

lied to the wheat, and which at present grow in arid regions. Their work is demonstrating with scientific precision that such and such qualities must be induced in wheat to adapt it to desert conditions. Knowing this, the experimenter can intelligently go to work to induce variations and to originate new species. Those characterized by the desired qualities will be kept and made to vary further. Thus in a score of years it may be possible to accomplish that which now could scarcely be brought to pass in a thousand. It is no idle dream to hope that some day wheat or other useful grains may grow wherever grass now flourishes. The wonderful process of evolution, rightly directed, may ultimately double the food supply of the world.

The tale of man's conquest of nature is an old, familiar story. In the portion dealing with the desert a new chapter is now being written. For ages the world has seen men like the rancher from Kansas who passed us in the twilight with his tale of failing crops and straying cattle. Their pluck and endurance have won great victories, but in the end the rigors of the desert have

defeated them, except where streams from the mountains furnish verdure and life. Their cry has gone up for succor, and the country has answered with great irrigating dams and ditches on the one hand, and with experiment stations on the other. But those who build the dams are the first to tell us that the total supply of water, both above ground and below, is so small that scarcely a tenth of the land can ever be adequately watered; and those who experiment with crops know that their knowledge of how plants grow is so slight that half their work is in the dark. And so there is another cry, much fainter than the first because only the far-seeing realize how great is the need. That cry demands pure knowledge apart from any practical result. To obtain that knowledge is the work of the Laboratory. Part of what is learned may help the world materially to-morrow, and part may remain unused for a hundred years, or may never be used except as a step toward some other phase of truth. Yet even so its value is incalculable. The very fact of the existence of the Desert Laboratory will stir ten men to think where one man thought before.

## A Song in April

BY CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

SUN!—and the rush of the rain  
 Swift through the lilac lane;  
 The joy o' the world and the grief o' the world  
 Beat at my window-pane.

Love!—and the ancient tears;  
 Hope!—and a hundred fears.  
 The light o' the world and the dark o' the world,  
 They follow us down the years.

# The Soul of Mervisaunt

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

IT is a tale which they narrate in Poictesme, telling how love began between Perion of the Forest, that was a captain of mercenaries, and young Mervisaunt, who was a king's sister. They tell also how these two parted, since there was no remedy, and policy demanded she should wed the Earl of Dyvniant.

Then Perion fitted out a ship and sailed with his retainers to seek desperate service under the harried Kaiser of the Romans.

This venture was ill-fated, since, as the Free Companions were passing not far from Masillia, their vessel being at the time becalmed, they were attacked by three pagan galleys under the admiralty of the proconsul Demetrios. For Perion's men, who fought so hardily on land, were novices at sea. They were powerless against an adversary who, from a great distance, showered liquid fire upon their vessel.

In such fashion Demetrios took some thirty prisoners, and made slaves of all save Ahasuerus the Jew, whom he released on being informed of the lean man's religion. It was a customary boast of this Demetrios that he made war on Christians only.

And presently, as Perion had commanded, Ahasuerus came to Mervisaunt.

The princess sat in a high chair, the back of which was capped with a big lion's head in brass. It gleamed above her head, but was less glorious than her bright hair.

Ahasuerus made dispassionate report. "Thus painfully I have delivered, as my task was, these fine messages concerning Faith and Love and Death and so on. Touching their rationality I may reserve my own opinion. I am merely Perion's echo. Do I echo madness?—This madman was my loved and honored master once, a lord without any peer in the fields where men contend in battle.

To-day those sinews which preserved a throne are dedicated to the transportation of luggage. Grant it is laughable. I do not laugh."

"And I lack time to weep," said Mervisaunt.

So, when the Jew had told his tale and gone, young Mervisaunt arose and went into a chamber painted with the histories of Jason and Medea, where her brother the King Urieyus hid many jewels, such as had not their fellows in Christendom.

She did not hesitate. She knew that Perion was in captivity and might not look for aid from any person living save herself.

She gathered in a blue napkin such emeralds as would ransom a pope. She cut short her marvellous hair and disguised herself in all things as a man, and under cover of the ensuing night slipped from the castle. At Manneville she found a Venetian ship bound homeward with a cargo of swords and armor.

She hired herself to the captain of this vessel as a servant, calling herself Jocelin Gaignars. She found no time wherein to be afraid or grieve for the estate she was relinquishing so long as Perion lay in danger.

Thus the young Jocelin, though not without much hardship and odd by-ends of adventure here irrelevant, came with time's course into a land of sunlight and much wickedness where Perion was.

There the boy found in what fashion Perion was living and won the dearly purchased misery of seeing him, from afar, in his deplorable condition, as Perion went through the outer yard of Nacumera laden with chains and carrying great logs toward the kitchen. This befell when Jocelin had come into the hill country, where the cry of Demetrios blocked a crag-hung valley as snugly as a stone chokes a gutter-pipe.

Young Jocelin had begged an audience of this heathen lord and had obtained