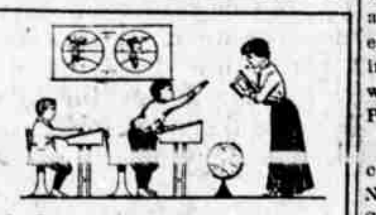
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