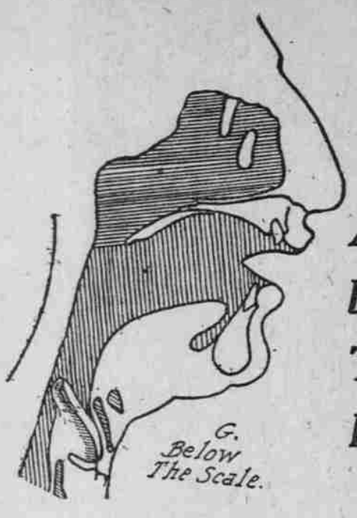
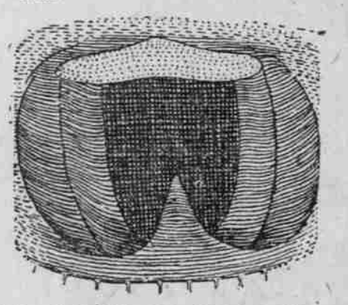
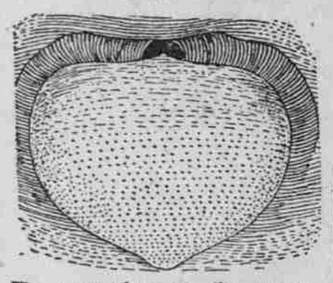
How "Bobbie" Murray Sings the Highest Note Ever Sung



The diagram above shows the sizes of Bobbie Murray's oral and nasal chambers during production of this tone.



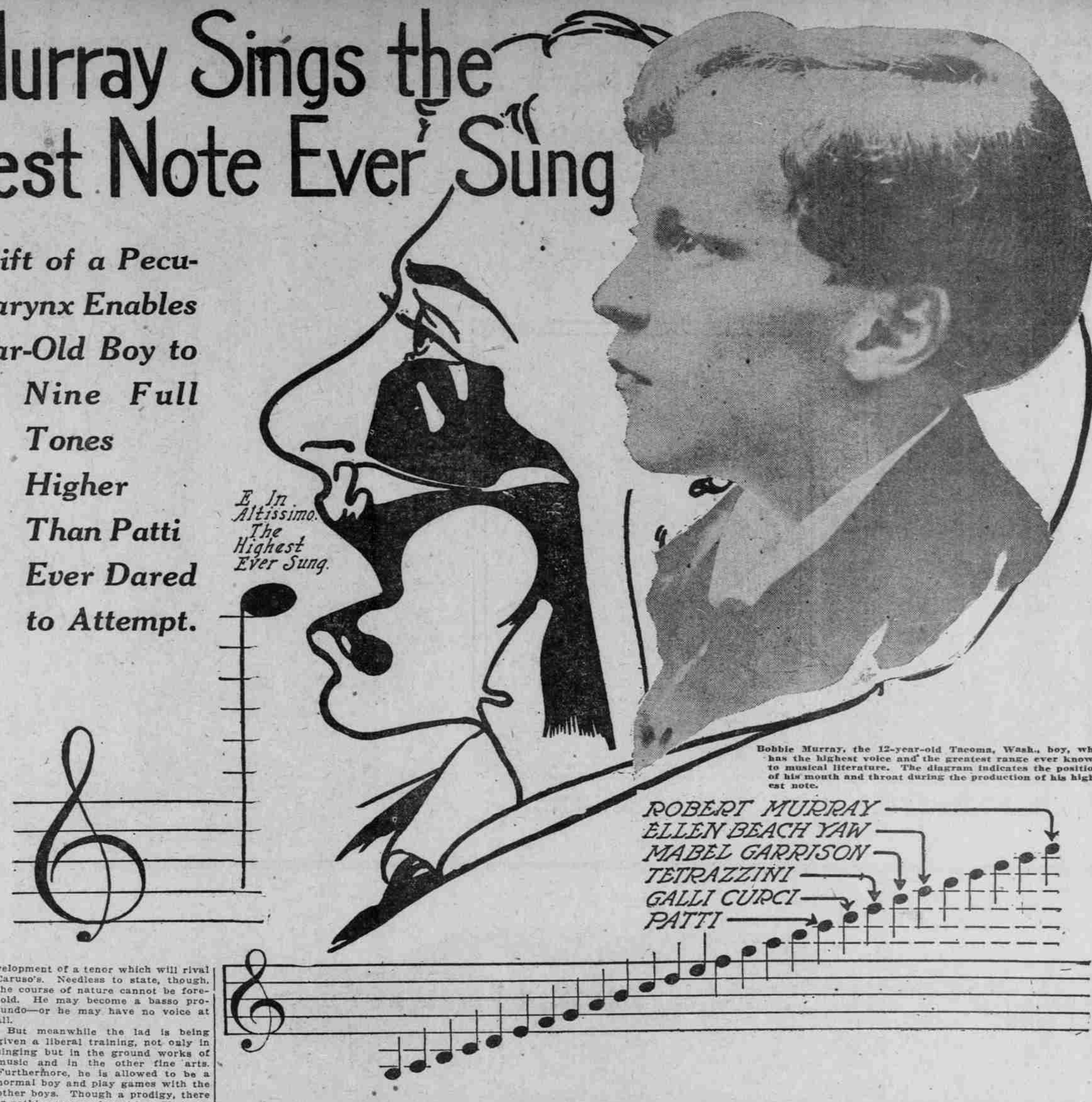
The relationship of the tongue and the soft palate.



The narrowing of the aperture through which the tone passes is shown.

Observe how the oral cavity has decreased in size, thus offering greatest resistance to this tone as it comes from the larynx.

And How the Gift of a Peculiarly-Formed Larynx Enables This Twelve-Year-Old Boy to Produce Notes Nine Full Tones Higher Than Patti Ever Dared to Attempt.



Bobbie Murray, the 12-year-old Tacoma, Wash., boy, who has the highest voice and the greatest range ever known to musical literature. The diagram indicates the position of his mouth and throat during the production of his highest note.

This scale gives a graphic representation of Bobbie Murray's range and how he tops the next highest singer by five whole tones.

WHEN a 12-year-old boy produced the highest musical sound that ever issued from a human throat, it was a performance that naturally created an unusual amount of interest among students of anatomy. It meant that nature had again excelled herself in the construction of those delicate membranous devices by which the human voice is made. Musicians, however, could feel no more than a passing curiosity. Here was another freak of nature. Well, what of it? they asked.

But when a musician finally heard young Robert Murray of Tacoma, Wash., sound this high and flute-like note, he realized that not only a physical marvel had been performed, but a musical marvel as well. For at the top of his range, which is E in altissimo, the boy has a flawless purity of tone and exercises the same delicate control of pitch and placement that he does in his middle register. In other words, within those five tones by which his voice is higher than any other living singer, Robert Murray can vocalize with the same assurance, trill with the same delicacy and produce a rapid sequence of sound with the same flexibility that any well-trained singer does within a natural range.

Not only has Robert Murray the highest voice ever possessed by a human being, but his range is greater than any other singer known to musical literature. Further than that, he has what the musicians are calling a second voice—a voice produced by different muscular effort than the ordinary vocal sounds—which is a perfect reproduction of a bird. He has made an old figure of speech come true—he actually sings like a nightingale.

Strangely enough, young Robert Murray was born in a family that had never previously produced a singer. A prodigy himself, he is fortunately blessed with sensible parents who are taking care that their son's priceless gift is properly protected and that the boy himself is not spoiled. His father is Frederick H. Murray, former city attorney of Tacoma, and his mother is a gentle-voiced little woman who thinks of her phenomenal offspring as a little baby still needing affection, before he vizualizes himself as anything else.

A suggestion of prenatal influence is contained in a story told by Mrs. Murray. There had been another son, Frederick, also a singer, who died at the age of 6. Before Robert was born Mrs. Murray was often affected with melancholy over the loss of her first child, and in her efforts to assuage this grief she would take long walks into the woods and listen for hours to the birds singing.

Evidence of vocal ability was discovered in Robert when he was 6 months old, Mrs. Murray insists. She watched him carefully all through his early years, and a year ago took him to New York for study and instruction under the best teachers obtainable. It was during the course of his studies that his wonderful range was discovered.

In order to appreciate the fineness of the tones produced by this boy one has merely to compare their lofty pitch with the highest tones required by the scores of those florid Italian, German and French operas through the singing of which so many singers mounted to fame. The coloratura arias from "Mignon," "Lakme," "The Magic Flute" the "Barber of Seville" and others which were supposed to tax a singer's voice to the utmost, rarely carried the voice above high C. In the celebrated "Queen of the Night" aria from "The Magic Flute," there is a high F, which some singers take and others shirk by dropping to an octave below. In "Mignon," a high G is scored and it is told of Mme. Adelina Patti that when she came to that note she let the flute in the orchestra take it. This doesn't mean that Mme. Patti's voice couldn't possibly have reached that high. As a matter of fact, her voice was unusual. Her reason for declining that G was traceable to her feeling that the tonal quality might suffer. The highest note Patti ever sang was a high C.

Beyond Patti are Jennie Lind, Sybil Sanderson and Galli Curci, who sings high D; Tetrazzini in high E, Mabel Garrison high F, and Ellen Beach Yaw, the highest of them all with her high G; but none can compare with the marvel from the Pacific coast.

As a matter of fact, to say that the limit of Robert Murray's range is E in altissimo is to place an arbitrary limit; he usually runs the scale right up over the keyboard of the pianoforte, but beyond that the vibrations of his voice are so fine that the tone becomes a whistle and the overtones are beyond the power of the ear to grasp.

Such musicians as Frances Alda and Enrico Caruso and such eminent authorities on voice-making as Dr. Frank E. Miller, Frederick E. Haywood and Emil J. Pollak have heard him sing and they all say the same thing—that he is the musical marvel of all time.

One must go back to 1770 to find a voice that even compares with the boy's. It is recorded that Mozart interpolated into his "Magic Flute" various cadenzas which could only be sung by the phenomenal voice of Lucrezia Agujari, an opera favorite known as La Bastardella. A high F remains in the score of the "Magic Flute," but Robert Murray ranges an interval of a seventh above this.

Vocal bands that are only seven-eighths the size of those normally found in the larynx, an unusually large epiglottis and a large palate which makes an extremely small aperture for the passage of the tone from the larynx into the mouth, and extraordinary muscular control enable this boy to produce those extremely rapid vibrations and account for the high tone. The largeness of his oral and nasal cavities give him vocal purity.

The boy's length of head (see accompanying photograph) shows an unusual space for resonance and throat organs. According to Frederick Haywood a voice is like a violin; it depends for tone on the vibrations caused by the bow playing across the strings, but the quality of tone comes from the sound board at the back. A perfect sound board reflects beautiful tones. So it is with the human voice. There is a difference, of course, in the fact that the human structures can be developed.

The structural difference between the throat organs, nasal passages and resonance chambers of the ordinary person and the extraordinary singer, marks the reason for the difference between the usual voice and the great voice. The phenomenal voice, as in the case of Master Murray, who has very large larynx pockets, large nose chambers and unusually large sinus spaces above and below his eyes. These, together with the pharynx and mouth, form the resonator, which throws forth the tone produced by the vibrations of air passing between the small vocal bands.

The time will come, of course, when Robert Murray's voice will change from treble to bass. Everybody concerned fondly hopes that he will carry over into his new vocal estate the same range capacity and purity of tone that he now has. Several throat experts have declared that the elements are propitious for the development of a tenor which will rival Caruso's. Needless to state, though, the course of nature cannot be foretold. He may become a basso profundo—or he may have no voice at all.

But meanwhile the lad is being given a liberal training, not only in singing but in the ground works of music and in the other fine arts. Furthermore, he is allowed to be a normal boy and play games with the other boys. Though a prodigy, there is nothing queer about him. He loves the outdoors and loves athletic sports. He also has a pronounced esthetic sense, as his interpretations of the songs he sings plainly show.

Included in his repertoire are several songs of his own composition. One of these, "The World's Lullaby," for which he wrote both words and music, has been published. The melody is said to show a distinctive inventive gift, while the verses, which are herewith shown, are perfect metrically:

Peeping through the fleecy cloudlets,
  Angels faces I can see,
And I often think and wonder
  How they're guarding you and me.

In the floods of yellow glory,
  When the sun sinks in the west,
I can hear the heavenly chorus
  Lulling all the world to rest.

Dr. Frank Miller, the throat specialist, after examining Robert's throat and hearing him sing, made the following statement:

"I have made a thorough scientific examination of the boy soprano, Robert Murray, and can say that this marvelous boy has one of the most wonderful voices in the world, and with it he has the geometrical brain, so much desired by Plato, the philosopher, producing the strange combination of a perfect scientific singing voice and a perfect bird voice at will, or at the suggestion of his teacher.

"He is the most wonderful vocal phenomenon I have seen in my experience, due to his wonderful development of the epiglottis and a beautiful throat, the larynx being patterned after Melba and the great soprano singers. His singing tones are such that very few can estimate the quality of his overtones, for he often sings tones of 2048 vibrations per second, the overtones of which are beyond the power of ordinary ears to grasp. Unquestionably he sings some of the highest tones ever heard with most startling effectiveness.

"He demonstrates the boy voice, the high soprano voice and the bird voice as perfectly as any other I have heard. His teacher has taught him to blend the octave adjustments in a most remarkable way. Master Murray responds so well to scientific instruction that but one suggestion suffices to adjust and blend the compass of the octaves of his voice.

"(Signed) FRANK E. MILLER."

THE INFERNAL MACHINE; BY F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

(Continued From Page 3.)

water leaking in through its brass circumference. The cabin was illumined only by a diffused radiance entering by the narrow slit above the door from a source somewhere along the corridor.

Still his brain remained terror-riveted upon the one theme, a furiously whirring machine out of control—he found himself still staring, against his will, at a funnel whose rolling heavy smoke suddenly shot upwards upon a sheet of red flame, a geyser of flying cinders. . . .

The hours passed in the half-light of his steel cell, far down in the depths of the great ship that crashed and thudded tirelessly into the buffeting seas. The dishes slid, overturned upon the floor as she pitched and wallowed and shivered in the ever-renewed collision of blindly meeting forces. Still the feverish whirring vibration of the turbines continued undiminished, permeating every atom of her structure as it did every fiber of his body, blurred ever and anon by the heavier vibration of propellers racing free in the instant or two before their automatic check came into play, stunned into abeyance every minute or so by the smashing impact of yet another great wave that swept down her length in a swish and scatter of flying water.

Up above there—the scene came vividly to him—behind the oilskinned watch upon her bridge, the great funnels were still belching black smoke into the blackness of the night. Under them—he thrilled with fanatic hatred—damnably confident passengers in their evening finery were seated at flower-decked tables in gilded saloons. Under them again, far, far below, the firemen were shoveling, shoveling, naked to the waists, in the eye-scorching hell of the open furnace doors. From the bunkers the coal was tumbling down to them in an avalanche of black chunks, all indistinguishably like each other.

His hyper-excited mental activity began to find new channels for itself.

He found himself speculating—unable to stop speculating, a new form of torment reeled out by that ceaselessly whirring machine in his head—on the nature of the explosion when it should occur. Would he hear it in this part of the ship? He remembered, in newspaper accounts of torpedoings during the war, the statements of passengers in big liners who had heard nothing, felt only a slight shock, when the ship's side was blown in. That diabolical little German-Jew's infernal machine would explode deep down in the very center of the vessel—"blow de belly out of her"; the forecast rang in his ears. What sound would come to him here? A mighty roar, rending her vitals, flinging every one prostrate, or . . .?

What was that? His heart stopped in recognition of a faraway, muffled shock. He listened, his senses strained to an intense acuteness. What was that dull shock, deep down in the ship? His scream rang, strange and terrifying, in his ears, unconscious as he was that he had uttered it. He started from his bunk, clutched at the edge of it with clawlike, rigid fingers, sweat pearling upon his forehead, as he steadied himself upon the sloping floor that listed away under him and came not back. He listened, ears at strain for the slightest sound. There was a strange hush, an utter absence of the vibration so long continued. The engines had stopped!

At last! It was the explosion. He had no doubt of it. A breathless terror swept over him, denying utterance to the flood of wild blasphemy which rose in him like an inversion of agonized prayer. Mingled with it was a great relief. The whirring of that infernal machine in his head had stopped. He could think now, think with a rapid lucidity that amazed him. His mind, miraculously alert, took in all the implications of his position, while yet he clung to the bunk, speechless and incapable of movement.

Woud anyone come to let him out? There was a rapid scurry of feet along the corridor. It passed, ceased definitely. Then, in heart-stopping confirmation of his fear, the light in the corridor went out suddenly. He stood, clutching at his bunk, in an absolute darkness that enveloped him almost tangibly. He let go of the bunk in a dash for where he knew the door to be, slipped, with a sharp stab of accentuated terror, upon a wet floor sloping permanently at an acute angle, despite its slow rise and its seemingly endless subsequent subsidence. He crawled upwards on it, knocked his head against the door, pulled himself upright with a grasp upon its handle. Then, in a sudden access, he found his voice. He shrieked—piercingly, shriek upon shriek, that rang through an appalling silence—shrieked like a maniac forgotten in his cell.

None came to answer him. There was no sound in the corridor outside. What was happening in that deathly silence which pervaded the great ship? He failed to bring himself to exact imagination. She still rose, still subsided, heavily, lazily. But the list which sloped the floor slippery under his feet remained uncorrected. Was she still afloat—settling, slowly but surely? He ceased his maniac shrieks to listen. There was no sound. This far-down corridor, remote from the general life of the ship, tenanted only by emigrants on the westward voyage, was deserted. He shook furiously at the implacably locked door, crashed his fists against its panels in frenzied blows that had no result but the flaying of his knuckles. He flung himself against it like a wild thing in a cage. The door remained immovable.

He stopped again, listened—listened for the rushing cataracts of water he knew must be pouring into the ship, down her companionways, along her corridors. He heard nothing. There was no sound perceptible in that rayless blackness which pressed upon him, save a sough and swish of water exterior to the ship. Then he understood. Of course, they would have closed down the water-tight doors! He shrieked a curse at that unknown officer on the bridge performing his obvious duty, in a vivid imagination of the great steel doors sliding down into their immovable positions, shutting off the water indeed from this compartment, shutting him off inexorably from escape even could he break out into the corridor.

In the horror of this realization he relaxed his hold upon the door tilted forward against him, slipped and slid in that utter blackness, down the sloping floor to the wall of the ship. He felt over it with trembling, eager hands, felt for the heavy brass fastening of the porthole. It was still firm, though his hands were wetted in the water which welled up gently around its rim.

Despite the complete cessation of the crashing impacts with which the ship had so long smashed into the heavy seas, her equilibrium was by no means stable. She still rose, though heavily and draggingly; still sank, ever more and more deeply it seemed, in a sluggish roll which emphasized in its swing-back the ugly list that the lift had failed to correct. In that engulfing blackness she seemed to subside ever lower and lower, inert, incapable of righting herself, cradled still by a motion of the waters that swished and washed against her flanks, sinking with every lurch into rayless, unimaginable depths.

The frenzied man huddled there in the darkness against the wall wet with water from the leaking port had no doubt of it. He knew. That infernal chunk of coal had done it work only too well. Paralyzed for any movement, his imagination worked feverishly and yet, in that complete dark, could form no definte mental images. To his horror, that terrifying machine in his head had started again—beyond his control.

t was like being in a darkened movie hall, where the still whirring machine could only project flitting and fragmentary pictures from a torn film in the intervals of frequent "black-outs" upon the screen. But still the machine went on maddeningly—the more maddening because somehow the machine was part of himself. The mental photograph of a sinking derelict he had once seen recurred over and over again in that patchy sequence—the hulk sagging in the seas which lapped over her, higher and imperceptibly higher—the desks awash, waves licking the canvas of her bridge—and then the silent, sudden engulfment, disappearance.

Were they still afloat, upon the surface? He dared not give himself the answer. Even though they had sunk beneath the wave-tops, he remembered—all scraps of apposite knowledge that he had ever picked up coming to him with a memory preternaturally acute—that great ships like the Gargantuan, if their bulkheads were closed, did not drop like a stone to the bottom of the sea, but remained, swung as it were at an intermediate depth, in a slow and gradual subsidence as one compartment after another was burst into by the pressure of the water.

Such—he knew it—was their position now, rolling sluggishly fathoms down how many, he wondered?—below the surface of the sea, sinking gently, ever sinking, down, down, down in the darkness towards the bottom. That darkness! The awful of it came upon him suddenly in renewed access of horror. He put his hand out in it, invisibly. That darkness, utterly black, blacker than the blackest night, which enveloped him

(Concluded on Page 6.)