

"I certainly do," I said heartily—I might say enthusiastically—first, because I was seeking no maniacal dispute, second because what he stated was a fact, as far as I could see.

The figure on the rock relaxed and I felt I had made a favorable impression.

"Stranger here?" was his next shot.

"Yes."

"Ah—that accounts for it. Yes, undoubtedly, shovels were made to shovel with. And I claim that a man who came here to shovel, and wants to shovel, should be permitted to shovel."

I considered this remarkable declaration, but, at the moment, it did not occur to me that it had a bearing on my mission which was to ascertain what extraordinary engineering difficulties had been encountered and recommend to the directors of the Dry Lake City Excavation Company how best to expedite matters.

2

Dry Lake City lies in the Nevada desert at the head of Dry Lake Valley, the area our reservoir system will irrigate. The Valley, an arid wasteland populated only by a