

New Fables by Skookum Chuck

(R. D. Cumming)

Human Side of Uumlah, Chapter VI.
of the Fifty-Fifties.

The little parish church was crowded to capacity. The seats were filled to overflowing for the occasion reached out far beyond the ordinariness on my right and Professor Agnew on my left.

I sat in a pew between Miss Agnew on my right and Professor Agnew on the left. Liliana sat next to Florence and Mrs. Agnew was beside her husband. Between us we occupied an entire pew for a few rows from the front. The Agnew family and myself were the only whites in the congregation.

Uumlah, the lay preacher of the Fifty-Fifties was in the pulpit, his head just appearing above the level of the stand although he stretched himself to his full length with the characteristic agony of the race.

There were men, women and children; male and female had they come to hear the words of wisdom and advice that were to flow from the lips of one who was far superior mentally to the average Fifty-Fifty.

The service was non-denominational and seemed to be a lecture rather than a sermon. Some parts of it were a call to arms in self-defense against the aggressor of the original human race and a plea for emancipation.

We appeared to have adjourned to the church immediately following the explosion of the power plant on which Anthropeidea depended for its supply of domestic and irrigation water, and the argument of the lecturer followed this line of investigation when I found myself so abruptly in the midst of the excited congregation.

Many remarks that fell from the lips of the lecturer made me feel most uneasy even with the Agnew forces to right and left of me. At such times the eyes of the speaker as well as the entire congregation would swing in my direction, and I sensed a meaning that made my blood run cold almost in every word he uttered. Many of his remarks were directly personal, although they were no doubt meant to be general in their character and to cover the entire race to which I belonged.

"We have been expecting this disaster for years and years, but the passage of time without molestation had given us confidence in our rivals for foot-space on this earth, and we had ceased that vigilance which the disaster has proved was still neces-

sary," gesticulated the speaker, while all eyes were riveted on every inch of my person in front, behind and on both sides.

I experienced the sensation of one in a den of lions without a means of escape.

"He surely does not refer to me?" I questioned Florence, fearful of what might follow were I to remain, and creeping close up to her imaginary protection.

"Nonsense, no," she replied.

But words that followed savored more of blood, and I gripped the soft fingers in an appeal for assurance that I could trust her to save me. I attempted to lean on the girl's authority as a member of the Agnew family to save me from impending danger to my life.

"On the ground that we are soulless and unhuman and a mere offshoot from the lower creations of the animal kingdom, we are being prosecuted, trampled under foot, disfranchised, denied the rights of common justice in the human courts of the land!" roared the speaker, every word a thrust at my soul and a threat to my body. "We have no more standing in law than Satan and the serpent had in the Garden of Eden. We can be killed, our crops can be destroyed, our property blown to atoms; we can be driven from our homes, and we have no redress. Who is responsible for this? The fanatic element of our rivals. Men like that!" and he pointed to me cringing beside a woman to whom I prayed for protection. "The destruction of our power plant was the work of organized propaganda against us, and a direct challenge to our plea for human franchise. It is a mockery for we have no means of bringing the criminal to justice. Even did we succeed in capturing him, no warrant would be issued for his arrest, for in the eyes of the government no crime has been committed. At this very moment we have suspicions, yea, we have evidence enough to make an arrest, but we have no law behind us to support our actions."

Again I seized the hand of Florence Agnew in an agony of fear. With a warm re-assuring grip the girl restored a confidence which her presence seemed to give. And then I had the great physical strength of the Professor for bodily protection did the enemy become too threatening. In the presence of the god and creator of the Fifty-Fifties, I de-

pended for immunity from any danger that might threaten.

"Failing government support," Uumlah continued to thunder, "we must take the law into our own hands! The unwritten law must be our refuge. In the absence of law we must deal with the situation according to our own conception of justice, notwithstanding any consequences. But, if we are not protected against murderers, thieves, aggressors of every kind, neither can we be held responsible for any crime we may commit. We can seek revenge with impunity."

Again a tremor convulsed my entire body, but Uumlah drifted away into another channel where his words were less steeped in blood:

"Perhaps the enemy is brave and more bold in the knowledge that we have pledged ourselves, as a religious principle, not to murder upon any provocation," he said, while his face lit up with a sort of sanctimonious smile which was more relief to my frightened heart even than the power for restraint that the Professor and his family may have exercised over the strange people.

It was at this point of the argument, perhaps owing to the momentarily slackening of my nerve tension, I noticed that the building was equipped with a broadcasting apparatus. The instrument for receiving the voice was at the side of the pulpit and to the right of the speaker. The lecture, therefore, or whatever it could lay claim to be, was reaching from the little church to all corners of the globe, where it was no doubt received with more or less wonder and astonishment. I wondered what effect it would have on listeners-in at Eutopiana the city which I had visited in the early stages of my strange dream.

But the lecture was to furnish me with much valuable information with regard to the strange times and the stranger people in whose midst I found myself so mysteriously placed. I was also to learn some astonishing but cloudy facts concerning the older human race.

"The puzzle in this world," continued the preacher, "is not that there is an intelligent race of beings, but that there are not more of them. The tragedy of countless species of living things marching down the ages with their clouded and hampered and undeveloped brains—brains that might function intelligently were they given the opportunity—is,