

Attacked by Bats

Caught in an Underground Cavern, Well-Digger Faces Death Before a Swarm of Vampires, But Successfully Eludes Them

By WILLIAM HORNE

BIZARRE and eerie come almost unbelievable stories from India and South America of the horrible vampire bats that feed on human beings at night, but nowhere on record has there been such an experience as recently befell Wallace Irving, planter, who lives in Dooly County, Georgia.

"I've had a lot of strange things happen to me," says Mr. Irving, "but the strangest of all began one day a few weeks ago when from the bottom of my well I was suddenly plunged into an eerie, subterranean world of rushing water and black caverns.

"And, while wandering far beneath the earth's surface, I was suddenly attacked by a swarm of blood-sucking creatures which I will always believe were vampire bats, although I know that vampires are not supposed to exist in America.

"I was cleaning my well, taking advantage of a six weeks' drought. Down there fifty feet below the surface at the bottom of my well it was dark, and I could barely see. I had stuck my shovel down for a last dip into the mud and sediment when it happened. The bottom of the well literally fell beneath me, and my scream of terror was choked by a mouth full of mud and water as I went down into utter darkness.

"A roar of rushing water filled my ears as my head banged suddenly against a hard, wet wall that seemed to close in on me. I swallowed a mouthful of water and mud, went under, felt my feet touch hard bottom, then managed to stand up with my head above the surface.

In Another World

"**I**T WAS dark—a terrible, water-filled darkness—so black and rushing it took all I could do to breathe. It tugged at my clothes, filled my mouth and clutched me down in a smothering embrace.

"I thought I was gone, then. It was like being in another world, a world of rushing, roaring black water and hard, jutting rocks that tore at my face and body and slipped from my grasp and slammed me from side to side until I thought I couldn't stand all the pain. But I did stand it, although I don't know how.

"The current was very swift at this place. It tugged at me and almost tore me off my feet, but somehow I managed to brace myself and walk with it down that narrow channel.

"Then suddenly it grew deeper. As a usual thing I am a good swimmer, but I was weak and sore, and it was all I could do then to keep my nose above the surface to breathe. Finally it shallowed and I was able to touch bottom. I remember how thankful I was for that, for my strength was just about gone. I waded, and the water receded down to my waist.

"That was when I was brought suddenly into a maelstrom of surging, shallow current that almost pulled my feet

from under me, and brought me suddenly hard up against a blank, hard wall.

"I moved my feet about beneath the water and with one toe felt an opening. That was it. The stream had worn a hole through the ancient bed during the long years, and it tumbled through this hole to a second bed below. How far, I had no way of telling. But I could, since discovering the opening, hear the dull roar of it below me."

"For a long time I just stood there hanging to a small out-thrust rock that offered me a handhold, trying to collect my scattered wits. My nose was still bleeding and my lips were split. I could taste the salt of fresh blood in my mouth. With one hand I scooped up cold, fresh water and washed my lips and my mouth. For a moment it seemed to revive me. I groped out with my hands to my right, and I was surprised to find that I could not reach the ceiling in that direction.

"Feverishly, with new hope, I reached up in the blackness above my head and discovered that a wide opening existed in the right-hand wall almost on a level with my shoulders.

"Had I stumbled, by sheer luck, on another ancient stream bed, one that was a layer higher than that I was now standing in, and that that had long since gone dry?

"Without further exploring, I scrambled from the water to the edge of that newly discovered hole and felt my way before me. There was a floor, hard and high and dry. With new hope I made my way down this new-found tunnel."

Suddenly, as Wallace Irving made his way slowly through the narrow, dry channel up the incline he felt a whirr of air close beside his head. He slapped one hand about his face in sudden alarm. What was the sudden movement about his face and the dull whirring sound in the darkness?

He stopped still, and then it came again. This time even closer than the first and with the swift whirring in his

Everywhere about him the flitting forms darted and whirred and squeaked. They struck at his face and neck with their sharp beaks and claws

ears came the unmistakable sound of a tiny squeak. Bats, he swiftly realized. He shuddered where he stood.

"The channel had widened here," he declares, "and somehow I felt that I had entered into some kind of a wide, empty chamber. Maybe it was just my feelings, but suddenly I went cold all over as I heard that whirring sound again and the distinctive beating of small wings on the still, dank air. I flailed my arms about my head and went on. At each step the squeaks grew more numerous and the darting, unseen forms whizzed closer to my face and head."

"The flitting forms about me grew thicker and the squeaks louder and more numerous. Finally the air seemed full of them. Everywhere about me they darted and whirred and squeaked. Finally they began hitting me on the neck and in the face and on the head. I ripped off my sodden coat and covered my head, but it didn't seem to do any good. They came on, seeming to charge in the blackness in droves.

"Now, I had heard and read of vampire bats, and my understanding of these creatures was that they only attacked a human being during the dead of night when the victim was asleep. But not so with these fellows. They came at me in droves. They flocked about my face, even partially protected as I was with my wet coat, and seemed to flutter beneath it.

"A dozen times I was bitten on the neck, in the face, on my bare forearms and hands. I screamed out at them, I cursed them. I wound the coat about my face and fought my way forward as fast as I could. Where? I didn't know or care. Those little devils were flock-

ing by the score all about me. They were attacking me in droves."

Suddenly, no longer able to stand the attack, Irving screamed, got to his feet and ran madly through the darkness. That was a lucky move. For almost immediately he felt a fresh breath of air on his sodden body, he felt cool air fan his sweating face and a dim, fitful light cut through the darkness of the chamber about twenty feet ahead.

With a wild cry he ran toward that soft light and presently stood looking up at a two-foot crack in the rocky ceiling of the channel no more than three feet above his head.

"It was the best sight I've ever seen," he avers. "And I stood there sobbing my relief, looking up at the opening where the daylight poured in.

"I threw my coat to the flooring of the cavern, reached up above my head and grasped a thick root. I drew myself up to the opening, reached through and grasped another root. Dirt fell in on me, filling my face and eyes and mouth. But I didn't mind that. Here was freedom. At last I could get up to the air and sunlight and on top of the earth again. Nothing mattered now, except to get out of that hellish place.

"I pulled through, and as I did those bats flew at me in earnest. They hit me in the face, battered against my head and one of them scrambled down my shirt and wriggled down my back.

"I worked my way through the mass of tough roots, fighting through the avalanche of dirt and small pebbles that showered down in my face. Then suddenly I was up beside the thick trunk of a wateroak. I crawled out on to the ground, staggered up and made my way from the tree.

"I thought once that I'd like to take a light and explore that cave. But I know, when I think of those bats that seemed to want to eat me alive, so like the vampires of India and South America, I know I'll never go into that underground world again."

