

QUESTION!

What with the physical shocks incidental to my first interview with Professor Challenger and the mental ones which accompanied the second, I was a somewhat demoralized journalist by the time I found myself in Enmore Park once more. In my aching head the one thought was throbbing that there really *was* truth in this man's story, that it was of tremendous consequence, and that it would work up into inconceivable copy for the *Gazette* when I could obtain permission to use it. A taxicab was waiting at the end of the road, so I sprang into it and drove down to the office. McArdle was at his post as usual.

'Well,' he cried, expectantly, 'what may it run to? I'm thinking, young man, you have been in the wars. Don't tell me that he assaulted you.'

'We had a little difference at first.'

'What a man it is! What did you do?'

'Well, he became more reasonable and we had a chat. But I got nothing out of him – nothing for publication.'

'I'm not so sure about that. You got a black eye out of him, and that's for publication. We can't have this reign of terror, Mr Malone. We must bring the man to his bearings. I'll have a leaderette on him tomorrow

that will raise a blister. Just give me the material and I will engage to brand the fellow for ever. Professor Munchausen – how's that for an inset headline? Sir John Mandeville redivivus – Cagliostro – all the imposters and bullies in history. I'll show him up for the fraud he is.'

'I wouldn't do that, sir.'

'Why not?'

'Because he is not a fraud at all.'

'What!' roared McArdle. 'You don't mean to say you really believe this stuff of his about mammoths and mastodons and great sea sairpents?'

'Well, I don't know about that. I don't think he makes any claims of that kind. But I do believe that he has got something new.'

'Then for Heaven's sake, man, write it up!'

'I'm longing to, but all I know he gave me in confidence and on condition that I didn't.' I condensed into a few sentences the Professor's narrative. 'That's how it stands.'

McArdle looked deeply incredulous.

'Well, Mr Malone,' he said at last, 'about this scientific meeting tonight; there can be no privacy about that, anyhow. I don't suppose any paper will want to report it, for Waldron has been reported already a dozen times, and no one is aware that Challenger will speak. We may get a scoop, if we are lucky. You'll be there in any case, so you'll just give us a pretty full report. I'll keep space up to midnight.'

My day was a busy one, and I had an early dinner at the Savage Club with Tarp Henry, to whom I gave some account of my adventures. He listened with a sceptical smile on his gaunt face, and roared with