When Del & I visited Axel Munthe’s home, it seemed like the jewel in the crown of Capri, situated in Anacapri, the small town at the top of the island. We first glimpsed it as a white wall at the tip of the mountain from the piazza where we disembarked the ferry from Sorrento on the mainland. As we wound our way in the tour bus over the sinuous road to the top, the emerald waters of Capri came into view as the beach slowly widened and fell away, till it was a thousand feet below us. As I gazed out the window of the bus towards the sea, I couldn't glimpse the edge of the road, the tiny chained barrier, or any of the trees on the mountainside, only beach sand and multi-hued water in shades of green and blue. The next time I saw the beach and water again was looking out over that white wall from the San Michele chapel of Axel Munthe’s magnificent house. To the right of my viewpoint was the eponymous statue of Mi-cha-el the Archangel looking at me from his niche which marked the end of the walkway around his chapel. To the left, on the white parapet sat the granite Sphinx looking over Capri, carved unknown millennia ago in a land across the Mediterranean Sea, Egypt, its several ton bulk transported to Italy by one of the Caesars, perhaps by Julius as a gift from Cleopatra, perhaps by Tiberius who built his summer home on the very foundation of San Michele, but most likely by Nero who built a villa in Calabria on the mainland beneath whose ruins, Axel saw the Sphinx in a dream and decades later recovered the sculpture from the desolate ground along a coast of high cliffs at great peril to his life, and transported it, carrying it up the 777 Phoenicians steps to Anacapri and placing it upon a white-washed promontory jutting from the wall of the San Michele chapel.

We walked through Munthe's home, seeing antiquities he excavated with his own hands as he personally, with several local workers’ help, built this home and now museum. Tiberius instructed his home on this site to be built, but Axel actually designed and built this home. Was this Swedish doctor an architect? No. He had never designed a building of any kind before, more intent on saving people from dying of diphtheria or cholera or consumption, not constructing houses. He never drew an overall plan, but worked on a vision he had and modified it daily with crude sketches of the day's work ahead of him and his helpers. "Books on architecture don't build buildings, people do," he said to one of his friends who wondered about the worthiness of his
endeavor.

In the shops on Anacapri were numerous colorful books of Axel Munthe's story of his life, but books-with-photos I outgrew at about nine years old, when I began reading in earnest and learned the power of my imagination was greater than that of any photographer. So I waited till I got home and bought a hardback copy of his book in its 40th printing in 1930. The cover had water spots on it and needed some sprucing up before it could take its place in the upper right corner of my review page on-line, so I took my photo of the San Michele statue in its niche and placed it gently into position on the 1930 cover and the result you can see.

Axel Munthe finished his life blind in one eye, often saying that he used his blind eye when looking at something a friend did wrong, and in the New Preface to the American Edition in 1929, he talked about using his blind eye to look back on his own life. As in the tragedy Oedipus where the seeing are blind and the blind can see truly, Axel Munthe used his blind eye to see things his seeing eye could not see, and reports to us all that it saw in the pages of this delightful novel. To write an Autobiography, he says:

>[page i, ii] All a man has to do is to sit still in a chair by himself, and look back upon his life with his blind eye. Better still would be to lie down in the grass and not to think at all, only to listen. Soon the distant roar of the world dies away, and the forests and fields begin to sing with clear bird voices, friendly animals come up tell him their joys and sorrows in sounds and words that he can understand, and when all is silent even the lifeless things around him begin to whisper in their sleep.

Someone called this book the story of Death, and maybe it is so, Axel writes, after all, he has been wrestling with Death for so long, his companion at the bedside during the plague of cholera in Naples as a young man when he watched, administered what he could, and waited as so many died. He personified Death, talked to him, and drew comfort from his presence at times when he was alone but for him, with otherwise only the dying for company.
I have been wrestling so long with my grim colleague; always defeated I have seen him slay one by one all those I have tried to save. I have had a few of them in mind in this book as I saw them live, as I saw them suffer, as I saw them lie down to die. It was all that I could do for them.

But Axel had lots of company in his long life, as a reader of his book will discover. In the Preface, he imagines seeing them active in Heaven in ways similar to how he saw them when they were alive in his world. None so prominent as the Italian postman, a female letter carrier who climbed from Capri to Anacapri every day to deliver letters to Axel and the few other people in the small town. They provide a perspective of his life in a nutshell, a chance to know all about Axel Munthe before reading the book — these were the people who loved the good Dr. Munthe, among many others.

They were all humble people, no marble crosses stand on their graves, many of them were already forgotten long before they died. They are all right now. Old Maria Porta Lettere, who climbed the 777 Phoenician steps for thirty years on her naked feet with my letters, is now carrying the post in Heaven, where dear old Pacciale sits smoking his pipe of peace, still looking out over the infinite sea as he used to do from the pergola of San Michele, and where my friend Archangelo Fusco, the street-sweeper in Quartier Montparnasse, is still sweeping the stardust from the golden floor. Down the stately peristyle of lapis lazuli columns struts briskly little Monsieur Alphonse, the doyen of the Little Sisters of the Poor, in the Pittsburgh millionaire's brand new frock coat, solemnly raising his beloved top hat to every saint he meets, as he used to do to all my friends when he drove down the Corso in my victoria. John, the blue-eyed little boy who never smiled, is now playing lustily with lots of other happy children in the old nursery of the Bambino. He has learnt to smile at last. The whole room is full of flowers, singing birds are flying in and out through the open windows, now and then the Madonna looks in to see that the children have all they want. John's mother, who nursed him so tenderly in venue des Villiers, is still down here. I saw her the other day. Poor Flopette, the harlot, looks ten years younger than when I saw her in the night-café on the boulevard; very tidy and neat in her white dress, she is now second housemaid to Mary Magdalen.

Axel Munthe openly admits to hobnobbing with hobgoblins and
changed during his lifetime, how one does not have to climb the 777 steps to Anacapri, etc, and he segues into talking about the little people he has known.

[page vii] The maddened rats in the cholera slums of Naples, who frightened me to death, have long ago retreated in safety to their Roman sewers. You can drive up to Anacapri in a motor-car, and to the top of the Jungfrau in a train, and climb the Matterhorn with rope-ladders. Up in Lapland no pack of hungry wolves, their eyes blazing in the dark like burning coals, is likely to gallop behind your sledge across the frozen lake. The gallant old bear, who barred my way in the lonely Suvla gorge, has long ago departed to the Happy Hunting Fields. The foaming torrent I swam across with Ristin, the Lap-girl, is spanned by a railway-bridge. The last stronghold of the terrible Stalo, the Troll, has been pierced by a tunnel. The Little People I heard patter about under the floor of the Lap tent, no more bring food to the sleeping bears in their winter quarters; that is why there are so few bears in Sweden to-day. You are welcome to laugh incredulously at these busy Little People as much as you like at your own risk and peril. But I refuse to believe that any reader of this book will have the effrontery to deny that it was a real goblin I saw sitting on the table in Forsstugan and pull cautiously at my watch-chain. Of course it was a real goblin. Who could it otherwise have been? I tell you, I saw him distinctly with both my eyes when I sat up in my bed just as the tallow candle was flickering out. I am told, to my surprise, that there are people who have never seen a goblin. One cannot help feeling sorry for such people. I am sure there must be something wrong with their eyesight. Old Uncle Lars Anders in Forsstugan, six feet six in his sheepskin-coat and wooden shoes, is dead long ago, and so is dear old Mother Kerstin, his wife. But the little goblin I saw sitting cross-legged on the table in the attic over the cow-stall is alive. It is only we who die.

This may be the memoir of a doctor, but of no usual doctor. Here was a doctor who administered his potions to others, but
when he came down with insomnia, nothing helped, and "a man cannot live without sleep."

[page xi] When I ceased to sleep I began to write this book, all milder remedies having failed. It has been a great success so far as I am concerned. Over and over again I have blessed Henry James for his advice. I have been sleeping much better of late. It has even been a pleasure to me to write this book, I no longer wonder why so many people are taking to writing books in our days.

Axel is not name-dropping or talking about something he read in a book by Henry James, no way, Henry was a friend of his who gave him the advice in person. A list of Axel's friends would read like a Who's Who of his time. He doesn't name the unexpected visitor who sat down across from him at his writing table when he started this book, pestering him and saying he had built San Michele, not Axel, and he was going to live there forever. Axel asked him to leave him alone and let him write about San Michele and the precious marble fragments of Tiberius he has rescued.

[page xii] "Poor old man," said the young fellow with his patronizing smile, "you are talking through your hat! I fear you cannot even read your own handwriting! It is not about San Michele and your precious marble fragments from the villa of Tiberius you have been writing the whole time, it is only some fragments of clay from your own broken life that you have brought to light."

By this time, some of you, who skip over Forewords,
Introductions, and Prefaces in any book, may be wondering about why a reviewer would spend so much time writing about the Preface of a book, thinking "Why don't you get on with reviewing the book?" The answer should seem clear: Axel has reviewed some essential aspects of his book in these two Prefaces I have quoted from and done so with a compactness and verve that I can only hope to match in the remainder of my review.

As a young man Axel landed on the Isle of Capri and was immediately taken by the mountain and had to climb it. It would be decades yet before he would return to live on the top of the mountain, but a time wave from the future had hit him and held him in thrall(1). It was a feeling so powerful that his fifteen-year-old female guide to Capri could not talk him out of it.

[page 4] Towering over the friendly little village the somber outline of Monte Solaro stood out against the Western sky with its stern crags and inaccessible cliffs.
"I want to climb that mountain at once," said I.

But Gioia did not like the idea at all. A steep path, seven hundred and seventy-seven steps, cut in the rock by Timberio himself led up the flank of the mountain, and half-way up in a dark cave lived a ferocious werewolf who had already eaten several cristiani. On the top of the stairs was Anacapri, but only gente di montagna lived there, all very bad people; no forestieri ever went there and she herself had never been there. Much better climb to the Villa Timberio, or the Arco Naturale or the Grotta Matromania!

One can already see that an Italian dictionary is a required adjunct to reading this book. The steps were cut by Tiberius Caesar, the werewolf had eaten Christians, only mountain folk lived there, and even the tree cutters avoided the
place. Only the letter carrier who could not read even the addresses on the letters, the already aged Maria Porta-Lettere, went up those steps to that forbidding place. "A crazy Englishman" was the last words he heard from Gioia (Joy).

[page 5] "È un pazzo inglese," were the last words I heard from Gioia's red lips as, driven by my fate, I sprang up the Phoenician steps to Anacapri. Half-way up I overtook an old woman with a huge basket full of oranges on her head. "Buon giorno, signorino." She put down her basket and handed me an orange. On the top of the oranges lay a bundle of newspapers and letters, tied up in a red handkerchief. It was old Maria Porta-Lettere who carried the post twice a week to Anacapri, later on my life-long friend, I saw her die at the age of ninety-five. She fumbled among the letters, selected the biggest envelope and begged me to tell her if it was not for Nannina la Crapara who was eagerly expecting la lettera from her husband in America.

Axel could not stop for long, a sip of wine with Mastro Vincenzo in his vineyard, a conversation, a vow to return, and soon he was walking up to the San Michele chapel at the top of the hill which had stood as an irresistible beacon to him, drawing him onward to his fate. His day dream of buying the Mastro's house and vineyard and joining the chapel and the house with white loggias, avenues of cypresses, peopled by marble statues, was interrupted by a vision of a tall figure in a red cloak, the Spirit of the Place who had guided Tiberius two thousand years earlier in building his summer home. Axel expresses his wishes to him which include a granite sphinx:

[page 17] "And here where we stand with this beautiful island rising like a sphinx out of the sea below our feet, here I want a granite sphinx from the land of the Pharaohs. But where shall I find it all! . . . Where shall I find the sphinx?"

"On a lonely plain, far away from the life of today, stood once the sumptuous villa of another Emperor, who had brought the sphinx from the banks of the Nile to adorn his garden. Of the palace nothing remains but a heap of stones, but deep in the bowels of the earth still lies the sphinx. Search and you will find her. It will nearly cost you your life to bring it here, but you will do it."

Axel went back to the Latin Quarter in Paris, working to complete his medical studies, learning to "handle
the sharp edged weapons of surgery, to fight on more equal terms the implacable Foe, who, scythe in hand, wandered His rounds in the wards, always ready to slay, always at hand any hour of the day or of the night." (Page 23) By the time chestnuts were in bloom, he had become the youngest M. D. ever in France.

His youth did not serve him well at first, as he needed to intern in the real world and to find out that what was wrong with people was not so important as what he told them was wrong with them. In this next passage we catch our glimpse of his sense of humor. His private practice opened him to a set of people that he had never met in the hospital as an intern. There were people who came in with a laundry list of complaints and didn't want the diagnosis to be something trivial.

[page 32] They seemed quite upset when I told them that they looked rather well and their complexion was good, but they rallied rapidly when I added that their tongue looked rather bad — as seemed generally to be the case. My diagnosis, in most of these cases was over-eating, too many cakes or sweets during the day or too heavy dinners at night. It was probably the most correct diagnosis I ever made in those days, but it met with no success. Nobody wanted to hear anything more about it, nobody liked it. What they all liked was appendicitis. Appendicitis was just then much in demand among better-class people on the look-out for a complaint. All the nervous ladies had got it on the brain if not in the abdomen, thrived on it beautifully, and so did their medical advisers. So I drifted gradually into appendicitis and treated a great number of such cases with varied success. But when the rumor began to circulate that the American surgeons had started on a campaign to cut out every appendix in the United States, my cases of appendicitis began to fall off in an alarming way.

Cutting out an appendix! That would never do for these patients. As one doctor said, "I never heard such nonsense! Why, there is nothing wrong with their appendices, I ought to know, I who have to examine them twice a week. I am dead against it." Dr. Axel was learning about human nature, and being paid well by the volunteers who showed up at his office to be examined.

[page 33] It soon became evident that appendicitis was on its last legs, and that a new complaint had to be discovered to meet the general demand. The Faculty was up to the mark, a new disease was dumped on the market, a new word was coined, a gold coin indeed, C O L I T I S! It was a neat complaint, safe from the surgeon's knife, always at hand when wanted, suitable to everybody's taste. Nobody knew when it came, nobody knew when it went away. I knew that several of my far-sighted colleagues had already tried it on their patients with great success, but so far my luck had been against me.

When a young Countess came to him positive that she had appendicitis and Dr. Axel assured her it was not. She sobbed when told that, wanting to know what it was. He told her to be brave and to stay calm and revealed to her reluctantly that it was colitis.

[page 34] Colitis! That is exactly what I always thought! I am sure you are right! Colitis! Tell me what is colitis?" I took good care to avoid that question, for I did not know it myself, nor did anybody else in those days. But I told her it lasted long and was difficult to cure, and I was right there. The Countess smiled amiably at me. And her husband who said it was nothing but nerves!

The cure required she return to the good doctor twice a week, but that was not soon enough for her as she returned the very next day. Axel was stunned by the change in her appearance, so cheerful and bright, and asked what she wanted. Well,
she wanted to know if colitis was catching. Seems like she was concerned about her husband and wanted the good doctor to tell him it was safer if they do not sleep in the same room. Soon, Axel was able to report that the twice a week sessions were doing her good. "It was evident that colitis suited her better than appendicitis, her face had lost its languid pallor and her big eyes sparkled with youth."

(page 40)

What is confidence? Where does it come from, from the head or from the heart? Does it derive from the upper strata of our mentality or is it a mighty tree of knowledge of good and evil with roots springing from the very depths of our being? Through what channels does it communicate with others? Is it visible in the eye, is it audible in the spoken word? I do not know, I only know that it cannot be acquired by book-reading, nor by the bed-side of our patients. It is a magic gift granted by birth-right to one man and denied to another. The doctor who possesses this gift can almost raise the dead. The doctor who does not possess it will have to submit to the calling-in of a colleague for consultation in a case of measles.

This last note about measles caused me to chuckle as I recalled the day when I noticed my internist in a hallway outside of the consultation room where I sat waiting for him to return with his diagnosis for my strange symptoms. I was thirty-five at that time, had been bed-ridden for most of a week, and my regular doctor had sent me to this internist for a consultation. Not only could he not yet tell me what was wrong with me, but he had brought in a fellow internist and the two of them were looking up something in the large medical dictionary in full sight of me! ! ! I trembled as he returned to explain to me what was wrong. "Don't worry," he said, "it's just that it's not often we get a case of red measles in an adult." Me, who had red measles as a young boy, confirmed by my mother who raised five boys and a girl and ought to know, with red measles! Sure enough, the flood of the measles symptoms came back to me and they matched exactly the strange symptoms I had been experiencing, fever, red spots on my body, my eyes sensitive to light.

This next passage reveals how Axel Munthe talked to animals, this time to a Polar Bear in a zoo, likely
And Ivan, the big Polar Bear at the Jardin des Plantes, did he not clamber out of his tub of water as soon as he saw me, to come to the bars of his prison and standing erect on his hind legs put his black nose just in front of mine and take the fish from my hand in the most friendly manner? The keeper said he did it with nobody else, no doubt he looked upon me as a sort of compatriot. Don't say it was the fish and not the hand, for when I had nothing to offer him he still stood there in the same position as long as I had time to remain, looking steadfastly at me with his shining black eyes under their white eye-lashes and sniffing at my hand. Of course we spoke in Swedish, with a sort of Polar accent I picked up from him. I am sure he understood every word I said when I told him, in a low monotonous voice how sorry I was for him and that when I was a boy I had seen two of his kinsmen swimming close to our boat amongst floating ice blocks in the land of our birth.

In a wonderful paean to dogs, Axel explains the dog's nature better than anyone else I have encountered. My own dog, Steiner, a Schnauzer, when I am in a hurry walking around the yard, is in my way, seeming to know ahead of time where I am heading and managing to be there before me, indicating a type of prescience that has always amazed me.

A dog gladly admits the superiority of his master over himself, accepts his judgment as final, but, contrary to what many dog-lovers believe, he does not consider himself as a slave. His submission is voluntary and he expects his own small rights to be respected. He looks upon his master as his king, almost as his god, he expects his god to be severe if need be, but he expects him to be just. He knows that his god can read his thoughts and he knows it is no good to try to conceal them. Can he read the thoughts of his god? Most certainly he can. He knows by instinct when he is not wanted, lies quite still for hours when his king is hard at work as kings often are, or at least ought to be. But when his king is sad and worried he knows that his time has come and he creeps up and lays his head on his lap. Don't worry! Never mind if they all abandon you, I am here to replace all your friends and to fight all your enemies! Come along and let us go for a walk and forget all about it.

Like Axel, I have never taught my dogs any tricks. He says, "Personally, I have never taught my dogs any sort of tricks, although I admit that many dogs, their lesson once learned, take great pleasure in showing off their tricks." (Page 63) Often it has occurred to me that what is called a dog trick is actually a trick which the dog has taught the master and to which the master submits openly upon any request of the dog, usually pointing carefully to how well the dog accomplishes his wishes and blithely ignoring how well he carries out the dog's wishes himself. My dog has taught me many tricks which I gladly carry out for him if he will only shake his tail vigorously enough.

When our beloved Steiner stayed for days under the cover of ginger plants in our yard, not eating, not
wagging his tail, and causing us concern, we followed Axel's wise advice and left him alone. We only checked briefly each morning to see if he had survived the night, and were overjoyed when after a week, his tail was wagging again and his normal habits returned with his sleeping in his bed in the utility room at night. It's been several years since that trial on our patience and Steiner is alive and well as ever.

[page 63, 64] Never disturb a sick dog when not absolutely necessary. As often as not your untimely interference only distracts nature in her effort to assist him to get well. All animals wish to be left alone when they are ill and also when they are about to die.

Among the famous people Axel knew and worked with was Louis Pasteur during the time of his experiments with a cure for hydrophobia. Axel assisted in the care of the six Russian peasants who had been mauled by a pack of rabid wolves and were in Paris, seeking against all odds a cure from the famous Pasteur.

Axel tackled an epidemic of diphtheria in a poor section of Paris with "no means of disinfection either for others" or himself. Here's his report on that experience.

[page 83] I had to sit there for hours, painting and scraping the throat of one child after another, there was not much more to be done in those days. And then when it was no longer possible to detach the poisonous membranes obstructing the air passages, when the child had become livid and on the point of suffocation and the urgent indication for tracheotomy presented itself, with lightning rapidity! Must I operate at once, with not even a table to put the child on, on this low bed or on its mother's lap, by the light of this wretched oil-lamp and no other assistant than a street-sweeper!

When the epidemic was over and he was able to return to his fashionable patients, he wondered about leaving Paris entirely, but these thoughts came to him, about his rich, self-indulgent clientele which now filled his days.

[page 85] What a waste of time! thought I as I walked home, dragging my tired legs along, the burning asphalt of the Boulevards under the dust-covered chestnut-trees gasping with drooping leaves for a breath of fresh air. I know what is the matter with you and me," said I to the chestnut-trees, "we need a change of air, to get out of the atmosphere of the big city." But how are we to get away from this inferno, you with your aching roots imprisoned under the asphalt and with that iron ring round your feet, and I with all these rich Americans in my waiting-room and lots of other patients in their beds? And if I were to go away, who would look after the monkeys in the Jardin des Plantes? Who would cheer up the panting Polar Bear, now that his worst time was about to come? He won't understand a single
word other kind people may say to him, he who only understands Swedish! And what about Quartier Montparnasse? Montparnasse! I shuddered as the word flew through my brain, I saw the livid face of a child in the dim light of a little oil lamp, I saw the blood oozing from the cut I had just made in the child's throat, and I heard the cry of terror from the heart of the mother.

Were there spirit folk, goblins and such? Lars Anders told Axel a story which indicated that one shouldn't be too sure that they don't exist. One man did and died.

[page 142, 143] Were there any Goblins in this neighborhood? Yes, there were plenty of Little People sneaking about in the dusk. There was one little goblin living in the cow-stable, the grandchildren had often seen him. He was quite harmless as long as he was left in peace and had his bowl of porridge put out for him in its usual corner. It would not do to scoff at him. Once a railway engineer who was to build the bridge over the river had spent the night in the Forsstugan. He got drunk and spat in the bowl of porridge and said he would be damned if there was any such thing as a goblin. When he drove back in the evening across the frozen lake his horse slipped and fell on the ice and was torn to pieces by a pack of wolves. He was found in the morning by some people returning from church, sitting in the sledge, frozen to death. He had shot two of the wolves with his gun and had it not been for the gun they would have eaten him as well.

There was a passage on page iv of the New Preface which needs to be quoted here.

[page iv] One reviewer has discovered that "there is enough material in 'The Story of San Michele' to furnish writers of short sensational stories with plots for the rest of their lives." They are quite welcome to this material for what it is worth. I have no further use
for it.

I would say there is material enough for a dozen or more different movies or just one epic movie like "Doctor Zhivago" in this book, except for the absence of a prominent love story. My nomination for the best story is the one in Chapter X The Corpse Conductor. No synopsis or review of the story can do more than spoil the plot and surprise ending of this amazing story which Axel relates about conducting an eighteen-year-old Swedish man home from San Remo. Dying of consumption, his mother was called from Sweden to accompany the doctor and her son. When they arrived in Basel, Switzerland, the mother had a heart attack which nearly killed her and necessitated that Axel put himself and the dying son up in a fancy hotel, and wait for the mother's recovery. The son dies and suddenly Axel is faced with a dead person who needs to be embalmed and a hotel room being torn apart to remove the bed linens and carpets, all at Axel's expense. He does a quick embalming based on his assisting at one while in medical school because it is much cheaper and he is footing the bill for the embalming. Then he tries to get the body onto the train and the train master insists that a Leichenbegleiter (Corpse companion) is necessary to accompany the body, someone who will ride in a sealed compartment with the coffin all the way to the ferry to Sweden. Axel won't have that as he has seen more of the body than he wants and has already purchased himself a ticket in Second Class. What happens next is the meat of comedy, tragedy, farce, and human folly all rolled into one.

Just as the train car is about to be shuttled to the side track because of a lack of a companion, one appears from nowhere, a dwarf who is a professional Leichenbegleiter. Axel is relieved but soon finds out that this dwarf is here to be companion to a Russian general who had died and is being sent to the same port to board a ferry to Russia. After some amazing maneuvering, Axel gets the station master to sunder the bureaucratic morass of regulations and allow the dwarf to companion two corpses.

If you have guessed how this tale might end up, it is probably because someone has already taken Axel's suggestion and written a story based on the plot of this true story as he experienced it. Will the boy's mother survive and want to see her son's body? Will she be shocked when Axel opens the coffin for her? Will his makeshift, home-brewed embalming preserve the boy's body? Truth is often stranger than fiction, and this story proves the old adage. Here's a short piece of the amazing story, in which the dachshund puppy which Axel bought as his own companion on the lugubrious journey, Waldmann, plays an important part.

[page 198, 199] While the station master returned to the perusal of his entangled documents, I took the hunchback aside, patted him cordially on the back and offered him fifty marks cash and another fifty marks I meant to borrow from the Swedish Consul in Lubeck if he would undertake to be the Leichenbegleiter of the coffin of the boy as well as of that of the Russian general. He accepted my offer at once. The station master said it was an unprecedented case, it raised a delicate point of law, he felt sure it was "verboten" for two corpses to travel with one Leichenbegleiter between them. He must consult the Kaiserliche Oberliche Eisenbahn Amt Direktion Bureau, it would take at least a week to get an answer. It was Waldmann who saved the situation. Several times during our discussions I had noticed a friendly glance from the station master's gold-rimmed spectacles in the direction of the puppy and several times he had stretched his enormous hand for a gentle stroke on Waldmann's long, silky ears. I decided on a last desperate attempt to move his heart. Without saying a word I deposited Waldmann on his lap. As the puppy licked him all over the face and started pulling at his porcupine moustaches, his harsh features softened gradually into a broad, honest smile at our helplessness. Five minutes later the hunchback had signed a dozen documents as the Leichenbegleiter of the two coffins, and I with Waldmann and my Gladstone bag was flung into a crowded second-class compartment as the train was starting.

Of course, Waldmann was house-broken, but he was not permitted in second-class, and soon both Axel and his traveling companion were relegated to the same space as the corpse companion and the two
corpses, and the five of them traveled to the port together, keeping each other company as much as possible in the stuffy railroad car, during which much is revealed to Axel about the Russian general and his embalming. Axel even got a much-needed shave from the dwarf, who had shaved many corpses before and "never heard a word of complaint." Axel complained about being made to lie flat on his back to be shaved, and got this explanation. "It is a matter of habit," explained the Leichenbegleiter, "you cannot make a corpse sit up, you are the first living man I have ever shaved." (Page 203)

Axel was forced into a duel by Vicomte Maurice after Axel saved a dog from being further brutalized by the Vicomte. Axel couldn't shoot, had never shot a gun, and didn't plan to pull the trigger at all, hoping the Vicomte would miss as often happened in those days. His gun went off much to his surprise and mortally wounded the Vicomte. Axel was later surprised to find that a bullet had gone through his own hat, barely missing his head, luck ever on Axel's side. When Rosalie come to see him with his breakfast, he indicated he was going out in a half hour and this conversation ensued:

But really Monsieur cannot go about visiting his patients in this old hat, look! there is a round hole in front and here is another behind, how funny! It cannot be made by a moth, the whole house is stinking with naphthaline ever since Mamsell Agata came. Can it be a rat? Mamsell Agata's room is full of rats, Mamsell Agata likes rats."
  "No, Rosalie, it is the death-watch beetle, it has got teeth as hard as steel and can make just such a hole in a man's skull as well as in his hat, if luck is not on his side."
  "Why does not Monsieur give the hat to old Don Gaetano, the organ grinder, it is his day for coming and playing under the balcony to-day."
  "You are welcome to give him any hat you like but not this one, I mean to keep it, it does me good to look at those two holes, it means luck."

Dr. Axel Munthe always kept hope and small wooden horses in his medicine bag. Hope was what he gave those patients with wretched doctors who had taken all hope away from them, making it likely that they will die shortly of the fear imbued in them by their own well-meaning doctors. The wooden horses were toys to give to children which had never had a toy or a small thing of their own to play with. It was a child's token of hope and love. In one case he brought a still born baby boy to life using his own breath and gave him up for adoption. Three years later he rescued the boy from an abysmal life in a shoemaker's shop, looking like a skeleton, unkempt, barely alive. He became Axel's mascot for Axel says he never slept so well as after he took a look at the little boy asleep in his cot before going to bed. Later Rosalie, his housekeeper, and an elegant lady who never had a child of her own became little John's daily caregivers. John loved riding in the lady's carriage, and she soon took to carrying him upstairs and bathing him and seeing him to bed each day. After John died quite young, Axel embalmed the body and gave him to the lady to bury in the parish churchyard near her home in Kent, England. This time Axel didn't bother to ask permission, suggesting she place the body in its sealed coffin on her yacht and sail away immediately. Hope and toys kept little John alive for years longer than his lugubrious existence with the shoemaker would have.

Hope kept the elegant lady alive. Here is a bit of her story.

I had been chucked by the wife of the English parson, but plenty of her compatriots were taking her place on the sofa in my waiting-room. Such was the luster that surrounded the name of Professor Charcot that some of its light reflected itself even upon the smallest satellites around him. English people seemed to believe that their own doctors knew less about nervous diseases than their French colleagues. They may have been right or wrong in this, but it was good luck for me in any case. I was even called to London for a consultation just then. No wonder I was pleased and determined to do my best. I did not know the patient but I had been exceptionally lucky with another member of her family which, no doubt, was the cause of my being summoned to her. It was a bad case, a desperate case according to my two English colleagues, who stood by the bedside watching me with gloomy faces while I examined their patient. Their pessimism had
infected the whole house, the patient's will to recover was paralyzed by despondency and fear of death. It is very probable that my two colleagues knew their pathology far better than I. But I knew something they evidently did not know: that there is no drug as powerful as hope, that the slightest sign of pessimism in the face or words of a doctor can cost his patient his life. Without entering into medical details it is enough to say that as a result of my examination I was convinced that her gravest symptoms derived from nervous disorders and mental apathy. My two colleagues watched me with a shrug of their broad shoulders while I laid my hand on her forehead and said in a calm voice that she needed no morphia for the night. She would sleep well anyhow, she would feel much better in the morning, she would be out of danger before I left London the following day. A few minutes later she was fast asleep, during the night the temperature dropped almost too rapidly to my taste, the pulse steadied itself, in the morning she smiled at me and said she felt much better.

Her mother implored me to remain a day longer in London, to see her sister-in-law, they were all very worried about her. The colonel, her husband; wanted her to consult a nerve specialist, she herself had tried in vain to make her see Doctor Phillips, she felt sure she would be all right if she only had a child. Unfortunately she had an inexplicable dislike of doctors, and would certainly refuse to consult me, but it might be arranged that I should sit next her at dinner so as at least to form an opinion of her case. May be Charcot could do something for her?

Perhaps you have guessed that what Munthe did for her was to allow her to befriend the young boy, John, take him on carriage rides, give him toys, and fill the void in her own life, truly a masterful cure administered by a student of Charcot's. A Dickens story lived out and related by Axel Munthe.

There are many great stories in this book, but my favorite is the staging of Hamlet in Lund, Sweden by a friend of Axel's, his old pal from the university in Upsala, Erik Carolus Malmborg, whose presence prompted him to attend the production. Axel thought Erik was destined to become a priest back then, but here he was appearing in the production of Shakespeare's Hamlet in the very town in Sweden that Axel was visiting at the time. The production was, however, like many of Axel's patients when he was called to them, on its death bed. The last series of performances had been disastrous and had left Erik and his traveling theater company broke. Well, here's the rest of the story.

Suddenly I also remembered having heard that he had taken to the stage, of course it must be my ill starred old friend who was the Hamlet of to-night! I sent my card to his room, he came like a shot overjoyed to
performances to empty houses in Malmö the company, decimated to one third of its members, had reached Lund the evening before for a last desperate battle against fate. Most of their costumes and portable belongings, the jewels of the queen mother, the crown of the king, Hamlet's own sword which he was to run through Polonius, even Yorick's skull had been seized by the creditors in Malmö. The king had got a sharp attack of sciatica and could neither walk nor sit on his throne, Ophelia had a fearful cold, the Ghost had got drunk at the farewell supper in Malmö and missed the train. He himself was in magnificent form, Hamlet was his finest creation — it might have been expressly written for him. But how could he alone carry the immense burden of the five-act tragedy on his shoulders? All the tickets for the performance tonight were sold out, if they should have to return the money, complete collapse was inevitable. Perhaps I could lend him two hundred kronor for old friendship’s sake?
I rose to the occasion. I summoned a meeting of the leading stars of the company, instilled new blood into their dejected hearts with several bottles of Swedish punch, curtailed ruthlessly the whole scene with the actors, the scene with the grave-diggers, the killing of Polonius, and announced that, ghost or no ghost, the performance was to take place.

It was a memorable evening in the theatrical annals of Lund. Punctually at eight the curtain rose over the royal palace of Elsinore, as the crow flies not an hour's distance from where we were. The crowded house chiefly composed of boisterous undergraduates from the University proved less emotional than we had expected. The entrance of the Prince of Denmark passed off almost unnoticed, even his famous "To be or not to be" missed fire. The king limped painfully across the stage and sank down with a loud groan on his throne. Ophelia's cold had assumed terrific proportions. It was evident that Polonius could not see straight. It was the Ghost that saved the situation. The Ghost was I. As I advanced in ghost-like fashion on the moonlit ramparts of the castle of Elsinore, carefully groping my way over the huge packing-cases which formed its very backbone, the whole fabric suddenly collapsed and I was precipitated up to the armpits in one of the packing-cases. What was a ghost expected to do in similar circumstances? Should I duck my head and disappear altogether in the packing-case or should I remain as I was, awaiting further events? It was a nice question to settle! A third alternative was suggested to me by Hamlet himself in a hoarse whisper: why the devil didn't I climb out of the infernal box? This was, however, beyond my power, my legs being entangled in coils of rope and all sorts of paraphernalia of stage craft. Rightly or wrongly I decided to remain where I was, ready for all emergency. My unexpected disappearance in the packing-case had been very sympathetically received by the audience, but it was nothing compared to the success when, with only my head popping out from the packing-case, I began again in a lugubrious voice my interrupted recital to Hamlet. The applause became so frenetic that I had to acknowledge them with a friendly wave of my hand, I could not bow in the delicate position I was. This made them completely wild with delight, the applause never ceased till the end. When the curtain fell over the last act I appeared with the leading stars of the company to bow to the audience. They kept on shouting: "The Ghost! The Ghost!" so persistently that I had to come forth alone several times to receive their congratulations, with my hand on my heart.

We were all delighted. My friend Malmborg said he had never had a more successful evening. We had a most animated midnight supper. Ophelia was charming to me and Hamlet raised his glass to my health offering me in the name of all his comrades the leadership of the company. I said I would have to think it over. They all accompanied me to the station. Forty-eight hours later I was back to my work in Paris not in the least tired. Youth! Youth!

Axel never knew what his income was as a doctor. He saw his profession like that of a priest, after all, he asked of us Readers, "What was to the heart of the mother the value in cash of the life of her child you had saved? What was the proper fee for taking the fear of death out of a pair of terror-stricken eyes by a comforting word or a mere stroke of your hand?" And his biggest question of all, "Why didn't we build more hospitals and fewer churches, you could pray to God everywhere but you could not operate in a gutter!" (Page 279) Axel knew about operating in a gutter, for often during the cholera epidemic in Naples, that was where he found his patients dying as well as in the poorest sections of Paris during the diphtheria epidemic.

"How much should one pay a doctor who saved both of one's legs from amputation?" I'm asking the question for Axel, as he never asked it. But surely he must wondered that about Professor Tillaux, the famous surgeon whose clinic was in Hôtel Dieu, who saved his own legs during a catastrophic avalanche after his climb to the top of Mount Blanc, upon which he smoked his pipe in a place most people are panting to catch some oxygen in the thin air. He had his boots cut from his feet after being rescued and staggered into Tillaux's clinic.
Professor Tillaux stood washing his hands between two operations as I staggered into the amphitheater of Hôtel Dieu the next morning. As they unwrapped the cotton wool round my legs he stared at my feet, and so did I, they were black as those of a negro.

"Sacré Suédois, where the devil do you come from?" thundered the Professor.

Tillaux had taught Axel enough surgery that he was sure Tillaux was going to amputate both his legs. Any doctor in Paris would have done so, as Axel well knew. But Tillaux kept coming for six days, three times a day until Axel was in the clear and then administered the worst penalty Axel could endure: bed rest for six weeks. After that Axel walked on crutches for another month and he was all right. How can one ever repay for such a doctoring?

The next time Axel needed doctoring was for his insomnia. His good friend Norstrom was his doctor and his eventual cure was to insist that Axel Munthe return to his beloved San Michele, build his own home there and never leave there so long his sight remained fully. Axel writes in the last sentence before this next passage, "Voltaire was right when he placed sleep on the same level as hope." This is a brilliant insight into what happens to the human being during sleep: hope is build up by our spiritual guardians like corn ensiloed during the summer months to provide nourishment to animals during the winter months when they survive on the ensiloed corn. When we awake we feed off of the hope which our guardian angel and their helpers have ensiloed in our soul. Note especially near the end of the passage where Axel's insomnia gives him a reputation for kindness.

I did not go off my head, I did not kill myself. I staggered on with my work as best I could, careless, indifferent what happened to myself, and what happened to my patients. Beware of a doctor who suffers from insomnia! My patients began to complain that I was rough and impatient with them, many of them left me, many stuck to me still and so much the worse for them. Only when they were about to die did I seem to wake up from my torpor, for I continued to take keen interest in Death long after I had lost all interest in Life. I could still watch the approach of my grim colleague with the same keenness I used to watch him with when I was a student at the Salle St. Claire, hoping against hope to wrench his terrible secret from him. I could still sit the whole night by the bedside of a dying patient after having neglected him when I might have been able to save him. They used to say I was very kind to sit up like that the whole night when the other doctors went away. But what did it matter to me whether I sat on a chair by the bedside of somebody else or lay awake in my own bed? Luckily for me my increasing diffidence of drugs and narcotics saved me from total destruction, hardly ever did I myself take any of the numerous sleeping-draughts I had to write out the whole day for others. Rosalie was my medical adviser. I swallowed obediently tisanes after tisanes concocted by her [RJM: herbal teas], French fashion, from her inexhaustible pharmacopæia of miraculous herbs. Rosalie was very worried about me. I even found out that often on her own initiative she used to send away my patients when she thought I looked too tired. I tried to get angry but I had no strength left to scold her.

Norstrom was also very worried about me. Our mutual position had now changed, he was ascending the slippery ladder of success, I was descending. It made him kinder than ever, I constantly marveled at his patience with me. He often used to come to share my solitary dinner in Avenue de Villiers. I never dined out, never asked anybody to dinner, never went out in society where I used to go a lot before. I now thought it a waste of time, all I longed for was to be left alone and to sleep.

Norstrom wanted me to go to Capri for a couple of months, for a thorough rest, he felt sure I would return to my work all right again. I said I would never return to Paris if I went there now, I hated this artificial life of a big city more and more.

And so Axel returned to Capri, to Anacapri, to Mastro Nicola, to Timberius's summer palace's ruins, to the
San Michele Chapel where he spent the rest of his life, except for a winter or so in Rome where he made money off rich Swedes and English folk to finance his work on his new home. "It was all done by eye", Mastro Nicola called Axel's architectural design for San Michele.

The huge arcades of the big loggias [RJM: vine-covered walkways] rose rapidly out of the earth, one by one the hundred white columns of the pergola [RJM: columned portico across front of home] stood out against the sky. What had once been Mastro Vincenzo's house and his carpenter workshop was gradually transformed and enlarged into what was to become my future home. How it was done I have never been able to understand nor has anybody else who knows the history of the San Michele of today. I knew absolutely nothing about architecture nor did any of my fellow workers, nobody who could read or writer ever had anything to do with the work, no architect was ever consulted, no proper drawing or plan was ever made, no exact measurements were ever taken. It was all done all'occhio as Mastro Nicola called it.

I told Mastro Nicola that the proper way to build one's house was to knock everything down never mind how many times and begin again until your eye told you that everything was right. The eye knew much more about architecture than did the books. The eye was infallible, as long as you relied on your own eye and not on the eye of other people.

At times Axel saw the red-cloaked figure walking among the loggia, the same one that had appeared to him in a dream to tell him that he would build San Michele, and he seemed to be inspecting the work of Axel and his workers. Surely this was Sant' Antonio, the patron saint of Anacapri, Axel thought.

The episode in Chapter XXI about the telegram is worth the price of the book itself, but I will leave it as a homework exercise, dear Reader, as it spans several pages — I will only hint at the delight of the first telegram ever sent by wireless from the mainland to Capri using semaphores or flags. And the anguish of the aged letter carrier Maria Porta-Lettere trying to deliver a telegram no one could translate to God only knows who. Eventually, the Swedish minister arrived and wanted to know if Axel got his telegram. Did he get it? Everyone in Anacapri got to see it, but not a single one could decipher it! The minister insisted on knowing why he did not acknowledge his telegram and warn him about the 777 Phoenician steps he would have to climb to visit him!

Of course I got it, we all got it, I nearly got drunk over it. He softened a bit when I handed him the telegram, he said he wanted to take it to Rome to show it to the Ministero delle Poste e Telegrafi. I snatched it from him, warning him that any attempt to improve the telegraphic communications between Capri and the mainland would be
When Axel showed him around San Michele, the Minister was full of admiration, but when Axel pointed out the place he had selected to install the huge Egyptian sphinx of red granite, the Minister asked for a glass of wine and a quiet place to have a talk with Axel. Soon he was asking Axel about who his architect was and about the source of his funding. A similar thing was asked me by my friend Clay Andrews, also a doctor, when I told him that Axel tended the sick of Capri at no charge while he built his beloved San Michele.

[page 347] He gave me another uneasy side glance and said he was at least glad to know I had left Paris a rich man, surely it needed a huge fortune to build such a magnificent villa I had described to him.

I opened the drawer of my deal table and showed him a bundle of banknotes tucked in a stocking. I said it was all I possessed in this world after twelve years' hard work in Paris, I believe it amounted to something like fifteen thousand francs, maybe a little more maybe a little less, probably a little less."

The Minister's advice to start up a practice in Rome during the winter months and spend his summers in Capri shook Axel up so much that he took a swim in the sea and didn't dare to return to San Michele until he had done so. And thus began his fortuitous adventures in the Piazza di Spagna area of Rome, no doubt the very popular area now called the Spanish Steps. His first client had been treated by all the doctors in Rome to no effect when Charcot himself recommended Axel to her, and soon Axel's reputation was good as gold after Axel's strong dosage of hope and a minor massage got her paralysis completely abated, and half the fashionable Roman society had seen her walking along the Villa Borghese using only a cane.

[page 353] Soon it became very difficult for any foreigner in Rome to die without my having been called in to see him through. I became to the dying foreigners what the Illustriissimo Professore Baccelli was to the dying Romans — the last hope, alas, so seldom fulfilled. Another person who never failed to turn up on these occasions was Signor Cornacchia, the undertaker to the foreign colony and director of the Protestant Cemetery by Porta San Paolo. He never seemed to have to be sent for, he always seemed to smell the dead at a distance like the carrion-vulture.

Plus, Axel's penchant for not setting any specific fee, nor bothering to send out bills, soon infuriated the medical guild in Rome who sent a deputation to him with the aim of correcting this failing of his, as they saw it, by insisting he join their Mutual Protection Society. Especially egregious was Axel charging only a
hundred francs for an embalming instead of the guild's fee of five thousand francs. Here in part is Axel's answer to the deputy:

I answered I was sorry I could not see the advantage either for me or for them of my becoming a member, that anyhow I was willing to discuss with them the fixing of a maximum fee but not of a minimum fee. As to the injections of sublimate they called embalmment, its cost did not exceed fifty francs. Adding another fifty for the loss of time, the sum I had charged for embalming the parson's wife was correct. I intended to earn from the living, not from the dead. I was a doctor, not a hyæna.

He rose from his seat at the word hyæna with a request not to disturb myself in case I ever wished to call him in consultation, he was not available. I said it was a blow both to myself and to my patients, but that we would have to try to do without him.

The deputy was soon to call Axel to see him after a stroke, at which time he told Alex the guild had been busted and he couldn't trust any of his so-called friends to heal him. Alex soon had him back on his feet and flourishing.

Another hilarious moment came when Axel healed a monkey belonging to a retired old English chemist, reported to be a renown surgeon for the South during the Civil War. The old monkey was a horrible sight, having been almost scalded to death from upsetting a boiling tea kettle. The monkey, named Billy, was fond of whiskey, as was the old doctor, and led to the drunken bout involving the two of them, Billy and the old doctor, one day which Axel happened upon. Billy was later to come into Axel's possession after the old doctor died and lived out his days with Axel in San Michele, sober of course, Axel cured him of his dipsomania. Billy would do tricks for the chemist such as bringing him a fig when asked, as he demonstrated to Axel. The old doctor called Billy his son, a term of endearment, and understandable since Billy was the closest thing to a son the doctor had, often married, but having no offspring, or did he? This sounds like something from the pen of a Southern writer like William Faulkner.

Billy got slowly better. I saw him every day for a fortnight, and I ended by becoming quite fond both of him and his master. Soon I found him sitting in his specially constructed rocking chair on their sunny terrace by the side of his master, a bottle of whisky on the table between them. The old doctor was a great believer in whisky to steady one's hand before an operation. To judge from the number of empty whisky bottles in the corner of the terrace his surgical practice must have been considerable. Alas! they were both addicted to drink, I had often caught Billy helping himself to a little whisky and soda out of his master's glass. The doctor had told me whisky was the best possible tonic for monkeys, it had saved the life of Billy's beloved mother after her pneumonia. One evening I came upon them on their terrace, both blind drunk. Billy was executing a sort of negro dance on the table round the whisky bottle, the old doctor sat leaning back in his chair clapping his hands to mark the time, singing in a hoarse voice:

"Billy, My son, Billy, my sonny, sooooooony!" They neither heard nor saw me coming. I stared in consternation at the happy family. The face of the intoxicated monkey had become quite human, the face of the old drunkard looked exactly like the face of a gigantic gorilla. The family likeness was unmistakable.

"Billy, my son, Billy, my son, sooooooony!" Was it possible? No, of course it was not possible but it made me feel quite creepy. . . .

Once Dr. Axel was called in by a dying man and was introduced to William James, the famous psychologist, who was there to receive a message from his friend, his first words sent psychically from the spiritual world after he died. Unfortunately James' pad was still empty when Axel left after the friend died. (Page 373)

People might say that Axel was for the birds, and they would be right. He single-handedly got the
The lucrative practice of netting and killing all the nesting migratory birds on the mountainside of Capri outlawed. Do you know how they decoyed the birds into their nets to capture them? They used blind birds. The blind bird sings all night.

Long before science knew anything about the localization of the various nerve-centers in the human brain, the devil had revealed to his disciple man his ghastly discovery that by stinging out the eyes of a bird with a red-hot needle the bird would sing automatically.

One had to sting the eyes out of the bird and have it survive, something that was very difficult to do as only one out of a hundred birds survived the operation and lived to sing all night. Only when the bird butcher of the Isle of Capri was dying, and asked, begged his sworn enemy Axel to attend to him, did Axel extract a pledge from him to stop the butchery of the birds. Axel was truly for the birds.

In the amazing story of the Bambino (Jesus as a baby) we learn that a bush of rosemary in flower is used every year to decorate the altar, actually the nursery of the Baby Jesus. Why rosemary? "Because when the Madonna washed the linen of the Infant Jesus Christ, she hung his little shirt to dry on a bush of rosemary." I read these words only a couple of weeks after seeing the first rosemary in bloom while I was in California and have included a photo so you may see as well.

As the end of his life draws near, Axel Munthe leaves his beloved San Michele for the mainland and the Tower of Materita where he will spend his time, dialoguing in earnest with his lifelong companion, the earnest harvester who never gives up, never leaves a field unharvested, un gleaned, removing the very last grain. The harvester asks if Axel wished a priest to be sent for, "They always send for a priest when they see me coming." No, Axel replied, "It is no use sending for the priest, he can do nothing for me now. It is too late for me to repent and too early for him to condemn, and I suppose it matters little to you either way." Axel continues:

"I heard a golden oriole sing in the garden yesterday, and just as the sun went down a little warbler came and sang to me under the window, shall I ever hear him again?"

"Where there are angels there are birds."
"I wish a friendly voice could read the 'Phaedo' to me once more."
"The voice was mortal, the words are immortal, you will hear them again."
"Shall I ever hear again the sounds of Mozart's Requiem, my beloved Schubert and the titan chords of Beethoven?"
"It was only an echo from Heaven you overheard."
"I am ready. Strike friend!"
"I am not going to strike. I am going to put you to sleep."
"Shall I awake?"
No answer came to my question.
"Shall I dream?"
"Yes, it is all a dream."

Axel's book ends with a magnificent dream in which he is met by St. Peter who will not let him enter until Axel tells him something he did that no other human had done. All the things that Axel thinks of, St. Peter can think of many other men, many other doctors had done. Axel is saved at the last second by a tiny bird, who landed on his shoulder and whispered into his ear, "You saved the life of my grandmother, my aunt and my three brothers and sisters from torture and death by the hand of the man on that rocky island. Welcome! Welcome!" St. Francis of Assisi rose in front of the mighty judges and looked them in the eyes, "his wonderful eyes that neither God nor man nor beast could meet with anger in theirs." At that, Axel's head sank on St. Francis's shoulder, thinking that he was dead and did not know it.

A fitting end to the life of a fascinating man, Dr. Axel Munthe, architect and builder of San Michele, and beloved doctor to the peoples of the Isle of Capri and the cities of Naples, Rome, and Paris.

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Footnotes

Footnote 1. The idea of a time wave from the future is embodied in my Matherne's Rule #36: Remember the future. It hums in the present.

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