

The Ultra-Elixir of Youth

A. Hyatt Verrill

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The **ULTRA-ELIXIR of YOUTH**

By A. Hyatt Verrill

Author of "The Man Who Could Vanish," "Through the Crater's Rim," etc.

"I will shrink to an infant in the clothes I have on, in the makeshift, cut-down things I am wearing. My brain is still clear and filled with the thoughts of a grown man—yes, even the scientific side of my intellect is unchanged.... I have sought perpetual youth and I have found it; but such a youth! Youth reduced to the nth degree."

Modern science is deeply immersed in experiments to bring forth the Elixir of Youth. Glandular knowledge is progressing rapidly and the time will come, so our scientists assure us, when man can stay reasonably young for several hundred years. Our author, in his deft and original manner, images a gas which will prove the Elixir of Life. That his experiments

exceeded his wildest expectations and proved an Ultra-Elixir and a disaster to all concerned, only makes the story more complicated and absorbing. It is a picturesque tale of the biological possibilities in the field of modern science.

From time immemorial mankind has sought for the secret of eternal youth, for some means to prevent the ravages of age. In many lands and in many ways men have devoted their lives to endeavoring to make this dream of perpetual youth a reality. They have concocted weird mixtures or elixirs, they have wrought spells and practiced magic, they have searched in strange lands for a fabulous life-giving fountain, and they have been jeered at, ridiculed, scoffed at for their pains. Hence it will come as a most amazing surprise to the world to learn that one man actually accomplished his purpose, and discovered the secret which had so eagerly and vainly been sought for during countless centuries. Moreover, his discovery was made recently—within the past three years in fact, while more astonishing yet, the secret has been forever lost to the world.

Now that the man responsible for the results can never repeat his performance, and has left no detailed explanation of the means whereby the conditions were brought about, there is no reason why an account of the whole matter should not be published.

Undoubtedly many of my readers will recollect the excitement caused by the inexplicable disappearance of Doctor Elias Henderson, the well known and prominent

biologist of McCracken College. Probably, too, it will also be remembered that, almost coincidentally with his disappearance, a number of the University students vanished, as well as two private citizens and a physician.

As a great many more or less conflicting accounts were published in the newspapers of the time, and as many of these were far from accurate, it may be well to give a brief resumé of the events, for, strange as it may seem, the disappearance, which for a time supplied headline material for the press, had a very direct bearing upon the discovery of perpetual youth, or rather, I might say, the discovery had a direct bearing upon the disappearances.

The facts in the case were simple and were well established. Five students, two private citizens, an instructor and a female doctor, together with Doctor Henderson, completely vanished without any apparent or determinate reason. The investigations which followed, and which oddly enough were only instituted after the disappearance of Doctor Henderson, revealed the fact that the ten missing persons had been absent from their accustomed haunts for some days before they had been missed. It was also established that all had been very friendly and that they had frequently met, apparently in secret, and that the other nine had made periodical visits to Dr. Henderson's laboratory. This, however, was not strange, as it was well known that all, with the exception of the two citizens—one a merchant and the other a banker—had been taking courses in biology from Dr. Henderson. It was therefore assumed that the meetings referred to were in the nature of purely scientific affairs, although why the unscientific merchant and banker should

have been present, or should have visited Dr. Henderson's laboratory, was a mystery.

Had Dr. Henderson not vanished, it is highly probable that he would have been suspected of making away with the others, but as he, too, had disappeared, any such theory was of course discarded. It was also determined that not one of the ten had any apparent reason for vanishing; not one was in debt or involved in any scandal, and no one could advance any reasonable theory for any person wishing to murder them, for with the exception of the banker and merchant, all were persons of very moderate means, while the banker and merchant were known never to carry large sums of money on their persons, but conducted practically all of their business by means of checks.

Finally, and making the case even more baffling, the garments of all the ten were found intact though carelessly tossed aside. The students' clothes were found in their several rooms, the garments of the merchant and banker were discovered in their private offices, the lady physician's garments were in her office, and Doctor Henderson's street clothes were found in a corner of his laboratory. No one who was questioned, and hundreds of persons were examined, could definitely swear as to when they had last seen the missing persons, and not one witness could be located who was positive as to the last person seen with any of the missing people. Doctor Henderson was a rather retiring, secretive man, and frequently slept on a cot in his laboratory, and as no one really knew when he had vanished, no one

could remember having seen any stranger or other person with him when he was last seen. The janitor of the building, after striving his best to revisualize the events of the past few weeks, stated that he was under the impression that he had seen a young man—a youth of fifteen or thereabouts, entering and leaving the doctor's laboratory on several occasions, but he could not be sure whether or not he had ever seen the scientist in the young fellow's company. The servant at the home of Dr. Elvira Flagg, also was hazy in her memory, although she, too, declared that she had noticed a young man, and a girl of about the same age, who frequently entered and left the office; but whether in company with Dr. Flagg she was not sure. As the office boys of both the merchant and banker also remembered seeing a youth make frequent visits to their employers the police at once began a search for a stripling answering the rather vague descriptions of the several witnesses. No trace of such a person could be found, but, to their surprise and confusion, the garments of such a young fellow were found in a closet in Dr. Henderson's room, in the suite occupied by the merchant, and in the hotel apartments of the banker. Nothing further was discovered, and the entire affair was given up as an unsolvable mystery. During the investigation however, evidences were discovered which tended to show that several other and hitherto unsuspected crimes had been committed by the missing parties. Just what these were, the authorities have never disclosed, but according to persistent rumor they were in the nature of infantile crimes. Gossip had it that persons had been questioned who insisted that they had heard the cries of infants issuing from Dr. Henderson's laboratory, that no children had ever come forth, and that it was their belief that the scientist and his friends had sacrificed the

infants in some experiments or had actually subjected them to vivisection. Hence, in the minds of many persons, the missing ten had had good reason to disappear, being, so these worthies argued, fugitives from justice and from the wrath of the public. Indeed, rumor and gossip soon linked the names of the ten as members of some secret and horrible cult with human sacrifices and what not. And the action of the police in hushing up the matter and abandoning all efforts to solve the mystery, only confirmed these ugly rumors in the minds of many.

But like all other mysteries and scandals, the matter soon lost interest, and within a twelvemonth was practically forgotten. Thus matters stood when I received a letter from the regents of McCracken College in which I was offered the position of Professor of Biology left vacant by the disappearance of Dr. Henderson.

Ordinarily, I think, I would have declined, for I had an excellent position, and while the salary at McCracken was larger than that which I was receiving, yet it did not offer the scope in research work which I desired, and as I had a fairly good income of my own, the salary was not so important. But remembering the mystery which had surrounded the former biologist's disappearance, and having been well acquainted with Dr. Henderson when we were students together at Belmore, the offer somehow appealed to me, because for some inexplicable reason, I had a feeling that I might be able to solve the mystery.

I therefore accepted the position, and, a few weeks later, found myself in possession of Dr. Henderson's laboratory,

instruments, notes and apparatus. I had in fact almost literally stepped into his shoes. I am not superstitious and am not nervous, and I have never been subject to hallucinations or to any sensations for which I cannot account upon scientific or medical grounds. But from the moment when I took charge of Dr. Henderson's work and laboratory I had the strange and wholly unaccountable feeling of being in the presence of others, of being constantly watched. At times this sensation became almost unbearable. Several times I found myself involuntarily stepping aside as if to avoid stepping upon or bumping into someone, although the room was empty, and once or twice I actually started and shivered as I seemed to feel hands touching my limbs or body. It was, of course, ridiculous. I was no believer in ghosts or spirits, and I decided that it was merely a psychological matter, a reaction of my nervous system to the atmosphere of mystery which pervaded the place. Hence, I laughed at my own sensations, called upon my superior mentality to govern my subjective nerves, and proceeded with my work, but throughout my stay in the laboratory—which was, I must confess, of short duration—I never overcame the decidedly uncomfortable feelings which I have mentioned.

My first act upon taking possession of Dr. Henderson's apparatus and laboratory was to combine a thorough search of the premises with an equally thorough housecleaning. Dr. Henderson, like so many scientific men, was unfortunately far from orderly or neat. Instruments, books, papers, apparatus, formulæ and chemicals had been left in disarray, evidently having been left wherever the biologist had used them last; drawers and cupboards were piled full of a hodge-podge of odds and ends; soiled laboratory aprons, old shoes

and dirty towels were tucked away here and there, and as I cleared up the place I wondered how the police could have made a thorough search of the room under the existing conditions. And it was soon evident that they had not. Among a pile of old magazines, discarded litmus paper, and other rubbish in a closet I came upon a find which, temporarily at least, completely knocked me out. This was in fact a bundle of infant's garments, rather mussed and soiled and evidently worn. For a space I sat, gazing at the tiny garments with a strange mingling of horror, dismay, amazement and wonder. Had the ugly rumors been true after all? Had my old classmate gone mad with his researches and had he actually sacrificed an innocent child on the altar of science? If not why should he have been in possession of these garments? Where were the remains of the child itself? And what had been his relations with the others who had vanished? What terrible things had occurred to cause them all to disappear? Surely, I thought, no matter what events had led up to the culminating destruction of the child, Dr. Henderson must have made notes of it somewhere. Whatever he had done had beyond doubt been done in a mistaken, a warped idea that it was in the cause of science; that the means would be justified by the end; and hence he would have been certain to have recorded his theories, or the results of his experiments. To solve the mystery I must find such notes, and, abandoning all other work, I sought diligently and feverishly for some note book, some pad or even some scrap of paper which might explain everything.

Of course, I realized, there was a possibility, even a strong chance that he had destroyed the notes or had taken them with him. The very fact that he had disappeared,

together with the others who I no longer doubted had been implicated with him in the crime, proved that they realized the enormity of their deeds and hence would have destroyed any evidence or records. But the fact that the garments had been left so carelessly about caused me to think that more conclusive proofs might also have been overlooked. Moreover, Dr. Henderson, as I had discovered already, was extremely absent-minded in ordinary matters, and he also had had a habit of jotting down notes on anything and everything that came to hand. Hence, I reasoned, even if he or the others had made away with the most important evidences, there was more than an even chance that they had overlooked or had completely forgotten stray notes which would throw light on the matter. It was slow work, studying the almost hieroglyphic-like writing of my predecessor and examining every scrap of paper, even the margins of leaves in books and pamphlets, for what I sought. And for hours my efforts were fruitless. At last, when I had almost abandoned hope, I opened a small drawer in a littered and dust-covered desk and made a second and most surprising discovery. The drawer was filled with the strangest collection of objects which could possibly be imagined in the laboratory of a scientist. There were infants' garments, bottles of prepared foods, a nursing bottle, safety pins, a rattle, various other objects requisite to the welfare of small children, and, what seemed to me most important of all, a square, rather thick book which, immediately I opened it I discovered was a diary. Here, if anywhere, I felt, lay the solution of the mysteries. The first entry was dated over three years back, but a short perusal of the pages proved that the diary had not been kept regularly or consecutively, and that for long periods, no dates had been entered. It was, in fact, more of a

journal or note book than a diary, and almost feverishly I turned the pages, glancing only at the occasional dates, and to my delight found that the last dated entry was September 14th, of the current year, only a few days before the disappearance of Dr. Henderson had been made known. Beyond question, then, there would be references to the mysterious events, and turning back the pages, I set myself to the task of reading the volume page by page.

And as I did so I became more and more astounded at what I found, for the indisputable evidence of Dr. Henderson's writing proved that the vanished biologist, whose whole life had been devoted to science and proven facts, had believed in the wholly unscientific and preposterous dream of perpetual youth.

"I see no scientific reason why organic matter should deteriorate with age," he had written in one entry. "Age, in animals or plants, is merely the decay of certain tissues or cells brought about by various causes, most of which are unnatural, artificial or due to the abuse of nature's laws. I have talked with E. on the subject, and she agrees with me. If we admit Einstein's theory of relativity then age is merely relative—in the universal scheme of things the infant is as old as the senile centenarian or vice-versa. Biologically there is no such thing as old age. Growth, yes; the building up of tissues by cells, yes; but the healthy, normal cell of the aged plant or animal is indistinguishable from the corresponding cell of the new-born infant or the seedling plant. Scientifically endless youth or the arresting of cellular decay

may be impossible, but so many known facts refute scientific possibilities that I am beginning to lose faith in scientific laws."

A little later I came upon the following: "I have cautiously sounded my class by dwelling lightly upon the matter of arresting decay and producing so-called perpetual youth. I judge several of the young men were intensely interested as, after the lecture, they remained and plied me with many questions. The subject opens up endless vistas. If the breaking down of cellular tissues were possible, death could be averted, except by accident, and practical immortality could be achieved. And what tremendous accomplishments might be achieved by a scientist, an artist, any intellectual man, if he was assured of a virile, healthy existence for hundreds of years; if for a century or more he retained the energy, the brain power, the physical and organic status of the prime of life.

"I believe this might be accomplished. E. (I had already assumed that Dr. Elvira Flagg was the E. referred to) is as greatly interested in the subject as myself. In her practice she has opportunities to study living beings in all stages of cellular decay or age, and with physical and mental powers breaking down through various causes. Her observations are as valuable to me as are my biological experiments to her. Several of my young men are also vastly interested and we often discuss the matter together. Perhaps the time has not yet arrived when man can choose the age or physical state in which he elects to remain, but some day it will be as ordinary an affair as to select one's food or method of conveyance."

For several pages after this last entry Dr. Henderson's diary omitted all reference to the subject, and I began to think that his observations had been wholly theoretical, and that he had not seriously considered the matter. But in this I was grossly mistaken, for once again the subject was the sole topic of the notes.

"I believe that we are on the way to solving the problem of arresting the deterioration of organic matter when caused by the lapse of time," he had written. "A regrettable accident has indicated the path we should follow. Several weeks ago the huge airship *Colossus* was destroyed by an explosion when passing over the village of Emerson. One of my young men who resides in the vicinity of Emerson mentioned a most curious and interesting phenomenon which has occurred where the accident took place. The health of the residents has greatly improved; several of the aged inmates of the County Home have recovered full use of their limbs and eyesight, and some ancient and dying trees have shown unusual and most astonishing growth—putting out new shoots and fresh leaves. I have visited Emerson in company with E. and have verified all these statements. Vegetation is far more luxuriant in the area about the village than elsewhere, and E. personally interviewed and examined a number of persons, and she assures me that there are indisputable proofs of marked rejuvenation. We believe that the QW gas with which the airship was inflated was the direct cause of these interesting phenomena. As workers in the laboratory where this gas is manufactured have exhibited no signs of similar effects, we can only assume that the explosion, which has so far been inexplicable, altered the gas in such a way as to produce some chemical compound which

has the power to arrest the ravages of age and to cause rejuvenation in organisms. Unfortunately the composition of QW is a closely guarded secret, and the gas is not available for experimental purposes. Could we only obtain a small amount of the gas we might make astounding discoveries."

I was now as deeply interested in Dr. Henderson's records as he had been in his visionary dream of perpetual youth. The destruction of the *Colossus* was still fresh in my mind; it had been a nationwide sensation, for the explosion, the cause of which had never been found, had utterly destroyed the entire crew of the immense craft. Neither could I doubt the truth of Dr. Henderson's statements regarding the conditions which had followed the disaster. But, I reasoned, this might have been due to perfectly normal and easily explained causes which the biologist in his enthusiasm had overlooked. Was it not quite possible that the gas, or the compounds arising from its explosion, had acted as a fertilizer and had thus caused a sudden spurt of vegetable growth about Emerson? And was it not equally possible, and even reasonable, to suppose that the disaster, the excitement attendant upon it, and the shock of the explosion had caused a nervous exhilaration or had acted as a stimulant to the inhabitants, especially to the aged members of the community, which would, temporarily, give them new vigor and a false rejuvenation? Yes, unquestionably such was the case, for, I reasoned, had the effects been lasting, had there been any marked and unusual results from the explosion of the airship, the press would most certainly have gotten hold of it.

Such thoughts raced through my brain as I perused the succeeding pages of my predecessor's journal, until once again, I found myself fascinated by the record.

"E. has solved one of the obstacles," it began. "Among her patients is a Mr. Burke, a wealthy merchant who is under a deep obligation to her. She has mentioned her desire to secure some QW gas for an experiment of great medical and scientific value and he has assured her that through political friends he can secure some. If we obtain this I shall endeavor to reproduce on a small scale such an explosion as occurred at Emerson, subjecting aged tissues to the resultant gases. The difficulty will be to obtain the same effects. QW is theoretically non-explosive, and I am now devoting all my spare time to solving the problem of why the *Colossus* exploded. In this work I have the invaluable assistance of Montross, one of my students who has shown unusual ability in chemical research work and received his degree in that science last spring."

Evidently Dr. Henderson's problems occupied far too much of his time to permit him to make regular entries, or else nothing important enough to transcribe occurred, for the next entry in the journal was dated nearly two weeks after the foregoing, and, as was so often the case, made no reference to what had occurred in the interim.

"There is now no doubt in our minds that so-called age may be arrested," he wrote. "My experiment, 612A, has proved this. In a way, the explosion was rather disastrous, for it destroyed much valuable apparatus and quite seriously injured Montross. However, he is rapidly recovering and E.

declares that the amazing rapidity with which his injured tissues are healing is due entirely to the effects of the unknown chemicals released by the breaking down of the QW gas. Evidently, too, the effects of these are incredibly rapid, for despite the fact that owing to the unexpected violence of the explosion having destroyed the apparatus designed to hold the resultant chemicals, the organisms I had in readiness have shown truly remarkable signs of rejuvenation. Indeed, E. and myself have felt the effects. We both have more vigor, greater vital force and greater clarity of thought than previously, and yet there must have been a most minute quantity of the chemicals produced by the explosion. Montross declares that now we have solved the problem of breaking down QW we can unquestionably produce the desired chemicals without resorting to such a roundabout and dangerous method.

"It is a great pity that science is so hampered by lack of funds. To secure the apparatus and chemicals required to carry on our experiments, and to perfect them, it will be necessary to secure large sums. Neither E., Montross nor myself possess sufficient money, and to solicit funds from the university or from others would be futile. We would be scoffed at if we divulged the purpose for which we require the money. I fear we will be forced to abandon further researches in this direction. What a pity, when the results might be of such incalculable benefit to mankind!"

Again there was a lapse, until under date of July 5th was the following: "Montross has paved the way for carrying on the experiments. His uncle, a Mr. Redfield, is a wealthy banker whose obsession has been a fear of becoming a

helpless, decrepit old man. A few days ago he stated, in the presence of young Montross, that he would give a million if he could retain all his faculties until his death. This gave Montross an idea, and at the risk of being jeered at, he related what we had done and suggested that Redfield should finance our experiments. To his delight his uncle was intensely interested and expressed his willingness to do so on the condition that he might be a witness of our experiments. I have agreed to this, as had E. Her friend, Burke, has also been taken into our confidence, and five of my students have been enlisted in the cause. We have agreed that what we do must be kept to ourselves until we meet with success or failure, and as E. puts it, we have formed a little scientific secret society. We have no desire to let others know what we are doing or to let the press reporters get hold of the matter. Hence we meet more or less secretly or in my laboratory where we are safe from prying eyes or listening ears.

"Montross is entirely recovered and is working diligently at his chemical preparations. Burke, by the way, has been of inestimable aid, for he has managed to secure the formula for QW. Political graft after all has its advantages."

As I read on, I became more and more amazed, more and more fascinated by the revelations of this intimate journal of the missing biologist. Already much which had been mysterious had been cleared up. The bond which had linked Burke, the hard-headed merchant and political boss, Redfield the millionaire banker, Dr. Flagg the female physician, Montross the instructor in chemistry, the five students and Dr. Henderson, was explained. The reason for the meetings of the ten was clear and, beyond question, all had seen fit to

vanish for the same reason. I had little doubt now that even that reason would be divulged as I read on, and forgetting time, work and all else, I devoured the contents of the journal. But what I found exceeded my wildest dreams and fascinated, astounded, fairly trembling with excitement, I read the wholly incredible, yet indisputably true story of the most amazing events ever transcribed by human hands; a story which, omitting the dates and irrelevant entries, ran as follows:

"Montross has succeeded. He has separated over twenty hitherto unknown chemicals from the QW gas. Among these is an entirely new element which he has named Juvenum and which he believes holds the key to our success. Even if we fail, the discovery of this element will make him famous. Burke and Redfield are fairly crazy over the work. The latter has put his entire fortune at our disposal. E. has been untiring, and as soon as our labors are crowned with success or we are convinced of the futility of further investigations I shall make her my wife. If we succeed, the vista before us is too marvelous to realize; endless years of perpetual youth together; never to grow old, never to lose the freshness and beauty of her full womanhood, never to lose my vigor, my intellect, my enthusiasm! But we have all agreed not to keep the knowledge of our success from the world. We have argued at length on this. Burke and Redfield were at first all for retaining the secret. Burke saw a marvelous money-making opportunity in it, treating persons for fabulous sums—millionaires he stated would pay anything to retain their youth, while Redfield argued that if no one grew old the world would soon be overcrowded and dire results would follow. E., however, pointed out that even if we could

prevent the ravages of time we might not and probably would not be able to prevent the ravages of diseases nor fatalities through accidents and that, youth being more impulsive and reckless than maturity, the percentage of accidents and disease would be greater, while many persons would not care to avail themselves of the treatment. Montross also pointed out that the benefits derived by scientists and other intellectuals being able to carry on indefinitely would more than offset any dangers of overpopulation, and that, unquestionably, those men with their discoveries would be able to solve any such problems which might arise. He himself, he stated, would devote his entire life to producing artificial foods, thus reducing the areas essential to growing crops and rendering more space available for industries and housing. For my own part, I declared that it would be extremely selfish to retain the secret, and that we would, I felt sure, be heartily sick of youth if we found ourselves still young while all our friends and acquaintances were aging and our associates through decades were to be yet unborn generations. We have also discussed the question of our discovery producing immortality. None of us believe this will be possible, and I do not think any of us believe it desirable. Burke is a devout Roman Catholic; Redfield is a pillar of the Episcopal church; E. is very religious and a member of the Methodist church; Montross is an Episcopalian and while I profess no particular religion I am a firm believer in the omnipotence of the Creator and His wisdom. I believe, too, in a future existence of some sort, and neither the others nor myself would wish to forego the chances of such a state. Moreover, none of us, with the possible exception of some of my young and ultra-modern students, believe that man has the power to change

the laws of Nature or to accomplish anything in opposition to the will of God. To prevent the visual ravages of time upon the system would, we all agree, be no violation of Nature's inexorable laws, whereas immortality would be in direct opposition to the entire scheme of things. To increase the span of life, and to retain the faculties of youth during that life, would be a blessing, but to live on forever would be a curse....

"We have carried on very extensive tests with various organisms, both vegetable and animal. We find that, as Montross expected, the new element Juvenum is the active principle, but we have met with an unexpected obstacle. While the lower forms of life respond to the treatment and become rejuvenated, or do not age, yet they soon cease to function or die. What a calamity it would be if man, in his desire for youth, should be compelled to shorten his existence, to flit, like a butterfly, for a brief space and then die while in the possession of the youth he sought! Perhaps, after all, our lives as they are, are preferable; perhaps old age has its advantages. However, we feel that the trouble is not insurmountable, that by experimenting we can produce the desired effects without the unfortunate results....

"We have hit it! Purely by accident we—for I must give credit to my assistants, and especially to Burke who is the last man in the world one would expect to make a discovery—purely by accident, I say, we have solved the problem. To while away the time, Burke brought a radio receiving set to the laboratory. One of the receptacles containing the

organisms treated with Juvenum was close to the set, and whereas all other treated organisms died after a few days, those beside the radio set continued to live and thrive with remarkable vigor. Burke, oddly enough, was the first to notice it, and called our attention to it. Johnson, one of my students, is a radio enthusiast and possesses an intimate knowledge of the apparatus. He declared that the electromagnetic waves, or the electrons from the tubes, must have been instrumental in producing the results, and we at once proceeded to experiment along these lines. Unquestionably Johnson was right. Organisms, both animal and vegetable, exposed to the vacuum tubes' action and treated with Juvenum become rejuvenated and thrive prodigiously, whereas others similarly treated, but kept from the tubes' influence, expire rapidly. The question now is, do the rejuvenated organisms retain their vigor and condition after a certain duration of exposure to the tubes or is the action of the radio energy essential in order for them to exist?...

"Perpetual youth is within our grasp! Once organisms are treated with Juvenum and subjected to the vacuum tubes' action, they retain their vigor and continue to live without aging. We now have a number which for several weeks have remained unchanged, yet which, under normal conditions, would have died of old age long ago. We are now ready to test our methods upon higher forms of life. Tomorrow we shall treat rabbits and guinea pigs, some potted plants and some birds. Montross has an ancient toothless dog of which he is very fond, but which he must destroy very soon. He is to try the effect of our treatment upon the beast. E. has offered a parrot which has been for many years in her family and which shows evidences of extreme age. Johnson

facetiously offered to steal a decrepit cab horse and bring the creature to the laboratory, while Burke declared the best subject would be our octogenarian state senator, and Redfield suggested that we try the treatment on the local trolley line. We are all so elated that such nonsense is forgivable, and we are all terribly in earnest and are under such a nerve strain that we must find an outlet for our feelings. That we are on the verge of proving the epochal discovery we have made, I am convinced, for microscopic examinations of the cells and tissues which I have prepared show undeniable proofs of marvelous rejuvenation and increased vigor and resistance....

"We cannot believe our senses. Every experiment has been a tremendous success. Three days ago Montross's dog was a miserable half-blind, toothless thing and today he is frisking about like a puppy; he can see almost as well as ever and teeth are sprouting from his gums. E.'s ancient parrot is gay with the plumage of a young bird, he talks and chatters constantly, and climbs about like an acrobat. So marvelous were the results that Burke, Redfield, Johnson and several of the others insisted on taking the treatment despite my advice, for I fear there are possibilities which we did not foresee and which may not be altogether desirable. I had sought for means of retaining youth, but our discovery goes beyond that and restores youth. In all probability further researches and experiments will enable us to administer a treatment in such a manner that almost any desired condition of maturity may be attained and permanently fixed, but at present we cannot be sure how much of age will be wiped away and how much of youthfulness will be restored. Earnestly I pointed out to Burke and Redfield that it would be far from desirable or pleasant if, after taking a treatment, they should be

transformed to beardless boys, irresponsible youngsters whom no one would recognize. But they were adamant. They argued that by taking a light treatment they could test out the powers of the Juvenum, that as they had made the experiments possible they should be entitled to be the first to test the effects of the discovery, and that they hadn't the slightest fear of its restoring too much of their past youth. Johnson and the others sided with them, and at last, realizing, I fear a bit selfishly, that some one had to be the first to take the test, I consented.

"But I insisted that only a very light, almost superficial, treatment should be given, and to this they consented. I have watched them carefully; E. has kept accurate records of their pulse, respiration and temperature, and we find that they already show distinct signs of slight rejuvenation. Johnson and the other young men show it the most markedly, but this is to be expected of course, as their systems are more responsive and less deterioration of cells and tissues renders the action of the treatment more rapid....

"Everything is most satisfactory. Burke and Redfield look like men of forty, and declare they feel better than they have felt for years. Johnson has the fresh color and spirits of twenty, and his companions are in practically the same condition. Today, Montross took the treatment, and E. insists she will do so tomorrow. Of course, in that case, I can do no less than follow, and yet, somehow, I have a premonition that we have not yet learned all the powers or peculiarities of Juvenum, and that we have been over-hasty in submitting ourselves to the tests....

"A terrible thing has happened. My worst fears have been confirmed. We have all taken the treatment and we are all in the same awful predicament.

"For several days the animals treated remained in the same state to which they had been altered by the treatment. Then, to my horror and amazement, I noticed that the dog and parrot were showing signs of growing constantly younger. The cur was acting more and more like a puppy; the parrot was losing its full plumage and was acquiring pin-feathers. I hurried to the apartments of Burke and Redfield and found both men in seclusion. Burke, who had been a stout, florid man of sixty had become unrecognizable as a young man of thirty,—slender, freckle-faced and red-haired. Redfield's alteration was even worse. From the paunchy, gray-whiskered banker he had become transformed into a sallow-faced young man, and, catching a glimpse of myself in a mirror, I discovered that I, too, have lost ten years in appearance. Almost too distraught to express my fears I rushed madly to E.'s office. But instead of the woman I had expected to wed I found a beautiful girl who, outwardly at least, appeared no more than twenty years of age. She, however, did not share my fears. She was overjoyed at the recovery of her youthful beauty and she was elated at the change which had taken place in myself. In vain I tried to explain to her that if the rejuvenation process continued we would all be regarded as mere boys and girls; that already Burke and Redfield were afraid to appear before their employees.

"But she, perhaps because of her medical and anatomical knowledge, argued that my fears were groundless. We were,

as I well knew, in full possession of all the knowledge and experience we had acquired during our lives. Regardless of physical appearances we were mature, experienced, and fully developed mentally, and, she added, unquestionably the banker and merchant, with their youthful frame and vigor, could accomplish far more than in their physically aged condition.

"After a time I felt that perhaps she was right. But I still feared that the process of rejuvenation might continue, that no one could foretell when it would cease.

"The only thing to do was to devote all of our energies to finding a means to control the action of the Juvenum, and I summoned Montross and the others, who had all leaped backwards for from ten to fifteen years. I explained my fears and the necessity of finding some means to check or control the action of our discovery.

"For a few days the effects of the treatment appeared to cease of their own accord, and no marked physical changes took place. Then, as if by magic, the rejuvenation process took hold once more, and in a few days Burke and Redfield had become scarcely more than youths. Johnson was a mere lad, while E. and myself, who had been the last to take the treatment and who had taken far less than the others, felt and looked like a youth and girl of eighteen. Burke and Redfield were beside themselves. They had important business to attend to, and already their absence from their offices was causing uneasiness. All seemed to look to me for a way out

of their difficulties, and, without effect, I tried to make them see that they were the ones who had insisted when I had cautioned and that, moreover, I had shown my faith in submitting to the treatment.

"Realizing that no one would recognize the banker or the merchant, I suggested that they go to their offices, put their business in order, and then retire to their apartments until I had had an opportunity to carry on further tests of formulæ Montross and myself had worked out....

"We are all lost. Nothing we can do will check the effect of the Juvenum. E. and myself are so changed that when, yesterday, we went to her office to secure some things she wanted, her housekeeper did not recognize us. We have all been obliged to purchase the garments of young people. And Burke and Redfield are worse off than any of the rest. Whether they received larger amounts of Juvenum than the others; whether, as I suspect, they surreptitiously treated themselves a second time, or whether the Juvenum acts more rapidly upon old persons, I do not know. But yesterday when, after repeated calls by phone, I got no reply and went to their apartments, I felt that I must be going mad. Burke had become a gawky boy of twelve and Redfield was unrecognizable as a lad of fifteen. Both were frenzied, both begged me to secure proper garments for them, and both were indescribably pitiful objects to behold—mere children with the brains, the intelligence, the knowledge, the thoughts of grown, experienced men.

"The only redeeming feature of the day was my marriage to E. We both felt that if we waited longer no minister would

marry us, fearing we were under age, but our happiness we fear will be short lived. We all know now what is to follow. We all know that we are past human help unless a miracle occurs. Ours is an agony almost beyond endurance. The poor rejuvenated dog which Montross, poor fellow, offered in the cause of science, has proven an object lesson to us, has brought home to us the terrible consequence of attempting to interfere with the plan of the Creator. The creature is now a toothless, purblind puppy, while the parrot is a fledgling, raucous-voiced and almost naked. Did ever human beings face a like fate? If we are to believe the evidences of our senses we are slowly, but all too rapidly, growing constantly younger. In a short time,—God knows when,—we will be squalling, helpless babies! Already Burke and Redfield are toddling about, supporting themselves by chairs and burbling unintelligible words. Surreptitiously and at night E. and I managed to kidnap them from their rooms and bring them here. They were then boys of eight. And by dint of threats, by argument and through their own agony of suspense, I have managed to gather all the others together here in my laboratory. All I say, but Montross, Johnson and two others are missing. What has become of them we do not know. Perhaps they have committed suicide, perhaps they have gone mad, perhaps they have rushed madly away seeking to escape the inexorable fate before them....

"Such horror! I feel that I must go mad. Were it not for E. I would make away with myself. I know now what has become of Montross, Johnson and the others. I have found a note from Montross stating that he and Johnson had agreed to make a supreme test, to make a brave effort to avert the horrible fate to which we were doomed, to strive to check the

accursed Juvenum by taking a stronger dose, in a hope, a mere chance that, like some poisons, one treatment would offset the other. What happened I know only too well. It is incredible! The thing is unthinkable, but true! The dog, two days ago, was a feeble puppy; yesterday it was a blind, newly-born, tiny thing; today it has vanished! The parrot became a fledgling, yesterday a round white egg appeared in its cage. Today the cage is empty. Nature is being reversed! With incredible speed we and all life subjected to the damnable treatment of Juvenum, are progressing backward. Beyond doubt Montross and the others have already vanished, have already passed back to the embryonic state, even to the unknown, unsolved mysterious source whence comes all life. My wife and I, of all the ten, remain as rational human beings. Burke and Redfield are gurgling, cooing, helpless babies whose wants occupy all of our time. And my heart is wrenched each time I look at my darling wife. No longer is she a woman, no longer a budding girl. She is a slim wisp of femininity perhaps twelve years of age, but still possessing all her womanly instincts, all her knowledge of medicine, all the thoughts, the longings, the ambitions that were hers when, seemingly ages ago, we first discussed the question of perpetual youth.

"But bravely, uncomplainingly, she has borne the ordeal which we are passing through. She has never blamed me; she is as patient, as smiling as cheerful as ever, though she knows that only a few days remain before she, too, will be a helpless infant.

"And the utter horror of it all, the most terrible part of the whole affair, is that even to the last minute, even though they

crow and cry and drool like normal infants, Burke, Redfield and the others possess the intellects, the brains, the sensations of their mature years. I can see it, and I shiver with terror at the sight, for the agony of mind which is theirs is stamped upon their baby faces.

"I can scarcely bear to write. Redfield, Burke and the others have gone. Yesterday they were there, tiny, red-faced, toothless, newly-born babies, and today no trace of their presence remains. And my wife! As I write, she who was my beloved Elvira is creeping about the floor, while I, the last of the ten to succumb to the effects of our accursed experiments, sit at the desk, torn with unbearable dread, with indescribable horror at the fate which, so unconsciously, I have brought upon my wife and the others. And though I am writing this in the same hand which I used when a full grown man, although I have felt no change in my brain, yet I am but a youth, a mere stripling, a beardless boy of perhaps a dozen years. Were it not for Elvira, were it not that until her last moment I must care for her, I would follow the example of Montross and Johnson and would hasten my end by taking a double dose of Juvenum. But instead, I have destroyed everything. Every chemical, every formula, everything to do with the damnable affair has been made away with. Never shall the world know how to do what we have done if I can prevent it. Nothing shall be left that will be available for others. And as soon as Elvira has drifted backward into that unfathomable beyond whence all life comes, I shall face the most terrible fate of all. No one will be left to care for me. I shall be a helpless infant and, must, I feel sure, go through

the retrocessional process to oblivion, for I long ago promised Elvira that I would not take my own life, and, I feel sure, I will not be granted the solace of starving to death, for I am convinced that this whole horrible nightmarish affair is but a reversion of life as it has been for us; that time has been turned back, as related to our own existence, that if we survived the perils of infantile mortality nothing can prevent us from retroceeding in the same manner, and that, as long as I did not starve to death while an infant, I cannot hope to succumb to starvation now that my infancy is to be repeated, even though there are no loving hands to care for me.

"And another strange thing has happened. Of late I have been aware of the presence of beings about me. They are invisible, intangible, but I feel their nearness. Are they the spirits of my companions? Can it be possible that, having gone back beyond the stage of human form at birth, they have been unable to return to embryonic form, and are still filling the atmosphere about me?...

"These will be my last lines. My beloved wife has gone. To the very end she seemed happy. In her baby eyes, as I tenderly, though clumsily fed her, was the look of contentment; her baby mouth smiled, and there was none of the agony which contorted the infantile countenances of Burke, Redfield and the others. This morning she faded from sight and vanished, and I feel that somewhere she is watching me and waiting for me. I am more resigned to my fate now. And for the first time I have given thought to matters aside from our own affairs. What, I wonder, will the world think when it finds that ten members of its population have inexplicably vanished into thin air? No doubt there will

be investigations; the police will be called in; but only to make the mystery the greater. What will they think when they find the baby clothes which have served for Burke, Redfield and even for Elvira in turn? Only I will be without the tiny garments. Long before my body is small enough for them I will be unable to dress myself. I will shrink to an infant in the clothes I have on, in the makeshift, cut-down things I am wearing, and crawling from them, a naked infant, I shall probably find them an interesting plaything. Strange, now that my fate is so near at hand, I am so calm, that I can see the humor of the situation. But my great regret is that after today I will be unable to record my sensations. Even if my mind remains mature my childish hand will be unable to hold a pen or form the letters. I am now a child of eight or ten years in appearance and physical characters, and I am forced to sit upon a pile of books in order to write. Ever since this morning I have realized I am dwindling. I have been forced to add two books to the pile. But before I am unable to do so I must make some preparations. I will place this journal among the infant's garments and other things in a drawer beyond my own reach, for otherwise, in my infantile state, I may tear and destroy the only record I can leave of the incredible events which have transpired here in my laboratory. I can write no more. My brain is still clear and filled with the thoughts of a grown man,—yes even the scientific side of my intellect is unchanged. But I find the pen difficult to hold, and my childish fingers can scarcely form the characters I wish to write. And there is no more to record. I have sought perpetual youth and I have found it; but such a youth! Youth reduced to the *n*th degree, the utter youth of invisible existence, the youth of the pre-natal, inexplicable germ of life, perhaps the——"

The journal ended in an undecipherable scrawl. Trembling, shaken, pale with the suspense of what I had read, I sat staring, and was aware for the first time that the vast laboratory was dusky with approaching night. Then, with a stifled cry, I sprang to my feet. An invisible, intangible presence seemed to be near. I could have sworn that fingers clutched my clothes. With my scalp tingling, terrified as I had never been in my life, I fled from the room which, despite common sense and reason, I felt sure was still tenanted by the missing ten. And I was even more terrified as another thought flashed across my mind. How did I know that some of the terrible element, Juvenum, might not have remained in the laboratory? How could I be sure that I had not inadvertently exposed myself to its effects? How could I be positive that I, too, might not find myself going backward, doomed eventually to pass out like a snuffed-out candle? Never again, I determined, would I enter the laboratory. I would resign the next day, I would return to my former work, and, for a space I knew, I would live in deadly fear of signs of regained youthfulness.

But fate took a hand in my plans. That night a disastrous fire swept McCracken College, the laboratory with all its contents was utterly destroyed, and to this day the true explanation of the disappearance of Dr. Henderson and the nine others has never been published.

And my fears proved groundless. I grew no younger, as the months passed, and when, a year after reading Dr. Henderson's amazing journal, my wife found several gray hairs over my temples, I felt sure that all danger of my

having been exposed to the perils of perpetual youth were over.

And, as Dr. Henderson's diary has burned to ashes with the rest of his possessions, and I fear that the vivid memory of its contents might grow dim if I delay longer, I have decided that the world shall know the truth.

The End

[The end of *The Ultra-Elixir of Youth* by A. Hyatt Verrill]