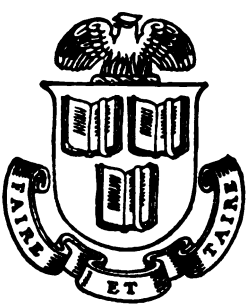
THE
Wolf's Long Howl

BY

STANLEY WATERLOO



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PROFESSOR MORGAN'S MOON

I AM aware that attention has already been called in the daily newspapers to certain curious features of the astronomical discussion between Professor Macadam of Joplin University and Professor Morgan of the same institution; but newspaper comment has related only to the scientific aspects of the case, lacking all references to the origin of the debate and to the inevitable woman and the romance. As a matter of fact, the discussion which has set the scientific world, or at least the astronomical part of it, by the ears, had its inception in a love affair, and terminated with that affair's symmetrical development. It has seemed to me that something more than the dry husks of the story should be given to the public, and that a great many people might be quite as much interested in the romance as in the mathematical conclusions reached. That is why I tell the tale in full.

Had Professor Macadam never owned a daughter, or had the one appertaining to him been plain instead of charming, young Professor Morgan would never have broken a metaphorical lance with the crusty senior educator. But Professor

Macadam did have a daughter, Lee—odd name for a girl—and she was about as pretty as a girl may grow to be, and sometimes they grow that way amazingly. She was clever, too, and good, and Professor Morgan had not known her for half a year when it was all up with him. It became essential for his permanent welfare, mental, moral and physical, that this particular young woman should be his, to have and to hold, and he did not deny the fact to himself at all. Without going into detail, it may be added that he did not deny the fact to her, either, and so exerted himself and improved his opportunities that before much time elapsed he had secured a strong ally in his designs. This ally was the young lady herself, and it will be admitted that Professor Morgan had thus made a fair beginning. But all was not to be easy for the pair, however faithful or resolved they were.

College professors generally are not much addicted to either the accumulation or the love of money, but Professor Macadam was rather an exception to the rule. Sixty years of age, noted as a great mathematician and astronomer, he had long had a good income from his teaching and his books, and had hoarded and made good investments, and was a rich man. Lee, being an only child, was in fair way some day of coming into a fortune, and her father was resolved that it should not go to any poor man. He had often expressed his opinion on this subject; it was well known to

the lovers, but this did not prevent Professor Morgan, who was just beginning and had only a fair salary with no surplus. from asking the old man for his daughter.

The interview was not a long one, but there was a good deal of low barometer and high temperature to it, meteorologically speaking. Professor Macadam fumed, and flatly declined to consider the subject of such an alliance. "It is absurd!" he said. "What would you live on?"

Professor Morgan intimated that two people might sustain themselves in a modest way on the salary he was getting.

"Nonsense, sir! Nonsense!" was the retort. "My daughter has been accustomed to a better style of living than you could afford her, and I decline to consider the proposition for a moment. You're in no condition to support a wife, sir! Figures do not lie, sir! Figures do not lie!"

Professor Morgan suggested that figures sometimes did give a wrong impression.

"Then it is because they are used by an incompetent person. I am surprised that you, sir, assistant professor of astronomy in a great institution of learning, should assert that any mathematical fact is not an actual one. Prove to me that figures lie, and you can have my daughter! But this is only nonsense. You are presumptuous and something of an ass, sir. Good day, sir!"

When Professor Morgan imparted to his sweet-

heart the result of this interesting interview, they were both somewhat cast down. It was she who first recovered.

"And so papa said you could have me, did he, if you could prove to him that figures ever lied?"

"Yes, he said that, though I don't suppose he meant it. It was simply a sort of defiance he blurted out in his anger. But what difference does it make? How could I prove an impossibility in any event, even if such a grotesque challenge were accepted in earnest? When I said to him that figures might give wrong impressions, it was only to convey the idea that people who cared very much for each other might get along with very little money, and that the ordinary estimates for necessary income did not apply."

"You don't know papa! He'll keep his word, even one uttered in excitement. He has almost a superstition regarding the literal observance of any promise made, though it might be accidental and really meaning nothing. You are very clever—as great a mathematician as papa is. You must prove to him that figures sometimes really lie, even where computations are all correct. Surely, there must be some way of doing that."

"I'm afraid not, dear. The moon isn't made of green cheese."

"But there must be some way, and you must find it. You shall be like a knight of old, who is to

gain a maiden's hand by the accomplishment of some great deed of derring-do. Am I not worth it, sir?" And she stood before him jauntily, with her pretty elbows out.

He looked down into a face so fair and so full of all fealty and promise of sweet wifehood that he resolved in an instant that if it lay in human power to meet the terms of the old man's challenge the thing should be accomplished. He said as much, and what he said was punctuated labially. Being a professor, it would never have done for him to neglect his punctuation.

It was not three months after the stormy Macadam-Morgan interview that Professor Morgan's great book on "Eclipses Past and to Come" made its appearance. And it was not three weeks after that great work's appearance when all the scientific world was in a turmoil.

Professor Macadam had, for a season after the interview between him and Professor Morgan, maintained a cold and formal air in all his intercourse with the latter gentleman, but after a time this wore away, and the old relations, never very familiar, were resumed. Indeed, it seemed at length that Professor Macadam had forgotten all about the affair, or if he remembered it at all, did so only as of an exhibition of foolishness which his own force and wisdom had checked forever. When therefore Professor Morgan's book ap-

peared it was read at once with interest, as the work of a scientist, who, though not a veteran, was of undeniable ability and good repute.

But when the book had been considered there was a literary earthquake! Professor Macadam reviewed it, and sought to tear it, figuratively, limb from limb! He was ably supported by other pundits everywhere. The point upon which the debate hinged was a remarkable one.

As already indicated, Professor Morgan's standing as an astronomer was undisputed, and Professor Macadam did not question the accuracy of his reasoning, so far as mere computations went. It is known, even to the non-scientific, that eclipses of the moon can be foretold with the utmost accuracy; and not only this, but that astronomers can readily determine, by the same methods reversed, when eclipses of the moon have occurred at any time in the past. It was to one of Professor Morgan's past eclipses that Professor Macadam objected.

In a long-ago issue of a great foreign review, M. Camille Flammarion, the French astronomer, advanced the view that this globe has been inhabited twenty-two millions of years, which is accepted by other scientists as a fair estimate. It is also admitted that the moon was at one time part of the earth, and was hurled off into space before the crust upon this body had fairly cooled. Of course, there is no way of fixing the exact date of this

interesting event, but for the sake of convenience it is put at about one hundred millions of years ago. It may have been a little earlier or a little later. But that does not matter.

In the table of dates of past eclipses in Professor Morgan's book he referred to a certain eclipse of the moon which occurred about two hundred millions of years before Christ, and not a flaw could be discovered in his figuring. But Professor Macadam did not hesitate to make a charge. He asserted with great vehemence that as there was no moon two hundred millions of years before Christ, there could have been no eclipse of the moon. Had there been an eclipse of the moon then, he admitted that the eclipse would have taken place at just the time Professor Morgan's table indicated; but as the case was, he referred to such an event contemptuously as "an Irish eclipse," and was extremely scathing in his language. His review closed with an expression of regret that an educator connected with the great Joplin University could have been guilty of such an error, not of figures, but of logic.

Professor Morgan replied to all his critics, Professor Macadam included, in a masterly article, in which he declared that he was responsible only for his mathematics, not for the degree of cohesion of the earth's mucky mass hundreds of millions of years ago, and that the eclipse he had calculated must stand.

Professor Macadam came to the charge once more,

briefly but savagely. He again admitted the correctness of the computation, but ridiculed Professor Morgan's attitude on the subject. "His figures," he concluded, "simply lie."

The day following the appearance of Professor Macadam's final article, he was called upon in his study by Professor Morgan. The younger man did not present the appearance of a crushed controversialist. On the contrary, his air was pleasantly expectant. "I called," said he, "to learn how soon you expected my marriage with your daughter to take place?"

The older man started in his seat, "What do you mean, sir?" he demanded.

"Why, I called simply to discuss my marriage with your daughter. On the occasion when you refused my first proposition you said that if I proved that figures would lie your consent would be forthcoming. I have proved to you that figures sometimes lie. I have not only your own admission, but your assertion to that effect, made public in the columns of a great quarterly. I know you to be a man of your word. I have come to talk about my marriage."

Professor Macadam did not at once reply. His face became very red. "I must talk with my daughter," he said finally.

That afternoon Professor Macadam and his daughter had an interview. The young lady proved very firm. She would listen to no equivocation and

no protest. She had thought her father to be a man of honor—that was all she had to say. She touched the old gentleman upon his weak point. He yielded, not gracefully, but that was of no moment. She and Professor Morgan, just then, had grace enough for an entire family—in their hearts.

And so they were married. And so, too, you know the origin of one of the most exciting scientific discussions of the period.